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The St. George Journal
connecting people and the natural world
from the Friends of St. George

Autumn 2020 - Transitional Issue



Dear Readers and Contributors,

The St. George Journal as you have come to know it will be no more - perhaps to arise again in a shorter form at some point.

For now, the SGJ is settling in, as are we all, to post-Equinox COVID days all pointed in the direction of deep Autumn and Winter with its uniquely, historic turbulence, uncertainty, and far-reaching change.

The truth is that, as SGJ Editor, I am regretfully, no longer in a position to commit the time and energy, that such an ambitious undertaking requires. Another truth is that this protracted period of continuing COVID uncertainty has taxed all of our resources and attention spans. We use much of our energy just to keep up with all the information and challenges coming our way.

There is an urge to simplify and pare down our lives. Many of us find ourselves spread thin as we attempt to accommodate all the changes and stresses of this COVID period and are drawn to focus and use our energies on pressing big issues of our times and our personal and family lives.

It has been a delight and a privilege to bring together so many of the talented ones of St. George to give voice and image to the rich habitat of this peninsula, jutting out between ocean and river and send it out to



Summer Sweet Autumn Clematis knockin' itself out . . .

It was these contributors who made the SGJ come alive

Regular Columns

Hugh Blackmer - *Penisular Creatures*

Anne Cox- *Hedgerow Diary*

Sally Byrne Crusan - *Kids Corner* Herring Gut Learning Center Liaison

Barbara Cross - *Book Corner*

Steve Cartwright - *A Sense of Place*

Sally Crusan - *Herring Gut Learning Center Liaison*

Jan Getgood - *Native Plant Corner*

Brian Higley - *Excavations*

Kirt Gentalen - *Nature Bummin'*

John Knuerr - *Invasive Plants*

Dale Pierson - *Goin' Native*

Sonja Shamanska - *Kids Corner/SGMSU Liaison*

Anita Siegenthaler - *Nature Nerd*

Guest Contributors

Larry Baily

Betsy Blackmer

Jane Bracy

Conservation Commission

John Cotton

Kids of St. George

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Wende McIlwain - Chair

Anita Siegenthaler - Secretary

Del Welch - Treasurer

Sandra Roak - At Large



the gift of late bloomers . . .

As we wrap up this phase of the SGJ with an abbreviated issue, we offer up a handful of familiar columns and few notices for your pleasure and reflection.

May we all continue to find support and solace and be sustained in deep ways by the privilege of living so close to the land-sea-sky of St. George. The simple pleasures and gifts of the natural lifegiving rhythms of this place and the people who have chosen it as home, inspire us to expand to connect and engage in the pressing realities of the big picture in which we live.

A poem unearthed by our staff Anthropologist/Librarian, Hugh Blackmer is food for thought as we all look into the unknown.

THE BIG PICTURE

by Ellen Bass

*I try to look at the big picture.
The sun, ardent tongue
licking us like a mother besotted*

*Think of the meteor
that annihilated the dinosaurs.
And before that, the volcanoes
of the Permian period—all those burnt ferns
and reptiles, sharks and bony fish—
that was extinction on a scale
that makes our losses look like a bad day at the slots.
And perhaps we're slated to ascend
to some kind of intelligence
that doesn't need bodies, or clean water, or even air.
But I can't shake my longing
for the last six hundred
Iberian lynx with their tufted ears,
Brazilian guitarfish, the 4
percent of them still cruising
the seafloor, eyes staring straight up.
And all the newborn marsupials—
red kangaroos, joeys the size of honeybees— steelhead trout, river dolphins,
all we can save
so many species of frogs
breathing through their
damp permeable membranes.
Today on the bus, a woman
in a sweater the exact shade of cardinals,
and her cardinal-colored bra strap, exposed
on her pale shoulder, makes me ache
for those bright flashes in the snow.
And polar bears, the cream and amber
of their fur, the long, hollow
hairs through which sun slips,
swallowed into their dark skin. When I get home,
my son has a headache and, though he's
almost grown asks me to sing him a song.
We lie together on the lumpy couch
and I warble out the old show tunes, "Night and Day" . . .
"They Can't Take That Away from Me" . . . A cheap
silver chain shimmers across his throat
rising and falling with his pulse. There never was
anything else. Only these excruciatingly
insignificant creatures we love.*



Hugh Blackmer - "Thunderous"

From Friends of St. George

Some images of Autumn . . . and a few random tidbits and things it might intrigue you to know

(Photographs in this issue by Wende McIlwain unless attributed to another.)



