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One Way to Launch 'One Wild Life'



*Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?* – from *A Summer Day* by Mary Oliver

In introductions to young students I often relate some story to them from way back when I was their age. All involve my intense focus in the discovery of living beings beyond humanity that existed both around me and more broadly in the world. I was especially captivated by *wild* creatures, large and small. Of course, personal experiences with the small ones - mostly insects, spiders and other invertebrates - dominated my elementary school years because they were what was most accessible to an inner city Chicago kid with limited means of getting around. I borrowed field guides and other nature books from the library with regularity and leafed through them with a longing and aspiration to someday experience each one in the flesh in its appropriate habitat.

As I pursued these endeavors there seemed to be little to no interest or assistance from any of the adults in my life, but I never blamed them. I could see they were busy. My dad was at work all week, then worked on projects around the house or the yard on Saturdays. My mom was busy with the never-ending merry-go-round of keeping it all together for me and six other sibs largely in the form of meal preparation, laundry and perpetual house-cleaning. We'd go to mass on Sunday.

Other adults in my life, of course, included my teachers - first at the school in St. Andrew's Parish, then, when we moved to a larger house a few miles further west on Addison Street, at St. Viator's. The subjects covered in each ensuing grade level had everything to do with arithmetic, reading, spelling, history, art, and religion, and little or nothing to do with *my* innate passion, the pursuit of which dominated so much of my time outside of school.

How could a kid come to any other conclusion? What I found interesting and important was not so for others. Besides, the education model of the time was being run by people older and wiser than me. They surely had a firmer grasp on what subjects to deem as essential and what others to consider as frivolous,

and therefore, expendable in the process of molding a functional adult. Natural science education didn't make the cut. I was on my own.



Discoveries such as this assassin bug were subjected to close inspection.

As I grew, so grew my self-education in local wild things. By sixth grade, I and my newly-found friend, Goose, who shared the same enthusiasm, walked or rode bikes, public buses and trains far beyond our neighborhood in search of frogs, snakes, bugs and birds. We became regular adventurers to numerous Cook County Forest Preserves and frequented the Lake Michigan shoreline in all seasons. With virtually no guidance from adults we scoured field guides to help us identify and understand the myriad lifeforms we discovered. We found and devoured other books, non-fiction and fiction alike, which not only furthered our basic understanding of the natural world but immersed us in characters with a concern for wild things as focused as our own.

Yet, since I first became self-aware as a preschooler, then after more than thirteen continuous years of formal education, it wasn't until I enrolled at MSU to pursue a wildlife biology degree as a young adult that I was exposed for the first time to officially sanctioned academics in the area of my greatest level of interest and occupation. I was struck quite quickly with the fact that many of the introductory courses covered basics in identification, behavior and ecology that I had already learned independently. Much of this content was not so complex as to pre-require a K-12 education. Rather, there seemed to be a recognition that students entering a wildlife or zoology program could not be assumed to be capable of identifying even some of the most common wild things because opportunities to learn about them were simply missing from standard el-hi education.

Fast forwarding a half century, public and most private schools continue to forego any sort of sustained natural science education in their curriculum. Heck, even self-designated STEM or STEAM schools largely fail to acknowledge the biodiversity that exists right outside their windows. Seems the *S* for *Science* does not include *natural* science. Is it any wonder that so much of society places little value on our living environment, much less the balance of the various physical components that allow for that life?

I wrote a column on the conundrum to open our July 2018 newsletter, entitled *There is No N in STEM*: <http://naturediscovery.net/pdf/WILD%20TIMES%20July18.pdf>. In it, I proposed an expanded acronym that environmentally-concerned educators should embrace – STAMEN, the *N* of course, designating the purposeful inclusion of natural science education in all grades.

As Nature Discovery's mission traverses its 35th year, a deep look into the rearview mirror induces a cognizance that the journey, as dictated by the laws of life on Planet Earth, is inexorably finite, precarious, and therefore, precious. Along the way, countless individuals, families and institutions of various sizes have consciously chosen to liaise with us because they valued what we have to offer, and for that we are grateful.

Beginning in 1990 with Montessori Children's House in Lansing, our regular specialist educational services have also been contracted by Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing (since 1992), and by Okemos Nursery School (since 2008). Our working relationship with all three continues to this day. Over the decades many other private schools and homeschool networks have invited us to become regular fixtures in their educational endeavors, as well, albeit without the remarkably sustained longevity of the above-mentioned few.

