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About 5,700 words

APRIL

[Picture: buck at dawn, reflected in pond]

or prairie showing stars

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THEATER IN THE ROUND

In the half-light of dawn, our pond's silver surface reflects a deer wrong-side-up. Of his real self, I can see only antlers above the wheatgrass till sunlight ripples down the Horseshoe Hills to my west, floods a stand of cottonwoods, and flows eastward over pond, grass, and buck, who thereupon takes his daytime shape and walks away with all four feet on solid earth, and I think: It is not everyone who gets to see a deer upside-down and dawn coming in from the west.

After that, the weather gives us a world tour. Our usual Montana frost nips the dandelions, then melts under a Sonoran sky, which yields to Oklahoma-sized hailstones ping-ponging on a lawn green as Ireland. Latest from the front: Alaskan snow-squall assails squadron of crows. They regroup in the lee of our house, bedraggled as crows ever get, then decide their course and beat on toward British Columbia, brave and black in a white tempest.

All the world's a stage, if you look on nature as spectacle, and both of us do. Anna may be excused because she grew up in Ireland, where they do April year-'round. I come from electric country. Grandma would hear the screen door banging and run outside for a toddler who did not want to be rescued from thunderstorms. Still doesn't.

Our local forecaster, on the other hand, is a pretty young

woman from California who finds rain threatening. There will be good weather when this front passes through, she says, as if good weather were the kind they have in the Mojave Desert. What brought her here? Montanans want to hear that the snow-pack is still building in the high country, promising streams full and bright, and that the front moving in will bring moisture for the topsoil. Our Weather Mother should tell us of winter-wheat greening and voices in the sky. She should announce what the Irish call a "soft day thank God" -- rain to grow the cover that grows the pheasants and ducks.

Weather for ducks is not what the forecaster wants. She represses a shudder as she reads of cars stuck in snow on the pass, trucks blown over on the interstate highway, and snow-pack still building at high altitude.

She is fighting nature. Humans have a right to bewail random acts of an angry god -- tornadoes, say -- but our local violence comes in lighter doses and, within limits, is predictable. Drivers should know that rain in the valley means snow in the pass. People who build houses on hilltops must expect gales to peel the shingles. And neighbors of ours report that their basement floods every summer, sure as snow-melt raises the water table. Gets the place scrubbed out.

MICROCLIMATES

> Let me repent of my living too abundantly and blindly in a too easy and forgiving land and forgetting that the universe is mostly a dry, old cosmos, with wetness and life the exceptions.
>
> William Least Heat-Moon[1]

Mountains make their own weather, and the results are called microclimates. Ask any farmer: He will know his personal weather, and probably that in the rest of the valley. If no expert is handy, however, a topographic map can tell you something about the interplay of slopes and seasons.

1. South End

Contour lines close together, for example, show that the south end of this valley has steep, north-facing slopes. Sun falls obliquely on them and snow melts slowly, watering a dark forest of spruces, firs, and pines. You can visit the south end in August, fish its cold streams, and bump into newcomers shopping for houses in the forest primeval. Its shade is welcome to summer visitors. By late October, however, ruffed grouse may already be burrowing in snow. And in April, the South-endians are still shoveling their driveways while people at the opposite end of the valley are mowing their lawns.

2. North End

For the first wildflowers, hike sunny, south-facing slopes at the north end of the valley. Yellow bells are up already, and Wyoming kittentails and Rocky Mountain Douglasia -- pink mats pioneering on soil not far removed from rock. The grassland flowers are chilled nightly, baked daily, and beautiful for their tough fragility. Hard life has given the prairie shooting stars, for example, an economy of line you would expect in Japanese paintings. Twelve strokes of a brush would catch leaves, stalk, flower and all.

Arid though they seem, these south-facing slopes export grain to the world. Pasture grasses will be up soon, and slender leaves of winter wheat have been green all winter under a thin layer of snow. We think of the cereals as real Montana stuff, though they were domesticated near the Dead Sea, where hungry old people began to cultivate the seeds of wild grasses.