First rains and winds, unpredictable temperatures, frost in June, and months of rainless skies - a challenge for all gardeners (even Anne Cox!) and all creatures alike. Now there is the challenge of impending winter, which will be upon us with breathtaking swiftness and short days.

Still, the summer earth fed us, dazzled us with her beauty, the seas gave us fish and lobster and the heavenly bodies went about their eternal business astounding us with rainbows and continuity.



Some summer visitors came and went, helping cheer us and supporting the local economy . . . and most of us in Knox county have survived the assault of COVID with its sickness and loss, isolation and loneliness, offering us the consolation of more space and time to reflect.



We have learned the joys of take-out food and to take our pleasures and get our information remotely, as we become, oh so much more, adept on Zoom - or not. Many of us have turned to webinars, found favorite podcasts, and are perpetually on the hunt for a good film to watch or a good book to keep us company. A couple of recommendations to connect us to the natural world . . .

A film for these times:

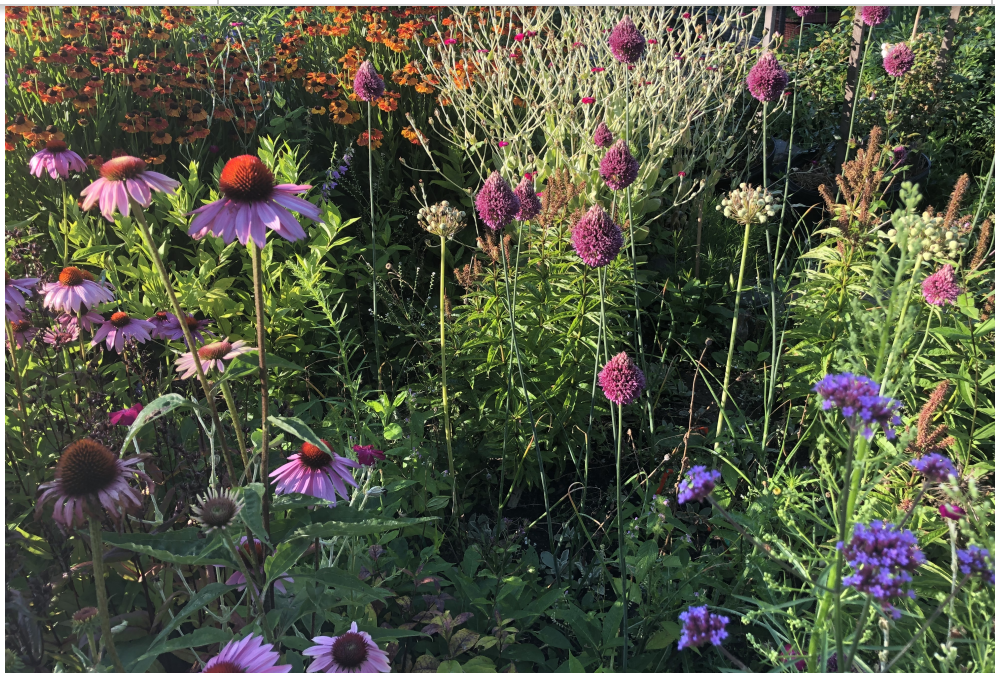
[My Octopus Teacher](#) on Netflix - astounding underwater footage of an intimate relationship between one man and one animal.

