**Other Life-Worlds**

Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer Ed Yong writes in his 2022 book, *An Immense World*: “There's a vast world around us that animals can perceive—but humans can't.” For instance, in a dark room we are guided only by touch and sound, but “a bird in the room would be able to pick up on the magnetic field of the earth and would know which direction to fly if it was time to migrate. A dog would be sniffing out various odors that a human would not be able to smell. A rattlesnake would detect the presence of humans in the room by sensing their infrared radiation.” In the same dark room, each of these creatures would experience a living-world radically different than the living-world we experience.

Also, we can’t perceive the “electric fields” that sharks and platypuses sense, or the “magnetic fields” that robins and sea turtles use to guide their travels. We can’t hear the “ultrasonic call of rodents and hummingbirds and can’t see the “ultraviolet light that birds and bees” perceive. Bats can catch insects in the dark by navigating with the echoes they hear of the clicking sounds they make. Elephants can sense with their feet low-frequency sounds made by other elephants who are miles away.

I agree with Yong, who says that if we think about the living-worlds of other animals, we may realize “that nature’s magnificence is all around us. It's in our backyards, it's in our gardens, it's in the bodies of some of the most familiar creatures around us, my dog, the pigeons on the street," Yong says. "It just makes things that felt very familiar feel newly wondrous.”

The living-worlds of a related species, of course, overlap each other. Bee eyes are sensitive to the colors blue, green, and ultraviolet, colors that guide them to flowers providing the food bees need. Did the eyes of bees evolve to see the colors of flowers? No, because the bee eye evolved before the flowers. Yong writes with joy: “the colors of flowers have evolved to ideally tickle the eyes of bees, and I think that's a truly wondrous result. It means that beauty, as we know it, is not only in the eye of the beholder, but arises because of that eye.”

Yong concludes that “if we think of nature as something remote and distant, accessible only to someone who can go to a national park, we lose the impetus to save and to protect it. I think if you understand instead that nature is everywhere, then I can go on an adventure just by thinking about the sensory world of the sparrow that sits on the house opposite to me. I think then nature feels like something close to me, close to my heart and close to my life. And I feel like if that's the case, people will be more motivated to try and protect it.” For every animal or plant “has a unique way of experiencing the world, that is worth learning about, worth cherishing, and worth protecting.”

**I suggest that imagining the living-world of a butterfly or a squirrel, or any animal or plant, may be an eco-choice—enriching your living-world by widening your compassion.**

Quotes from Terry Gross, “The human sensory experience is limited. Journey into the world that animals know,” *NPR*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/06/22/1105849864/immense-world-ed-yong-animal-perception-echolocation>.