



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

My knowledge of nature is formidable, even if I do say so myself. Few men can spot a tiger quicker than I can. However, unfortunately there are no tigers to be found in our camping area in the swamp. I am also an expert on elephants, zebras, hippos and gorillas. All evening I have been looking for something like this in order to regain my children's respect for me as a nature expert. Their, "Daddy, what's that?" questions prod me to spout forth sage answers based on my vast jungle experience. But it's embarrassing for me to point out an object in the lake as an alligator, only to have my seven-year-old daughter wade out and pick up a submerged palm frond.

I'm fairly good on birds. I'm pretty hard to fool when it comes to identifying a solid red bird, or one that has a red breast or one that has great big talons, a great beak, a tremendous wingspread and appears on our money. But it seems that we've pitched our tent in the midst of a migration of the oddest species of birds I've ever seen. Most of them are tiny, dull-feathered little things that are forever hopping from limb to limb. I refuse to let my children think I am stupid and have finally taken to making up names such as a "hammerhead hummer," a "flea picker" and a "bongo burpo." Happily my image has been restored as the great white father with the red forehead and baggy Bermuda shorts that cover mosquito bitten legs.

I do have a few tips I would like to pass along to campers now that the season is approaching. One of them is never to yield to the temptation to stretch out on your back, arms under your head, and gaze upward at the blue sky. It seems that the woods are full of little creepy things that immediately cover your body. Some of them stay with you for several days after you get home—and always seem to leave itchy spots in the most hard-to-scratch places.

I also recommend brief camping trips. This keeps you occupied. The typical three-day camping trip is composed of one day to set up camp, one day to break up camp, and one day to scratch. That's about all most of us air-conditioned TV watchers can take at a time.

I also recommend taking someone along like Nancy. Nancy is the 20-year-old ex-hippie from California that lives with us. Before her conversion to Christianity she lived in Height-Asbury in a hippie commune and learned all the rules of survival. Therefore Nancy was able to teach the children things like how to brush their teeth from a paper cup and occupy their hands (when all they wanted to do was scratch) by stringing beads.

Our last night in camp we did see an alligator, by the way. He came up to our campfire which was beside the lake and the children fed him marshmallows. So, if nothing else, we have at least discovered that even the fiercest of creatures responds to kindness and compassion. If my children can remember that lesson, then these three days of sleepless scratching and slapping will all have been worthwhile.