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IT'S ALL CONNECTED

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The Art of Storytelling - What I Learned From Obi Kaufmann

I love a good book. More so, I love great storytelling. Storytelling from bygone eras were not only forms of entertainment, but those stories were told and retold as a way to teach and remind people of various lessons necessary to survive. This art isn't really gone, but perhaps a bit forgotten in our age of computer screens where we can type a few words and get instant gratification without the need to dive deep or even reflect much.

A good argument won't force people to change their ways, but a good story will inspire people to take action on their own. Storytellers like this still exist. And they use all kinds of media to share their thoughts, knowledge, passions, and philosophies. Podcasts, music, movies, social media, public speaking, webinars, art, and books all have a place in artful storytelling and can help engender social change and awareness. Jumpstart Nature strives to highlight folks who share their storytelling with an eye toward climate change, biodiversity issues, and more.

Recently, I had the good fortune to have a chat with [Obi Kaufmann](#), artist, poet, author, and naturalist. Obi discussed issues we face with equal doses of realism and optimism. I found his love of place to be infectious and left with a stronger sense that we can still find the right balance between people's needs and those of the more-than-human world.

Obi has created a new type of book - a Field Atlas, which combines his artwork and storytelling in a visually compelling format. Through these books, Obi lays out the story of California and the beautiful, varied place it is, was, and can still be in the future. Obi hopes the reader will come along with him on the journey, stating that "it is a journey without a destination, but a good heading through this bottleneck of the 21st century." Through these books Obi shows the "possibility of leaving behind a California whose natural world is in a better shape at the end of the 21st century than it was at the end of the 20th century."



Telling a better story about how abundant this place once was and will become again could help us emerge on the other side with a land that is richer than it is today in every sense. As he says, “even with the advent of climate breakdown by way of anthropogenic global warming, we have a very low extinction rate in California which means all the pieces are still on the board. That is a miracle to be stewarded...to be called out again and again.”

There is a growing school of thought that the term **nature** reinforces the false idea that we humans are separate from it. Obi, and many others, are now using the phrase “more-than-human world” to help bridge that elitism people have developed over the beings that share the planet with us and provide us with so much more than we can give back.

“Connectivity between the human community and the more-than-human community is paramount. Every peoples in the history of the planet has been supported by natural ecological services and their steady return within regimes. Saving that is saving ourselves. And, that case made again and again in these books is still not made enough.” - Obi Kaufmann

The physical connections between place A and place B is one kind of connectivity. And, on this issue, we have far too many fragmented populations of flora and fauna. **Basically, we have a system that is out of balance.** Greater diversity equates to greater resiliency, and as Obi reminds the reader, “all of us are impacted by the way we treat the land.” His desire is that the books are a source of inspiration for a deeper connection with the knowledge of the place where you live. Though these books focus on the place that is California, the journey of understanding and connection could translate to other locales as well.

The [California Field Atlas](#) series consists of six books all of which promise that you will learn something on every page and are filled with stunning art and cartographic drawings by Obi himself. Read one or all. In addition to these written tomes, you may enjoy listening to Obi and Greg Sarris discuss the importance of storytelling, stewarding the land, and finding your connection to the more-than-human world, in a podcast called [Place and Purpose](#).

Before we finished chatting, Obi shared that people must protect the more-than-human world, otherwise it is going to get very lonely...an idea taken from another storyteller, E.O. Wilson, who coined this the Eremocene, the Age of Loneliness. In the book, [Half-Earth](#), E.O. Wilson pointed to the fact that our man-made world has led us to a **three-headed environmental crisis: climate change, mass extinction, and ecosystem collapse.** *We do have the solutions*, it may simply be the desire to implement them that is the true obstacle.

What Goes Bump In The Night

As daylight fades, we seek refuge with our modern comforts, often neglecting the vibrant, more-than-human world that comes alive while we rest. With All Hallows Eve almost upon us, it seems appropriate to point out that life in many wondrous forms is just getting started when the sun goes down...and it's not scary at all.

This nighttime hustle and bustle isn't limited to wide open spaces and National Parks. Your backyard and neighborhood parks also come alive with different denizens each night. Listen to our Nature's Archive episode, "[Life After Dark](#)" with Charles Hood and José Martínez-Fonseca, authors of [Nocturnalia: Nighttime Life of the Western USA](#) and you'll come away with easy ideas to explore and connect with the dark-adapted species outside your door.

Let's look at a few animal and plant friends that prefer darkness, what they are doing all night, and how we can help them thrive:



Flying Squirrels do not actually fly, but glide long distances using the skin between their arms and legs like a parachute. There are about 50 species of flying squirrels in the tribe Pteromyini. They are social animals that travel in groups and only come out at night. Flying squirrels are small and may be found in woodland areas making them very tough to spot in the dark. Quite recently it was discovered that Northern flying squirrels fluoresce pink under UV light, though it is not known why since other squirrel species do not have this trait.

