

Group Presentations on Local Species
American Nature Writing
Fall 2007

You will be required to do a group presentation in groups of two (or three) people on a local species found in the Carleton Arboretum. You will be randomly assigned a partner and a species and will have most of the term to gather information about your species. Each group will present the results of their study in 10-12 minute presentations to the class at the end of the term. You may use audio-visual material in your presentations if you like, but you are not required to do so, and you must keep within your time limit. Each group must have a two-page, double-sided handout to distribute in class in connection with its presentation. (You should also have a separate page that lists your sources of information: so three separate pages of information in all.) The same grade for the presentation will be assigned to all the members of a group, and will be based both on the quality of your handout and of your oral presentation.

These are meant to be creative explorations and presentations. Each handout must contain basic factual information about your species, but it is not meant to be a scientific catalogue. Every handout should include a sketch (not a photograph) of your species by one or both of you. (Be sure to identify who drew the sketch.) In whatever way you can, you should try to imaginatively “inhabit” your species. Think of yourself as composing a *biography* of a great blue heron, a *poetics* of big bluestem grass, or a *story* of bur oak.

Be patient and relentless in your research. Remember, as Barry Lopez says, “if you want to know you must take the time. It is not in the books” (118). Study the *Cowling Arboretum Map* carefully; it is full of both visual and verbal information. It is essential that you try to actually encounter your species in person (see, touch, smell and hear it, as appropriate) in the Arb. Do not rely on the internet alone for your information. Take advantage of the services of reference librarians in Gould Library, particularly Iris Jastram.

Myles Bakke, the outgoing Manager of the Arboreteum, has once again generously volunteered to come to class and meet individually with groups and answer specific questions about each species. He would prefer not to be

contacted by phone or email. (There may be the possibility for some of you to join Myles and his student naturalists in their jaunts on Friday afternoons. More on that anon.)

The following are some possible kinds of information you might attempt to gather about your species:

- Where else in the world (or county or the state) besides the Arb, does your species occur?
- How many names, in how many languages, can you find for your species? How do they translate? Which is your favorite name?
- Uses in food, medicine, in/as artifacts – in different cultures?
- Does your species appear in any literature or written texts (journalism, cartoons, advertisements, government regulations)? Are there references to it in music or film?
- What is its habitat? What other species or resources does it crucially depend upon?
- Is it a humble (little known) or a “celebrity” (well known) species? Why do you think it has the status it does?
- What do you find most fascinating or surprising about your species?

All sources of information must be carefully, completely acknowledged and identified in your bibliography. Be sure to include your names on the handout.