

# Friends Connecting to Friends

## Issue 10, October 2, 2020

### COVID-19 Steals Our Mobility but Not Our Memories by Lowell Adams

My wife and I still stay pretty close to home in an effort to remain free of COVID-19. We have groceries delivered, but go out for occasional doctors' appointments and other things. I have been to Patuxent several times since March, masked up and socially distancing. Two visits were to the *Wildlife Images* Bookstore and Nature Shop with fellow Friends' Board member Sparky Sparks. Our purpose was to determine and install needed safety features in anticipation of the Visitor Center opening soon. Another trip was a field outing of the Dr. Chandler S. Robbins Memorial Endowment Committee of Friends of Patuxent. That committee is planning some outdoor exhibits in honor Chan's legacy and love of birds.

Without doubt, COVID-19 has restricted the movements of the Adams family. My wife and I had eagerly anticipated a 10-day trip to California in late March 2020 to visit son Chris and his family, including two little grandsons. It was a disappointment to cancel that trip. The California family is doing ok, but they are challenged with this pandemic like everyone else.

COVID-19 stopped our California trip, but it cannot stop our memories of the summer of 2019 when son Chris and grandson Alex (8 years old) flew to Maryland for a visit with Nana and Pop-Pop. Alex and I were always the first ones up in the morning, and on the first morning after his arrival, I lifted the blind in Alex's bedroom and showed him a white-tailed deer lying down near the house in the backyard. Alex was off to a good start.

Alex was eager to go fishing, something he had never done. So, I had him practice casting with a spinning reel in the backyard before going to Wilde Lake in Columbia for trophy bluegills. Alex learned that task quickly. At the lake, we did what all fisher men and women do. We tried to catch fish. Alex and I both were getting a little disappointed because the fish were not biting. At the third spot, however, Alex was rewarded with his trophy. He caught some more bluegills, but that first one was the best. All were returned to the lake.



Alex wanted to go on a night hike with some really good flashlights, so we hiked the pathway up the creek that feeds into Wilde Lake. It's always fun to look for eyes staring back at you in the woods at night. We were not disappointed. We saw several white-tailed deer, and a raccoon climbing a tree. I was hoping to hear the barred owl I knew was in the area, but the woods were silent that night. All in all, it was a wonderful visit. We are looking forward to many more once we get better control of COVID-19.



## NEW SPECIES OF FROG ON THE HOME LIFE LIST by Matthew C. Perry

"Grandpa, come quick, there is a green frog on the window." Hmm, that got my attention. I have never seen a green frog far from the several frog ponds near our house. I did go quickly to investigate and immediately saw it was a green treefrog clinging to the outside window with its large adhesive disk toe pads. I have seen many green treefrogs during my wetland field activities, but never on my property during the last 40 years.



*Green treefrog on window of Mitchellville, MD, home*

I grabbed my camera and a stepladder and took a few pictures. I also caught the frog, so my granddaughter could get a closeup look, and then allowed her to release it in the same site. We then had a good discussion about this treefrog and how it is a different species from the numerous gray treefrogs that she has seen and heard many times at our house.

The green treefrog is about half the size of a gray treefrog and easily identified by its bright green color and a bright yellow “racing stripe” usually apparent on its side. The gray treefrog comes in several colors, including green, but has a distinctive bright orange color on the inside of its hind legs, which is usually not seen until captured.

The green treefrog is at its northern range limit in central Maryland, whereas its common relative, the gray treefrog, is found throughout the eastern United States. The green treefrog is a common species east and south of Route 95, and much more active at night. Although our daytime encounter was unusual, the tremendous amount of rain and high humidity during the first two weeks of September are factors in its appearance. It is often considered the “rain frog” and some folks feel they can predict rain as its call get louder in damp weather. The call is a bell-like sound, giving it another common name as the “bell frog.” The gray treefrog has an extremely loud trill and when many are calling it is deafening. The sound quickly is stopped if you intrude on their breeding habitat.

I am appreciative of the sharp eyes of my 5-year old granddaughter and it is common when she visits that her eyes see something that I have missed. Although the green treefrog is not an uncommon species, it was a new species for her, and I am pleased that it was a new one on our property. It is good to have the proper habitat to get the maximum biodiversity. Frogs are species that can be enjoyed near our residences without problems, and their consumption of insects is appreciated, especially the numerous mosquitoes that follow the rain.



*Green treefrog in hand before release by granddaughter*

## A Probable Paper Wasp by Jerry Persall

This enlarged photo is of a wasp Mary captured and released yesterday in our house in Colorado. For some reason we seem to be getting more insect visitors than usual of late and wonder if the wildfire smoke is driving them to seek refuge.

We have long had a self-imposed commitment to let no flora or fauna we personally encounter go unidentified. It has taken us on many natural history adventures, revealed many of nature's secrets and brought to us a widely expanded view of the wonders of the natural world. Until we ID-ed this guy it was a U.F.I. – unidentified flying insect. We also practice catch and release except in the case of creepy spiders. Just kidding!



