

Connecting Karsts and Hummingbirds!

Our youngest grands, twins, have just launched their respective undergraduate journeys at different universities. It'll be fun for us to follow these adventurous pathways of becoming. I mention them because as I was nudged after highlighting the values inherent in the young learning through discovery in Nature to share examples, a couple of our experiences together here at the ranch came to mind.

In one of our infrequent rainy years, grasses had grown tall in the pastures. An invasive tall grass had become quite evident a little distant from our yard. On one of the frequent visits we enjoyed, they asked if I'd take them to "that place where your walking stick keeps going in." It was a karst on the edge of our fenced yard that had a rocky opening and they loved to listen to me speak about "what just might be down there" as it takes draining runoff in hard rains "down, down, down." Our young lady said, "you call it a karst?" I replied yes, it's one of several around the ranch. Typical of a five- or six-year-old, in unison the pair asked, "can you show us others?" I replied, "since you have long pants (a rarity!) and closed toe shoes on, let's go see!" We walked into the taller needle grasses in the adjacent pasture and the hunter to be said, "look a large animal was sleeping here, but the cows are in another pasture right now." I suggested we examine closely and asked if they noticed that the grasses were not crushed down like we noticed where deer sometimes sleep in our yard. I asked if they ever watched the waters in their bath when the plug is pulled and the water swirls down the drain. "Oh, yes!" We closely examined the swirl pattern. I suggested this is one of the karsts, just not as rocky but like a basin. "Hmm, and are there more?" We went looking. Among our karst discoveries was an unusually large opening that has a heavy stone resting on top that both allows draining waters to enter but helps prevent a calf or kid goat (or grandfather!) from stumbling with troublesome consequences. Karsts became a frequent subject and request to "go see and show." Soon Karen and I took them to the Witte Museum when an Edwards Aquifer Authority exhibit had a small theater providing a "virtual journey inside the aquifer."

On a later visit, I noticed the two sitting on our front steps very attentive about something. They were whispering and pointing in an engaged conversation to a place on a tree limb. As I got near, silence was required. They showed me a very intense building project by a tiny hummingbird attaching something of a swing to a small branch. I invited them to come look at a large cobweb in the tree outside our bedroom window where I had found curious a hummingbird coming repeatedly and pulling webbing. Aha! Another discovery in Nature! Afterward we discussed the marvels hidden from us unless we observe carefully. Later I had to report that suddenly I found a tiny eggshell and a vanished little woven nest. Not as easy a discovery conversation was required. But discovery, indeed!

Perhaps karsts and hummingbirds do have a connection when providing a means to address what some have described as our "Nature deficit disorder" among the young, and, I'd add, not so young.

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