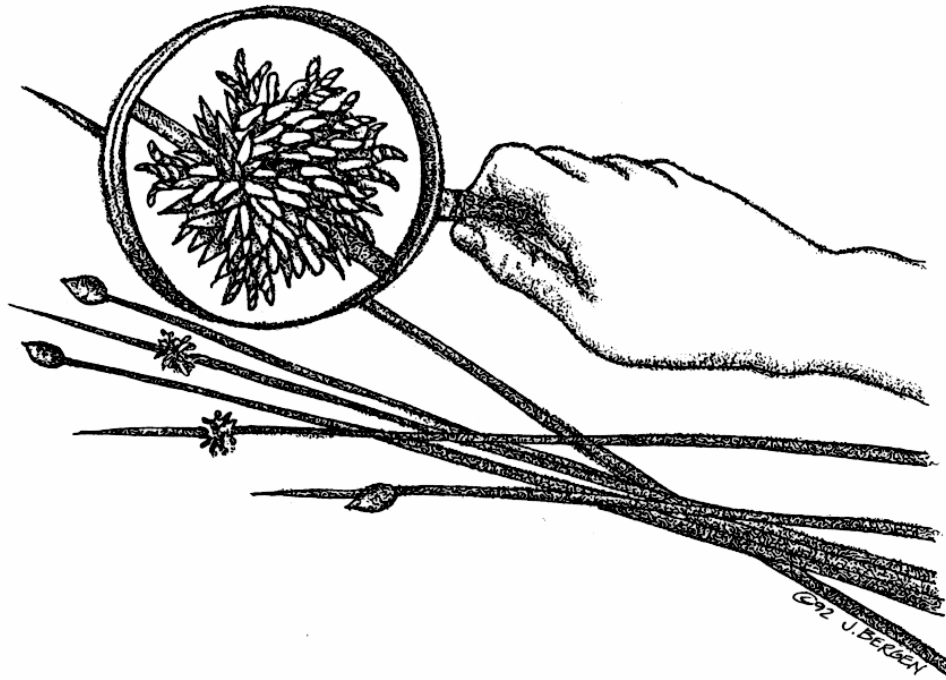


Nature Study for Beginners

by Kenn Oberrecht



Oregon's coastal region is endowed with a rich diversity of wildlife and habitat types. The landscape is characterized by a splendid variety of biological and geological features. Forests and farmlands, dunes and headlands, mountains and meadows,

parks and gardens, rivers and creeks, marshes and estuaries, tide pools and beaches--all combine to form an ideal setting for the study of nature. What a wonderful opportunity for the budding naturalist.

Getting started in nature study in a place like this is easy. The first step is to determine where your interests lie, then how you want to approach them.

One possibility is a general approach that would include the study of a variety of organisms and their relationships with one another as well as with their environment. We call that discipline ecology.

Perhaps you would prefer a more specific approach--say, the study of insects (entomology), birds (ornithology), fish (ichthyology), amphibians and reptiles (herpetology), or plants (botany). Some even further narrow their studies to become experts on a specific family, or even one species.

Getting started in nature study in a place like this is easy. The first step is to determine where your interests lie, then how you want to approach them.

The next step is to head for one of our three libraries: Coos Bay Public, North Bend Public, or Southwester Oregon Community College. There you can browse electronically through the files in the COASTLINE computer, punching in such subjects as nature, birds, mammals, fish, waterfowl, trees, wildflowers, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fossils, geology, zoology, weather, astronomy, tidal marshes, and estuaries.

Periodicals on nature, conservation, and ecology abound and range from broadly general to highly specialized. Good ones for starters are National Wildlife, Audubon, and Natural History.

You'll find enough volumes to keep you reading in your subject area for years. If you're unsure of what approach to take, start with a general book about nature, such as Joy of Nature, edited by Alma E. Guinness, or A Practical Guide for the Amateur Naturalist, by Gerald Durrell.

Periodicals on nature, conservation, and ecology abound and range from broadly general to highly specialized. Good ones for starters are National Wildlife, Audubon, and Natural History.

You will eventually want to build your own reading and reference library. Visit local bookstores and browse the shelves for both new and used books. In addition to general books on nature and those on specific subjects, you'll want a good field guide. Alfred A. Knopf publishes the Audubon Society's series of field guides, available at most bookstores. They cover subjects from wildflowers to whales, are vinyl covered, and will fit in a parka pocket.

Nature study is a relatively inexpensive form of outdoor recreation, but you will need some gear when you go afield. A good pair of binoculars is indispensable. Carry a pocket knife, a small magnifier or hand lens, a notebook, and pen. All of this can go into a fanny pack or rucksack, along with rainwear and any food and beverages you care to take on day trips.

This should be a good start for anyone interested in nature. As you learn more and your interests gain momentum, consider taking some courses and enrolling in nature workshops. Join a national conservation organization, and become active in a local chapter or club. Volunteer to work with local conservation-oriented groups.

Few pursuits allow us to combine education and recreation in such an enjoyable and important way. Nature study, at any level, is uniquely rewarding.

