



THE REWILDING INSTITUTE

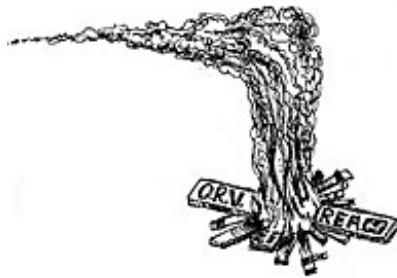


Issue No. 41

August 21, 2012

Around the Campfire

with Uncle Dave Foreman



Natural History: The Ground Upon Which Conservation Rests

It is a few months later than I would have liked, but the next Rewilding Institute book, *Take Back Conservation*, is at last with Raven's Eye Press in Durango. It will roll off the press in time for Yule gifts (hint, hint). In *Take Back Conservation* I weigh what is wrong with our wilderness and wildlife family today and lay out the steps to get us back on track. By the way, among our wrong-way steps are two from the last sentence: Too many of our leaders and even grassroots conservationists don't see our network as a family anymore, and the conservation network to many is no longer first and foremost about the good of wilderness and wildlife. Among the steps for which I call in *Take Back Conservation* is bringing natural history back to the fore. What follows in this *Campfire* are two steps from the book about how to raise natural history again.

• *Rebuild natural history as craft and science, and bring it back as the keystone of conservation.*

I keep going back to Leopold's insight about those who cannot live without wild things for how it grabs so well and thoroughly the inner being of wilderness and wildlife conservationists. It's why I name those who shield wildlife and wilderness *Cannots* and *wildlovers*. Overall, we wildlovers want to know something about the wild things we hold so dear. We learn about wild things through the craft of natural history, either as folk naturalists or as scientific authorities. Once upon a time, most conservationists knew something about the birds, wild blossoms, trees, and such in their neck of the out-of-doors. Once upon a time, biology was mostly natural history—botany, ornithology, mammalogy, herpetology, ecology, and so on. Nowadays, many leaders and staffers of conservation clubs and teams are more knowledgeable about and enthralled with political things than wild things. Knowing political

things is good, too, but their natural history skills and feeling of *wonder* in the big outside are often scant.

Nowadays, it seems most biologists are “lab rats” who seldom if ever go outside for their science. Even some conservation biologists are lightweights when it comes to natural history. Peter Kareiva, head scientist for The Nature Conservancy, says, “I’m not a biodiversity guy.” As for me, I feel naked without my binoculars.^[1] Once upon a time, college biology departments offered a slew of natural history courses and many were field courses. Among the most wanted college classes, even for nonbiology majors, were natural history field courses. To wit: the only elective Nancy took while working on her master’s degree in nursing at the University of Arizona was a field course on the natural history of the Sonoran Desert taught by the legendary Paul Martin. Natural history courses are fading from biology departments today, somewhat owing to how few biology faculty can teach such classes now.

Reed Noss, of the University of Central Florida and one of the world’s top conservation biologists (and unmatched in bringing conservation biology to the conservation network), believes that the root of what is wrong with conservation biology today is the fading of natural history. Tom Fleischner, of Prescott College in Arizona, worries about the overall loss of natural history and has started a campaign to build up natural history as the core of biology and as a love for conservationists. Bringing together a wide sweep of authors, he has edited a book, *The Way of Natural History*, whose chapters underline why natural history is so key.^[2] (You can buy this wonderful little book from The Rewilding Institute—see the order form at the end of this *Campfire*.)

Conservation clubs need to get on what I hope becomes a bandwagon to bring back natural history. All who work on wildlife and wilderness conservation should set goals for themselves to know scads of wild things in the lands where they work. The toughest, most dogged conservationists are those who love wild things and who *know* the wild things living in the wild neighborhoods they haunt—and shield.

• Reach out to naturalists and wilderness recreationists to get them to become wilderness and wildlife shielders.

