



Weekly documentation of the interactions, interconnections, and complications between animal lives.



ESSAY THREE: "ECOTONE"



I remember hearing the family laughing first. Then, the (what I think was) Maiden Grass tussled from a source I couldn't yet see. This was my second day of a two day solitary rest in Utah's Canyonlands. I'd made it through two and a half weeks of backpacking through the La Sal Mountains and was resting my feet in the narrow bit of Colorado River pooled at the base of the canyon.

I had another two weeks left of the trip. The group I was backpacking with were all set up along the river taking their own solitary rest days. I hadn't spoken to anyone 48 hours, and given that I'd been without screens or families or friends for even more time, I actually felt very comfortable in my solitude.

The grasses snapped to the ground, rock bits shot towards me. I turned and saw four ATVs heading my way, through what I thought was inaccessible land. I looked at my blistered feet, the blood pooling under my big toe nail. *There are other ways in?* I thought, laughing.

There was a fantasy I'd bought into when I first started wanting to explore "nature," thinking that it was always a pastoral place filled with wild, untamed animals. And while I did encounter mountain lions, lizards, scorpions, and otters on my trip in Utah, the idea that these areas were totally isolated from "civilization" was naive. As was my idea that the borders between spaces were clear.

In *The Practice of the Wild* by poet Gary Snyder, he writes of how "the "older human experience of a fluid, indistinct, but genuine home region was gradually replaced—across Eurasia—by the arbitrary and often violently imposed boundaries of emerging national states. These imposed borders sometimes cut across bio tic areas and ethnic zones alike. Inhabitants lost ecological knowledge and community solidarity. In the old ways, the flora and fauna and landforms are part of the culture. The world of culture and nature, which is actual, is almost a shadow world now, and the insubstantial world of political jurisdictions and rarefied economies is what passes for reality. We live in a backwards time. We can regain some small sense of that old membership by discovering the original lineaments of our land and steering—at least in the home territory and in the mind— by those rather than the borders of arbitrary nations, states, and counties." What Snyder advocates for in his writing, in particular his incorporation of Buddhist ideas—finding himself in between both Western and Eastern thought, is to imagine our borders with land through how vegetation changes rather than where governments have drawn lines. If at all.

This idea is also illuminated through the concept of an "ecotone," or a space that exists between two biomes, something not easily defined by scientific category. These spaces are documented quite regularly. I realize now that when I thought I was fully in a canyon, a desert, all it took was one family to pierce through my simplification. I learned I was also near a city. A community. After they passed through and we began to walk further down the river, I listened closer to the sounds around me. Sometimes, I heard a highway buzz.

There's a way I would want to mourn this, that it's maybe not possible to have this isolationist experience of nature as often as I would like to think I can. I'd been reading Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* before my trip and he often lamented what the touristification of national parks had done to them, but I recently started reading Rebecca Solnit's essays again on Thoreau (which I go more into below), but it made me wonder who the isolationism serves, and what am I craving from it?

At the time I went on the trip, I think I was wanting self-knowledge, and to know I could do something really, really hard. And I learned those lessons, to a degree. But I also think I wanted an experience to compare my "regular life" to, to know what I would see when I ventured out. Now I understand this is possible daily no matter where I am.

This ecotonic space also brought me closer to animal life. I've shared this story before, but in a moment where I felt truly exhausted, sore, and like I couldn't finish what I set out to do, a blind field mouse sat on my lap as I was collecting wood. The moment felt like a positive omen, a nudge to keep going—maybe for us both.



COLLABORATION

Reckoning Press Podcast

The background of the title is a complex, multi-layered illustration. On the left, there are large, textured shapes in shades of green and blue, resembling foliage or water. In the center, a vertical yellow and orange shape looks like a flame or a stem. On the right, a white bird with black outlines is shown in flight, its wings spread. Above it, a fish is depicted in a blue and red striped pattern. The overall style is expressive and colorful, with a mix of organic and geometric forms.

I hosted my first roundtable with Reckoning Press to talk about animal consciousness. I was joined by Priya Chand and E.G. Condé to talk about animal consciousness, animal rights, and human rights. Listen to the full episode [here](#).

READING LIST: BLURRING BIOMES

This week, I'm reading Rebecca Solnit's *The Thoreau Problem*, which challenges environmentalists who think their "peace" and "harmony with land" means total separation from society, those who don't want to be disturbed to take action on social justice issues. She takes the familiar image of Thoreau away at his cabin at Walden and highlights facts of his time there:

- He went to prison during these years for refusing to pay his taxes in protest of slavery and war
- He often went to town to see friends and was still regularly engaged with local affairs
- His mother and sister were both abolitionists in Concord and were active supporters of the Underground Railroad
- Thoreau hosted the Concord Female Anti-Slavery group at Walden

I think this essay does a great job highlighting how seemingly distinct biomes are never totally separate, as are our lives.

I have a few **copies** of my zine *Love*, left for \$2. Learn more [here](#).

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