little boy blue
animals
May 11
Written By a far away fellow

On many of our adventures whether on pathless woods or where the waves break on a low sandy shore, Blue and I would settle a while. Blue is my trusty Blue Roan Cocker Spaniel. He would sit on his haunches with a morose appearance watching his master. A watchful sleepy eye would appear and analyse the footsteps, creaks and sounds around him. Blue stood slack but ready, his smooth narrow head flickered as he shifted his gaze, his growls grew more menacing, his eyes becoming fixed in their stare.

Blue suddenly yelped his impatience and flew at the hedge turning a pheasant out from the taloned Bramble hedge below. At first she fluttered but at length she springs to smoother flight. He would later lie in the warm noon day sun; he breathed softly and sighed lowly with his legs moving as though he was running. Was Blue chasing pheasants in his dreams, one can only wonder?

In the sweeps of wind and waves I would listen to the sound of the laughing gulls, the sound of which I had in my ears for so long, I could not do without it. Their tossing flight and cries floated higher in the sky above with the sound of their voices being loosed to the eddies of the wind.

During stormy winter weather the gulls travel inland to the areas of flooded farmland which has been under water for many weeks at a time, where they would bathe and preen their oily feathers. On stormy days they stand to face the howling winds so as not to ruffle their fine feathers before they return to their coastal homes, laughing their near-human laugh as they scoot by the slappy shores. A bird will fluff out his feathers when he is cold, tired, angry, and sleepy or when his feelings have been hurt. The way he carries his feathers may be an indication that all is not well. Sometimes we too have to stand strong and face our own challenges head on, just like the gulls. They eyes of the gulls fix on Blue and I with a look of undisguised distain before
hearing the sound of ‘quoc, quoc, quoc’ informing all that there is a human approach close by.

All this time Blue’s excitement has been elevating until he could contain himself no more. He rose to his feet and raced towards the gulls on the beach with the sand arose behind him by the kicks of his hind legs, jumping and barking as the gulls took to flight to escape his excited advances. As they landed some way down the beach Blue was not far behind them and before long he was but a spot in the distance. The gulls rose once more and headed out to the water to escape him. He had never been in the sea before and wasn’t too fond of water, however, if the gulls were going in then so was Blue. He would chase another group back up the beach then drop at my feet with his tongue flagging. After his salty bath and fish supper he retired to his basket, Blue would cease to listen to the footfalls and sleep on.

I would soon become aware that life is a great bundle of little things seeing a spirit everywhere, gentle in thought to my eyes beheld. One never tires of seeing the wonders that surround us or their beguiling and impressive charm, but I will endeavour to give them an added charm always striving to be more truthful to write or render a scene with the authentic sunlight of life.
The Edge Lands of our Waterways

natureanimals
May 13
Written By a far away fellow

I awake early as the day dawns and the morning bright. Woven between dew laden brambles sparkling in the sun was the hoariest grey and white of the spider’s web telling me the promise of a lovely day. They are nature’s weather forecasters, for if she sits in the centre of her web with her eyes downcast, the day will be clear and bright.

As I begin my journey on this beautiful morning a skylark lifts its wings and ascends to fetch a song from heaven singing so blissfully high above the fields of swaying barley and growing wheat, but the sounds from his throat strings stops me in my tracks. I then notice a cock pheasant approaching from a small wooded copse, closely followed by a male hare, a jack. This wonderful sight is one that I have encountered on several occasions. It would appear that they have formed a partnership to protect one another from predation. Most birds have splendid eyesight, whilst many animals have keen noses and quick ears. I rest a while and marvel at this magical scene as the pheasant carries on feeding whilst the hare goes on a rampage. He was relentless in his pursuit of fun, leaping and scampering about, then suddenly he decides to show me what speed really meant, his prowess and enthusiasm inspires me.