Wild animals of the south-facing slopes are as distinctive as the vegetation. The short-grass prairies are natural producers of sharp-tailed instead of ruffed grouse, pronghorns instead of moose, and lanky jackrabbits instead of fluffy snowshoe hares.

Few windows shine from the dry slopes. Farmers come from generations of farm families, usually, and have learned to build on low, sheltered sites close to year-'round running water. Look for a few big cottonwoods and a house occupied during much of the state's history. The view may not be sweeping down there in the draw, but there will be mountains somewhere on the horizon.

3. Middle-Land

Anna and I are centrists by coincidence. The spring creek by which we live does not literally spring, or make an upward leap, but simply trickles out where the great submerged lake -- alias water table -- reaches the surface. And this naturally occurs in the low, middle part of the valley.

Schematically, then, ours is a small, wet, flat place in a region that is big, dry, and rugged. Some of our wildlife is unique to bottomlands; the rest comes from all around. We will never have animals that require wide open spaces -- pronghorns, for example. But sharp-tailed grouse fly in from the north when food is plentiful here, and ruffed grouse will arrive from the other end of the valley if I live long enough to get thick, all-age stands of aspen established.

SPRING

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land

He was a sidewalk person who wrote those lines, and nature was just his prop. Lilacs are tame and opulent -- bred by humans to be conspicuous. Look at lilacs and see a spectacle. Wait for lilacs and you've missed out on spring.

Down here on the water table, we've got it soft -- pussy willows, mostly. Tough love will come late in the month, when tiny yellow blossoms appear on the buffalobrush, then freeze before they can set fruit. Or perhaps it is the insects that get nipped before they can pollinate the flowers. It puzzle me that our most successful wild shrub should have evolved this erratic reproductive schedule, but perhaps buffalobrush simply does not need to waste energy on a berry crop every year.

If our botany is slow-starting, however, the zoology is in full bloom. The creek is full of green heads, yellow beaks, and wiggles -- mallard drakes in courtship display. Another drake has just dropped in, wings cupped, orange feet down. What concerns me (and the bachelor drakes) is that only one female has shown up for the party.

The hen climbs out to look for a nesting site and waddles off through dead grass, followed by a drake who does not really want to settle down but needs to keep an eye on his flighty fiancée. He wants to fertilize all her eggs. She would prefer to hedge her bets, and genetic analysis slows that she is usually successful in finding multiple mates.

Magpies in the brush watch the young couple and call out Why? Why? Why? That's a human interpretation, of course -- influenced by a good guess that the magpies are going to eat all the dusk's first clutch of eggs before they hatch, or shortly thereafter.

Magpies are too clever by half. They hunt, gather, loot, pillage, and brag. "Look at me," says magpie, white and black and swaggering. I do look, and admire. But I know why Magpie has a hook at the end of his beak, and if I get a dizzy spell when I am weed-spraying, one of these days, I will recline with my eyes down.

Spring's most spectacular celebrants are the sandhill cranes, huge and gangly and graceful for all that. Their courtship seems protohuman because they use space for cover rather than sneaking around in brush. Imagine, please, what it is to catch such a show on home turf. The alfalfa is thick-rooted to cover the mud but short enough for tricky steps by the male crane, who half-jumps, half-flies, and whoops withal. His mate joins the dance. And then the two of them circle our place and theirs in the air, necks stretched forward and legs behind, wings

pushing on the downstroke and flipping up, syncopated. There were such trumpets in the Globe Theatre. There were such dances in the Eocene Epoch. How could I not join in with my knobby knees?

I own this place. The crane owns it too, and the mallard, the magpie, the hummingbird, and every other ever-loving resident down to the firefly and farther. If we could map all the overlapping territories on sixty acres, it would look like a painting by Willem de Kooning, whose drops and splotches seem random but in some puzzling way are right.

