



## The Southern Wildlife Watcher: Notes of a Naturalist

**Rob Simbeck**

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Rob Simbeck's poetic nature book *The Southern Wildlife Watcher* includes three dozen examples of regional wildlife.

Simbeck, whose awe toward nature compels him to engender awe in others, has been writing essays for *South Carolina Wildlife* since 1994. He expands those conversations in these thirty-six entries, whose subjects are grouped according to their habitats—in the air, on the land, or in the water. Each entry is accompanied by a color photograph and strives to reveal the “sacred ordinary in all its guises.”

At times, the work is akin to a poetry book for nature lovers, as the featured wildlife lend themselves to poetic imagery. Take the exquisite lime-green nocturnal moth, who is named for Luna, the Roman goddess of the moon, and who thrives in sweetgum, hickory, and pecan forests. Or the red velvet ant, who is not an ant at all, but a wingless wasp, while the ruby-throated hummingbird tops the tape measure at three inches. It suggests that the audience be a part of the incredible monarch butterfly migration by planting milkweed in their gardens, and acquaint themselves with the amazing earthworm, who holds the secrets to healthy soil.

The book reveals that an oyster can live for twenty years, and that the common whitetail dragonfly nymph can capture and eat prey bigger than itself, even baby snakes. It shares that a male carpenter bee is attracted to yellow, but poses no real threat—it's the busy female who will sting. And among the book's scientific facts and quotes from experts, there are also references to historical events and trends that had a negative impact on these species: the bald eagle's population crashed in the 1950s due to the DDT pesticide, and the red fox is still targeted by the fashion industry for its fur.

Engaging and filled with surprising facts, Rob Simbeck's compact nature anthology conveys awareness of the natural world.

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