



RELIGIOUS NATURALIST ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

created by religious naturalists for religious naturalists

April 2024

image by [Jongsun Lee](#) on Unsplash

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Feature Article - April 2024

The Awe of an Eclipse by JD Stillwater

Have you seen a total solar eclipse, either the one this month in North America, or a past one? I was fortunate enough to see both the 2017 and 2024 “Great American Eclipses,” and a big part of that good fortune was hearing the urgings of astronomers and others who, uncharacteristically, use words like “spiritual” to describe the experience. One astronomer said, “I’m warning you; once you’ve seen one, you’ll be chasing eclipses for the rest of your life!” It’s true.

The experience of totality is hard to describe. It’s unsettling, surprising, joyous, connective, astronomical, beautiful, breathtaking ... I could go on for quite a while, and no mere language can quite capture or express it. It’s ineffable, a word more often heard in traditionally religious contexts.

On April 8, I was in Wapakoneta Ohio, on the grounds of the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum with a few thousand other people. It was a friendly, diverse crowd, filled with happy anticipation. We had surprisingly clear skies, perfect for an eclipse.

When totality squeezed all the daylight out of the world, the crowd made an odd sound, a guttural cry, as though “breathtaking” meant the heavens forcefully drew the breath up through thousands of vocal chords simultaneously. I felt a deep kinship with the sun, moon, earth, and the people around me. It was too beautiful to express except with a

primal groan of joy and awe.

A total solar eclipse, like many natural phenomena, is awesome in the original sense of that word. Like many astronomers, psychological researchers that study the experience of awe *also* use words like “spiritual” and “religious,” because the effects of awe on our brains and bodies are so similar to what religious believers describe and experience at the heights of religious passion.

Awe research also suggests that some people are “dispositionally awe prone,” attentive to opportunities for awe. Awe-prone people are less likely to require “cognitive closure,” and are more comfortable with ambiguity. They tend to describe themselves with larger categories of existence, with big-picture worldviews. Awe-prone people exhibit a greater sense of connection with the natural world, and higher eudaemonia (sense of personal well-being and meaningfulness).

Going out on a limb here—I’d guess that those reading this RNA newsletter include a far higher proportion of awe-prone people than the general population. By the way, awe researchers often use natural settings like forests, wild animals, and waterfalls to invoke awe in subjects. I think awe is a primary Religious Naturalist “sacrament.” It’s how I experience the religious aspects of my naturalist orientation in the world.

These two North American total solar eclipses were peak experiences for me, but they are not the only ones nature offers the awe-prone. May you have such experiences often.

JD Stillwater
RNA Secretary

P.S. Maybe I’ll see you in Alberta, Canada on August 23, 2044, for the Great Canadian Eclipse!

Help Wanted! RNA is looking for volunteers with abilities in Accounting, Volunteer Coordinating, Spotify, Google Workspace, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Grant-Writing. Do any of those sound like fun to you? [Say so here](#) and we’ll get you started!



News and Events

RNUU Discussion Group: The Sacred in Religious Naturalism

Thursday, April 25th 3:30 PT, 4:30 MT, 5:30 CT, 6:30 ET

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9291456582>

This month we will discuss the sacred in Religious Naturalism. Your homework is two-fold. First read a short passage from Jerome A. Stone's [What is Religious Naturalism?](#)

RNA Store

RNA "Swag" Now Available!

We are now offering RNA branded merchandise on our website. Get yours here: <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/shop/>

NEW



Classic Tote Bag
\$24.36



Flexi case
\$12.73 - \$18.18



Heavyweight
Unisex Crewneck T-
shirt
\$15.93 - \$26.96



White 11oz Ceramic
Mug
\$12.60 - \$16.04

News and Events continued...

IRAS FREE Webinar: Astrobiology of Pluto

Thursday, April 25, 2024, 5 PM EST; 4 PM CST.

Please join IRAS for another session of our monthly webinar series, **Science, Religion, and Society**, featuring: **Dr. Michael E. Summers**, Prof. of Planetary Science and Astronomy at George Mason University, and co-investigator on the NASA/New Horizons mission to Pluto. [Click here to register](#)

Program for the Evolution of Spirituality at the Harvard Divinity School

April 24-27, 2024 - , Cambridge, MA, with a theme of: "Alternative Spiritualities of Celebration, Resistance, and Accountability". This includes a presentation, with storytelling and song by RNA member, Bart Everson, with George Cawley, on "Decolonizing the Mind through Gaian song".

