

# Bard Songs and Seasons



Ed Keenan

Trail Poems

*inspired by nature. . .*

*'hitched to the universe'*



## Preface

### *BardSongs and Seasons*

“Bard”, meaning a poet or minstrel, combines with songbirds and seasons. So, “BardSongs and Seasons” are the poetic expressions of an avid birdwatcher (*‘birder’ or, ‘twitcher’*) and one who is a lover of nature. Whether woodland, desert, prairie or seashore, “Ed Keenan has a special love of migratory birds and the ever changing seasons. To him, each defines the other.

However, these writings are about much deeper feelings—the feathers, fragrances, songs, seasons and serenity—that are part of every birders experience. Though having the semblance of poetry, what is written is not by an acknowledged poet. His writing is therefore not bound by the critical conventions of poetry writing.”

Nevertheless, he says: “My poetry is bound by the harmonies of nature—controlled by its pulse, patterns and rhythms—it is more about experience than form, more about feelings than bookish correctness. It is also about poetic imagery and word economy, a manner of expressing a thought or feeling in a way that more readily captures the senses than a wordy essay. So, with a few natural word-strokes and images, I have sought to narrate the essence of nature as I have felt it, to portray nature as I have seen it, to personalize the earth as I

have lived it, to explain nature as I conceive it. Mostly, it is a strong desire to share—to draw the reader in—to bring him or her in to my personal thoughts and experiences, or, perhaps, to introduce a newly interested birder to perceive the wilderness in a different way.

If by reading a ‘bardsong’ or verse or a line, the reader tells me they “smelled the damp woods”, or “saw the yellow bird” or “felt a snowflake on their eyelash” then, we will have walked the same trail, experienced the same experience and birded together. We will not have tromped through the woods loudly, but, will have walked slowly and whispered in hushed tones. If you tell me that you came back again to read and experience the same sights, sounds and feelings of the seasons, to reminisce or seek solace, or to visualize the same woods again, I will be delighted that we met again as kindred spirits. But... if you should have paused long enough for the ripples of disturbance to fade away, and the natural sounds of twittering birds to return, along with that of little paws rustling in the leaves—if each creature came in close and personal—then you and I will have experienced a natural telepathy by the nuances of nature’s verse.

My love of birding and nature began more than seventy years ago. I was seven years old living in the semi-arid mountains of eastern San Diego County of southern California, near the Mexican border. Ignorant and unappreciative, I started out in the woods by shooting birds with a slingshot and a Red Ryder BB gun. What else were we to do with those toys? My brother and I fed the dead

birds to the house cats and tacked the wings and tail feathers on the barn, the more colorful the better. In time, as appreciation grew for their magnificent beauty there came a drastic conversion! My penchant for shooting birds came to an abrupt halt. But, it is also what led to my love of birds and an aversion to cats under the bird-bath! Yes, I know, it's a real dichotomy.

That was long before I ever knew of a 'Field Guide to Birds' by Roger Tory Peterson, eastern or otherwise. During my childhood, Peterson had only begun to turn his attention to the western birds. In time we naturally learned a lot about the habits of the indigenous birds, their song, their flight, their food preferences and their nests, but we knew little of their correct names. So, not knowing the names of the birds, except maybe in general, we gave them an ID of our own making.

There were Cheet-birds, (Audubon Warblers), based on their sound. Wild-canaries, (Lesser and American Goldfinches), because they were yellow. Oakie-birds, (Bushtits), because they were like a bunch of migrant fruit pickers, stripping a tree. Also, being WW 2 kids, there were Nazi's, (Wrentits), because they were sly and skulky with a yellow evil eye, always half hidden in the cover. There was even a Laughing-bird, (Canyon Wren), named for its descending, laugh-like, trill. More than once, just when we had stubbed a toe or banged a knee this bird would sing its song, and we swore that it was snickering at us! Yes, to this day, there exist numerous other bird names that have never been recognized by the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU).

Following the pattern and harmonies of nature, with its complexity of simplicity, these bardsongs are loosely arranged in thematic octaves. Like entering the woods by different routes or trails, one can begin reading at any numbered trail (book section) and imagine each as a different nature walk or stroll. A quick review of this poetry book reveals that it is not intended to be read all the way through, uninterrupted, from cover to cover. No, from bedside to creekside, each trail is a unique experience, real and imaginary, and will surely be recognized by some.