Funny thing happened after we had lived here for two springs: Anna pointed out that our recorded music was gathering dust so we sold it all at five cents on the dollar. Not that the cranes are in Beethoven's class. They do not compose at all and may not even learn their song, except as it comes down from the dawn. But Beethoven gives no live performances and cranes do, closer and fresher for all its age, spring's embers fanned by long brown wings.

LOVE & DEATH

> It's anything but the romantic idea that nature is nice and kind and stable.... To some people it isn't a pretty view of the world. It's nasty and things get nastier and nastier. Everyone is affected mostly by their enemies.
>
> Geerat Vermeij[2]

The pheasant in our streamside brush is chivalry in flower -- wattles shockingly red, ear-tufts long and green, neck-ring white, body copper and olive and iridescent as the sunrise. He can afford to be brightly dressed because he knows how to hide. He calls discordantly from our streamside brush, then emerges in concordant fragments between the trunks, one frame at a time, visual equivalent of the meadowlark's radiant song. And then he pauses and disappears in some trick of light and shadow.

"It's romance he's wanting," says Anna. You might suppose that his song would be as glorious as his feathers but it is no more musical than the raven's gronk. The low frequency carries through grass and mist, nevertheless, and hens get the message.

So do humans. Something is right with the world while the pheasant still crows. He is Phasianus colchicus, Apollo's messenger, sunbeams in his cloak and heroes in his name. We may get other wildlife mixed up. We may call our hare a jackrabbit, our deer an elk, and our elk a moose, but the Phasian bird is a

pheasant forever.

He is, moreover, an alarm clock, alerting us that the sun is rising in a gunsight notch of our home mountains. "All's well at first light," he croaks, and I nudge Anna, who might have snoozed through the cosmic event, and remind her that no one else on the planet will see the dawn exactly as we do.

April is the kindest month -- a time for place-bonding and pair-bonding. Summer is overstuffed; autumn is busy; winter's snow gets old. Spring sneaks between bare trunks. When you love April, you love Nature with her clothes off.

> ... the essence of life is that it lives by killing and eating; that's the great mystery the myths have to deal with.
>
> Joseph Campbell[3]

The pheasant eats. The pheasant is eaten. He is dressed up for a party at which he may be the main dish. Why bother, if this is all life is?

But it is not all, and the pheasant bothers strenuously. I am enlisting Rooster because I have watched his life in flickers and checked what I saw against the findings of scientists, who have researched the species in depth.

1. Temporal Dimension

Give Rooster a full year, considering that he has lived through the winter already. This is life triumphant, for a bird

that might have been eaten in his nest by a mouse, in which case he would have had nothing beyond dim heartbeats in his shell.

Suppose that an owl catches him now. It will be a slower death than some, but it will come only once and the killing will last about thirty seconds. Life has lasted for 31,536,000 seconds.

2. Economic Dimension

Rooster has eaten, say, a hundred other forms of life each day, from beetles to barleycorns, while not being eaten in turn. This puts him ahead by 36,500 to nothing. You might call his an abundant life.

3. Thermodynamic Dimension

Each of the lives Rooster ate was smaller than his own; otherwise he could not have swallowed them whole. In sum, however, he took in enough calories to grow large, handsome, and strong.

4. Competitive Dimension

Rooster has been tougher (or luckier) than his peers, of whom seven in ten have died already.

5. Genetic Dimension

Hens are softer targets than cocks, and have a higher mortality rate. If Rooster can get even one mate, therefore, he

will be outperforming most of his peers, and this is his goal. For him, it's not who dies with the most toys that wins. It's who gets the most hens. His testes have reached full size by April and he keeps moving and crowing in an attempt to use them. He has flown across the creek onto last year's flat dead grass, where he struts like a minstrel onstage -- pushing his luck for these few weeks, risking all for immortality.

