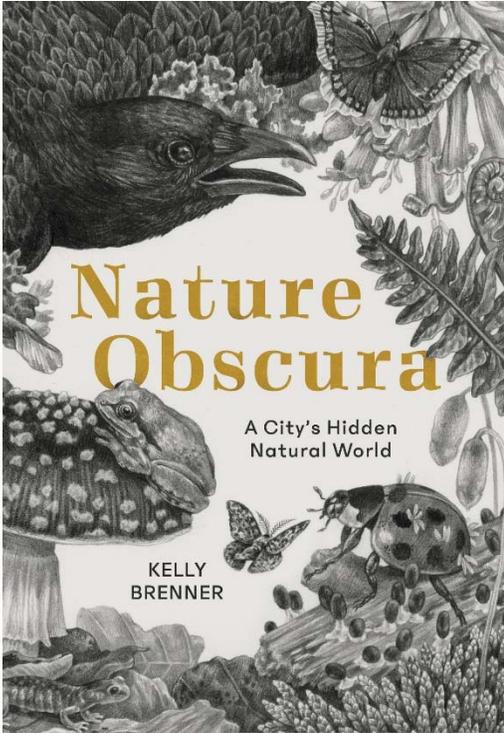




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Mountaineers Books, 206-223-6303 x138
tessd@mountaineersbooks.org

A funny, inspiring, and intimate dive into urban nature across four seasons



Nature Obscura

A City's Hidden Natural World

By Kelly Brenner

NEW APRIL 2020

With wonder and a sense of humor, *Nature Obscura* author Kelly Brenner aims to help us rediscover our connection to the natural world that is just outside our front door – we just need to know where to look.

Through explorations of a rich and varied landscape, Brenner reveals the complex micro-habitats and surprising nature found in the middle of a city. In her hometown of Seattle, which has plowed down hills, cut through the land to connect fresh- and saltwater, and paved over much of the rest, she exposes a diverse range of strange and unknown creatures, many of which can be found throughout the Pacific Northwest.

From shore to wetland, forest to neighborhood park, and graveyard to backyard, Brenner uncovers how our alterations of the land have affected nature, for good and bad, through the often unseen wildlife and plants that live alongside us. These stories meld together, forming an eloquent tapestry, in the same way that ecosystems, species, and humans are interconnected across the urban environment.

Kelly Brenner is a naturalist, photographer and a writer based in Seattle with a focus on urban nature. Founder of the *Metropolitan Field Guide*, she writes about urban nature, wildlife habitat design, books, poetry, folklore, nature artists, and a variety of other natural history topics. Her work has been published in *Crosscut*, *National Wildlife Magazine*, and *The Open Notebook*, among others. Learn more at metrofieldguide.com and follow her on Twitter @KellyBrenner.



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Excerpt from Nature Obscura by Kelly Brenner

Imagine, if you will, an animal that weighs the same as two dimes. This tiny animal has a heart that beats up to 1,250 times a minute when active. At rest, it takes 250 breaths a minute. Its tiny wings beat up to 200 times a second, which propels its flight to 30 miles per hour and hits 60 on a dive. This is an animal that must consume at least double its body weight each day, and feed frequently during the day, or starve to death within a matter of hours. The food this animal consumes is nectar, supplemented with a few insects. It's hard not only to find the time to eat constantly, but to find enough to eat. Now imagine this animal doing this in the dead of winter, not in sunny San Diego, but in Seattle. This is the story of Anna's hummingbird.

Of the more than 320 species of hummingbird in the New World only 14 visit the United States. A mere four regularly make their way to Washington State and just two visit Seattle. But only a single species, the Anna's hummingbird, can be found here throughout all the seasons. My yard is one of many that the Anna's visit, and I watch them throughout the year. They are my constant companions – as long as I keep feeding them. If I forget to fill the feeders or go on vacation, they'll abandon my house and visit one of the many others in the area that also provides feeders. I don't take it personally.

I've fed and watched Anna's hummingbirds for well over a decade, from a feeder on a small balcony near Portland to the small front yard of a rental house in Eugene, Oregon. Even while we lived in the middle of the city in Seattle, they found my lavender plants up on the sixth-floor balcony and visited regularly. Today, at our house in south Seattle, I feed them in both the front yard and backyard.

Neither explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in 1805 nor David Douglas in the 1820s ever encountered the Anna's hummingbird. The birds didn't live here when Washington became a state in 1889. They likewise missed out on the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, the opening of the Smith Tower, the *Spirit of St. Louis* landing at Sand Point Naval Air Station, the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, and the Seattle's World's Fair. Anna's hummingbirds were not documented in Seattle until 1965, and it wasn't until Luke Skywalker blew up the Death Star to cheers of audiences in 1977 that they started nesting here. These little nomads are not just increasing in range, however; they're also increasing in number. Anna's have seen a sevenfold rise in their Seattle-area numbers since 1990. A bird that just started breeding here when I was born in 1978 is now commonplace in my yard today.

It is thought that the Anna's relatively sudden movement to Seattle is due in large part to an Australian tree, the eucalyptus. Along with tree tobacco, another non-native tree favored by hummingbirds, eucalyptus was introduced to Southern California somewhere around 1870 and quickly spread throughout much of the southern part of the state, providing an ideal hummingbird resource in places previously bereft of nectar-producing plants in winter. The hummingbirds then expanded northward from their historic chaparral habitat of dense thickets of tangled, thorny shrubs in Baja California and Southern California.