A noteworthy commonality stands out among these many settings. We did not pursue a single one of the cooperatives. Those responsible for the content of their curricula invited us to become a part of their team of educators. Aware of a specific lack within the curriculum of a discipline in which most children demonstrate an innate affinity and enthusiasm, these administrators worked to fulfill it with the in-depth studies and explorations of the living wild world that we provide and encourage.

Kelley Halverson and Joy Ellen, elementary school teachers with over forty years of combined teaching experience mostly in area public schools, were disenchanted with the status quo, cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching our youth. Rather than dictating, grade by grade, what every student should be learning why not create a learning environment where each student, based on their personality, natural interests, abilities and talents, is encouraged and assisted in crafting their own path toward adulthood?



Founders of One Wild Life Learning Community, Kelley Halverson and Joy Ellen.

The poem by Mary Oliver entitled *The Summer Day* (<https://www.loc.gov/programs/poetry-and-literature/poet-laureate/poet-laureate-projects/poetry-180/all-poems/item/poetry-180-133/the-summer-day/>), spoke to these teachers so powerfully that they adopted some of the final words of the work (quoted at the onset of this column) in the naming of their first imagined - and now realized – small, private “dream school.” Now in its second year, One Wild Life Learning Community currently operates out of rotating residences in Okemos. They hope to have a permanent learning environment in the next year or two. This school year Joy, Kelley, and the multi-age elementary students under their guidance are the latest to invite us to become a regular contributor to their community’s endeavors.



The aptly limited number of students in the “microschool” allows not just for a low student-to-teacher ratio, but for copious field trip opportunities, as well. I can’t say that I’ve ever met an elementary student who dislikes field trips, and these students will be the first to tell you that ultimately, *out there* is their real classroom.

In our first monthly meeting the group visited our nature center, where, among other experiences within our Michigan reptiles & amphibians zoo, they reveled in learning about, handling, then feeding frozen-thawed rodents to our huge and highly-social Black Ratsnakes.

In October I was informed that the students wanted to become more familiar with river habitats, so we scheduled a guided experience at Legg Park in Okemos and explored living elements of the floodplain forest adjacent to the Red Cedar River.

On a cold, clear November morning we met along the river walkway at Potter Park in Lansing and watched and listened for bird life in the trees and along the vegetated bank. Large flocks of migratory geese and other waterfowl that feed in the south campus agricultural fields through the day use these waters every night as their floating dormitory. They leave at their leisure in the morning then return in late afternoon.

The unscripted highlight, however, was a Merlin - an uncommon little falcon recently removed from the state-threatened list - that migrated from more northerly climes to claim this vicinity as its winter hunting



The Potter Park Merlin basks in sunshine as well as attention from field trip participants below.







ground. Perched contentedly in the leafless treetop of a parking lot oak, it looked as if it may well have recently finished consuming one the many available songbirds we identified as they foraged through the tangled branches and brush that bordered the river. The bird basked in the morning sun's slanted rays for minutes on end against a backdrop of blue sky and seemed quite unruffled at the conversation and excitement of the small group of young, bundled hominids below as they took turns goggling at it through binoculars and spotting scope.

wish I had had access back then to a learning environment so conscientious and supportive of the innate interests, drive and purpose that I knew to be me. The sky has no limit. Given a dedicated means of assistance and encouragement there is no telling how high a young mind may eventually soar.

- Jim McGrath

"IF EACH PERSON HAS NATURAL GIFTS AND INNATE TALENTS, THEN THE TRUE NATURE OF EDUCATION MUST INVOLVE THE AWAKENING, INVITING, AND BLESSING OF THE INNER GENIUS AND UNIQUE LIFE SPIRIT OF EACH YOUNG PERSON." ~MICHAEL MEADE

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE ABOUT

-  We are a non-traditional, multi-age community learning and growing together.
-  We value and nurture the whole child, inviting everyone to know and challenge themselves, others, and the world around them.
-  We engage and empower students to be advocates of their own learning and agents of change.
-  We support a place-based education, individual learning pathways, and an integrated academic curriculum.
-  We strive to reimagine, reclaim, and regenerate education so all can thrive and remember the inherent joy of learning.
-  We are different -- on purpose.

"YOU WILL BE HEARD. YOU WILL BE CHANGED. YOU WILL LEARN. AND MOST OF ALL YOU WILL LAUGH AND SMILE."

