



Black Mountain News 4 Aug. 1983

Desert beauty offers inspiration

"For every man the world
is as fresh as it was the
first day, and as full
of untold novelties for him
who has the eyes to see them."

— Thomas Huxley

"Look! Look!"
"I'm looking! I'm looking!"
"I know you're looking, but
do you really see?"

In art class I heard the instructor repeatedly emphasize the importance of seeing in order to portray what was before the artist. The secret of the artists success was in his ability to see. Cave Creek's renowned photographer of nature, Willis Peterson, in his book "The Glory of Nature's Forms," said he sees nature through a camera. His photographs are a breathtaking truth of that statement.

In order to enjoy the beautiful and the unusual in life, especially in nature, we must learn how to *look and see* ... really become aware; really *tune in*; truly get *into* observing. If you're not accustomed to *seeing*, it will take some practice at being alert; paying very close attention to your surroundings; consciously *zeroing in* on your immediate area. It's well worth the effort; for what you'll see, particularly in nature, will astound you. I guarantee!

Here in the Sonoran desert, we have a wondrous school of nature, constantly in action, to teach us to see. On the many hikes in the local desert, and while watching attentively the happenings in my own back yard, I've been rewarded (greatly) for *seeing*; so I'll share some of those joys. Remember, they're yours to

experience too; for taking time to really *look and see*.

For the last three years, in the late fall, a desert tortoise (or two) parades across the acreage; so I've assumed this is a regular migration route on their way to hibernate for the winter. Two of them had distinguishable markings; one had a trace of red paint on its shell and the other had a club foot. I'll watch for them again this fall.

When my three children were growing up here in the desert, one of their greatest delights was to discover a *horny toad* (horned lizard). We heard that they would squirt blood in your eyes if alarmed; but since this never happened in eight years, we doubted it.

Recently, I was hiking along a busy, paved desert road and saw a horned lizard freeze on the roadway when I approached. Due to my concern for its welfare, I picked it up to carry it to the desert. It squirted blood all the way up my arm! I looked carefully at the lizard; and found a tiny opening above the eyes, with a drop of blood clinging to it.

My father was a woodsman in Ohio and often found bee trees; and I've found bee saguaros, complete with honeycombs and honey. I saw the bees hovering near the saguaro and went to investigate. What a total surprise! A real discovery for me.

In the Seven Springs area, a very large bird of prey, probably an eagle, was on the ground with wings fluffed and partially unfolded, thrashing and turning, dust flying; then it began to rise, with its great expanse of wings

fanning the air laboriously. Held in its talons was a very large, orange-beige-bellied snake. It was so heavy that at about the 3-foot level the reptile dropped. This drama unfolded in front of me on a low, roadside cliff as I was attempting to drive and watch — therefore I'm not sure of the identities of the contestants, but felt extremely privileged to see them in combat.

One evening as I sat on the patio, a Great Horned owl swooped down and perched on the house beam, only a few feet away, watching the old, slow-moving cat in the bushes. Luckily I was able to catch the cat and put it inside before disaster struck. The owl stayed until dark; despite my cat rescue and other moving about. Eventually, I felt intimidated by this huge bird and moved inside to observe.

In June, I witnessed a cicada killer transporting a cicada to its earthen nest site. Because the cicada was too heavy for the wasp to fly directly to its nest, it carried the stung and paralyzed victim to the top of the shrub, and then flew at an angle to the nest hole and dragged the cicada inside where it would lay a single egg.

Backyard briefs: A jackrabbit eating a large grapefruit, then grabbing it in its mouth and running across the desert; a gopher snake being attacked from the air and then pursued on foot by a curve-billed thrasher; and a red racer at the watering station.

My wish for you is that your world too, will be "as fresh as it was the first day, and as full of novelties because you have the eyes to see them."

— Edie Hennacy