



# Discoveries

News and Views from Discovery Southeast

Summer 2001

## Gold Creek solstice

### Field notes from the crest of the year

Richard Carstensen

**June 20, 2001. Walked flume trail to first meadows past Ebner Falls. Occasional direct sun. Intensifying drizzle by 4pm.**

Today's outing was a hybrid between low- and high-tech journaling. The *Art and Nature* workshop with Kathy Hocker renewed my interest in pencil sketching (faster than ink stippling!). But I'm equally attached to my new digital ultrazoom camera. I took about 50 photos with notes. Back home, I picked the best, and drew for the next two days.

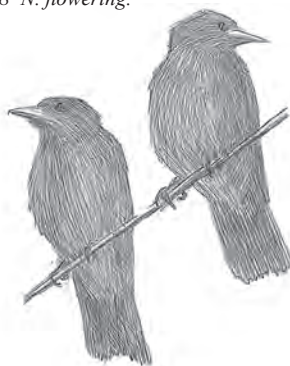


***lilac blossoms*** - Many front yards on Behrends and Evergreen finally have flowering lilacs. Great fragrance! My mother's lilac in Rochester, New York (43° North Latitude) bloomed in mid-May this year, a full month earlier than Juneau's 58° N. flowering.



***cow parsnip flowering sequence*** - Even the fully expanded umbels lack the huge diversity of pollinators they'll have in a week or two.

***blueberry moth (sp?)*** - Little charcoal moth with white wing bars settles onto early blueberry leaves. We see this species every summer after flower petals drop and the hard green berries are forming.



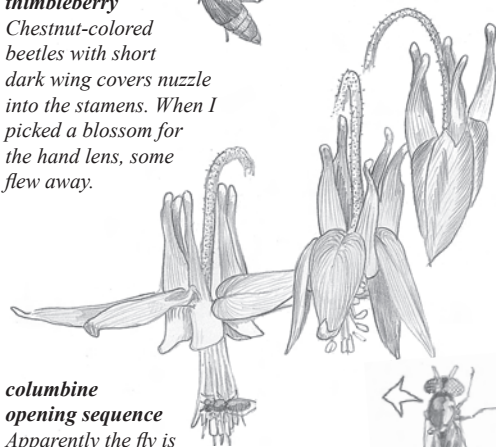
***crow fledglings*** - Age clues: clutzy flutterings on the power lines; ratty tail feather tips; no suspicion of my camera-pointing, only 20 feet below them.



***cocoon hunter*** - Jay with full crop leaps up to pluck from the underside of flume-trail hand railing. I looked under and found silky wads tucked into dry corners.



***beetles on thimbleberry*** Chestnut-colored beetles with short dark wing covers nuzzle into the stamens. When I picked a blossom for the hand lens, some flew away.



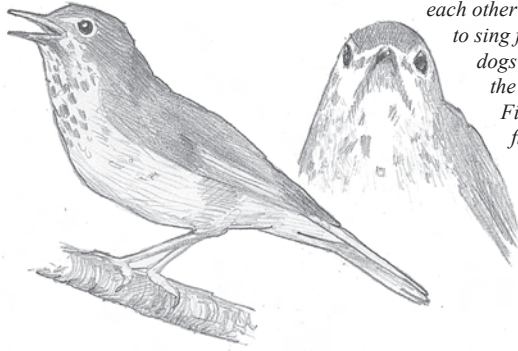
***columbine opening sequence*** Apparently the fly is more interested in pollen on the anthers than in nectar up in the spurs. Although columbine is peaking and widespread, I saw no hummers today. Are they all at the sugar-feeders?

