

Making Ripples

Nature's Brain Ticklers: What Do You Want to Know?

by Amanda Bancroft

Over the years, this column has featured various topics from making a difference to information on ecology and sustainability, such as energy efficiency, wildlife, plants, water, transportation, stars, weather, gardening, green building, and much more. As the 5th year anniversary of Making Ripples approaches this fall, what's missing? What tickles your brain and makes you curious about nature?

Some people feel more driven to discuss rocks than snakes. But others love a good “herp” romp through a swamp full of frogs. Flowers are super popular except maybe among those with allergies. Sometimes, it's not even the flowers but what they attract which captures our curiosity: hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, bats, and moths. Nocturnal creatures are often overlooked, yet because of this, few know about them and become intrigued. Trees, water, soil, air, and foundational supports for life on Earth are essential, but may not seem very exciting to some people. Many feel that the most fascinating read comes from topics related to actions, such as how to create a wildlife-friendly yard or reduce carbon emissions using simple life hacks.

All of that is well and good, but what do you, our local readership, want to know? The most commonly asked question on Google (What is love?) is a great part of making a difference but the answer is subjective. And some things aren't subjective, no matter how much people want them to be. According to Google Trends, the most common question from Arkansans is “Who won the Civil War?”

The most common request received is for a column on a non-profit, business, or project, which is cool and certainly helps raise awareness. However, it leaves unanswered the question of what you personally wish you knew about the natural world. The process of answering this question is intriguing in and of itself, even if you tell nobody, because it's essentially a voyage of discovery. Do you have natural history questions about how certain native fruits were used hundreds of years ago by people living here? Or perhaps you just want to know what causes some birds to visit feeders when others won't. Getting outside (or observing from indoors) leads us to question, and that is a gift. A caveat: a single observation made at one location by one person is very limited. But just avoid making generalizations about people or nature from a handful of personal experiences, and you'll have a clearer picture. When in doubt about a conclusion, make room for exceptions and the abundant grey inside most facts.

Have a special request for a topic? It just might get covered in a future column. Submit your ideas or questions to: MakeSomeRipples@Gmail.com. Thank you for reading, and in your own unique style, making the world a better place for everyone!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Mt. Kessler. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.