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## **Food Detective: Elusive eats, only in the wild**

BY DAVID HAMMOND

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After Bob Latimer was shot for the fifth time during his career as a private investigator, he decided to retire from the gumshoe biz and work for the South Australian Tourism Commission.

In November, he took me around his part of the continent, introducing me to his homeland and the foods unique to South Australia.

As we drove through the Outback — quickly swerving at one point to avoid road-killing a goanna — we started talking about foods you can't buy, like the goanna itself, a protected lizard prominent in Aboriginal folklore.

Bob also told me about the witchetty, a moth larvae eaten "fresh" off the tree by indigenous Australians.

"Witchetty has a custardy texture," said Latimer. "Don't care much for it. And it's a food you can't buy. It's eaten, but it's not available in any grocery store or restaurant."

In Chicago, there also are many foods free for the taking and not found in any stores. I'm not talking about food that simply grows wild, but rather food that is available only in the wild.

When I was a kid, we'd pick mulberries with my cousins in Morgan Park. A fruit common in the Chicago area and much maligned for the purple mess they make, mulberries are a humble street treat I've never seen for sale at Jewel or Dominick's.

Wooded areas in the Midwest are home to many varieties of edible mushrooms that are undomesticated and largely unavailable for sale, perhaps because it's difficult to harvest them in sufficient quantities.

In my own backyard, even into late autumn, are lamb's quarters, a native leaf eaten as salad. It's a weed, and so shunned, and it's one food among probably thousands that you simply cannot buy.

No doubt some of these foods, like the witchetty, have not been monetized because, to put it kindly, demand is lacking.

Still, there's something precious about foods that thrive outside the scope of commerce — wild things without a price tag.

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