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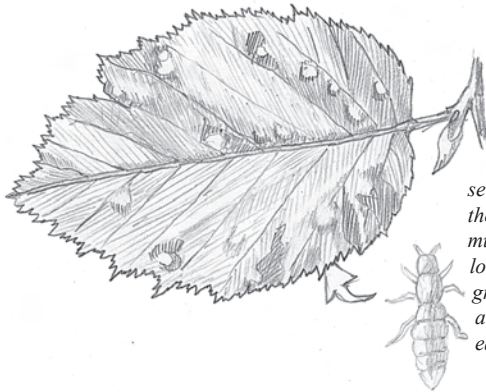
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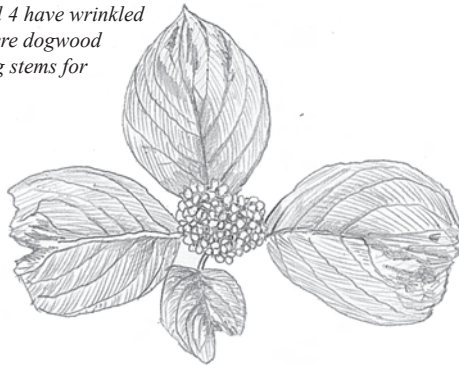
**Swainson's thrush** - Stood for 15 minutes with the camera set a full-telephoto, while several agitated male Swainies chased each other in circles around me, pausing to sing ferociously. When hikers with dogs passed by it would interrupt the bird-battle for about a minute. Finally I got several shots of a flume-side singer.

**Douglas maple** - Rooted among some red alders, but not very happy in the shade. The 3-inch trunk now leans almost prostrate. Probably got established many decades ago when the canopy here was more open, and is now being out-competed. But how did it get here at all? Maple samaras aren't great long-distance colonizers. Are there parent trees uphill?



**alder leaf puckers** - Little pimples on Sitka alder leaves are mostly convex on the upper surface. The concavities below have cottony packing. I smushed several with a pencil tip under the hand lens, not realizing I was murdering the inhabitants. Then located several tiny translucent green soft-bodied larvae (sp?) about a millimeter long. One to each pucker?

**red osier dogwood** - Something got into the leaves while they were still folded in bud; all 4 have wrinkled tips. This is one of the few places where dogwood is common enough to consider cutting stems for stream restoration work.

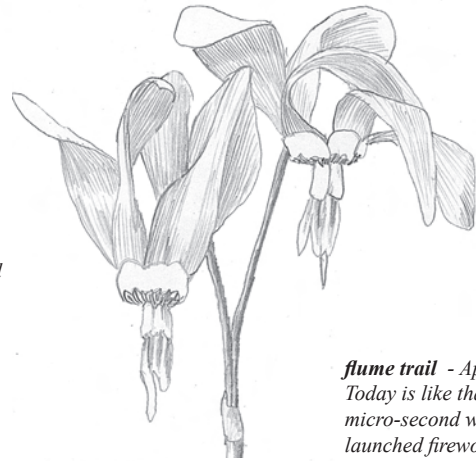


**Wilson's warbler** - My loud "pishing" noises over the roar of Gold Creek brought this singer to about 12 feet, and he lingered for several photos. A curious fox sparrow came in too but flew off before I could focus.



**red-backed vole** - Dashed out onto the road in broad daylight, reconsidered, and retreated into the dandelions. Tail about 1.5 inches long. Glossy rufous pelage indicates an adult, who should have known better; Basin Road is a canine expressway. (Territorial frenzy maybe, like the Swainies?) Happened too quick for a photo. This is a composite drawing from published shots.

**shooting star** - Down in the warmer beach meadows the petals have already dropped. Blossom on right is beginning to wilt.

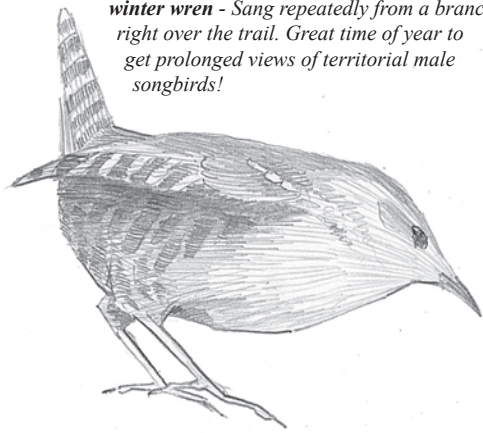


**flume trail** - Apogee! Today is like that exact micro-second when a launched fireworks rocket gleams brightest and highest.