I knew right away it was a wasp but ID-ing it to species was problematic, so I got help from my longtime Maryland astronomer/entomologist friend Richard Orr who was with the U.S.D.A. at an executive level. He quickly replied:

"Note how it folds its wings longitudinally making the wings appear narrow. This is the characteristics of the Wasp family Vespidae. Looks like a Paper Wasp to me -- genus *Polistes*. There are around 20 species in North America and likely more than one species in your area, so I am reluctant to put a species name on it. These wasps build the common upside-down paper nests with the individual cells exposed on the bottom and connected to an overhang by a thin petiole. They can sting and it is painful, but they are not aggressive like some of the hornets and unless you come in contact with the nest (or sit on one of the wasps by accident) you should not have a problem."

And, by the way, if you are the slightest bit curious about this sort of thing, I have found the best place to look first is **bugguide.net** at <https://bugguide.net/node/view/15740> where a clickable guide will take a non-specialist into the wonderful world of insects and, incidentally, teach you the difference between a bug and an insect.

Another satisfying natural history adventure!! Life is interesting even in lockdown.

## The Joy of Taking a Guided Tour Vacation by Natalie and Harold Woomer

While most of our hiking vacations have been self-planned, we have taken two guided group hiking trips. We are both introverts, so we weren't sure that we would enjoy a trip with people that we didn't know but the trips were fantastic. The scenery, camaraderie with fellow travelers, guides and food were wonderful in both trips. We took these tours because we wanted to hike in these areas but planning them on our own and doing them on our own seemed overwhelming.

Here are some things to consider when deciding whether or not to go on a guided trip:



### Pros of Guided Vacations

- Someone else does all of the trip planning, including what you are going to do and where you stay. They know the best places to go, eat and stay and will sometimes take you to places that only the locals know about. You just have to figure out which trip you want to go on.
- If you don't have someone to travel with and don't want to travel on your own, guided group trips are great option. There were quite a few individuals who came on our trips by themselves and most were women. Some were single and some had spouses who didn't want to travel.
- They take care of your transportation during the trip. If you don't feel comfortable driving in another country, this is very helpful.
- If you don't speak the language of the country you are visiting, it's helpful to have guides that speak English.
- You meet great people. We got to know a lot more people than we would have if we went on a trip on our own. Since we were hiking with others who liked to hike and travel, we had a lot in common with them and we learned a lot from them. We made great friends and were sorry when it was time to part.
- The guide company gives you a lot of information before you go on the trip – what you need to bring with you and everything you need to know to prepare for the trip.
- If you are going on an active vacation, it is good motivation for getting in shape.

### Cons of Guided Vacations

- It's a *lot* more expensive than going on your own.
- Since the trip is planned for you, you might not be able to do some things that you would have liked to have done. Although the trips we went on did schedule some free time where you can choose what to do. Another option is to go a little early or stay a few extra days at the end of the trip.

### Things to Consider When Taking a Guided Trip

- Find a trip that fits your interests. We like hiking vacations but there are all types.
- Read on-line reviews by people who've been on the trip that you are thinking of taking.
- Find out how many people will be on your trip. One of our trips had about 20 people and the other 14.

- When you are trying to determine whether or not to book a trip, representatives of the company can answer all of your questions. You can even ask them for details about the other travelers such as how old they are, where they are from and how many are coming by themselves. If you are thinking of going by yourself, it might be comforting to know that others will be going by themselves too. The companies we went with offered double pricing for singles who agreed to share a room with another same-sex single.
- We were concerned that we would be the oldest people on our trips (50ish at the time) and that we wouldn't be able to keep up with the others hiking all day for multiple days through the Alps. It turned out we were younger than most of our fellow travelers! Most of the hikers were in their 50s or 60s and some even in their 70s and one in his 80s. Maybe younger people aren't as likely to be able to afford the trips?
- What are the physical requirements? Tour companies will tell you how strenuous they are (or aren't) and what type of activities you will be doing. Will you be walking a mile on flat ground or 10 miles in the Alps per day?
- Find out information about your guides. How experienced are they? Where are they from? We used American tour companies for both of our trips. One had American guides and the other used English speaking guides who were from the area that we were visiting. While we loved both trips, we found that the local guides are able to give you much more information about the local culture, the area you're in, the native plants, etc.

### Hiking tour in the Swiss Alps

Our first group hiking trip was in Switzerland and was led by a father and son owned company out of the state of Georgia called Alpine Adventure Trails Tours, Inc. We flew into Zurich where the family met us to begin our adventure. The trip was 13 days long. We stayed in two small, quaint inns, the first in Zermatt, the home of the Matterhorn, and the second in the town of Grindelwald. We did day hikes from these inns and were given a choice of two hikes each day, one a difficult hike and the other one a moderate hike and each hike was led by a guide.



Or you didn't have to hike at all that day if you didn't want to. Then we would meet up for happy hour and dinner each evening. Having a daily choice on the level of difficulty of the hike can bring peace of mind if you're not sure of your abilities.

### Hiking tour around Mont Blanc

The second guided trip that we took was an 11-day hiking trip with REI where we hiked from inn to inn around Mont Blanc. REI transported our luggage between the inns so we just had to carry what we needed during the day. Here, everyone hiked the same route each day. If you felt unwell, you could ride in



the van that carried the the luggage. We started in Chamonix France, hiked into Italy, then Switzerland and back to Chamonix. We had three guides – two from France and one from Spain. It was great to get to know our guides and learn about the local culture.