



101 Nature-Oriented Things to Do This SUMMER

Naturalist [Jim Conrad](#)

1. **List all the trees in your neighborhood.** Our page on [backyard trees](#) can help. You may also want to look at our pages on [twigs](#) and [tree bark](#). Tree identification books can be reviewed [here](#).
2. **Find a spider web**, maybe in your basement or in the garden, among the shrubs or among some weeds, and see if the spider is there. Is the web an orb web, sheet web, or some other kind? Check out our [Spiders Page](#) and our [Spider Silk Page](#).
3. **Put out a birdbath** for birds and other critters. It doesn't have to be a real birdbath, but could be something like a turned-upside garbage can lid. The water should be no deeper than an inch. Keep a list of the species who visit.
4. **Find the star-shaped pith in an oak twig**, as shown on our [Woody Twig Page](#).
5. Go for Naturalist Jim's [Bug-Eaten Leaf Awards](#).
6. **Start a rock collection.** Our [rock section](#) can get you oriented..
7. **In the night sky, learn these constellations:** *The Big Dipper (Ursa Major), The Little Dipper (Ursa Minor), Leo the Lion, Boötes the Herdsman, Hercules, Corona Borealis, and Draco the Dragon.* One book to help you is [The Sky Observer's Guide: A Handbook for Amateur Astronomers](#)
8. **If you see a bird collecting worms or other food for nestlings, watch where the food is taken**, locate the nest, and watch it until the nestlings leave (Don't get too close or you'll upset the family.) Check out our [birdnest page](#).
9. At night and with a flashlight, **sneak up on a stridulating cricket** and watch it sing.
10. **Find a lichen**, as described on our [Lichen Page](#), and figure out whether it is *crustose, foliose* or *fruticose*.
11. If you have a camera, about 5 feet from the birdbath, put a box or some other structure large enough for you to hide in. After the birds become accustomed to this "**wildlife observation blind**" (maybe a couple of days), go inside, then take a close look at what visits the birdbath. Birds can count up to "one," so you may need a friend to go with you to the box, you get inside the box, then your friend leave. The birds will see "one" person go to the birdbath, and "one" return, so then they'll know the coast is clear for them!
12. In your basement or some other damp, slightly junky place, **look for "thousand leggers."** Are they centipedes, millipedes or



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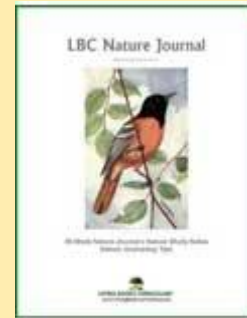
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maybe sowbugs? Our [Centipedes, Millipedes & Pill Bugs Page](#) can help you decide.

13. **Look for squirrels** around your house or in the local park. What kind of squirrels are they? Our [Squirrel Page](#) may be able to help.
14. **Make an online insect collection**, as described [here](#).
15. **Find a feather** and identify these parts of it: *shaft, vane, barbs*, and *barbules*. Our [Feather Page](#) can help.
16. **Find out where your house's water comes from**. Does your town have its own well, or take water from a reservoir or river? If your water comes from a reservoir or river, does the water seem clean to you, and free of chemical pollutants? Are you content with your water situation? If not, what are you going to do about it?
17. **Hunt around for a Tree-of-heaven, or Ailanthus**. Read about it in the middle of our [Plant Chemicals Page](#), and see the special glands at the bases of its leaflets. When you find one, smell of its glands and look for ants visiting them.
18. **Find out the geological age of the land on which you live**. You may need to consult a geology map of the kind described on our [Geological Processes Page](#).
19. **Look for fungi**. When you find a fungus, figure out what kind it is. Our [Fungus Section](#) can help.
20. **List all the butterflies in your neighborhood**. Our [Butterfly Page](#) can get you started. You can review the [National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies](#) available at [Amazon.com](#)
21. **Find a grass flower** and, referring to our [Grass Flower Page](#), identify a *spikelet*, the *glumes*, and a *floret*. You may need to use a pin to separate the various parts, and a magnifying glass.
22. **Make phenology observations** -- notes about seasonal things, such as flowering, fruiting, birds nesting, frogs croaking, etc. Post your notes at an [Online Phenology Database](#).
23. **Start a Nature Study Notebook**, either on paper or on your computer. The "Nature Study Notebook" section on our [Tools Page](#) offers some pointers for getting started.
24. **Get involved** with local efforts to save the environment and meet others who enjoy learning about nature. Check out our [Get Involved Section](#), which gives links to environmental groups on the Web.
25. **Learn to identify Poison Ivy**. One way to do this is to go to the Google [Images Page](#), type "Poison Ivy" into the search box, then look at the various thumbnail pictures showing Poison Ivy.
26. **List all the birds in your neighborhood**. The "how to birdwatch" part of our [bird section](#) can get you started.
27. Once you have your birdlist, **note next to each species' name what kind of beak it has**. Various beak types are described on our [Bird Beaks Page](#).
28. And once you have some birds listed, **listen to their songs** at the US Government Patuxent [birdsong page](#).
29. **Find a gilled mushroom and key it out** at Mycokey.com's [KEY to fungus GENERA](#)
30. When you **eat fried chicken, pay attention to the bones** and realize what part of the chicken's body you are eating. You might want to compare your chicken bones with those of the pigeon at our [Bird Bones & Muscles Page](#).
31. **Look for bats** at dusk just as it's getting really dark. They are