As I amble along the edge land of the canal a male mute swan a cob, glides across the water towards me with ruthless elegance driven by his large webbed feet. As I watch the ripples revolving, shrinking and weakening, he drifts lazily over, stops and looks down his bill at me. The female, the Pen and her three cygnets begin to beat the water with colossal wings driving a bow wave that slaps against the bank where many kinds of wildfowl flapped and quacked. These wonderful semi-wild creatures are so endearing with their proud confident demeanour and are the quietest of all the swans, hence their name ‘mute’. Swans feed mainly on aquatic plants, if however they predominantly feed off acidic plants they tend to develop brown markings on their feathers. All swans are protected by law; however, our native swans belong to the sovereign and are protected by the
crown. They are also a true symbol of love in many cultures around the world.

As I rest a while, hovering overhead with rapid beating wings with its tail spread far apart was a kestrel hunting for meadow voles but the peace and silence doesn’t last. A portly man approaches with a mobile phone clamped to his ear; he was vigorously vocal in a tongue I didn’t want to understand. He burbles a few platitudes and disperses the joy we have tasted. The stranger passes by but sadly he misses all. It would seem some people carry their own storm wherever they go. Perhaps he may lack the understanding that the happiness of our lives depends on the quality of our thoughts.

As his voice fades into the distance and the peace returns I hear the tell tale buzzing of a wasp inside a discarded ripe apple. As I approached and crouched down I watched him stagger from the apple having become intoxicated on the fermenting juice, alerting me that this is now the time to take my leave before he becomes aggressive. As I slowly rise a female pheasant breaks through the undergrowth allowing me to observe and admire her beautiful feather patterns, they remind me so much of the patterns of the changing seasons, but I also observe the complexity of the fern fronds from which she appeared. As I continued on my journey, there ahead of me was the sun like an immense dandelion looking over an old humpback bridge. The old sandstone bridge dated back to a time when goods were carried on barges pulled along by heavy horses. These once bustling canals are steeped in history but now only frequented by fishermen, pleasure boats and ramblers, but it is a fine place to stop and observe the life of the canal.

As I pass under the bridge there was a man with strongly marked features sitting on a bench soaking up the sun, his eyes were dark blue and steady, his voice was soft and he spoke as though he had come straight from Oxbridge. We chatted for a while about this beautiful place, sharing a growing sympathy towards landscape and nature and of times gone by. He then enthusiastically shows me the rope marks on the bridge created by the ropes of the heavy horses that towed the barges and as I run my fingertips along the deep grooves I am immediately taken back to that time where I visualise the horse moving with a stately clumping gait, bringing memories of my own
beloved horse Rocky to the forefront of my mind, which crowded me and left me with a sadness in my heart having recently lost him.

On the far bank of the canal is the stately butterbur plant, a shady retreat impervious to the eye, a plant often used to protect food whilst cooking in times gone by – nature’s cling film. Under the large shady leaves is where the little water shrew resides. His favourite food is the whirly-gig beetle which has eyes that can look two ways at once, down in the water below and also straight ahead along the surface of the water, but the shrew watches diligently, then suddenly with his venomous bite, the mighty atom strikes and the whirly-gig beetle whirls no more. By the entrance to an old lock gate now overgrown and barely visible is where the mayflies dance with their gauzy wings and where I watch a lovely scene of rising fish with the spreading circles of their rise, and where luminous bubbles go sailing by.

I then spot one of the most handsome waterside plants comfrey, this stately plant also known as knit bone, could be used as a soak to soothe tired aching feet, along with ephemeral plants such as chickweed, groundsel and the pimpernels, which was widely used by the village nurse in the process of fomentation for the treatment of sprains and cuts, also used in poultices to draw infected wounds in people and animals. Another important plant used in these times was tansy; it was used to ward off the many flies along the waterways from meat and wild game stored inside the larder but also used to cover and protect their lost loved ones on their long journey back home. They would also harvest the large leaves of coltsfoot which was then dried and smoked by the men and women in their clay pipes, known as ‘bargee baccy’. I feel we should all be indebted to the gypsies of the waterways for the wealth of knowledge they have left behind.

In the distance I can see the creamy coloured blossoms of the meadow sweet, and on the far bank swathes of reed mace rustles in the breeze where reed buntings gather the floss from the plumes to line their nests. Purple loosestrife grows in abundance here due to its ability to be pollinated in many more ways than any other plants thus ensuring its survival.

