

Conservation Corner

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Man must rise above the Earth – to the top of the atmosphere and beyond – for only there will he freely understand the world in which he lives.

When Socrates penned these words some 2,500 years ago, I'm sure he believed them. After all, surely a view from outer space would lead to a better understanding of the world in which he lived, right? Yet now that we have viewed Earth from afar, whether via manned or unmanned spacecraft, perhaps the only thing we more freely understand is how much we still don't know. With each new breakthrough and discovery, it seems we're often left with more questions than answers about the world in which we live.



One such example is the ongoing Rosetta project, whose mission is to help decipher and unravel the makeup, origin, and role of comets within our solar system. Specifically, one of the project's tasks is to analyze the water present on Comet 67P in an effort to verify the hypothesis that water also came to Earth riding on a comet. Not surprisingly, recent tests have led not to a clear-cut answer but rather more questions. Initial findings have revealed that the chemical signature of the comet's water is nothing like Earth's water. For now, scientists will need to look elsewhere for the answer.

We are not the only ones to explore outer space in search of answers. Ancient humans also looked to the night sky, envisioning creatures and heroes among the stars while telling stories to help explain the world in which they lived. The Navaho people explained the origin of star constellations like this: Long ago, before the two leggeds walked the Earth, there were no stars or moon in the night sky. The animals, tired of bumping into each other in the dark, asked the Great Spirit for help. He gave all the creatures shiny stones to make pictures of themselves in the heavens and sent Coyote to help them. Coyote soon tired of the job and carelessly flung all the stones across the sky, and that is why many constellations are incomplete or imperfect. Too late, Coyote realized he had no stones for his own picture, and has howled at the night sky in protest ever since.

In 1933 Henry Beston, a writer, naturalist, and one of the fathers of the modern environmental movement here in America said, "Our fantastic civilization has fallen out of touch with many aspects of nature, and with none more completely than with night."

If you want to reconnect with the night sky, plan to attend Star Gazing with Conservation on Wednesday, January 28, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Grab a friend, neighbor, or grandchild and join us in the Multi-Purpose Room at the Pocahontas Catholic School. Together we'll identify several winter constellations as we take a quick tour of the universe via the digital star lab. We can't promise all the answers, but we will have snacks, activities, and doubtless a few new questions, too.