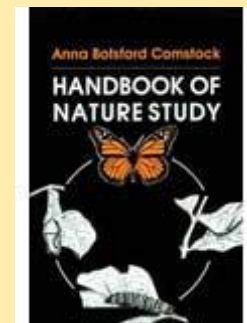


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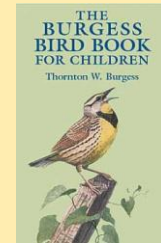
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more thick-bodied than birds and flutter instead of soar or glide. We have a [bat page](#), too.

32. After learning to identify Poison Ivy, **crush and smell several leaves of herbs, shrubs and trees**. Do some odors strike you as chemicals the plant is using to keep insects and other animals from eating it? If this interests you, look at our [Plant Chemicals used in Defense Page](#).
33. On trees, shrubs and weeds, **look for galls** as described on our [Gall Page](#). Maybe the [Gallery of Common Galls Page](#) can help, too.
34. Pull up a clover plant in a yard that isn't too sterile because of chemicals, and **look for the nitrogen-fixing nodules on the roots**. Our "Roots with Nodules" section at the bottom of our [Root Types Page](#) should get you started.
35. **In a garden flower, figure out the different parts**. Locate the *stamens* (pollen-producing male part, consisting of filament and anther), *pistil* (female part that will mature into a fruit, consisting of stigma, style and ovary), *corolla* and *calyx*. Our [Standard Blossom Page](#) will help you.
36. **Web rings** are linked-together Web sites dealing with specific subjects. If you have a special interest, such as birds, trees, or whatever, go to the [WebRing Home Page](#) and type your interest into the Search Box. If you find some rings, visit the sites in the rings.
37. Check out the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) about **Global Warming** provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
38. **Search for a member of the Mint Family**, as described on our [Mint-flowers Page](#). Several weeds and garden flowers and herbs are mints. When you find a flowering mint plant, notice its *square stem*, *opposite leaves*, and its *fruits divided into four "nutlets."* Often mints *smell minty*, too...
39. If you **find a birdnest**, determine whether it is a *scrape*, *platform*, *cup*, *adherent*, *pensile* or *pendulous* nest. Our [Nest Page](#) can help you with that.
40. **Subscribe to the weekly [naturalist newsletter](#)** issued by this site's producer, Naturalist Jim Conrad.
41. **Rub a slice of white bread on your kitchen table**, or anyplace you want to, slightly moisten the bread, then put it into a jar with a top on it so the bread won't dry out. Each day look at the bread. In a few days you should find one or more kinds of fungus established on it. Fungus spores are just about *everywhere*. Our [Fungus Section](#) is nice.
42. **Start your Birding Life List** listing all the birds you've ever identified with absolute certainty. Read our [Life List Page](#) and check out the [bird-identification books](#) available at Amazon.com.
43. **Go looking for insect eggs** and notice their incredible variety of sizes, shapes, colors and designs. Check out our [Insect Eggs Page](#).
44. **Dig up an Earthworm** and with your hands moist so you don't hurt it, see if you can identify the worm's *clitellum*, *excretory pores*, *chaetae*, *male pore*, *female pore* and *mouth*. We have a [drawing](#) identifying these features.
45. If you have a moist, junky basement, **look for Daddy-long-legs**, pictured and described on our [Harvestman Page](#).



The Burgess Bird Book

By the incomparable Thornton W. Burgess, this book is an enchanting collection of forty-five stories of bird lore. It teaches a wealth of information, while infusing a sense of reverence and care for the natural world...[more](#)