~SEAN, STUDENT

Website: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/6hbzHNVdghOIP/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/liveonewildlife/>

Email: live.one.wild.life@gmail.com



Give a *natural* gift this season

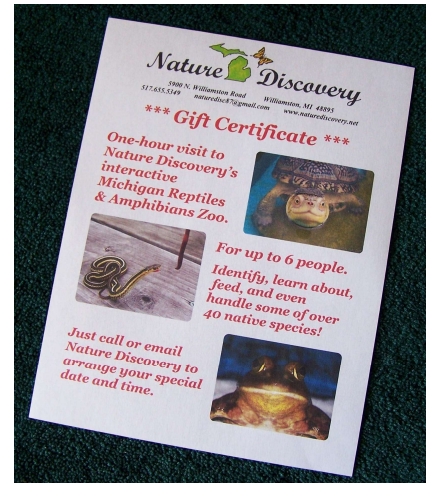
“FROGS OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION”

Instructional and environmental listening featuring our own original recordings of the breeding calls of 13 native species compiled from wetland habitats across the state. Load it onto your phone or tablet! \$15.

NATURE DISCOVERY GIFT CERTIFICATES

A guided experience for adults, couples, or families at our nature center located north of Williamston. Base rate is \$25/hr. Upon payment we will email you a certificate to print and present to the recipient.

Gift certificates are also available for a holiday “Friends & Family” Wild Life day camp date (reserve your own – more details on Page 6), and outdoor guided functions for adults and families, i.e., guided birding at a local natural area, guided general nature walks, evening “owling,” etc. Contact us for details or to discuss more ideas.



During this holiday season we wish to extend a heart felt ‘Thank you’ to all our avid supporters, including these donors for their contributions over the past month...

*Matt & William Burke
Sandy Carey
Michele Holbrook
Nancy & Henry Nelson
Elizabeth Zellner*



Nature Discovery

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“Family & Friends” Holiday Wild Life Day Camps

Choose Your Own Day!

December 20-23 and 27-30



Introducing a **NEW DAY CAMP CONCEPT** specially arranged for the current COVID conditions.

EIGHT DAYS are available on our holiday calendar from which parents may reserve a specific day (first come, first serve) for their own private day camp pod of up to 4 children - grades K or higher – which may include siblings, friends or classmates.



There is so much to do here that camp days just fly by! A combination of indoor and outdoor activities include lots of time interacting with scads of specimens of nearly 40 species of small and large Michigan-native reptiles and amphibians housed here, including turtles, frogs, salamanders and lizards. Participants never grow tired of handling our huge Black Ratsnakes. Our two tortoises, Milberta the Red-footed Tortoise and Fyodor the Russian Tortoise love to eat, and will munch lettuce in slow motion right from the campers' hands. Busy bird feeders outside the window offer up close looks and identification opportunities of a variety of winter

songbirds. Trails through six acres of natural area allow for plenty of guided exploration and fun activities in the fresh winter air. A mid-morning snack and a vegetarian hot lunch is also provided.

COST: \$320 per pod of 4 children per day (\$80/child). Contact us today to reserve one of these days while they last with a 50% deposit. Do you have a group of more or less than 4 students that you wish to enroll on your own reserved day? Contact us to discuss special arrangements and fee adjustments.

Contact us for further information or to schedule a day camp date.

Nature Discovery

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*Visit Our
Nature Center
by Appointment
Over the Holidays*

*Suggested Minimum
Donation: \$5/person/hr*



The sky's the limit for natural science learning here – with a Michigan twist! Adults, couples and individual families are welcome to schedule a safe, intimate outdoor or indoor visit to what we call “The Biggest Little Nature Center in Michigan,” and “Home to the Largest Zoo of Michigan-native Reptiles and Amphibians.” The unique, in-person, hands-on experiences here are unrivaled at any other nature center or zoo! We will bring snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders out of tanks to interact with adults or students of any age or grade-level. Visitors are required to wear a mask during indoor time.



Identify and feed “the grand slam of Michigan turtles” - all ten species native to our state! Meet, pet and feed “Milberta”, our always hungry Red-footed tortoise.

Handle any or all of Michigan’s three species of garter snakes while learning how to tell them apart, then watch them gobble up worms and tadpoles. Hold or “wear” a gentle 6-foot Black Rat Snake – the largest in the state!

Many more snakes, turtles, frogs and salamanders to identify and feed. Take a guided walk on our trails to identify birds, trees, vines, and invasive plants.

Ask about arranging weekly or monthly visits or regarding custom natural science lessons to supplement your student’s interests and grade-specific science requirements.