Books for these times:

[Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures](#) by Merlin Sheldrak

[Braiding Sweet Grass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants](#) by RobinWall Kimmerer

[Where the Crawdads Sing](#) by Delia Owens



Ah, the gifts of the perennial patch . . .

Conservation Commission Update



The St. George Transfer Station bedecked with solar panels . . .

(photograph from Conservation Commission website)

The St. George Conservation Commission and the St. George Community Development Corporation are cosponsoring

Solar Thursdays: New Options are Here!

October 1 from 6:30-8:00pm

November 12 from 6:30-8:30pm

(You need not miss anything - these sessions will be recorded and made available after their airing.

Check the CC website or contact Alane at the CDC for more information.)

periodically to introduce the community to alternatives available to reduce their “carbon footprint” using solar energy and save money. Speakers will address the latest advances in solar energy and solar energy options. State/local energy goals and relevant legislation will also be presented.

Check the excellent [Conservation Commission](#) website for updates and more information and updates on this and other programs.



- The Next Big Thing -

VOTE !!!
and urge everyone you know
to vote

"VOTE AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT - IT DOES!"



Such a T-shirt is available at Amazon and other online sources
<https://www.amazon.com/Vote-Your-Life-Depends-T->

**Time to think about what to plant next year
hope blooms eternal . . .**

**Still not too late to get in the garlic, spring-blooming bulbs, and
ORDER THOSE TREES!**



A hundred-year-old beauty still putting out . . .



Now accepting orders for spring 2021 delivery!

"& so to tenderness I add my action." –Aracelis Girmay

We and everything around us needs renewal from time to time. For some, this might mean rehabilitating a garden lot or mending a torn object. Others might retreat to a quiet place with

when nothing is enough? Try planting a tree, making it your neighbor and being kind to it. Pay attention and learn from it. Share its fruit and shade.
We can let this be practice toward tending relationships with *all* our neighbors.

Natural Wonders . . . an endless genre



a great year for all manner of Hydrangea . . .



Grape leaf variety showing their colors . . .



A little show off . . .



A quiet woodland moment . . .



Life in the slow lane . . .



The truly wild among us . . .

Carla Skinder





From scratch sourdough imitating pumpkins . . .

**Over and out for now from the SGJ
Enjoy the rest of the issue and
may Fall and Winter by kind to you
Wende McIlwain, Editor**

Voices From the Peninsula

A collection of articles from familiar contributors . . .

Hedgerow Diary

A reflection by Anne Cox, co-owner of [Hedgerow](#), plantswoman, landscape designer, artist, and community volunteer.



Another of Anne's crops . . .

The 2020 growing season

Photographs by Anne Cox

This year we had a late spring frost here in Martinsville—as in June 1 and 2. And we also had an early autumnal frost—as in September 14 and 15. In between, once the fog of June lifted, we had a great, warm, albeit exceedingly dry, growing season.



I had my best crop of artichokes ever, and a decent okra crop, which is impressive as I'd thought that I had lost the plants in the June frost. I did lose some of my zinnias in that frost, all of my eggplant, and some of the peppers. Onions and garlic were outstanding. The beans were good, once I excluded the deer with a double fence. Potatoes were good, though for the first time I had voles nibbling on them. Voles also enjoyed a few of the winter squash. The sweet peas in the lower beds did not do as well as those close to the house, so yet again I've learned that they like very good air circulation. I almost kept up with lettuce and arugula in succession plantings but stumbled a few weeks. I did not stick with my plan of succession plantings of broccoli or spinach. And the list goes on.



okra

Every year, something works well, something doesn't work at all. The non-heading broccoli was tasty but labor-intensive to cut all the skinny stalks before they flowered. I didn't plant enough beets, and I should have planted more beans. I liked the Seychelles runner beans, but not the blue cocoa as much. The deer got to my kale, but I was able to protect the Swiss chard for a very impressive crop that is still going strong. The early cherry tomatoes in the hoop houses did well, but the later tomatoes that got a bit pot-bound and nutrient-starved before I got them in the ground took a long time to get going.