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46. **Find a weed and try to identify it** by using Iowa State's [Weed-Identification Page](#).
47. If you have a moist or wet place outside, **look for a snail or slug**. On either of them, locate the two tentacles atop the head, and the two stalked eyes below the tentacles. Our [Snails & Slugs Page](#) explains things.
48. If your neighborhood has outcropping sedimentary rocks, or if there is rounded streambed gravel available, **look for fossils**. Visit our [Fossil Page](#).
49. If you have a scanner, read over our [Tips on Using the Scanner for Documenting Plants & Animals Page](#), then **start identifying and scanning all the insects in your neighborhood**. Keep your scannings organized so you can browse them the way you would a good insect collection. Check out our [Insect Profiles Pages](#) to see how we've organized our scannings and pictures.
50. In moist, shaded, undisturbed places, **look for mosses** in their spore-producing condition. Using the diagram on our [Mosses Page](#), identify a moss's *calyptra*, *capsule*, *stalk*, *leaves* and *rhizoids*.
51. Wander around looking at **how the blossoms of different plants are arranged**. Classify each arrangement type according to whether it is a *spike*, *raceme*, *corymb*, *panicle*, *umbel*, *cyme*, *scorpioid cyme*, or something else. Our [Blossom Arrangement Page](#) can help.
52. Identify just one thing in your backyard -- maybe a bird or a garden flower or an insect -- and then **use the Google search engine** to find out all you can about it. You'll just be *amazed* at what you can learn!
53. List all the ecological niches you can identify in your backyard. Our [Backyard Niches Page](#) can get you started.
54. Once you've made the above list, **write down each species you can identify using each niche**, and describe what the organisms are doing there.
55. **Find a composite flower** (described on our [Composite Flowers Page](#)) and, if it has these parts, identify its *ray flowers*, *its disk flowers*, *the receptacle*, and the *achenes*.
56. **Among the birds in your neighborhood, see if you can identify these behaviors** outlined on our [Bird Behavior in Our Backyards Page](#): *Establishing & defending territories*; *family raising*, and; *communal behavior*.
57. Dig into the leaf litter in a forested park or beneath a hedge to **find white strands of fungal hyphae**, as described on our [Hyphae Page](#).
58. Look very closely at any sand or streambed gravel you can find. Try to **see tiny crystals**, as described on our [Minerals Page](#). Especially if you have a magnifying glass you should at least see glass-like quartz crystals.
59. **Look for Chimney Swifts** in the summer sky. If you see some, learn more about them at the [SwiftWatch Page](#), and consider helping to conserve this wonderful species.
60. **Look for a wild-growing fern**. In the suburbs sometimes they may grow in the shade beneath shrubbery on the north sides of house. They like moisture so many backyards may not have any. If that's the case, maybe you can find one at a local park. If you find one, look for spore-producing *sori*, or fruit dots, as described

on our [Fern Page](#).

61. At <http://www.stategeologists.org/>, click on your state in the US map and visit your state's Geological Survey Web Site, where you can **learn about your state's geology and order geology maps**.
62. **Find a fruit** of any kind and decide what kind it is. Our [Fruit Page](#) can help you decide whether it's a simple, aggregate or multiple fruit, and if it's a simple one (as most fruits are) what kind of simple fruit.
63. If you have a special interest, such as birds, wildflowers, spiders, or whatever, **consider joining an "e-group"** at the [Yahoo Groups Page](#). Just go there, type your subject into the search box, and if you see a group you like, join it.
64. **Find a plant with spines or thorns** and try to figure out why it has them. Remember that plants evolved long ago when often large herbivores such as bison, wild horses and mastodons wandered the land. Of course we have a nice [Plant Spines Page](#).
65. **Look for animal tracks in mud**. You should be able to identify at least dog tracks, as drawn on our [Mammal Page](#). You may want to review the book [Field Guide to Mammal Tracking in North America](#) available at Amazon.com.
66. **Look for simple and compound eyes on an insect**, as described in the eye section of our [Insect Design Page](#).
67. On tree twigs, look for *lenticels*, *buds* and *leaf scars*, as described on our [Woody Twigs Page](#).
68. **Read Naturalist Jim Conrad's short online book [Walks With Red Dog](#)**, about being with a dog in the countryside.
69. On various trees, shrubs and herbs see if you can always **figure out exactly where the leaves are**. Our [How Can You Decide Whether Something is a Leaf or Not?](#) Page can help you here, especially with the question of whether something is a leaf or a leaflet.
70. Probably you've watched Robins **catching earthworms in your lawn**. Lie on the lawn and see if you catch as many as the Robins do. If you have chiggers or redbugs in your area you might want to spread a plastic sheet below you.
71. Find a caterpillar and notice its six black **jointed legs** immediately behind the head, its stubby, mid-body legs called **prolegs** and its end ones called **anal prolegs**. Our [Caterpillars & Other Insect Larvae Page](#) shows these.
72. **Capture, identify and then release a rodent** by using one of the non-violent traps described on our [Rats, Mice & Voles Page](#). Pay attention to the warnings about getting bitten or clawed, as well as about not upsetting the rodent.
73. **Find the scientific name of a plant or animal** by using the [Google Search Engine](#) and typing in its common or English name. Once you have the name, use Google to find a good etymology site dealing with Latin and Greek roots, to help you understand what the scientific name is saying. Visit our [On the Beauty of Scientific Names Page](#).
74. **Become an official frogwatcher**. For details go to [Frogwatch USA](#)
75. If you have tomato plants in your garden, **find a tomato flower** and notice how its anthers are grown together as shown on our [Tomato-flower Page](#). Mark a flower and day after day watch how the ovary expands, the stamens and corolla shrivel and fall off,

and finally the ovary becomes a tomato.