Contact us for additional information or to make an appointment any day.

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***By Appointment
Over the Holidays...***

***Go “Owling”
at Nature Discovery***



Schedule a 90 minute appointment for your small private group (recommended max. 6) to visit **almost any evening after dusk**, and we'll attempt to draw a *wild owl* in for a close-encounter!

The evening begins with Powerpoint images and recordings to help you become familiar with Screech, Great-horned and Barred Owls - the three permanent residents found in Lower Michigan. Then, learn about six other species - migrants from Canada - that drift southward into our area to hunt for prey over the winter, including where to go to see them.



Then, we will go out the back door into the darkness to try to get one to respond to recordings. If an owl comes close we will attempt to spotlight it for viewing. Bring binoculars and a camera if you have them.

Before or after the owling experience visitors may also wish to view and interact with specimens from our huge zoo of Michigan-native reptiles & amphibians.

Base suggested donation: \$60. Masks are encouraged while indoors.

Do you live in a rural area? Arrangements can also be made to have this program come to you whereby you may get a chance to meet your own neighborhood owl face to face. Contact us for details or to make an appointment, here or there.

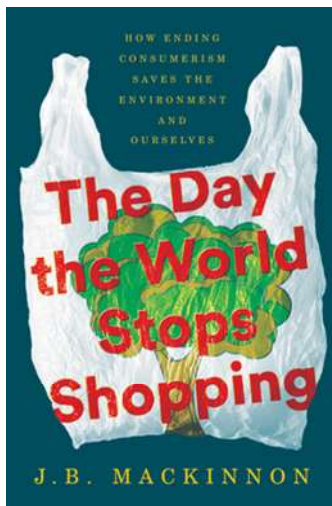
Note: The likelihood of attracting an owl is diminished in windy or precipitating conditions. If possible, arrange to schedule a visit after confirming a favorable weather forecast. If you schedule a date further in advance, feel free to cancel and reschedule on short notice if the forecast calls for poor conditions.

A Gift That is Universally Appreciated...

To say, “Tis the season of consumerism run amok.” would be appropriate except for the fact that consumerism has already been running amok for quite some time. More accurately, “Tis the season of a purchasing frenzy that gets ratcheted far above and beyond our ‘standard amok.’”

We scramble to buy gifts for others in our lives, quite frankly, whether they need said ‘gift’ or not. Our “consume-more”- based economy operates on a false premise of unlimited resources and turns a blind eye toward the tremendous carbon footprint the manufacture and purchase of so much frivolous stuff levies on our teetering climate systems.

If your response is “Well I’ve got to get *something* for (fill in the blank), have you considered the gift of service? Elderly parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and even friends you may know need help with projects around the house and yard (Personally, I can tick off about twenty right here.), and any of them would be thrilled to have any one of the tasks conquered by an able-bodied conscientious acquaintance.



Your very personalized gift could be as large or small as you decide based on your age, personal skills, and availability. Children could be similarly encouraged to give the gift of service based on their age and physical capability. A mere visit would be appreciated by an elderly relative or neighbor who lives alone. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination. If the physical act of giving something is preferred at the holiday get-together, a simple, perhaps hand-made card (put in a wrapped box?) could be presented to the recipient with the said service to be given.

Check out this recent discussion with journalist J.B. MacKinnon on *NPR* entitled, *What’s the Environmental Impact Each Time We Hit ‘Buy Now,’ and Can We Change Course?*

<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/30/1060185929/what-s-the-environmental-impact-each-time-we-hit-buy-now-and-can-we-change-cours>

MacKinnon is author of "The Day The World Stops Shopping: How Ending Consumerism Saves The Environment And Ourselves." One of the quotes it opens with sets the tone: “*A consumers’ society cannot possibly know how to take care of a world... the attitude of consumption spells ruin to everything it touches.*” –Hannah Arendt

Check it out of your local library.

–JM

The next generation would be justified in looking back at us and asking, “What were you thinking? Couldn’t you hear what the scientists were saying? Couldn’t you hear what Mother Nature was screaming at you?” –Al Gore

I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act like you would in a crisis. I want you to act like your house is on fire, because it is. – Greta Thunberg

***Scientific findings should never be distorted or influenced by political considerations.
– from President Biden’s Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking.***



Less Beef = Less CO₂
Cowspiracy.com

[Union of
Concerned Scientists
Science for a healthy planet and safer world



Worldwarzero.com



RSPO.org



insideclimatenews.org

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