As I make my way home, a mist was forming and a barn owl was flying low towards the bridge on broad soft wings. It wafted along as light as
the mist itself, but I must now pay my thanks to the little fanged monster, the spider for her weather forecast for the day had been glorious. But now the dusk is longing for the night and I must make my way home before the blue velvet night falls. Here the agrestic edge land and the canal have settled together like an old couple in the hollow of a mattress.

I will now take a respectful leave of you and natural history together but I hope by following my little breadcrumb trails may enable you to develop a new faith into the sensuous enjoyment of the natural world, but also to the intimacy, wonder and respect in the observation of creation.
The Nature of Flight

Written By a far away fellow

Being fully awake and with the soft magic of the half-light dissolved like mist, I stare in slack mouthed silence as squirrels hurriedly ripple across my path, their spines undulating like waves along a skipping rope. They have become startled by the rooks alighting in the great oak tree. Rooks have a more discerning scent and lead a flock of starlings to an area rich in food. They have a more delicate feel in their beaks enabling them to detect food from a greater distance so have formed a beneficial relationship with the starlings, the rooks also acting as a ‘look out’ for predators on open ground which can be readily observed.

As twilight descends large groups of starlings will gather together to form a ‘murmur’ as they take to the air sky writing, forming intricate patterns as they climb, switch and swoop in balletic flight through the air screeching loudly in their thousands before raining down to roost in woodlands, on bridges, piers, canals and even in town centres, then silence returns.

I watch in wonder the sunward flight of a skylark as he rises and falls perpendicularly. He sings aloft letting his little world know that he claims his ground below where he has a dam (female) and hopefully youngsters in a nest with her broodlings peeping from beneath her breast.

I watch eagerly our summer visitors the swallows sweeping over the surface of the fields and ponds with rapid turns and quick elevations. Swifts however, scythe through the air, they dash around in circles and when tired climb high up into the thermals taking a nap as they slowly descend. Their distant relatives the little martins move so delicately their flight is one like the butterfly.

I have often observed racing pigeons when liberated from their baskets. Suddenly there’s a great upward surge of birds wheeling and turning in the upper air and with one accord every head is turned
towards home. Just another example of how much of life is a mystery as their navigation is so accurate.

As summer gently flows into autumn an awe-inspiring sight is when a skein of geese are flying in formation behind the lone lead bird, always in a ‘V’ formation like an arrow head. As each bird flaps its wings the uplift created assists the ones close behind thus enabling them to fly much further. If however one should break away from its position it quickly realises the difficulties in flying alone and quickly re-joins the others. When the leader becomes tired it then drops back and another will take the lead. This behaviour continues throughout their long journey so that each lead bird rests in turn. The ones at the rear will honk to encourage the others to maintain speed.

As autumn turns to winter the flight of a flock of linnets is undulating whilst twittering as they fly sometimes joined by twites also known as mountain linnets and being smaller but similar in appearance. A charm of goldfinches with their kaleidoscope of many colours and their liquid twittering song is so delightful as they alight on the thistle heads to strip the floss and devour the soft seed inside, they are also fondly known as ‘thistle tweakers’.

The way that birds make use of nature’s signposts in the world around them is unperceived by humans, but also the smells in the air being so diluted that we are totally unaware and don’t even realise their existence.

If we pause to think a while and look around, we will then begin to realise that anything we once thought small would dilate with the grandeur of life. For you can really become swept away with it all. This then highlights our own ignorance humbling us in the presence of its all-wise creator. This wonderful place bore me, drew me in and held me. It’s there for everyone.

It’s yours if you want it.
A new and vital season arises from the harsh winter, born of the death of the old year. New life is beginning to stir from beneath the earth. Animals, insects, plants and trees burst into life below ground long before they emerge into the light, the promise of things to come.

The leader of the floral pageant is the Snowdrop, vital for the early bees food supply. Snowdrop meaning ‘hope’ in the language of flowers push their tender green shoots through the leaf litter followed swiftly by the nectar rich flowers. As the Snowdrops fade the charming and delicate Crocus unfolds her beauty. Wild flowers are also emerging at this time; Coltsfoot, Dandelion and Goat’s Willow all offering vital pollen and nectar for the hungry bees.