He is not worried. Alert, yes, but confident, even cocky. He has outgrown the harrier and learned that the owl seldom cruises sunny meadows. He knows too that I pose no danger to him at this season. On the contrary, I am fiercely protective of romance among pheasants. My bright young hero has already called one hen in from brush along the river, where she spent the winter. For the last week she has been hanging out near our house where three habitats intersect -- tall wheatgrass, alfalfa, and buffalobrush. Another hen or two could nest in there, if Rooster can get their attention.

6. Mythic Dimension

Rooster began calling attention to himself in February, when he claimed a territory with his raucous voice, and now he must fight tourneys in thin April cover. Yet he is not afraid -- or afraid only when fear is good for his survival. He has no work, no worry, and no existential concerns. I would not trade, but I am not sure which of us has the longest life.

NOTHING HAPPENING

Nature is wont to hide herself.

Heraclitus, On the Universe

If seeing nature was hard in Heraclitus' time, when the countryside was full of farmers one step removed from hunters, how about today? On the one hand, we have wild animals that evolved to be secretive; on the other, a body of consumers trained in the conspicuous.

Ralph H. Lutts writes in The Nature Fakers[4] that "countless televised nature programs have nurtured a deep love and affection for nature" by editing the tedium out of the show. "As a result," he continues, "people are often disappointed when they finally do get a chance to visit a wild place -- nothing seems to be happening."

Nothing happening. There is no future in this, media-wise, but an actual tourist on scene can, and commonly does, note that it's peaceful out here, which is a positive spin on Nature's nothingness. She is peaceful because she is not noisy like the city, not frantic like the job. The human spirit enjoys calm of a sort when nothing happens noiselessly in colors that do not catch the eye like, say, my wife's magenta stretch-pants. But having appreciated the muted stressless landscape, our visitor brushes off something that might be a mosquito and heads back inside for

a jolt of caffeine.

It is indeed tranquil here -- for us humans. Such other animals as may be eating each other are quiet about it, and nothing on the place is big enough to dine on people. (In another month there might be a real mosquito, but she won't drink much.)

We are bears with entitlements. We are cougars with dentists. We are wolves with police. Our distance from nature can be measured by our life expectancy, which is roughly triple that of our recent ancestors. We humans are the only residents of these acres that are neither in danger of being eaten by another nor of starving if we don't eat the other. Why should we not call this peace? We are perched here atop the great tree of life, exempt from ....

Nature, red in tooth and claw.

Tennyson

And yet the wildlife does not look nervous either -- not in April. Animals that had to starve did so during the January storm, and now there are tender green shoots and grain snow-free. Courtship is in full song. The rigors of birth are ahead. There are no gaping young to drain their mothers. Predation continues, but it is quick and silent -- unlike the mating birds' duel of voices, which we humans (being tuned out) find beautiful. Most of the eagles have moved on and our other large predators are as content as they ever will be, after their feast of ground

squirrels.

It is not that Nature is kind. No duck believes that, and no crane, pheasant, or warbler. Their life is an organized attempt to breed before dying. They cannot reject nature and therefore need not accept it. Nature exists only to those of us looking in from somewhere else, and all of us (even Thoreau) are sojourners in nature -- here by choice.

Our advantage is that we can learn to see nature. It is there for us because it is not us, and we are far enough away to notice. The seeing takes study, which takes time, which in turn takes love, because the same amount of work would earn more money doing almost anything else. Nature is there, nevertheless, for such third-millennium humans as care to look, and help is available from both science and myth. Our ancestors have been recording their visions in great cave cathedrals for thirty millennia.

Words are harder to date because we were using them long before we had symbols for them. The myths that come down to us in spoken form, however, are as powerful as those in the cave paintings.

LEARNING TO HEAR

> A man has no ears for that to which experience has given him no access.
>
> Nietzsche, Ecce Homo

The meadowlark is at full volume in April, and so loud a melody must come from the male of the species. For competitors of his own kind, the tune is a warning with flourishes: "Keep Out. Trespassers Will be Persecuted." But for a human, the music is breathtaking, as you discover when the angel stops singing and you exhale.