76. If you have a scanner, read over our [Tips on Using the Scanner for Documenting Plants & Animals Page](#), then start **identifying and scanning your neighborhood's trees** -- their leaves, flowers and fruits. Keep your scannings organized so you can browse them the way you would a good herbarium collection.
77. At night, **find a streetlight or backyard light and watch for insects who flutter into it**. These insects are trying to navigate by the light as if it were a star. However, as they fly, trying to keep the light at a certain angle as must be done to fly in a straight line, they begin passing by the light. They turn to compensate, then have to turn again, and before long they are circling the light and crashing into it...
78. When you go onto the Internet for the first time each day, **check out NASA's [Astronomy Picture of the Day](#)**. This will help you keep things here on Earth in perspective.
79. **Familiarize yourself with the ten most conspicuous insect orders** so that when you see an insect belonging to them you'll know which order they belong to. As explained on our [Insect Orders Page](#), the vast majority of insects you'll find will belong to these orders, so just by learning these ten orders you can easily learn to "order" your insects.
80. **Figure out where your trash goes**. The garbage truck picks it up, and then... ? Is anything recycled? Is it dumped at sea or burned, causing air pollution, or put into a landfill, using valuable land? Are you happy with what happens to it? Is there anything you can do to improve the matter? You may enjoy looking at the [Environmental Kid's Club page on Garbage and Recycling](#)
81. **Find a bean**, maybe a dried bean in your kitchen, and notice its *hilum*. Separate its two faces, and inside the bean identify the *plumule*, *radicle* and *hypocotyl*. Our [Seeds Page](#) can help you.
82. **Hunt around for a Ginkgo tree**. Look at our [Ginkgo Page](#) to see what's so special about that tree, then, when you find one, just look at it thinking about its being such a "living fossil."
83. Browse through the "[Factoids](#)" (snippets of information) relating to **human population**, presented by World Overpopulation Awareness.
84. If you live in eastern North America and have hummingbirds around your home, participate in [Operation Rubythroat](#) by collaborating with others to **study the behavior and distribution of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird**.
85. In local gardens, hedges, weedy places and woods, **look for insect pupae**, as described on our [Insect Pupae Page](#). Once you find one, mark it with a ribbon or other object, then visit it each day to watch for when the adult emerges.
86. One place on the Web to help you **get the scientific name of plants you identify** is the [B & T World Seeds](#) site. Try it out.
87. **Download some free nature books** from [Project Gutenberg](#). Look for writings by John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin and Jack London.
88. **Print out the drawing of our "Standard Blossom"** on our [Remember the Standard Blossom Page](#), then wander around looking at miscellaneous flowers seeing how they *differ* from the drawing.
89. If you have a microscope, **look at pollen grains** of different

flowers and notice how different they are from one another in terms of size and shape.

90. Most insects are either "chewers" or "suckers." Wander around looking at miscellaneous insects, deciding **which are chewers and which are suckers**. We have more information on our [Insect Mouthparts Page](#).
91. Calculate your Ecological Footprint at the [Low Impact Living Site](#).
92. **Learn to identify your local trees just by looking at their trunks**. Our [Tree Bark Page](#) can help you organize your thoughts about this.
93. **Learn the few most common Butterfly families**, as listed on our [Butterflies Page](#), so that when you meet up with an unknown butterfly you can at least say, "Well, it's in the #### family..." The [Butterflies of North America Page](#) can help you identify butterflies, as well as the [National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies](#)
94. **Understand your local weather** by looking at clouds, seeing weather maps, etc. The [About.com Weather Page](#) can help you.
95. If you had to personally kill the animals providing the flesh you eat each day, would you do it? **Is it moral for you to simply pay others to kill the animals you eat?** Think about these questions. You might be interested in the [Vegetarianism in a Nutshell](#) site.
96. From a local pond or ditch, **take a jar of water and set it in a window** where it gets some sunlight. Over the weeks, watch what happens.
97. **Look for a mushroom** and see if it has the following parts: *cap, stalk, gills or pores, ring, and cup*. Our [Mushroom Page](#) can help.
98. **Browse the spices of your kitchen**. If you find a spice whose origin you don't know, find out at the [McCormick Botanical Origins Page](#), where you can also learn a lot about each spice.
99. When you identify a bird, **see where it nests** during the summer by [clicking here](#).
100. **Catch up on the latest environmental news** at the [EarthJustice](#) site.
101. **Post your own backyard observations** at our [Backyard Nature Message Board](#)