**winter wren** - Sang repeatedly from a branch right over the trail. Great time of year to get prolonged views of territorial male songbirds!



**maidenhair fern** - Lime-lovers like maidenhair and spleenwort ferns are common on the outcrops. Does rock here have high carbonate content?



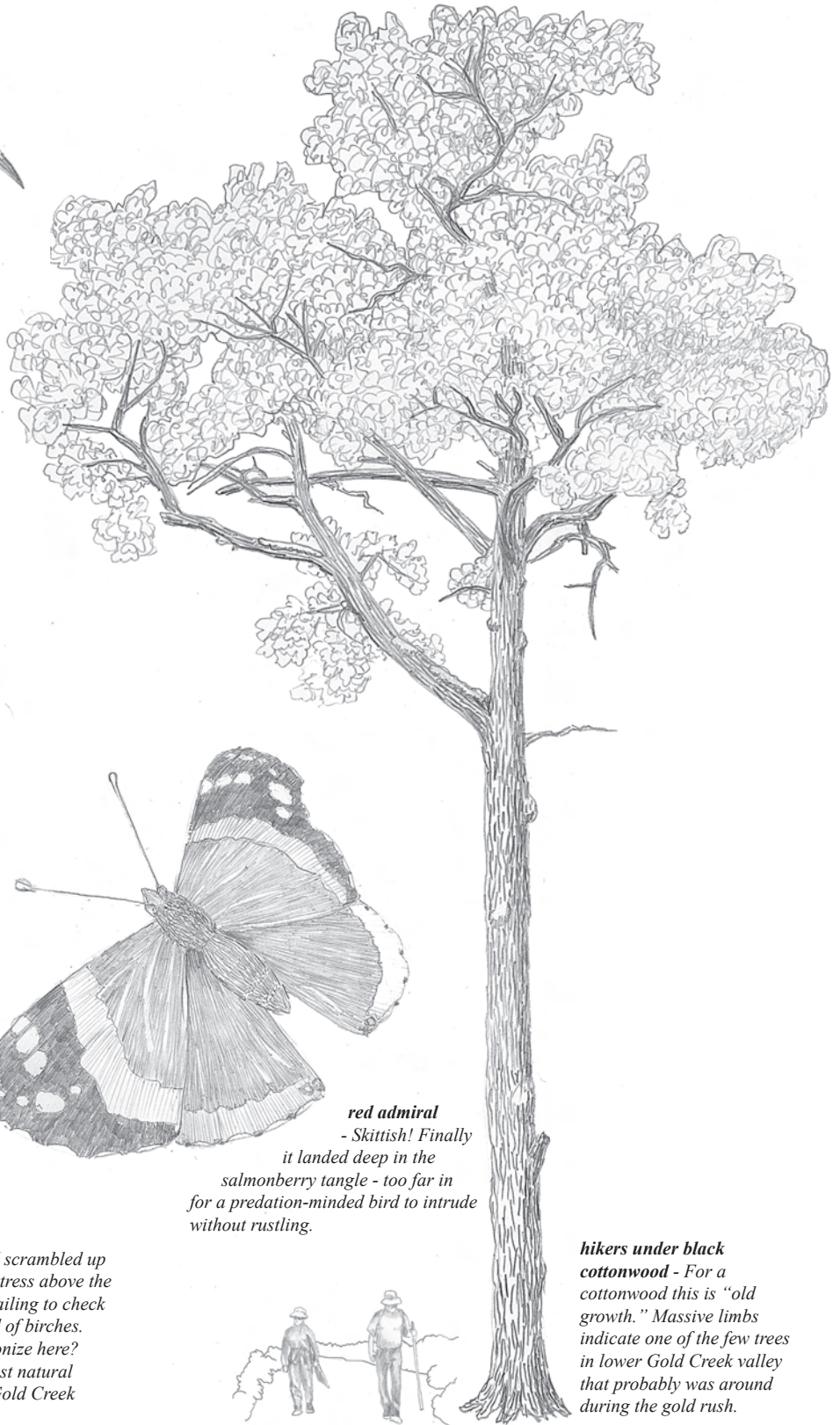
**paper birch** - I scrambled up the bedrock buttress above the mine-overlook railing to check on the little stand of birches. How did they colonize here? Where is the nearest natural population to the Gold Creek birches?



