

Episode 20: Under Hawks
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Every act of writing is a lightning strike whose thunder might rumble on for thousands of years.

Welcome, to The CryptoNaturalist.

Hello, friends.

Being a CryptoNaturalist or a naturalist or just a wide-awake human being involves two kinds of curiosity.

The first kind is the active, get-up-and-go sort that propels us to hunt for the answers, to seek out mysteries and follow their winding threads all the way to understanding. To walk with purpose toward new places and new ideas.

I suspect that's the sort of curiosity most of think of when we consider the concept.

The second, sometimes overlooked kind of curiosity has less to do with seeking and more to do with noticing.

I'd wager that, wherever you are in the world, there are a dozen worthwhile mysteries within your easy reach.

Heck, do you know what that chair you're sitting on is made of? Do you know the names of all the trees you can see from that window over there? Do you know if they're native to your area or if their species was brought from distant shores? When and why? What's the sky above you doing right now and what's it mean for the coming weather?

The point is, sometimes curiosity is about striking up a conversation with distant lands and abstract concepts and others it's about taking the time to speak with your immediate surroundings, learning the language of your time and place right here and now.

Whenever I take an interest in the small details, I usually find that I'm rewarded for the effort.

There is real beauty in the seemingly simple and mundane.

On a related note, today we're taking a look at semi-corporeal, subterranean birds of prey.

I mean... it can't always be about chairs and local weather, now can it?

Now, you and I both know that there are plenty of fascinating subterranean raptors to choose from, so I'm sure you're wondering which one I've chosen to focus on today.

Well, wonder no longer. Today we're discussing the giant, shadow-devouring Under Hawk. A bird whose semi-real talons dip into the sunlight world to pluck shadows from unsuspecting prey.

Chances are, a bit of your shadow has been taken by a under hawk at some point. I doubt you would even notice. Plus, it grows back in time. No harm done. Of course, some CryptoNaturalists theorize that losing part or all of your shadow can trim a few hours off of your life, but so can a night out at a bar or an order of mozzarella sticks, so I don't think it's worth too much consideration.

Of course, all that applies to us creatures of flesh and blood. For creatures that are entirely made of shadow, the stakes are, obviously, a little higher. I'm thinking particularly of shadow birds. You know how on sunny days you sometimes see a bird silhouette racing across the ground? Well, sometimes it's a bird shadow and sometimes it's a two-dimensional shadow bird. Under hawks are no trivial matter to them.

But, I digress.

I spent the last forty days in a large cavern underneath a lovely field of winter wheat not far from Lexington, Kentucky. The field was always teeming with wildlife (and their shadows). A murder of crows in a lone oak. A dozen or so white-tailed deer taking a break from the deeper woods to soak up the noonday sun. The field mice that run in staccato bursts and the birds and snakes that chase them.

I was beneath them all, in a natural stone chamber outfitted with my own special blend of UV lamps and a webwork of LED twinkle lights, all designed to make under hawks more visible to the unaided eye.

I swear, sometimes I get the sense that there is magic under every rock and log, if you just know how to look for it.

Speaking of seeking out magic, how about a little poetry?

It's time for today's hidden lore segment.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Eli Reeve.

I wonder
if the river
like me
considers her transience

if she ever loses her way
or her willingness
as she

runs away from the mountain
becomes bog
and berries and bears

bathes me in forgiveness

I wonder
when I see her swirl
seemingly
stuck between stones
if she will work it out this time

or if she is simply dancing

A lovely poem about nature and meaning and the way such concepts intersect with ourselves.

Eli (pronounced Ellie) is an aspiring artist and writer from Norway nesting in the jungles of Hawaii. Find her on Instagram at username eli.reeve ([instagram.com/eli.reeve](https://www.instagram.com/eli.reeve)).

On my fortieth afternoon underground, I was nearly ready to give up the project. There I was, staring out into the twinkling, violet glow that made the cavern seem like a strange undersea grotto, listening to the creek and whine of the lawn chair upon which I sat, a chair whose origins remain a mystery to me, when I heard whoosing, whomp whomp sound like a giant heartbeat deep in the earth.

I saw the hawk as it dove through my cave toward the surface. For the briefest instant, it was framed against the stone, a huge hawk, upside-down from my perspective, diving upward.

A breath later and it returned, and I saw the stark outline of deer shadow clutched in its talons of living darkness. A few flaps of those billboard sized wings and it was off, flying back down into the earth through the solid rock under my boots.

I doubt the encounter lasted ten seconds, but I believe it will stick with me the rest of my life.

I think my fascination with the under hawks comes, in part, from the exercise of trying to see the world through their perspective.

Just close your eyes and try to imagine it. You live within the earth. You perch on veins of magma, veins of liquid rock that branch out from the burning core of the world like an omnidirectional tree.

You live in this massive bubble and the surface of the world, your sky in every direction, is like a rippling sea. You see shadows move in these deep waters and you dive to pluck them from the frozen waves. Sunlight is alien to you. Gravity can't seem to find purchase on your dark feathers. Solid stone is but mist and spring breezes as you fly through the globe unhindered.

Even if my understanding of this perspective is incomplete at best, what a gift imagination is to grant me even this narrow glimpse into another creature's life.

Use this gift of your imagination and see how you grow in empathy and understanding. See how such imaginings bring new appreciation for your own unique perspective.

Until next time, we're all strange animals, so, act like it.

Credits

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Show Notes: Episode 20: Under Hawks (00:10:59)

Beneath our feet, the under hawks glide in search of shadows to pluck from the surface of the world.

Hidden Lore poetry by Eli Reeve. Eli (pronounced Ellie) is an aspiring artist and writer from Norway nesting in the jungles of Hawaii. Find her on Instagram at username [eli.reeve](https://www.instagram.com/eli.reeve) ([instagram.com/eli.reeve](https://www.instagram.com/eli.reeve)).