Spiders may be found on all continents, except Antarctica. There are approximately 45,000 species of spiders and all have silk, though not all spin webs. Spiders are afraid of humans and simply want to find some insects to prey upon. If you find them in your house, it is because they are eating other unwanted bugs. Are you Arachnophobic? You are not alone, but please simply gather up the spider in a small container and place it outside where it can keep helping you by controlling insect populations. Fun fact: spiders have blue blood due to the hemocyanin they use instead of iron, like humans.

Bats are the only true flying mammal and may be found worldwide except in very cold climates. With over 1,400 species of bats in the order Chiroptera, they have evolved into various sizes and feeding preferences. Bats eat insects, fruit, nectar, and sometimes even small mammals, but only three bat species sip blood. Pollination and insect population control services bats provide are invaluable to people. Bats are also a tourist attraction in cities where large roosts have formed. Did you know that bat poop, known as guano, is a coveted fertilizer?

Night blooming cacti such as Queen of the Night (*Peniocereus greggii*) and Dutchman's Pipe Cactus (*Epiphyllum oxypetalum*) both thrive in the deserts of the Southwest and further South. These unique cacti have fragrant white flowers that only bloom at night in order to attract pollinators such as bats and moths. Count yourself lucky if you've seen these in bloom because the flowers only survive for a few hours and wilt before dawn. This adaptation takes advantage of nocturnal creatures without the competition of daytime pollinators. The plants benefit from being the only flower open at night, so their pollen is likely to be spread to others of their same species increasing pollination and, therefore, continued existence.

Owls are majestic birds silently stalking their prey with wings evolved to make no noise during flight. Silent flight, superhero hearing, and large eyes to see well in the dark combine to make owls formidable predators. They hunt small mammals (mostly rodents), insects, and even fish. There are over 19 owl species in North America, so you are likely to find some near you. Check out these [free preview videos about owls](#) from Cornell Lab Bird Academy.

Lightning Bugs, also known as fireflies, are not flies. They are actually members of the beetle family and are commonly called glowworms elsewhere. The firefly family, Lampyridae, consists of roughly 2,000 species and most are nocturnal. These critters use a chemical reaction known as bioluminescence to light up parts of their bodies. The light is



used to find mates as well as attract prey. Of course, they are also a magical sight to behold on a summer evening.

Wolves are apex predators and provide important services in maintaining deer, elk, moose and other ungulate populations, though they are not picky and will hunt small rodents, lizards, waterfowl, and fish as well. They may be found in a variety of habitats, but tend to be in forested and large wilderness areas due to their larger territorial needs. The wolf, or gray wolf, is the largest member of the dog family Canidae. Wolves live in nuclear family groups and engage in pack hunting as it gives them an advantage over solitary

predators. Their characteristic howling and nocturnal habits mean wolves feature in myths and legends of many different cultures.

The creatures above and the rest of the more-than-human world are remarkable organisms which should be celebrated for their unique traits and the free services provided to us. **Show your appreciation** and:

- reduce light pollution at night by turning off all unnecessary lights
- use motion detectors
- and, direct any outdoor lights downward, not outward or up

Be a nature neighbor and:

- say no to rodenticide
- don't use other chemical pest controls, including neonicotinoids

There are many other options which are better for the planet and our own health too.

Quick Connections

Books, websites, documentaries, podcasts, events, quotes, and more



Ethan Tapper's book, [How to Love a Forest](#), is part land ethic and part forest management from the perspective of a "modern" forester, who thinks hard about trade-offs in landscape management. Listen in to a [Nature's Archive talk with Ethan](#) himself.



[Backyard Ecology](#) is a fabulous resource for turning your property into a native plant



Quote we're pondering

"This curious world we inhabit is more wonderful than convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used." - **Henry David Thoreau**



If you don't live in New York, you likely won't see this [beautiful bird migration](#)

habitat with an emphasis on the Eastern United States.

[mural](#) adorning almost 1,000 feet of wall in Brooklyn, so please read this lovely article about the artist and his work.

Community Connections

We want to connect with you.

Are you afraid of encountering wild animals or of finding them in your house? If so, which ones?

We read each and every response and will share selected reader stories in upcoming newsletters.

Share With Us

Your feedback is important. [Tell us](#) how we are doing and what you would like to see covered in future newsletters.

Every connection counts! Please help grow our community of everyday heroes by sharing this newsletter with a friend or colleague.

Thank you,

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