

Tip #92

Learning from Nature



From the first time I noticed a firefly or the lacy wings of a dragonfly, I was enchanted with nature, and wanted to learn more. I nearly drove my parents crazy, asking "what's THAT?!?!" I began exploring on my own when I was still a little girl, bringing home shells and rocks and small turtles as well as any number of wildflower bouquets clutched in my sweaty 6-year-old fist. My baby book has a drawing of something that could only be a ladybug, done at age 2!

These small things captivated many of us from earliest childhood, and we got down on our hands and knees to see them more closely. We asked questions. We looked at colorful books. And we learned.

Happily, this kind of learning from nature can continue all our lives-we can never understand it ALL, it is so complex and interwoven. Scientists are still discovering new plants and animals- or very old ones. What a gift, to be able to explore as long as we maintain our curiosity!

What we can draw, we care about; what we care about, we want to protect; and what we protect is there for us and future generations to enjoy.

Drawing and sketching from nature is one of our best tools. We stop, we pay attention, we notice details we might not if we were shooting a photo at 1/125 of a second, and certainly not if we're jogging or driving by! Even if we don't recognize the bug or flower or fossil, we can sketch as accurately as we're able, make notes and arrows pointing to important details, and ask ourselves questions to help us remember (how many legs, what is that animal doing, how do the leaves grow on the stem of that plant, what shape is the flower?). We make our own illustrations for a very personal field guide - in fact I've been privileged to write and illustrate a number of books on natural history, stemming from my early interest! See my booklist, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/booklist.html>.

This is a marvelous way to explore our own backyard, or bring back a very special record of a trip to an exotic locale.

Art 92-1, Look closely, and take notes



Such careful observation helps us to identify the flower or insect later, from books or from experts in the field. Here, I sketched cranesbill or wild geranium and wild ginger in my local park.

Art 92-2, Sketching in Nature group blog banner



This interest is shared by many...so I decided to start a group blog to begin a wider dialog with other artists who enjoy the same things. The bonus is that I get to see their work and learn about nature in other parts of the world!

You can find it at <http://naturesketchers.blogspot.com/> - we've just redesigned the site so it's cleaner, fresher, and easier to navigate. There are interior links so you can find the people or subjects that interest you most, and below each post there are other offerings via "LinkedWithin" that often take me to images I like to revisit.

We have 37 correspondents at this point, from all over - hope you enjoy the world tour!

Because this is such a lifelong interest with me - and so many others! - I made a special Amazon store link for books on field journaling, etc., which includes books that are in my own library. Each has a brief review - I don't include books that I haven't personally found helpful! You can find them http://astore.amazon.com/httpcathyjohi-20?_encoding=UTF8&node=15.

Or my whole store at <http://astore.amazon.com/httpcathyjohi-20> - there are lots of other art books, travel books and more!

For more free art tips, please visit my website, <http://cathyjohnson.info>, and click on the archived tips at upper left. And for more frequent updates on art and life - and food! - there's always my primary blog, <http://katequicksilvr.livejournal.com/>, or come visit me on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>!

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