

Catherine Sky

October 31

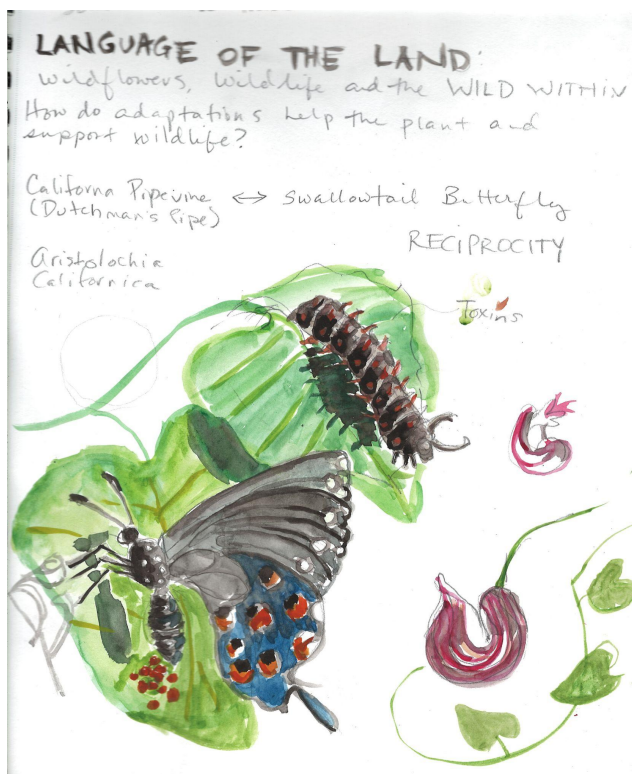
Speaker Write-up: Sonoma Land Trust, Language of the Land : Wildflowers, Wildlife and the Wild Within

Speaker: Shelley Spriggs

This presentation focused on the “unique relationship between wild flowers and wildlife.” I found it not only interesting, but useful as material for the arts-based ecological literacy curriculum I have been developing. The presenter organized the material by color of the flowers, beginning with red and moving through the spectrum all the way to violet. As such, I have chosen to reflect on some of the relationships presented and how they can be developed into a lesson on the visual interrelationships between wildflowers and wildlife. Through notes and small paintings, I was able to use visual language to explore some of the connections presented. .

California Pipevine and Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly

This interrelationship is unique because the pipevine contains a toxin to which only the

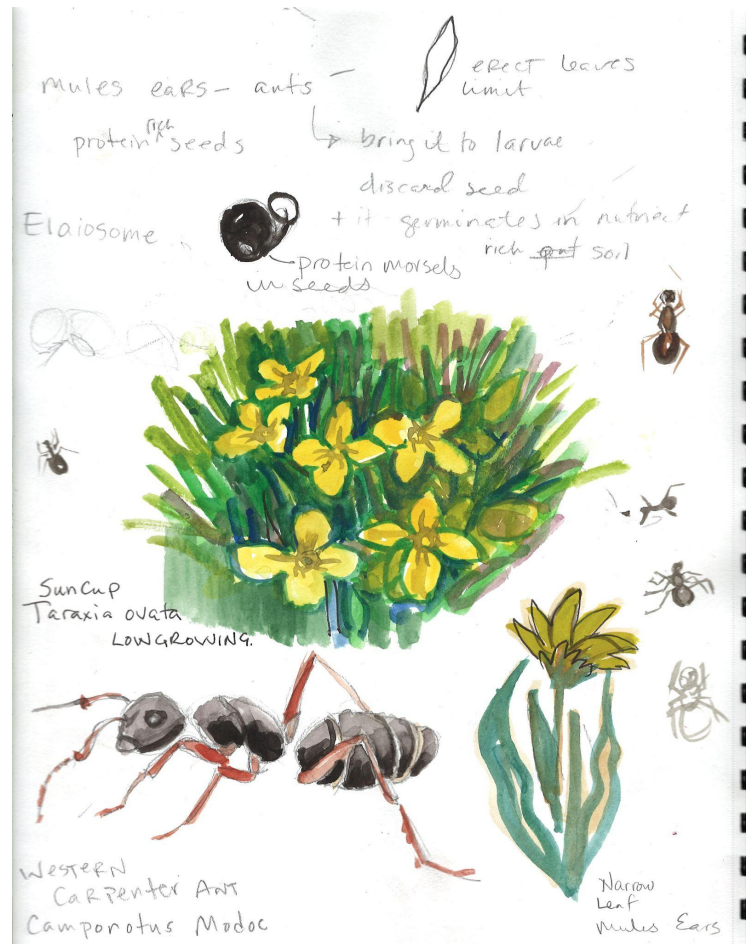


Swallowtail larvae is immune. The toxin is passed through all stages of the swallowtail's life cycle protecting it from predators who recognize the presence of the poison by the color red-orange which adorns the caterpillar, cocoon, adult and egg. This adaptation of an insect to a plant that benefits it uniquely presents a good opportunity to introduce the importance of color in protecting not only

the swallowtails from getting eaten but the birds from ingesting the toxin. For this reason I am interested in adding the pipevine to the bird habitat garden I am implementing on the campus of my school. While these butterflies caterpillars will (hopefully) not be food for the birds, they will be an exciting new pollinator for the garden

Suncup and Western Carpenter Ant

As the speaker enthusiastically introduced more and more information, I found myself wanting to explore each of these relationships more deeply. In the yellow category, the mule's ears' adaptation to dry conditions by upright leaves which limit transpiration illustrates the importance of shape and structure in plant adaptations. The seeds of the suncup's low growing yellow flowers contain a rich protein called an elaiosome which attracts the ants. Once the protein is consumed, the rest of the seed is deposited in the ant's nutrient rich environment where it germinates and grows in optimal conditions. I believe visual language is very important for illustrating these relationships.



California Buttercup and Blue-Eyed Grass

I learned that not only are colors important in the relationship between plants and wildlife, color contrast also plays a role. I am fascinated to find out that the complementary color pair yellow and violet has been proven to increase the number of pollinators in a given area. Complementary color pairs are known to artists as colors that enhance each other's properties through contrast. I am excited to learn that nature understands this as well. Knowing that more pollinators appear when yellow ranunculus and violet blue-eyed grass (not blue and not a grass) are intermingled seems to bring life and art together. Also the yellow centers of Blue-Eyed Grass efficiently draw insects directly to the pollen to the individual flower.



Lupine

Here is another exciting case of a plant using color to communicate with insects in a way that expedites pollination and saves valuable energy. Lupine flowers actually change color once they have been pollinated. They transition from contrasty bright white with black spots to red violet and eventually blue-violet once the pollen is no longer available.



From my point of view as an artist/art-educator, this presentation provided very useful information, delivered in an easy to understand and fun way. I am looking forward to further refinement of the material to present to students with paint brushes ready and loaded. Additionally, as we go into the wet season, I am excited to add these new native plants to our habitat garden.