

Mornings on Fair Oaks Bridge

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FEBRUARY 2018

I have visited Fair Oaks Bridge regularly for more than a year, through all its seasons and have come to know the rhythms of its wildlife. I ask a series of questions that still puzzle me. Even after visiting this site more than 100 times, I continue to cherish its beauty and the experience of watching wildlife wake up rituals during early morning hours.

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I WONDER WHY?

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2018, 7:40 AM, 46 DEGREES

THIS MORNING I SIT AND WONDER WHY?

I have watched wildlife morning wake up rituals, morning cloud formations and brilliantly colored sunrises for nearly 18 months at Fair Oaks Bridge. This morning I sit with questions and no answers. As soon as I think of one question, that leads me to wonder about something else. I present no right answers or facts for any question.

Why do Buffleheads dive for food in the center of the river corridor when other ducks feed near the riverbank in shallow water? Is the deep center the best place to find breakfast? How deep do they dive? What treats do they find? Buffleheads swim calmly up and down the center of the river, diving in one spot and reappearing a dozen feet or more away.



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I always look for Egrets and admire their beauty and elegant flights. I wonder how many miles they travel and what stops they make in a day? Where do they sleep? Why do they stand far away from ducks, seagulls and especially the Great Blue Heron? I see a pair of Egrets fly over and wonder why they always fly low and close to the water?

When Canada Geese honk as they fly, are they giving directions to they speak? I know the honking unifies the flock and actually helps them fly faster and farther.



I wonder where is the rain? Last year at this time, our rivers were raging torrents.. I stood on Fair Oaks Bridge a year ago today and watched the water underneath it swirl and churn. I was dizzy watching. The riverbanks, the boat ramp, the parking lot and the bike trail even further back, were all submerged under several feet of water. Crowds of people lined Fair Oaks Bridge to take pictures of the wild river.

Who has returned to see the river at peace?
Was the real attraction just the drama of a
raging river?

Visiting for the drama overlooks the larger story of understanding wildlife activity and interactions, and need to preserve their habitat throughout the year

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SPIDER WEBS – GEOMETRY IN MOTION

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2018, 8 AM, 46 DEGREES



WARM DAY, SUN HIGH, BIRDS TWITTER IN NEARBY TREES. The Egret takes its usual place on the riverbank. The pigeons and the ducks are absent. As I walk to the boat launch ramp, a hiker atop the Fair Oaks Bluff calls to me, *Hey. There is a seal in the river!* From a distance, I can see its head just above the water. Then it dives deep and rises out of the water just enough I can barely see its head. Where did the seal come from? What wrong turn led it so far from the coast?

This morning I see a busy spider and a series of spider webs attached to the side rails of the bridge. I marvel at their precision and the geometric shapes formed in each one. Fair Oaks Bridge is a popular colony for spiders. At least four to six webs are always attached to the side rails and truss frame until rainfall washes them away.



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I wonder if spiders are born with internal maps? What gives them such precise weaving skills? Which one is the lead string? How do they measure the length of each strand and intersecting line so all lines are the same length? Do spiders view their handiwork from a distance to see their progress?

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THESE BEAUTIFUL DAYS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018, 7 AM, 36 DEGREES

MY BACKPACK, JOURNAL AND CAMERA ARE CONSTANT COMPANIONS during early morning visits to Fair Oaks Bridge, the boat launch ramp and nearby areas along the American River Parkway. Sometimes I don't have words to express the joy and delight of these experiences. The beauty of these quiet mornings is a far deeper experience than that act of writing words on a page or taking photos can express. I sit and listen. I watch and wonder.

"These beautiful days must enrich all my life. They do not exist as mere pictures. . . but they saturate themselves into every part of the body and live always." John Muir

Every morning when I approach Fair Oaks Bridge, I wonder what colors will be painted across the sky when clouds reflect the sunrise – shades of pink, fiery orange or gold? Will I see a richly colored blanket of fog rolling slowly down-river? Will clouds be reflected in the American River? What wildlife interactions will I see?

I listen every visit for the relentless quacks of the female duck as she patrols the American River. I listen for her voice far off in the distance as she swims away. I listen for the calls of seagulls and watch them soar high above me. Birds sing unseen in trees – a calliope, a whistle, and other chirps and calls I cannot describe. I often hear the chortle of the Great Blue Heron and honk of Canada Geese long before I see them.

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