

Wasps Join Us for Lunch

I don't need to say anything to my grandson, Kinnikinnick, sitting beside me. He has been taught by his parents how to be in wasp territory, and he has absorbed the lessons well.

Be confident, quiet, without sudden movement.

He tells me, "No fear, and no aggression. Relax. Watch carefully when you move and be careful not to trap anyone anywhere," He is as aware as I am that the wasp we're watching flies much closer in front of us than usual, apparently closely examining us.

She is armed with a stinger and can be dangerous. She examines her environment, turns and observes us again from too close for my comfort. I try to remain relaxed and confident in my right to be here, at ease in the world, not thinking first of the weapon she carries, which she also uses to deposit eggs, but of her right to be here. I think of gentleness and respect between us.

Over the several years we've lived here, I've learned to relax around the wasps. I often remind myself to respect their right to be here, but I remain a little nervous about the possible danger from our wasps to our human visitors, because I feel responsible for every visitor's safety. I am aware that our approach to the wasps may not be widely accepted among our human visitors.

I tell visitors about the wasps' nests that hang on the underside of the roof on our front porch and about the wasps who use the nests, and we talk about how to be safe in wasp territory. Our human visitors then choose to go or not to go into wasp territory when they come to see us. There are other places we can sit and visit with each other and eat, farther from the wasps' nests.

The wasp hovering in the air in front of us turns and flies away, on her rounds of the day, eating from various flowers growing onto and around our porch and pollinating various plants as she forages.

I sometimes get uncomfortable if we eat on the porch, and a wasp lands on my food and takes first choice of any item on my plate. If I gently shoo it away, will it interpret my motions as aggressive? I don't speak waspinese, and the wasp doesn't speak English, so I can't find out through verbal conversation what might be in the wasp's thoughts about me and other

humans.

We use this roofed porch a lot. No one has ever been stung by any of the stinger-carrying pollinators, so our communication with other species, even without words between us, seems to be going well.

I always act with caution and politeness and let any wasp that claims the right have first choice of the food on my plate. Vegetables we've grown in our garden and I eat may have been pollinated by this wasp or her family, so if I think about it as "my" food, I need more education about the interconnectedness of all life. We eat food that belongs to all species, because our yard and our planet belongs to all life.

Many species of pollinators visit our bountiful flowers, eat from them and pick up pollen they carry to other plants to help build seeds that carry life into the future. We watch hummingbirds, moths, bees of several different kinds, dragonflies, damsel flies, and many fliers and walkers I can't identify, yet, come to flowers in our yard.

A green praying mantis stalks stiff-legged up my sleeve toward my face. This insect would only be a pollinator accidentally. Everything I read says they are carnivores.

Some students of life who write about their studies say many life forms, even insects, think and include recognizing individuals of different species in their thinking. I am honored that this four-inch long, majestic beast, the mantis, might recognize me and know me to be safe territory for its roving and hunting.

I continue eating my lunch while the praying mantis walks up my arm and across my hair. Several slow bites of lunch later, I ask Kinnikinnick, "Do you see that mantis anywhere? I'm wary of patting around to explore where I can't see. I don't want to pat it and damage it." We both look and don't see it anywhere.

"I think it's moved on."

Between bites, we take turns thanking various beasties, squirrels, birds, insects, for coming to visit us, to find their lunch, and to pollinate plants, for peacefully sharing their habitat with us.

I say to my grandson, "I'm grateful too that you come to visit us and eat lunch with us and all our wild friends."

He asks me, "Is this saying grace, if we say out loud what we're grateful for?"

"I think so. I think expressing gratitude for the beautiful life that lives all around us here would qualify as saying grace."