If more of us planted early flowering bulbs such as Snowdrops, Crocus and Aconites in September, we would increase their much needed early food supply, thus helping the bees to survive through till mid spring when wild and cultivated flowers are in abundance as they are seriously in decline. Bees are extremely important insects as they are the major pollinators of flowering plants.

Honey bees are the first to emerge in early spring, followed by the first queen bumble bee, then the early solitary bee. Bees are both a ‘keystone’ and an ‘indicator’ species; they tell us when something is wrong in the environment. They are vital for our own survival and must be helped in as many ways as possible to prevent their demise.

Bees have several enemies, a parasitic mite, and overuse of powerful chemical sprays on crops by land owners and loss of habitat. Where there is a huge loss of open land, concreted over to build houses or industrial buildings, the bees have to travel far greater distances to look for food. Farmers need to leave uncultivated bands around the edges of their fields, or leave whole areas fallow to encourage the growth of wild flower meadows. We too can help by leaving ‘ribbons
of life’ in our own manicured gardens to attract the bees and other wildlife.

In a hive each cast of bee has its own special function and works diligently for the benefit of the whole community. One particular band of workers flap their wings at the entrance of the hive just to keep it cool inside. Sir Christopher Wren was so impressed with the harmony to be found within a hive that he designed many churches with domes as a symbol of harmony (a Skep – a dome shaped hive).

I have tried to offer you some interesting facts which will hopefully help you to understand nature wherever it may be met, in town or countryside. By giving you some inside knowledge about the wonders that surround you, it will help you to enjoy nature more. It is full of untold novelties for those who have the eyes to see them.
When we enter a beautiful woodland setting we are then caught in a moment of admiration, one that is capable of lifting our spirits and touching emotions that lie deeper and are more meaningful to us than almost anything else in life.

I became enchanted by trees our woodland treasures, the role they have to play on this earth, their size, their beauty and their serenity. My favourite woodland tree is the Beech (Fagus Sylvaticus) ‘The Queen of the woods' which was brought here by the Romans. I love its form, tall and strong, the shape and feel of its leaves, smooth, glossy and deeply veined also the pattern and rough texture of the bark. Even a crack in the bark of a tree is a capacious and secret hideout for many insects. I loved to listen to the wind passing through its arching branches and marvelled at its technicolour splendour in the autumn. I would sit for hours watching mice and squirrels collecting the heavy seeds of the Oak and Beech, they cannot resist the oily starchy seeds and will endeavour to plant them close to the base of the tree, thus making their contribution to the next generation of woodland trees. Jays however, carry the seeds of the Oak much further afield to ensure a plentiful supply of food throughout the winter and hopefully the ones they forget will germinate and grow on the outer fringes of the wood.

Trees have a lifespan just like us; the Beech can live up to two hundred and twenty years and beyond. I would often sit at the base of a grandfather tree and wonder who had passed this way before, whilst listening to a cacophony of birdsong. When all was quiet the ghosts of pilgrims could be felt in the stillness of the air.

When a mature tree tumbles and falls to the ground it becomes a kind of midwife to the young deciduous trees. As its storage of water is
released it cools the hot summer air to a more breathable temperature, and as time goes by this fallen tree will be a food source and a home to a myriad of small creatures and fungi, it will eventually decompose and create rich humus to nourish the woodland plants and trees.

I would love to listen to the sweet harpsichord sound of the wind as it rushed through the trees and watched in wonder the ticker tape of falling leaves tumbling to the ground. I have observed the sudden switchback flight of the Woodpecker frantically searching for grubs and beetles to feed her hungry brood, nestled in a hole deep inside the crevice of a majestic oak, and who could mistake the heron’s silhouette as it winged its way overhead and watch in wonder the fragile flight of a butterfly in a nectar rich hawthorn hedge how it never damaged its delicate wings on the many thorns. To see a shy nymph who never ventured more than a few metres from where she was born, diligently guarding her home; but if you tried to catch her you never would, it’s just like happiness for she would come to you.