The meadowlark has an angel in mind too, as males commonly do. In showing off for his intended, however, he is also making his presence known to predators who might not have seen him but can hear him from a distance. He takes greater risks in mating season than at any other time.

The female meadowlark looks like the male -- so much so that I cannot tell the sexes apart, except by their behaviors. Hers is as cryptic as his is conspicuous. She will soon have young hiding in their patch of grass, and if I approach them she may lead me away with an odd little call. It is not loud, not even a song, but it sounds tasty -- the sort of conversation you would expect from a plump partridge or quail. Any of us predators would be interested. I followed it for a long distance, once, and never

saw what was making it.[5]

The female's cryptic behavior and succulent call seem like opposites but have the same function: saving the next generation. If she were not secretive, a fox might catch her and doom her brood, and yet if she could not inveigle a skunk away from them, they would die anyhow. She must be prepared for predation in all its forms -- from death on little cat feet to long wings in the clouds.

One day a fledgling lark flushed at my feet and finished its flight as a ball of fluff in a harrier's talon. I had not known harriers to do that. They had followed Huckleberry and me over hundreds of miles of grass and caught voles we disturbed, even harried young pheasants and partridges on the ground, but in all the long days there was just that one instant, one catch in midair.

> The drama of the sky dance is enacted nightly on hundreds of farms, the owners of which sigh for entertainment. They live on the land, but not by the land.
>
> Aldo Leopold[6]

A snipe is strumming the twilight, including our house in territory he defends. He climbs high, then dives with cupped wings, directing air over two stiff tailfeathers[7] that sing like an Aeolian harp. The temperature is dropping toward freezing, cooling muscles that make the whole performance possible. They

are the biggest parts of the snipe's body but still not more than an ounce on each side of the breastbone, and their work is heavy. It is all worthwhile, though. A cloud would sound like this if it could court the moon.

The snipe's purpose is immortality -- meeting and mating. Perhaps all music comes from the same source. Listen to any popular singer. Or better, listen to Beethoven, who (like the snipe) had no electricity. With artificial power came amplification, recording, transmission, and a number of other things summed up as entertainment.

The snipe is not entertaining. He is lusting beautifully, hoping to attract females of his kind. I am paying attention because his wind-harp tells me that a high pressure area will move in sometime tomorrow, spoiling the fishing. Best be on the water early. (This is folklore, supported by scientist Leslie M. Tuck,[8] who wrote the book on snipe. Expect low gray skies and rain when the winnowing comes erratically at low levels. When, on the other hand, a fluttering sound comes from high in the sky, a high-pressure area is bringing fine weather.)

Snipe are, I guess, the most widespread of the world's game birds, present on both sides of the equator and in both eastern and western hemispheres. We have learned to hunt them at certain times by certain rules, cook them by other rules, preserve the wetlands where they live, and evoke them in images. None have been painted on the wall of a cave, to my knowledge, but there is a snipe on one Irish coin, looking better than the usual stuffed

statesman.

We have also given special recognition to species that eat snipe. "Predators," we call them -- animals that plunder something we value. It's our language, inherited from our elders, but it does make Nature hard to understand.

LEARNING TO SEE

> Recently I was visited by a very good friend who had just returned from a walk in the woods, and I asked her what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied. I might have been incredulous had I not been accustomed to such responses, for long ago I became convinced that the seeing see little.
>
> Helen Keller[9]

Back to the singing meadowlark. He does not think of himself as a decoy, but your ears point your eyes in the right direction and there he is, perched on a fencepost with chest puffed out like the Barber of Seville, and if the Cooper's hawk were to make one of its cameo appearances, the opera might end in a shriek.

The lark is suspending a rule that philosopher Ortega y Gasset put this way: "game animals have always been scarce."[10] They may indeed be scarce. They will certainly make themselves scarce -- and silent -- when mating season is over.