The conference is free, for both in-person attendance and live streaming of presentations. Registration can be done via this [Registration Link](#).

Topics and times of presentations can be seen via the [Conference Schedule Link](#).

Announcing the Premiere of the Earth Eclectic Radio Hour

The Earth Eclectic Radio Hour is a weekly program of new music that celebrates the Earth and speaks to the heart.

If you're in New Orleans, you can tune into WHIV 102.3 FM at the *ungodly* hour of 5 AM Sunday mornings, right before the gospel show. Of course the station streams live [via their website](#), but if you're going to listen online, you might as well go to EarthEclectic.org where you can listen to the show on demand via Mixcloud.

The premiere is scheduled for 21 April 2024 and will be weekly thereafter.

News and Events (continued)

Regular Events:

Deep Transformation Network Monthly Meeting

Attend the live monthly network meeting on the **first Tuesday of every month at 1:00 pm Pacific** (check your time zones carefully!) <https://deeptransformation.network/spaces/10286307/feed>

Sacred Depths of Nature Presentations and Podcasts

Follow this link for the latest presentations and podcasts on *The Sacred Depths of Nature* with Ursula Goodenough. <http://sacreddepthsofnature.com/conferences/>

A calendar of JD Stillwater's upcoming events can be found at <https://www.jdstillwater.earth/events/>



Let's Go Local!

One of the challenges of our growing organization is to respond to our members' number one reason for joining: to connect with others with a religious naturalist worldview. To that end, we are working towards connecting members on a local level. We have members all over the world and this is therefore an exciting endeavor.

We are envisioning our first gathering taking place sometime in the spring of 2025, probably in the Midwestern United States, and probably a day long.

We'd love to hear from you. What would make it compelling for you to attend? What would you like to have included, and what factors would be important to you? Please click the button and give us your thoughts.

[click to let us know](#)

Music of the Month

Eclipse by Pink Floyd



This song (from Dark Side of the Moon), speaks directly to our place in the cosmos, and eclipses as a metaphor for it.

[Listen on YouTube](#)

[Lyrics](#)

Suggest Music

Help Build Our RNA Songbook

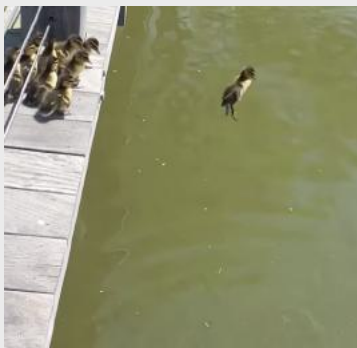
Do you know of a song or poem that we could add to our songbook? Click this link to nominate your item.

[Song Nomination Form](#)

[View Songbook](#)

Video of the Month

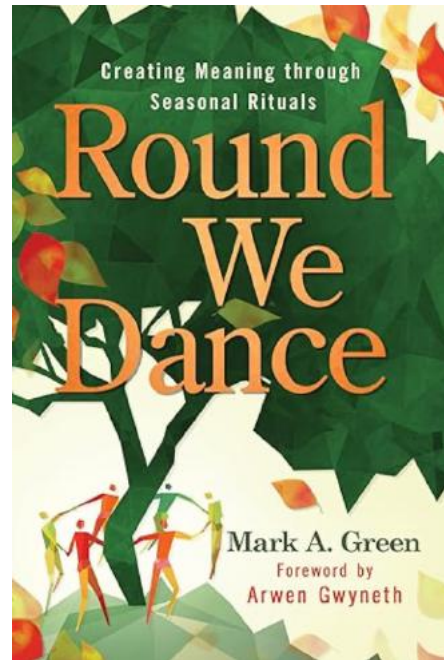
A Leap of Faith in Nature



These ducklings are about to take a swim but first they have to take a leap. No pre-flight instructions are given. Instincts work their magic. Some of the ducklings will need more work on their landings. [Watch on YouTube](#)

Book of the Month

Round We Dance by Mark A. Green



Sacred Celebrations for the Skeptical Seeker

Invite more joy and meaning into your life with nature-based rituals, ceremonies, and workings that are spiritually powerful but rooted in material reality. [View on publisher's website](#)

