

FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

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Lake Fire—Lake Hughes

On Wednesday August 12, 2020 approximately 3:30 p.m. a wildfire broke out in the Lake Hughes area. It burned approximately 31,089 acres and is now 100% contained. I drove Elizabeth Lake Road through the town of Lake Hughes and there was no structural damage in the town. I continued on to Lake Hughes Road to where Elizabeth Lake Road changes to Pine Canyon Road. You can start seeing fire damage on Pine Canyon Road when you reach the Critters for Cinema Sign and continues off and on until you reach the Young Nak Retreat. Three Points was spared in this area.



Burned trees



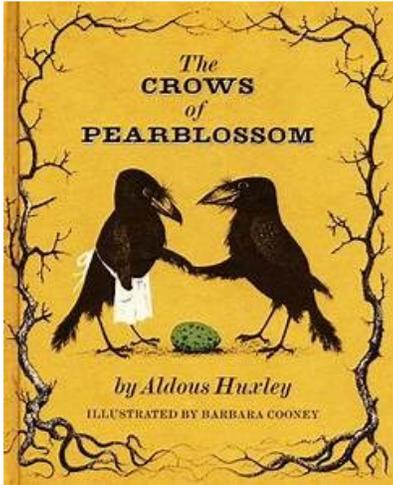
Burned hillsides



Home that was saved



Home that was not saved



THE CROWS OF PEARBLOSSOM

By Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley was born in England in 1894 and died in California in 1963 at the age of 69. He was a writer (*Brave New World* and a screenplay for *Pride and Prejudice*), a philosopher, and he wrote nearly fifty books, both novels and non-fiction, as well as essays, narratives and poems. He wrote only one children's story and that was for his five year old niece Olivia. Aldous lived in Llano, California at the time in the Antelope Valley with his wife Maria. Olivia and her family moved to Pearblossom, just four miles from Llano and the families spent time together.

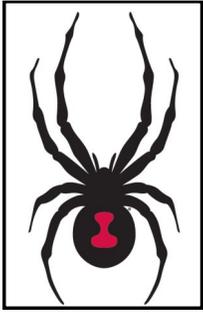
Aldous wrote "The Crows of Pearblossom" during a Christmas holiday in 1944 and in the story he mentions Olivia and her brother Siggy, plus their neighbors Mr. & Mrs. Yost in the book. The Yosts kept a copy of the story as the original manuscript had been returned to Aldous with the request that he illustrate it. Then a fire destroyed Aldous house a few years later and he died in 1963, which left the story nearly in oblivion for many years. In 1967 when Olivia had married and had a five year old daughter of her own, she found out the Yost family had a copy of the story and she had it published by Random House as a children's book. Below is a summary of the story.

Once upon a time Mr. and Mrs. Crow lived in a cottonwood tree in Pearblossom. There was a rattlesnake who lived at the bottom of the tree and every afternoon at three o'clock, when Mrs. Crow was at a store, he would slither up the tree and swallow whole whatever eggs were in the nest. A total of 297 eggs were eaten until one day Mrs. Crow came home early and catches the snake in the act. "Monster!" she cried. "What are you doing?" The snake answers that he is having his breakfast and slithers down the tree and gets back in bed.

When Mr. Crow comes home, Mrs. Crow demands he go down the tree and kill the snake. Mr. Crow refuses to kill the snake himself and he goes off to see his friend Owl who was a great "thinker" and was very wise. Owl comes up with a plan. Owl and Mr. Crow get clay from Mr. Yost's alfalfa patch and form the clay into egg shapes. They fire the eggs on the roof of Olivia's house and find some of Siggy's paint and paints them green with black spots just like crow eggs should look.

The next day the artificial eggs are placed in Mr. & Mrs. Crow's nest. The snake slithers up at his customary three o'clock time and he swallows the eggs whole. He is proud of himself and sings a song, "I cannot fly—I have no wings; I cannot run—I have no legs; but I can creep where the black bird sings, and eat her speckled eggs, ha, ha, an eat her speckled eggs." After the song is finished, he notices something wrong. The eggs had not broken before reaching his stomach, and he now has a terrible stomach ache. He twists himself up in agony, tying himself in knots around the branches of the tree and dies.

Mr. & Mrs. Crow were able to successfully hatch out four families of seventeen children each. The snake is still there and she uses it as a clothesline on which to hang the little crows' diapers.



BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

Latrodectus mactans

An adult female black widow spider may or may not have a red hourglass on her abdomen. She is, however, one of the most feared spider in North America. Her venomous bite (15 times stronger than a rattlesnake) can be excruciating, causing muscle aches, nausea, paralysis of the diaphragm that can make breathing difficult. In the United States each year, about 2,200 people report being bitten by a black widow, but most do not need medical treatment. Black widow spiders are not especially aggressive spiders and rarely bite humans unless startled or otherwise threatened. The mature female has mouthparts long enough to break human skin while the males and immature spiders can't bite. The bites are rare because it is metabolically wasteful for a spider to give up the chemical it needs to secure food. The female widow got her name because she sometimes will eat her mate.