Every autumn, while the past season is fresh in my mind, I try to take stock of what happened, successes, and failures. Where did I plant things in the wrong places, at the wrong times? What thrived? Which varieties have done well, which will I drop in future years? When did I under water things? Where was I just lazy? Where was the soil poor? How did the weed barrier cloth work (well!).

While I was digging the last of the potatoes (By the way, digging for potatoes is one of the great joys in life: finding buried treasure!) I was thinking about how my little business of growing vegetables will fail if I do not take the time to tell the truth about what I am doing. I can't just say I had the best broccoli crop ever, when no one got any broccoli from the market after mid-July, and so on. Only by analyzing and adjusting my practices can I provide good, nourishing produce. But I also know that no matter how much I analyze and plan, there will always be the vagaries of weather and my energy and inclination at any given time; each year something will do well, and something will not.

Peninsular Creatures

By Hugh Blackmer, anthropologist/librarian, [scholar](#), trash collector, [photographer](#), Mindbender.

Reflecting on the Blackmer joint show at Granite Gallery, 25-28 September 2020



Betsy Root Blackmer

A **four-day gallery show** affords time and space for an artist to contemplate the what and why of public display. Four 7-hour days sitting in the gallery is an education in what visitors attend to and are drawn by, and also reveals something of what they miss that we ourselves have learned to see in our own work.



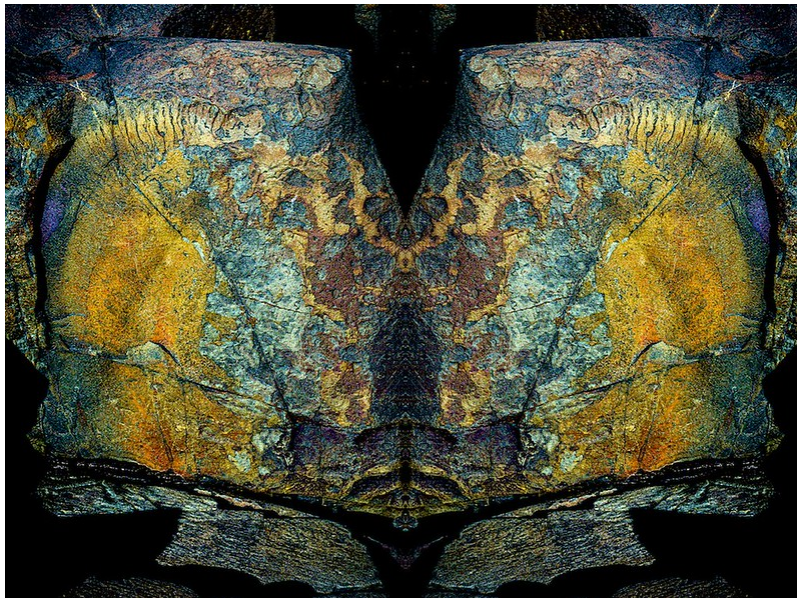
Hugh Blackmer

Months go into preparations for a show. Taking and processing the photographs is just the bare beginning, and decisions about presentation media (framed paper prints? metal? fabric? sizes?) are then followed by a process of designing the display space—what will hang next to what, how a visitor will experience the sequence, the finer points of hanging (height, spacing).



Betsy Root Blackmer

21 wall-hung images and a video of 70-some imaginary creatures is a lot to take in with a brief visit. To walk up to an image on the wall and examine its details by moving yourself before it brings it to life in a novel way. To enjoy the layout and juxtaposition in the designed space of gallery walls adds yet another dimension. The satins are 3 feet or more in their largest dimension and respond to air movement, and the metal prints have an intense presence that is different from what one sees on the computer screen.



Hugh Blackmer

And then there's the after, once the work is taken down and we begin to contemplate what comes next, and what the experience can teach us about the work itself and about our own development. Today I find it hard to imagine that I'll ever mount another show, but if I do, it will be very different in approach and content, in ways that I haven't yet begun to imagine.

