

Fauna of My Front Yard

(Text and images by Joseph Young)

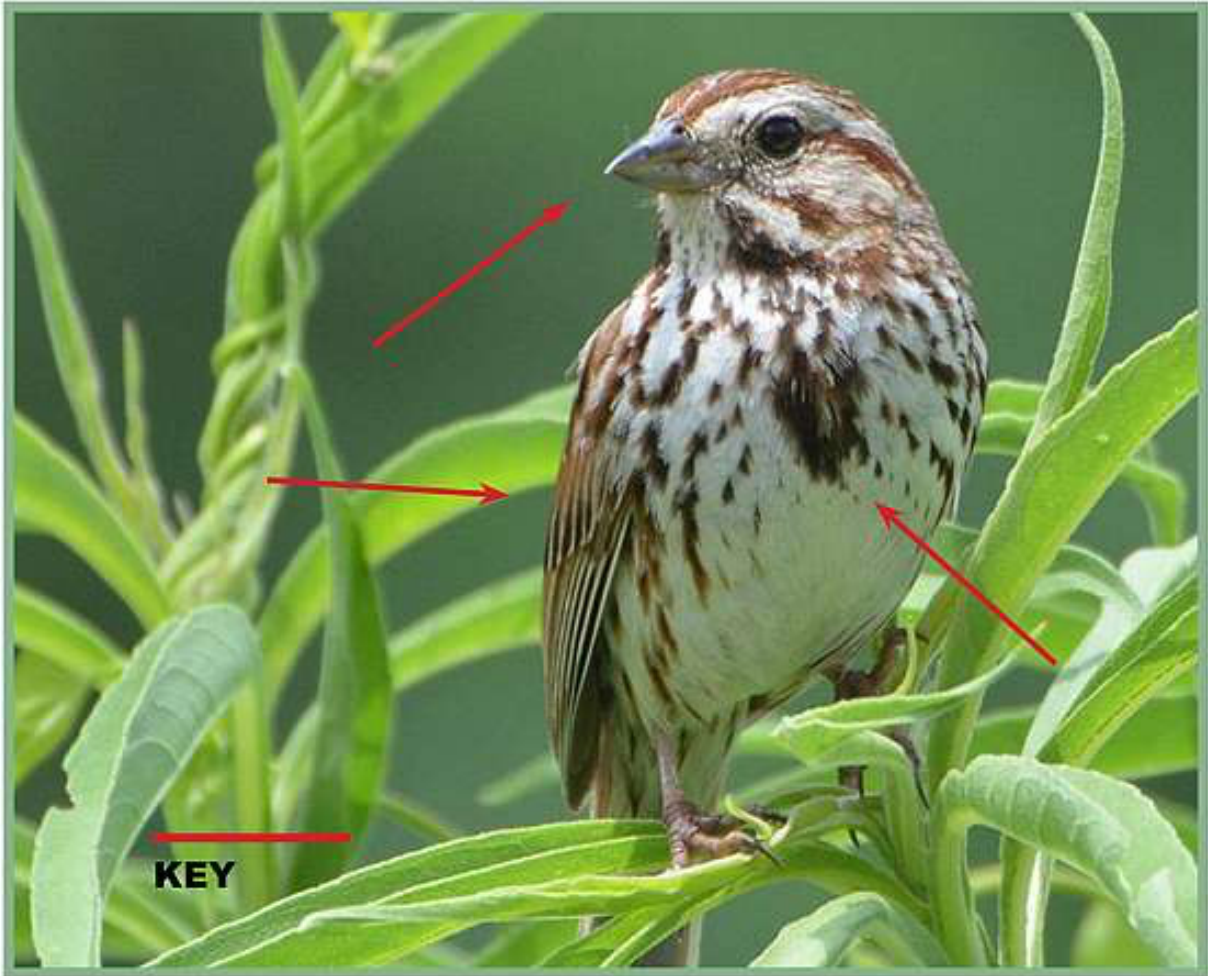
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I live at the near geographic center of Baltimore City. And I enjoy learning about the lives of nonhuman animals. These two things are more compatible than you might first think. Below, I offer ten vignettes about various forms of life I've come to know as I looked a little closer at my surroundings and thought a little more about the other creatures with whom I share my yard—the animals that live and work and play in and around this urban environment. All of these animals are common enough in this landscape that someone with a keen ear and eye might encounter them, too. There's a lot going on in my front yard—it connects continents, spans millennia, and astounds in its living variety.



