

# Conservation Corner

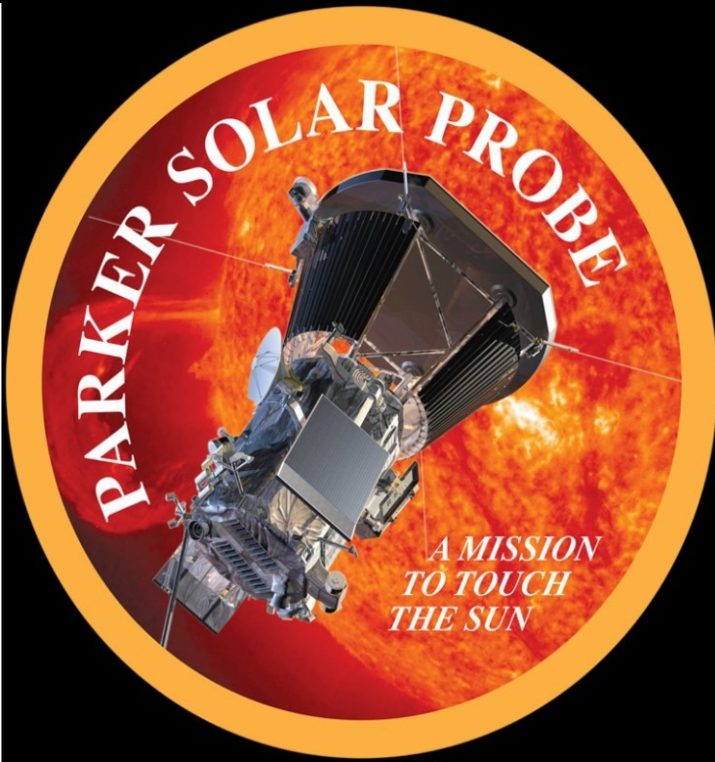
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“Don’t fly too close to the sun.”

This familiar proverb comes to us from Greek mythology. As you may remember, Daedalus, a skilled workmen and builder of the famous labyrinth on the Island of Crete, later fell out of favor with King Minos. To escape from his island prison tower, he fabricated wings for himself and his young son Icarus out of thread, wax, and feathers. Before their escape attempt, he warned his son to keep at a moderate height, neither too high nor too low. As they rose into the air and flew off, the ploughman stopped his work and the shepherd leaned on his staff to gaze at them in astonishment. The boy, however, like boys everywhere, began to leave the side of his father and soar upward as if to reach heaven. You know the rest of the story, how the blazing sun softened the wax which held the feathers, sending Icarus plunging to his death in the sea.



Millennia later, man is once again flying close to the sun, this time on the wings of NASA’s Parker Solar Probe. Its purpose, of course, is not escape but discovery as scientists seek to unlock some of the sun’s mysteries. Propelled by the world’s most powerful engine and a gravity assist from Venus, the probe will travel at speeds up to 430,000 miles per hour and pass within 3.8 million miles of the sun’s surface. The probe will approach the sun 24 times during its 7-year, \$1.5 billion journey. Protected by a revolutionary new carbon heat shield, we trust the Parker probe will fare better than Icarus did.

The probe is named in honor of 91-year-old Eugene Parker. The pioneer in helio-physics was on hand at the Kennedy Space Center August 12<sup>th</sup> to watch the Delta IV rocket launch his namesake towards the sun. It’s been 60 years since the astrophysicist accurately theorized the existence of solar winds, supersonic streams of charged particles that blast off the sun through space and sometimes wreak havoc with electrical systems here on Earth. Did you know this is the first time NASA has named a spacecraft after a living person?

Two of the sun’s mysteries scientists hope to unlock are why the sun’s corona is hundreds of times hotter than its surface and why the sun’s atmosphere is continually expanding and accelerating, the question Parker first asked in 1958. Hopefully, this mission will increase our understanding of the sun’s life-giving yet violent nature and lead to better protection systems for satellites and astronauts in orbit as well as power grids here on earth.

In closing, I’d like to remind everyone of the Wiegert Prairie Fall Fest coming up this Sunday, August 26. With school back in session and harvest just around the corner, we invite everyone to spend a relaxing day on the farm, visiting with friends and neighbors while listening to *Songs on the Prairie*. Remember, no space probes at this celebration. What would Harry think?