Nature Bummin with [Kirk Gentalen](#)

Kirk Gentalen has worked as a Maine Coast Heritage Trust land steward and naturalist since 2007. While his job focuses largely on Vinalhaven, he leads hikes throughout Maine and writes wherever he goes.

“Nature Bummin” column appears on Maine Coast Heritage Trust’s website at mcht.org/nature-bummin each month.

All photographs are by the author

Feels like fall. And with that, in-person school started back up in St George this week – drive carefully! With the world still ‘Covidized’, me being married to a teacher means keeping things tight as we all agree that ‘we’ don’t want to be the ones who mess things up Covid-wise. This, of course, means maintaining the effort to ‘keep it local’ and fortunately time in the yard and neighborhood continues to be time well spent. This point has been mentioned ad nauseam. I had been wondering if the yard really could maintain that entertainment factor and energy, you know, after such a summer of flowers, pollinators, and spiders. Followed by then raspberries and blackberries and other fruits of the pollinators labor. Is there a down period, or maybe a slow time, even for a couple of weeks? I hadn’t paid that close attention to the yard before. Every year is different for sure but turns out an old favorite is playing a major role in keeping the pollen and nectar speedball rolling into the fall. And it just happened to be orangey-yellow.

You may think I am talking about Goldenrods (Genus – Solidago; Composite family – Asteraceae), and this column would surely be amiss with honoring the show they put on now and through the fall. They are the gold in the fields and the shorelines. But this column is not about Goldenrods or the 23+ species of Solidago that one might come across in the North East. We’ll only mention that they are very attractive to Monarchs as the butterflies make their multi-generational movement to Mexico. Goldenrods are a story for another day.

Orange Touch-me-nots (*Impatiens capensis*), lovingly known as Jewelweed, are the flowers outside my window that have been distracting during recent zoom meetings. Or I should say, the activity at the Jewelweeds has been fun to watch the last few weeks. It’s easy to spot the action when a hummingbird or bee is at a Jewelweed flower, as the bloom plant sways with the wing inspired wind currents. It too easy not to be distracting.



I was introduced to the Jewelweed 25 years ago while working at an environmental education program in Ohio called Nature's Classroom. At this point, that's a good enough chunk of my life ago to refer to the plant as an 'old friend'. And there is some history here. The patch in Ohio I took the kids to check out was next to an area great for playing a hiding game called camouflage. One day in the fall of '95, a 5th-grade student came running mid-game, full speed and screaming her head off. At first, I thought it was the worst hiding effort I had ever seen, and then saw that she was holding her arm and that a serious amount of pain was occurring on her limb. Her arm fortunately wasn't broken (would have been the worst game of camouflage ever) and instead her story had to do with rubbing up against a small plant and then feeling pain almost immediately. Sure enough, I recognized the plant as Stinging Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) – side note - if you are going to led hikes learn to recognize poison ivy and stinging nettle. Anyway, during 'training' Gail Doyle (*the* Gail Doyle) mentioned ever so briefly (one sentence) that when smooshed, the base of a jewelweed stalk gives off a soothing gel similar to aloe. Without thinking (that's when I am at my best) we raced to the jewelweed patch, squished up some stalk and she rubbed it on her arm. The pain was gone as quickly as it showed up and I was the hero once again. That was a good foundation to base a history on, and it's been smooth with Jewelweed ever since. I also learned that maybe it wasn't the best place to play camouflage.

seed dispersal. After pollination, a straight, elongated oval seed capsule forms that is held under great tension. When hit by a wing, a stick, or sometimes just the wind the capsule will split and coil, ejecting seeds over three feet away – not bad for a rookie. Kids love to help with the seed dispersal of Jewelweed, and having the capsule twist in between your fingers is pretty cool, actually. See, plants can be cool.