The Perplexing Bumble Bee is the yellowest of all Maryland Bumble Bees, of which she is one of more than ten. That is, unless she's in the sun too long, as the bumblebee's soft coat can fade with the strong light. The buzz that gives the Bumble Bee her name shakes free the pollen in a flower and onto her body, to take home to the nest. The Perplexing Bumble Bee, like all Bumbles, can sting, though these bees are known, as a genus, to be gentle. The Perplexing Bumble Bee may fly into your house, seeming to look for something. What is she looking for, circling your legs, your room, bumbling in gentle loops? Quietly coax her outside again.

#bumblebee #pollinator #perplexing #soyellow #maryland #citywildlife
#urbananimals



The Song Sparrow is a small brown bird. In Maryland, you might confuse the Song Sparrow with the Savannah Sparrow or Lincoln's Sparrow. You might even confuse the Song Sparrow with the House Sparrow, a chunkier bird that came from Europe. The Song Sparrow is a prolific singer, who can sing 20 different songs with 1000 variations. Some of their songs sound like Beethoven's Fifth. These Sparrows learn their songs from their neighbors and use these tunes to distinguish their neighbors from strangers. Song Sparrows employ cultural learning, passing what they know along the generations. You might learn to tell a Song Sparrow apart from his neighbor.

#songsparrow #brown #culturallearning #maryland #citywildlife
#urbananimals



The Eastern Gray Squirrel is, as you might think, mostly gray. This Squirrel is crepuscular and so prefers to be out during the twilight hours of dusk and dawn, or when the day is gray. The name Squirrel comes from the Greek words *skia* and *oura*, or “shadow tail,” referring to the habit of shading himself beneath his bushy tail if he happens to be out during a yellow day. The Eastern Gray Squirrel is much faster at making decisions than you are when driving your car. Be careful, and remember that most vehicular encounters with the Eastern Gray Squirrel result in no harm to any party. Squirrels have excellent spatial memory. They may only pretend to bury food if they think someone is watching. The Eastern Gray Squirrel stores a potent brain.

#easterngraysquirrel #becareful #graymatter #maryland #citywildlife #urbananimals