What Ortega may not have understood is that every wild creature, at some point in its story, is game for another. Angleworm is prey for a snipe, who may in turn be plucked from her nest by a skunk, who is killed by an owl, who hides from an eagle and is harassed by crows.

Humans too evolved as both predators and prey. Today we speak of "natural death" -- meaning one that comes peacefully after life has run its course -- but our ancestors took care to make their sleeping places secure, and even today you lock your

door at night, though you have never seen a cave bear.

Dawn brings a new world. You do not see it well. You are no eagle, but in the land of the blind, you have one eye. You turn off shows that spare a mass audience from the stress of thinking. You come to prefer a living crane to any collection of pixels on a screen. You see the animal in people -- lark in the morning, rising from her nest after an hour of preening; harrier over your desk; sharpshin looking for a quick piece of the action.

Modest proposal: Tax artificial reality to support the real thing. Levy a charge on television, computer games, and movies with talking animals. A fee of, say, one percent yearly could take millions of children into places with frogs that do not turn into princesses and fawns that have no little friends in other ethnic communities. Until this sooty century, nature taught us art. Now we need art to teach us nature.

Adults might try something different. Look at a Cézanne on some wall without windows, then take the image back to the field, not the one where it started but any field, and superimpose it on light and shadow. Or try Russell Chatham's cottonwoods. Take them with you some day on a float down the Yellowstone River.

Here on the home place, though, take Seurat. His was a stroke of genius, or better a profusion of dots, which is how Nature works in the lowlands. Points of color become gold-washed buffalobrush, red-tailed hawk on a gopher hole, phlox hiding in grass, bubbles on the stream. Dots catch the pheasant sneaking through snowberries too, but a few thousand thin strokes would

better catch the bush itself and the tall wheatgrass. This is not an exercise in style. The marsh is an opulent, cluttered, purposeless confusion with things hiding in it. More is less, out there.

Learn to penetrate. Move your eyes not in a sweep but a series of slow steps from one side to the other, then lengthen the focus and keep trying. With luck, some dot will move and save you from parsing the whole landscape. Never mind the shining eyes of Brewer's blackbirds on the lawn; you will see more than you want of them without trying. Red-winged blackbirds in the willows are worth watching, but not for long.

Ducks, on the other hand, have weight to them and a drama you can see at any season but especially now, when two-thirds of the drakes -- those with no mates -- are swimming around picking fights with the third that got lucky. Be thankful that ducks have no talent for terrorism. If they could, the bachelor drakes would wrap themselves in explosives, walk into happy flocks, and blow themselves up to get even.

Look for half-bodies, on the stream -- not victims of explosion but pieces of ducks whose remainders are under water. Seeing top halves is not as easy as you might think, on water covered with dots of foam and splashes of light, but mallard drakes crystallize when you learn their shiny green-and-white contrasts and little curly tails. (The drakes' bright colors evolved to impress their mates but may catch predators' eyes too, and thus spare occasional hens.)

In the field, look for heads. The ducks' horizontal bills are at right angles to most of their cover and therefore catch your eye. With a little practice, you can identify species -- or at least narrow down possibilities -- at a glance. Blue-winged teal, for example, have a profile different from green-wings but exactly like that of cinnamon teal. To distinguish blue-wing from cinnamon hens, you have to note which drakes they are hanging out with. The cinnamon drakes are hard to miss, with their shocking blue wing-patches against bright red-brown body. (You can improve on this color scheme, if you are an artist. Never mind what the pious have told you about Nature's perfection.)

There are other good shows, but the spectacle outside the window is free for the looking and private -- unless I pick up binoculars. Huckleberry will then leap to his feet and join me, figuring that I am onto something good, and Tess will join Huck, figuring that he knows something she doesn't, in which she is usually right.

I could use more company of human kind, but the dogs share my antique passions and a mating season is good to watch even when we are not, for the moment, part of it.

