

A family member took a wonderful picture in the neighborhood a week or so ago—a beautiful bobcat striding across a lawn in the middle of the afternoon. What a treat for all of us to see this “neighbor” of ours whose tracks we often view, but seldom his magnificent self.

We tend to look at deer, bears, and other substantial parts of Nature with awe. It is the same with plant life. A towering white pine or the now reduced in stature silver maple in our yard evoke that same veneration.

This is understandable. But, we often neglect really looking and admiring the smaller beings in our natural world.

This thought came to me as I stood on the garden path leading to our little greenhouse. I was contending with a creature of our environment that I would just as soon not have to deal with. I was killing Colorado potato beetle larvae. But, as I stood there, I heard a whirring sound and recognized immediately that there was a hummingbird in the vicinity. I looked down the row of flower plants that line the path and spotted a female hummingbird aiming for the zinnia flowers. I have only a few zinnias, and they are planted in small clumps along the path, two or three plants in a bunch. As I kept my eyes on the tiny bird, its wings a blur of movement, she moved from one zinnia to another. A couple of times, she detoured to a marigold, the only other flower blooming at the moment, but she rejected them immediately and headed for the next zinnia.

Had I not heard that distinctive buzz of the hummingbird, I would never have known she was there. And, when a creature is quiet most of the time, the probability of enjoying its presence is even less likely.

Such is the case with the small being that occupies the milk house. We live in fertile frog territory with lots of wetlands—bogs, beaver ponds, creeks. The concerts we listen to during the spring months are both heartening and deafening. The shrill calls of the spring peepers are dominant for some weeks, and then other frogs take over.

My favorite of all, though, is the tree frog. Before a rain—if this is an “old wives’ tale” or not, it does seem that a good rain often follows a lot of tree frog calling—we listen to conversations from several spots. It is interesting to try to find the tree frogs, but we are not usually successful. Instead, it is by happenstance that we are aware of their presence. One individual spends a lot of time inside our thermometer on the side of the woodshed. A tree frog lives, at times, inside the gate latch. And, I am sure that several reside on the sides of our cabin.

Several years ago, there was a resident tree frog in the milk house. We would find it somewhere when we put together the cream separator and got our milk pails from the drying rack. That little fellow or girl showed up in all of the unexpected places one might think of.

This tree frog was in the milk house for three or four years—if, indeed, it was the same one summer after summer. For the past two years, though, the milk house has not seen a continuing presence of a tree frog.

Until this year, that is. The tree frog isn’t always so easy to see, because, of course, he adapts his visible color to his surroundings, and on the white

walls and window trim, he is a subdued gray. If he found something green on which to perch himself, he would likely seem to be an entirely different creature.

This little frog has been in the milkhouse for a couple of months now. He has done a spectacular job of keeping the flies under control, and he is fat and round.

So, while admiring the natural world, I hope I never neglect those smallest beings—at least the tiniest that our eyes can discern. And that means noticing a little flower on blue-eyed grass as well as admiring the large clusters of orchid-like blooms on the catalpa trees; or taking time to watch a spider build her web as well as marveling at the intricate dam-building of the beavers. The world we live in is populated by both big and small organisms, all with their importance to the planet.