Black widow spiders are approximately 1.5 inches long, weigh about 0.035 ounces, are carnivores and the female life span in the wild is 1 to 3 years while the male lives only 3 to 4 months. These spiders are solitary except for the mating ritual. The female widow is darker and larger than the male. The male often exhibits various red or red and white markings on the upper side of the abdomen, ranging from a single stripe to bars or spots.

Widow spiders construct webs of irregular, tangled, sticky fibers. They prefer to nest near the ground in dark and undisturbed areas and are nocturnal. They will frequently hang upside down near the entrance of the web and wait for insects, such as flies, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars, to get stuck in the web. Once an insect is caught in the web the spider rushes over to inject venom and wraps it in silk. To feed, the widow spiders puncture their prey with fangs and administer digestive enzymes into the corpse that liquefy the prey's bodies and suck up the body fluids. These spiders have poor eye site and depend on vibrations reaching them through their webs to find trapped prey or warn them of larger threats. Their predators are wasps, praying mantis, centipedes, other spiders, and birds.

The black widow female has a reputation for eating her mate. It is true that sexual cannibalism has been observed in black widows, but the behavior is rare in the wild. Much of the documented evidence for sexual cannibalism has been observed in laboratory cages where the males could not escape. Males can detect chemicals in a female's web that indicate whether she has fed recently, so they avoid hungry mates. If the female widow does eat the male it is because she mistakes him for food. When the male black widow spider prepares to mate with a female, he will create the right vibrations with his abdomen on the web that will tell her he is there to mate and not be food. Male black widows have their own webs but they will abandon them in search for females. The female has her own web and will stay put. The female will use pheromone-laced silk to attract the males who can detect the scent from 200 feet away. The male widow prevents other males from mating with a female by reducing the size of her web. He will wreck part of her web by systematically disassembling her web one strand at a time and bunches it into a little ball and wraps it up with his own silk that has his own smell telling other males to stay away. The female widow seems to like this and are less aggressive and become more receptive to mating. As soon as they have mated the female doesn't want any more males around and is ready to get on with eating, spinning her egg sacs and producing the offspring.

The female widow spins a globular silk container for the eggs and guards them until they hatch. She can produce from four to nine eggs per summer, each filled with 100 to 400 eggs. The eggs incubate for twenty to thirty days. Only around 30 spiderlings hatch because they cannibalize each other after hatching or may not survive their first molt. Widow spider nymphs are mostly white when they hatch from the egg sac. As they undergo successive molts, the spiderlings gradually darken in color, from tan to gray, usually with white or beige markings.

These spiders like to live a solitary life and just want to be left alone.

A HISTORY OF HOW THE JACK O' LANTERN CAME ABOUT

Nobody quite knows when people first started hollowing out vegetables to use as lamps, but the practice is at least 10,000 years old. Most historians agree that carving a jack-o'-lantern was first practiced in Ireland, although originally the vegetables used were large turnips or beets.



We seem to always think that a jack-o'-lantern as being a carved pumpkin but an old Irish folk tale from the mid-18th century tells of Stingy Jack and a carved turnip.

According to the story, Stingy Jack invited the Devil to have a drink with him. True to his name, Stingy Jack didn't want to pay for his drink, so he convinced the Devil to turn himself into a coin that Jack could use to buy their drinks. Once the Devil changed to a coin, Jack decided to keep the money and put it into his pocket next to a silver cross, which prevented the Devil from changing back into his original form.

Jack eventually freed the Devil, under the condition that he would not bother Jack for one year and that, should Jack die, he would not claim his soul. The next year Jack again tricked the Devil into climbing into a tree to pick a piece of fruit. While he was up in the tree, Jack carved a sign of the cross into the tree's bark so that the Devil could not come down until the Devil promised Jack not to bother him for ten more years.

Soon after, Jack died. As the legend goes, God would not allow such an unsavory figure into heaven. The Devil, upset by the tricks Jack had played on him and keeping his word not to claim his soul, would not allow Jack into hell. He sent Jack off into the dark night with only a burning coal to light his way and doomed him to roam the Earth forever. Jack put the coal into a carved-out turnip and has been roaming the Earth ever since. The Irish began to refer to this ghostly figure as "Jack of the Lantern," and then, simply "Jack O'Lantern."



In Ireland and Scotland, people began to make their own versions of Jack's lanterns by carving scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placing them into windows or near doors to frighten away Stingy Jack and other wandering evil spirits. In England, large beets are used.

Immigrants from these countries brought the jack-o'-lantern tradition with them when they came to the United States. They soon found that pumpkins, a fruit native to America, made perfect jack-o'-lanterns. Instead of using a burning coal to light the pumpkin they used candles.