Living Wonder of the Month

The life of the forest: Fungi



A forest is a system in which each organism plays a role and has an assigned function. It is worth considering the importance of fungi for the functioning of the forest – the most mysterious group of organisms in this forest puzzle. [Watch video](#)

Letters to Editor

From Mark Iredell

A couple of weeks ago, in honor of the then coming eclipse, Bonnie and I sang my own version of that song by Cat Stevens (aka Yusuf) over a karaoke backing track at the monthly open mic event at the local UU church. Here are my lyrics (preceded by some

Moon's shadow

[*original*](#) (Moonshadow by Yusuf / Cat Stevens)

[*karaoke*](#) version in original key D major

We are all livin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow
Risn' and growin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow

And if we did get oxygen, from a slower earthly spin
Oh yes we did get oxygen, oh yeahhh..., we don't have to photosynth

And if we did get multicelled, specialized and self-propelled
Oh yes we did get multicelled, oh yeahhh..., we don't have to self-compete

We are all livin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow
Risn' and growin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow

And if we did get larger brains, more thoughtful and more urbane
Oh yes we did get larger brains, oh yeahhh..., we don't have to overwork

And if we did get internet, text and email all typeset
Oh yes we did get internet, oh yeahhh..., we don't have to talk.

[instrumental interlude reprise of chorus]

Did it take long evolving? We look for evidence!
Oh did it take luck evolving? And where are we going hence?

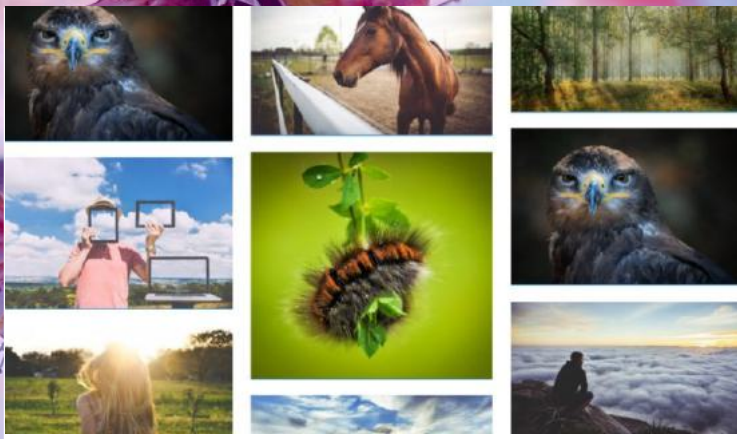
We are all livin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow
Risn' and growin' in the moon's shadow, moon's shadow, moon's shadow

Moon's shadow, moon's shadow.
Moon's shadow, moon's shadow!

Mark I
October 28, 2021

From Tony Van der Mude

I went to see the eclipse with another member of the Bedford UU church. The local newspaper asked for my impressions. They published it in the letters to the editor:
<https://thebedfordcitizen.org/2024/04/eclipse-notes-from-antony-van-der-mude/>



RNA Photo Gallery
add your photos

[Visit the Gallery](#)

Visit us on Social Media



Facebook



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Letters to the Editor:

Please send your comments, suggestions, questions, and submissions to newsletter@religious-naturalist-association.org.

If your letter has content that we would like to publish in a future newsletter we will contact you for permission.

RNA Forum:

PLEASE NOTE: **The RNA Forum will be closing down at the end of April.** After introducing this format and using it for several months, we found that it just didn't catch on as a popular communication tool. RNAnet@googlegroups.com and [Facebook](#) will remain the main venues for **online group conversations**. If there is anything on the forum you want to save please copy it from the forum and paste it into a document on your computer before April 30th. [Click HERE](#) to go to the Forum.

Website of the Month



PASSIONIST
**EARTH & SPIRIT
CENTER**

Our Vision

A single, sacred Earth community in which all members flourish.

Our Mission

We cultivate transformative learning and service opportunities dedicated to mindful awakening, compassionate justice, and care for the Earth.

<https://www.earthandspiritcenter.org>

RNA Links

Members Contributions: Our members contribute sermons, articles, videos, music and other material related to the Religious Naturalist orientation. Go to <https://religious-naturalist-association.org/members-contributions/> to check them out. Please consider contributing your own material. There is a link on the page for submitting items.

Members' Projects:

The RNA website has a section called [Members' Projects](#). This page provides links to projects of RNA members. If you have a project related to RN that you would like included on this webpage please email a description to projects@religious-naturalist-association.org.