THE FIRST TIME

> You're supposed to go through a series of transitions. At first you just want a fish, and since this is a complicated sport requiring some skill, landing that first one isn't always a snap.
>
> John Gierach[11]

Blame it on the snipe winnowing close to the roof, pulling me outside under low, slow skies with tingles of drizzle -- mayfly weather. Little spring olives would be hatching on the Madison River.

"It's crying time again," sang Anna. "You're gonna leave me. I can see that faraway look in your eyes." She did not mean it but Tess did. They looked forward to my outings for opposite reasons -- wife because she might get something done around here with me out of the way, puppy because she had been coming along for the last eight months and thought we were a team forever. I would have taken her and let her frighten a few trout if that's all there were to it. The trouble was rattlesnakes coming out of their dens and sunning, near-invisible till you stepped on them, and little Tess was a stepper. So I drove away with her dashing from window to window and rearing up with paws on the panes.

I was late and the skies were clearing, when I pulled on my waders, but I would have taken time for a few words with the women if they had given me an opening. There were two of them,

both fishing right by the parking place in flat shallow water a weighted fly. I asked what they were using and one said "Prince Nymph" without looking at me, so I hiked on down to good water and left them alone.

You can't blame women for worrying about men. Even our local newspaper has enough wrenching stories to destroy trust. So far, though, streams and fields appear relatively safe from reptiles of the human variety, and it's good to see more women out there. Where were you, all these years?

I walked a quarter-mile downstream and knelt to get the light angled right on tiny sailboats tempest-tossed. The wind had grown stronger and the mayflies were hard to catch, even for swallows. The trout would not rise at all. Then the wind dropped -- preparing to change directions -- and five fish began to feed on the surface and I caught two of them on a small dry fly. One trout was a rainbow long as my forearm, but not fully mended from spawning. The other was a young silvery brown that jumped twice and vibrated in my hand like Tessie when she's asking for a run. Neither trout wanted exercise, of course.

I released both. Fresh fish would be welcome on the table in spring, but not those from the Madison River.

The wind came back hard under my visor so I turned around and splashed upstream to the truck. The two women were where I had left them -- unwilling to wade deeper, perhaps. (It is a skill that has to be learned, wading: harder than casting, if you have not grown up on mossy rocks.) The new anglers were following

a fly-fishing-school routine, casting ten yards and wondering what to do next.

When the scream came I ran to help, trained husband that I am, but the emergency was a trout, young splashing brown like mine but caught by a maiden's personal Prince. Scream turned to laugh as the trout came in at high speed and dangled in the air, swinging back and forth while the angler tried to catch it in her bare hand. She did, too. Grasped it firmly, sort of, removed the hook, turned her prey loose, and kept on screaming while cliffs on the far bank screamed back echoes.

"That's my first trout," she said.

≈

APRIL

(1) National Geographic, August 1997, p.94.

(2) Dr. Vermeij is a paleontologist interviewd by Carol Kaesuk Yoon in the New York Times Feb. 7, 1995.

(3) The Power of Myth, with Bill Moyers. NY: Doubleday, 1988. p.xvi.

(4) Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 1990. p.193.

(5) The female meadowlark's decoy-call is not mentioned in the bird-books I have consulted, but Ben Williams identified it for me.

(6) A Sand County Almanac, p.34. Leopold's subject was the woodcock, which we do not have in Montana.

(7) Seigne, J.W. A Bird Watcher's Notebook. London: Allan, 1930. See Chapter III. Admirers of snipe and woodcock will want Seigne's books.

(8) The Snipes. Ottawa: Canadian Wildlife Service, 1992. p.41.

(9) Atlantic magazine, 11/97. The source is given as "Three Days to See," January, 1933.

(10) Ortega y Gassett, José. Meditations on Hunting. NY:Scribner's, 1985. p.59.

(11) Another Lousy Day in Paradise. NY: Simon & Schuster. p.226.