**red admiral**  
- Skittish! Finally it landed deep in the salmonberry tangle - too far in for a predation-minded bird to intrude without rustling.

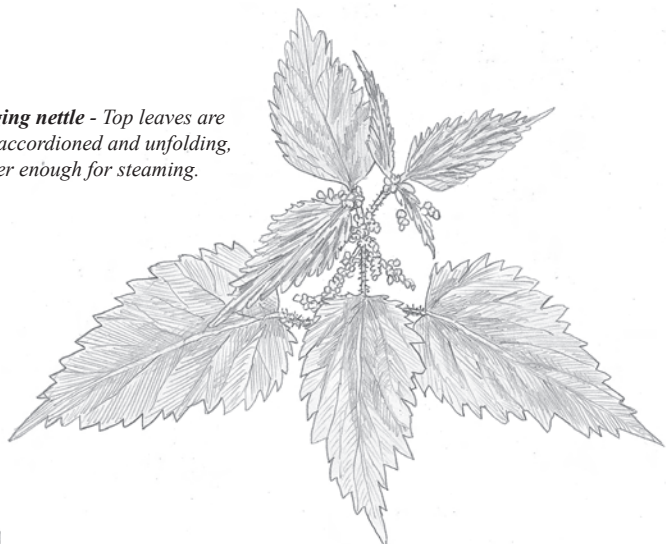


**hikers under black cottonwood** - For a cottonwood this is "old growth." Massive limbs indicate one of the few trees in lower Gold Creek valley that probably was around during the gold rush.





**stinging nettle** - Top leaves are still accorioned and unfolding, tender enough for steaming.

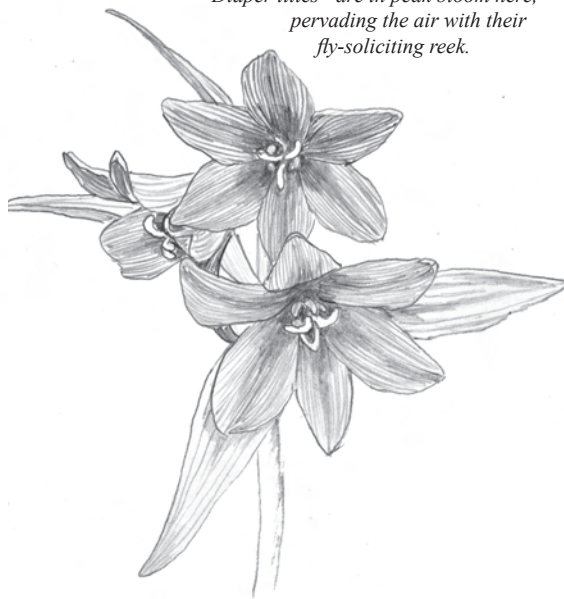


**pruned spruce tops** - At the Ebner Falls turnoff, many of the young spruces hosted a winter porcupine who clipped their upper twigs to chew off the needles. Porky even seems to have climbed out a bit onto the remaining slender branches.

Hemlock foliage (leaning leaders) is left untouched. Interesting that when porkies chew bark the preferences are reversed; hemlock is chosen over spruce.

**chocolate lily** - Above the falls where Gold Creek is no longer sunk deep into a canyon but runs almost at trail level, there are a few narrow stretches with rich alluvial meadows.

"Diaper lilies" are in peak bloom here, pervading the air with their fly-soliciting reek.



**Ebner Falls** - High water today from copious alpine snowmelt. Gold Creek raises a mist plume to about 50 feet in the canyon bottom. Looks like a fun kayak run.