On the woodland floor a carpet of Wood Anemones and Celandines shone like jewels through the shady tree canopy which were lit by shafts of filtered sunlight breaking through. The earthy smell of the humus rich leaf mould and the pungent aroma of the Ransoms (wild garlic) crushed under foot as you carefully made your way along the well-trodden path. Just to run your hands through the delicate ferns and mosses in the shady dampened areas of the woodland floor and to wander gently and carefully through this rich carpet would bring a feeling of peace and calm.

I visited the woods through all seasons as I never wanted to miss the many changing moods therein. The soft fall of rain through the canopy would change the mood once again. The sounds, the smells and the freshness of the air, the raindrops changing colour as they settled on the leaves before they gently tumbled to the ground, giving much needed life to all it’s inhabitants, those we see and to those where no eyes can follow.
Autumn would now take over highlighting the vast array of fungus from the edible to the most poisonous toadstools of every size, shape and colour. The wonderful kaleidoscope as the leaves changed from green to yellow, orange, red and then to brown drifting slowly to the floor. I loved to run through the deep carpet of leaves, the sound and feel of them crunching and rustling beneath my feet, kicking them into the air as I ran through the deep multi-coloured carpet. The rustle of the leaves as birds and mammals scratched in the leaf litter in search of the plentiful supply of food beneath, and then just before darkness engulfed the scene around me a Tawny Owl flew overhead etched against the inky sky.

Frost and snow brought its own special mood, with the woods becoming noticeably quiet. The leafless canopy enabled the soft snow to drift gently down and settle on the woodland floor changing the landscape yet again, whilst casting a delicate light throughout the wood highlighting the many varied animal tracks of those who had passed through the night before. As winter drew on the statuesque trees were waking from their slumber, things were stirring deep within in anticipation of the new life to come. Plants and animals were waking from their long winter sleep and I was there to witness it all.

This wonderful place was like a gentle breeze blowing away the many dark clouds. There were times when I would reflect back to my childhood. When I would sense a memory breaking through the surface like a sea monster, all of this and so much more would come washing over me dressed in that repressive gloom. I knew at the time and still sense the ghost of that feeling. I would then feel a wave of repose, a peaceful serenity and became released from my emotional chains. This beautiful woodland had touched me with the artistry of a magic wand, bringing harmony and solace back into my world.

Whilst suffering intolerable pain year after year, feeling totally alone and not knowing what the future held for me I took myself off the woods once again, for there waiting for me was the mother who held me in her arms, comforted me, eased my pain and understood my
anguish. I needed to find another way. I was never given any medication to relieve my pain and suffering; no-one counselled me to see how my head injury or my memory problem was affecting my life or to offer me words of comfort and encouragement. There were no follow up appointments with doctors or specialists to see how I was progressing, no-one to tell of my desperate situation, even my family had written me off. I was left to find my own way of coping and self-healing but through the process of mindfulness I came through those long dark years. I now had a reason to go on with my life, and with the aid of my precious little notebooks I came through, after all this was all I had.

I would then look upon my own unexpected situation and began to put it all to wonderful use. There is a way that nature speaks to us. Most of the time we are simply too busy, we are not patient or quiet enough to pay attention to the story and how it unfolds. But we have rifled only fragments of nature’s huge storeroom of secrets. I now understand what will really deliver the balance, the bliss that I have craved. Woodlands win on every front, they are good for people, good for nature and they also offer restorative powers to people with physical and mental health problems in such ways that are entirely compatible with beauty. They can turn a breakdown into a break through and albeit your sadness.

All my life I have been inspired by the beauty of nature and for a long time I have enjoyed the peace and spiritual enlightenment which only the contact with nature can bring. Every day I was taken on a spiritual journey to a different place where I was never judged or demised, a place where I had a sense of self worth, a place of belonging. I must now give thanks to the many wonderful trees, plants and creatures that have allowed me to become a part of their rich lives. They are the ones that had all the stories to tell, I merely undertook to translate them to you. For through the process of mindfulness this wonderful place was like a gentle breeze blowing away the many dark clouds.
What a wonderful place this world is when viewed through a child’s dreaming eyes of wonder. And the darkness you may ask, well this seemed to drift away into a different galaxy far away.

The boy who became ‘A Far Away Fellow’

We hope you enjoyed.

Please read more on www.afarawayfellow.com

Warm Regards