The most needed kind of outreach for conservation organizing is better called *inreach*—for it is truly reaching in to our own folks, members, mailing lists, and such to rouse them to do something: come to a hearing or public meeting, write a letter, carry a sign on a picket line.... If we could get all those who belong to wilderness and wildlife clubs, from the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society to Adirondack Council and WildEarth Guardians to Friends of the Boundary Waters and Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, to stand up and speak out, we would unleash a deafening roar and roiling of the American body politic that would shake the oligarchy and “decision-makers” to the core.

Though our clubs work hard at such inreach (some much better than others), they all can work more skillfully and doggedly. The step that would swiftly bear much weight is to cleave begging for dollars from action alerts. Of the scores of letters, emails, and phone calls I get from a throng of wilderness and wildlife clubs and teams, nearly all are sent for fundraising. Fundraising has too much become the tail that wags the dog of inreach. I believe that conservation outfits would better spur their folks to do something if the rabble rousing was not piggybacking the dollar grubbing.

Think of this: going through your mail you find a letter from a national conservation club. On the front of the envelope are the words in red: “Alert! Save Our Wilderness Areas!” The letter inside is not a call to “Send us your check for \$50 so we can fight this threat!” There is nothing like that in the envelope. Instead, you are told that in each state wilderness lovers are gathering outside the district offices of members of Congress to stand against a bill that would gut the Wilderness Act and other conservation laws. You are asked to protest legislation that would give the Border Patrol leeway to drive anywhere on the public lands within 100 miles of coasts or borders with Mexico and Canada to catch drug smugglers and waylay Al Qaeda terrorists. You are given the date, time, directions, and organizer contact for the nearest rally to your zip code. The alert also asks you to call, write, or email your members of Congress. If there is any bid for dollars, it is a quiet little box on a return envelope for you to let the club know you are going to a rally or have sent a letter.

In other words, conservation clubs should shift how they see their members—from check writers first to wildlovers willing to stand up for wild things foremost. Such a shift would make the conservation network mightier by far, and I don’t think it would harm income.

While stirring up those who belong to wilderness and wildlife clubs is the core of inreach

and comes before any outreach, the next target bunch should be thought of as inreach, too.

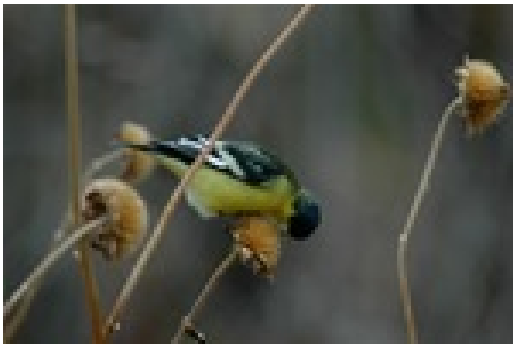
The low-hanging fruit for conservation calling-up has always been outdoorsfolk—wilderness wayfarers, hunters and anglers, and both scientific and folk naturalists. Moreover, the strongest workers for wild things—whether hired staff or grassroots—are those who get outside to be with wild things.

Our dare is this: Most wilderness hikers, backpackers, horsepackers, wild-river runners, canoeists, sea kayakers, scuba divers and snorkelers, mountaineers and rock climbers, cross-country skiers and snowshoers, wilderness hunters and anglers, and trail runners do not work to shield wilderness. They don't help to keep mostly wild landscapes roadless and free of development, to set aside new Wilderness Areas and other wild havens, or to watchdog already set-aside wild havens. Most birders, wildlife trackers, butterfly watchers, wildflower lovers, those who want to name trees, mushrooms, frogs, snakes, and other wild things, those who bliss out on or study the behavior of wild things, and the rest with field guides, binoculars, and cameras do not work to shelter wildlife. They don't help to ward wild neighborhoods and rebuild wounded lands and streams, watchdog wildlife management, get slipping-away lifekinds listed as Threatened or Endangered, fight so-called "predator and pest control," and work against all kinds of slob hunting and fishing that snuff and trample native wildlife. Sadly, most "Nature" photographers and natural history writers do not put their shoulders to the wheel of keeping wild things from harm.[\[3\]](#)