Like a canyon echo, in many ways this poetry is repetitious and unoriginal. But, so is nature's recurring themes; seemingly the same, but really always changing—as is a lichen, stalk or petal, or a fledgling, molt or bird egg—a metamorphosis of 'divine sequence'—ever growing, always new, never finished, always whole.

There is an ancient adage that says, 'there is nothing new under the sun', so it follows that there are thoughts gleaned from the experience and expressions others. A few are repeated. They are either directly acknowledged or their use is noted in 'single quote marks'. And, just as investing quiet time in the natural world is the only way to experience the reward of a sought after 'life bird', or one of nature's tranquil experiences, so too, it is my hope that the reader will be inclined to linger with some of the thoughts and verses of "BardSongs and Seasons."

Though philosophically "hitched to the universe," my poetry is not intended to express any type of worship or veneration of nature. The poetic metaphors, "mother earth"

and “mother nature,” etc., simply mean our natural world and its inspiring wilderness, our earthly planet as our marvelous mother ship—our nurse tank—that sustains all living things.

I hope you will momentarily leave your daily devotion to the god of technology (*Hephaestus*), and meet me on the trails of “BardSongs and Seasons,” to contemplate nature and its Grand Source and Fountainhead, and then be stirred to save the woods and memories for the next generation.

*Ed Keenan*

*Author*



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## *The Promise Of Crane Creek*

On my mental docket for quite some time,  
Crane Creek and Magee Marsh,  
the season of anticipation runs high,  
colorful warblers moving north in May,  
will this compare to Sabine Woods in early April?

Morning light opens the ends of the earth  
with piping songs of breaking dawn,  
the mind stops everything to listen,  
the avian trill of crystal notes are gaudy  
and each bird that eludes me piques my curiosity.

Not knowing is actually most enjoyable.  
Suspended from twig to twig,  
a luminous glow of spring ornaments,  
an elusive dazzle of flitting colors  
makes my apprehension want to know for sure.

And as the springtide of summer green rolls in  
the waves of warblers arrive.  
Then like a verse of striking contrasts  
comes' a golden-winged to sign my guest list,  
life's expectation fulfilled makes the heart sing!

We both flew a long way for eyes to meet,  
emblazoned on the gleam of dawn.  
The mulch and fragrance of woodland,  
and on the warming poultice of willow tangles  
bursts' the new buds that pollinate our spirits.

The sights of probability exceed all desire  
when a surprise beauty appears,  
a prothonotary glowing incandescent,  
proving that a doubtful wish is never certain,  
until the promise of Crane Creek makes it so.



## *The Purple Hour*

Toward evening  
When a butterfly lands on soft petals  
With the patter of silken slippers  
And seeing the sterile sky of summer  
Near the seepage of a thirsty stream  
A katydid sings  
And her song melds into the soul  
Of stillness

That purple hour  
Before dark voices descend on dusk  
And each bird comes to drink  
Just before the arguing of bullfrogs  
And silent silhouettes of early bats  
A coyote yips  
Adding equilibrium to the soul  
Of stillness





*It's where the rarest wildflower grows,  
like lakeside daisies  
that split the limestone pavement  
to meet a newborn sun,  
and the woods become the pasturage  
of my hungry heart.*

~ From the poem  
"Connected" (Trail 16)

To say that Ed Keenan is a late bloomer is an understatement. It wasn't until he approached seventy years old, the autumn of his years, that he turned his attention to nature writing. Being a woodsman and avid birder for more than six decades, he is a rich repository of experience and unique insights on nature. He writes in a very natural way — so much is communicated on so many levels with so few words.

Quoting the author's preface: "Like a canyon echo, in many ways my poetry is repetitious and unoriginal. But then, so is nature's recurring themes; seemingly the same — like a lichen, stalk or petal, or a fledgling, molt or bird egg — a metamorphosis of 'divine sequence' — ever growing always new, never finished always whole."

That rare perspective captures the reader to experience and evaluate nature in a uniquely different way. It is as though his pen flows from the quill of a wild bird. So quite naturally, his poetic writings reflect not only seasons of experience but, an unusual awareness of the outdoors. His thoughts and imagery will touch your life like a walk on a wilderness trail.

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