

# An Overture

---

## There is Magic in Mushrooms

If there is any magic in biology, it most likely is to be found in the field. No indoor biologist tied to his microscope can ever sense the totality of life science as does the field biologist. There is an essence about it—sounds, smells, images—of creatures eking out a living in native niches. It's a charming elixir, and once you've sampled the potion you're likely to return to the tap.

True, during this fragment in time the elixir is more bitter-sweet than totally intoxicating. Civilization relentlessly wrecks its plunder of native creatures and natural places. But the allure of biology "out there" will always be. As long as there are humans on this planet, there will be curious naturalists. We cerebrum-heavy humans emerge from the womb innately curious; interactions with pebbles, pungent weeds, and raindrops mold us all as naturalists.

But formal education grinds on. Spontaneous naturalists become appendages of books, vicarious consumers of scientific knowledge. Distilled and neatly packaged knowledge. Processed knowledge. "Correct" knowledge.

Some of the students of the sixties and seventies sought contact with their "inner selves" through mind-trips facilitated by chemical extracts from mushrooms and vapors from smouldering weeds. It could be they were following some primeval instinct to mend gaps in their own life experience. A mushroom on a dank forest floor has a smell and spongy-solid texture unlike anything else. We all need to experience it. If not, a small bit of emptiness is left, perhaps never to be filled. Perhaps such gaps are subconsciously resented by our psyches.

There is magic in mushrooms and euphoria can be found in weeds. These treasures can only be found "on location" where the mushrooms and weeds live, die, and decay. Learning biology in the field is like studying astronomy by visiting another planet—it's the real thing!

Alan J. McCormack, *editor*