Conservation clubs need to wield their skills and wiles to target outdoorsfolk and naturalists—at trailhead parking lots, outdoor-gear and bird-feeding stores, nature centers, wherever—to coax them into our clan, to give them something to do right away (sign a petition, write a quick letter), and to light a fire under them to stand up for wild things.[\[4\]](#) Not to donate money. Let me say that again. *Not to donate money.* Get folks who seek wild things to first stand up for wild things before trying to grub dollars out of them. I think an awful lot of folks who would help wild things fear conservation clubs as mostly moneygrubbers. That thought needs to be flipped on its head.

Conservation outfits of all kinds need to renew their steadfast targeting of those who go to the big outside and those who seek to know wild things. "Inreach" is where our greater might lies and we need to work on it before we reach out to others.

Dave Foreman



© Dave Foreman

With a rabble of Lesser Goldfinches and Pine Siskins outside my window scoffing up thistle seed and checking the sunflowers to see if there are seeds to grab yet

[\[1\]](#) I was once asked in a radio interview what book I would want with me if I were stranded alone on an island. "The bird field guide for the area," said I.

[\[2\]](#) Thomas Lowe Fleischner, editor, *The Way of Natural History* (Trinity University Press, San Antonio, 2011).

[\[3\]](#) I am proud to be a founding fellow of the International League of Conservation Writers: <http://www.ilcwriters.org/Home.html>. Bob Baron of Fulcrum Press is working to get more who write about wild things to do more for wild things through the ILCW.

[\[4\]](#) "Tabling" is one of the most needed things conservation clubs do. It is not done enough. Moreover, good tabling is a thoughtful art and conservation clubs need to hone that skill.

The Rewilding Institute web page. [Click here to order from TRI's Book List.](#)

Or fill out this form and send with your check to:

The Rewilding Institute
PO Box 13768
Albuquerque, NM 87192-3768

\$17 per book

S&H: standard delivery, 1 copy \$6; additional copies \$2 each.
Priority \$8; International \$16

Qty: _____ Subtotal: _____

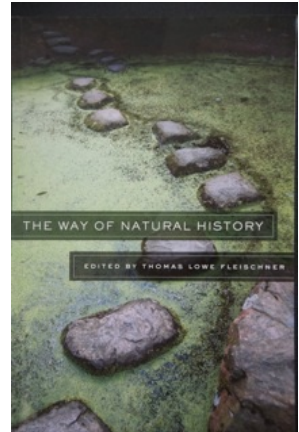
S&H: _____ Total: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____



<http://www.rewilding.org>

To receive "Around the Campfire," contact Susan Morgan at:
rewilding@earthlink.net

Please forward "Dave Foreman's Around the Campfire" to conservationists in your address book and to conservation discussion groups to which you have access.

We apologize if you receive multiple postings.

Permission is given to reprint "Dave Foreman's Around the Campfire" so long as it is published in its entirety and with this subscription information. It will make a good regular feature for your group's newsletter, either printed or electronic. Please contact Susan Morgan before reprinting it, particularly if you want to print a shorter version.

"Dave Foreman's Around the Campfire" also appears on The Rewilding Institute website; past issues are archived there and available.

The blog feature on The Rewilding website also posts comments from readers. "Dave Foreman's Around the Campfire" has no subscription charge. It is funded by Rewilding partners who are donors to The Rewilding Institute.

If you like "Dave Foreman's Around the Campfire," please go to <http://www.rewilding.org> or click on the link above for information about how to support the work of The Rewilding Institute.

The Rewilding Institute, P.O. Box 13768, Albuquerque, NM 87192
www.rewilding.org

[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

The Rewilding Institute
P.O. Box 13768
Albuquerque, 87192
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