Neither the soothing gel nor the exploding seed capsules are what distracting about Jewelweed from my window though. It's the Hummingbirds. Ruby-throated to be more precise. Mostly females or juveniles to be even more precise. They absolutely love Orange Jewelweed flowers, which apparently can pump out 2.5 milliliters of nectar a day at 40% sugar. Doesn't sound like much, but for a hummingbird visiting a ton of these flowers the deal is great. Multiple times an hour the orange blossoms can be seen shaking and dancing in the breezes the hummingbirds make with their wings. Favorite hummingbird perches are too many to count around this nectar world, all right out my window. I just saw one as I was typing – I swear! It's awesome! Distracted by a hummingbird at a Jewelweed flower while typing a column about being distracted by hummingbirds at Jewelweed flowers. Destiny....



I don't think I have ever watched a Hummingbird at a Jewelweed flower before, much less seen them take on a Jewelweed colony! (I know, what have I been doing all these years?). I've known the Jewelweed for its gel and seed dispersal, and to see that Hummingbirds dig it too is an added bonus to the plant's resume. It's only Zoom meetings that suffer here, and that's only if you look at it the wrong way. Jewelweed makes Zoom better!

See you out there!

Nature Nerd from Anita Siegenthaler, a founding member of FOSG, conservationist, naturalist, ever curious, guardian of process.



The Journey of Monarch Butterflies

Monarch butterflies are now searching for nectar among the goldenrods and late-blooming flowers of Maine and our East Coast as they prepare for flight to Mexico. They use a route they have never traveled, to a place they have never been. Who among us could fly as far as 3000 miles to specific fir forests in Central Mexico without a map?

Our east coast monarchs journey to the Oyamel fir forests, or to one of nine other sites where they join thousands, we hope millions, of other monarchs for approximately seven months. In spring, these “snowbirds” mate and begin their northward trek. After mating, they have only a month to live and lay eggs exclusively on milkweed plants and no more six or seven months to continue the flight. Eggs hatch in about four days. After nine to fourteen days, the caterpillar morphs into the chrysalis stage. In another eight to eleven days, the caterpillar has become a monarch butterfly.

That newborn monarch continues the northward flight. Several generations of monarchs will continue that flight north. They depend on finding roosting places with nectar and milkweed for laying eggs. Absent needed plants, a monarch dies with no heirs. Other destructive conditions include:

- (1) herbicides that destroy milkweed and native nectar-producing plants,
- (2) pesticides that poison insects,
- (3) climate change
- (4) natural enemies include some viruses, bacteria, mites, nematodes, ants, spiders, wasps, and flies which attack the monarch larvae

The monarchs we see now are the surviving great and great-great-grandchildren of the butterflies that departed Mexico in spring. Late hatching monarchs will respond to the shortening of daylight and the decrease of temperature by not maturing enough to lay eggs. They make the hazardous journey to fir forests in Central Mexico and try to survive for the northward migration. Even in their winter haven, black-backed orioles and black-headed grosbeaks can tolerate eating mature monarch butterflies. Logging the firs reduces protection from these predators.

Common Milkweed might spring up in an area in a yard, along a driveway, along a road. It appeared along our driveway in weedy gravel and provided a view of monarch caterpillars for grandchildren. Not every plant in an unwelcome or unusual place is a “weed.” Seeds of Common Milkweed have silky tendrils that ride the wind. Maine milkweed species include Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) Swamp Milkweed (*A. incarnata*), and Butterfly Milkweed (*A. tuberosa*). For those who winter in the South, other types of milkweed can be planted to sustain the butterflies.

On the land . . .



the spring meadow where once there was nothing but lawn . . .



Autumn meadow gone to glorious seed . . .

Meadow thoughts

Consider re-planting some of your unproductive and resource sucking lawn to a thriving meadow habitat . . .

Consider NOT cutting back your gardens, but rather allowing them to stand to provide birds and insects shelter and feasting throughout the winter.

Mother Earth and her creatures will thank you and you will delight in a year-round display of flower and form . . .

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