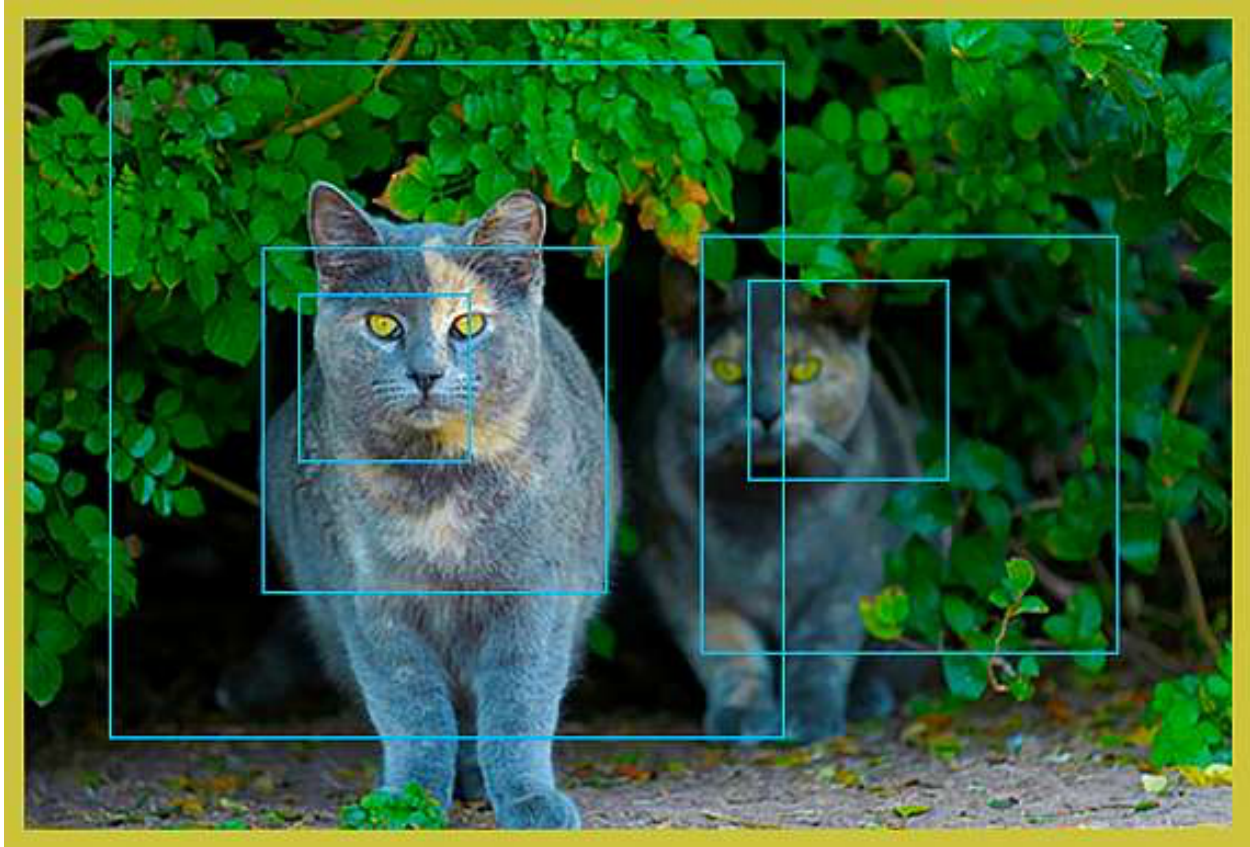
The Chimney Swift had to change names. His flight is erratic. Chimney Swifts migrate to Peru when winter comes. He once lived in hollow trees. Chimney Swifts scare predators by making a collective thunder with their wings. A Chimney Swift rips off twigs in flight to build his nest. Audubon called the Chimney Swift the American Swift. The Chimney Swift eats airborne spiders. He looks like a flying cigar. When the trees were cut down, the American Swift had to nest in chimneys. There is disagreement whether the Chimney Swift mates in flight. The chattering in your chimney could be baby Chimney Swifts. The species name, *Pelagica*, means “of the sea.” Leave your chimney open for the Chimney Swifts. Chimney Swifts migrate in clouds of many thousands. It only looks like he beats his wings out of sync. The sooty-colored Chimney Swift is something that’s fast.

#chimneyswift #americanswift #erratic #thatfast #maryland #citywildlife
#urbananimals



If you look on the internet, you'll see that the Clover Mite is widely considered a pest. In Maryland, they might gather on your garden wall to take in the sun; they might come inside to sit on your windowsill. Clover Mites do not harm your house, pets, or furniture. They do not bite. If you hurt them they leave a red stain. The Clover Mite is parthenogenetic. She lays her eggs and when they hatch they are genetically identical to her and her sisters. No one has ever identified a Clover Mite that's male. The Clover Mite receives her color from the plants she eats—clover, dandelion, daffodil. She is so small you might not notice her, tiny as the dot on an i.

#clovermite #innocuous #identical #i #maryland #citywildlife #urbananimals



The Community Cat lives many lives. They are feral, born wild, indifferent to, or frightened of, their Human neighbors. They are stray, so once had a home inside. They are domestic, only outside for the day. Neighbors have a lot of different opinions about the Community Cat. The Community Cat is a scourge—diseased, health hazard, unleasher of untoward death to the Birds. The Community Cat provides necessary predation to the weak and weary—important in their ecosystem—healthy as almost any Cat. The Community Cat should be seen and left alone; fed and cared for; destroyed by any means we might bring. Over them, there is a fight in our community, a science that's both wild and trained. Meanwhile, the Community Cat lives all of their lives: grooms, fights, mates, eats, meows, preys, purrs, thinks, feels, is.

#communitycat #argument #alive #maryland #citywildlife #urbananimals



As you know, the Turkey Vulture eats death. He's been known, through the study of his pellets, to feast on the carrion of mice, shrews, deer, pigs, sheep, chickens, blackbirds, snakes, turtles, shrimp, snails, grasshoppers, mayflies, coyotes, sea lions, and more. In Maryland, adjust accordingly. Maybe better to say the Turkey Vulture plucks death, the Latin word *vultur* meaning to pluck or tear. The Turkey Vulture plucks the instrument of death, perhaps because in lacking a syrinx he can't sing. In flight, a flock of Vultures is a kettle, a roiling cauldron of soup as they ride the thermals above. The Turkey Vulture smells death. One of his kettle soars close to the ground to pick up the scent, alerting the rest to the body. Of the genus *Cathartidae*, the Vulture is thus "the purifier." Lovely, ugly, maligned, and essential, the Turkey Vulture is the cleaner of death.

#turkeyvulture #intodeath #likesagoodbody #lovely #maryland #citywildlife #urbananimals



Mokkinbado o kiku. Ting zhi geng niao. Escute o mockingbird. Luister na die bespotting. Ascolta il mockingbird. Samleng saechchmak. Makinig sa nakakatawa. Gwrandewch ar y gwatwar. Hern tsu di mokingbird. Mockingbirdni tinglang. Listen to the mockingbird. Lytt til hanfuglen. Horen Sie sich den Spottdrossel an. Isma 'l-mockingbird. Auskultu la mokridulon. Fa'alogo I le tauemu. Akouste to koroidevo. Koute mockingbird la.

#mockingbird #mimuspolyglottos #mimicofmanytongues #googletranslations #maryland #citywildlife #urbananimals



You may be tempted to write about the Eastern Eyed Click Beetle, since he's so handsome, but you've never seen him in person. Write about *Aeolus* sp., who you have, and is pretty easy on the eye in any case. *Aeolus* sp., like all Click Beetles, clicks. Should a Bird or Human come upon him in the grass, he'll fall to his back, playing dead. Touch him with a beak or finger and the special spine on his thorax will snap to send him into the air, and several inches away, with an audible click. This sudden change in locale may help him to click another day. Nice work, *Aeolus* sp. *Aeolus* was the Greek god of the wind, "The Changeable," which sounds about right. The Click Beetle is cosmopolitan, with a range over much of the world. You may write about him wherever you are.

#aeolus #clickbettle #notthatonetheotherone #maryland #citywildlife
#urbananimals



The Evening Bat is fond of the evening. Whether she is more fond of the evening than other Bats, almost all of whom are nocturnal, is an interesting thing to consider. Female Evening Bats are quite social. They gather in maternal colonies of up to 300 individuals as they raise their pups. They recognize their pups by their individual smells and their individual squeaks. Being a mammal, an Evening Bat nurses her pups with her milk, and she might nurse pups she did not birth as well. Evening Bats display resource partitioning, deciding to eat different insects than other Bats to limit the competition for food. Since flying takes so much energy, requiring a strong flow of blood through her body, a Bat's heart is three times larger than most mammals. The Evening Bat is fond of the beetles that eat our crops. Some of us are not fond of Bats, which is an interesting thing to consider.

#eveningbat #nosesthatlookliedogs #3xheart #maryland #citywildlife
#urbananimals

