

The Nature Connection

Bringing Nature, Animals & the Arts to People

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

FALL 2008

THE NATURE CONNECTION (FORMERLY ANIMALS AS INTERMEDIARIES) is a nonprofit organization that brings educational and therapeutic nature-based programs to children and elders at institutions where access to the natural world is limited. Founded 25 years ago, The Nature Connection grew out of a belief that people's connection to nature can provide a sense of wholeness and a sense of place.



Meeting a Chinchilla at Boston's Hope

Sue Huszar

Volunteer Connects Elders with Stories

After reading a call for volunteers in *The Boston Globe*, Joanie Caruso made a call to The Nature Connection in March 2007. "I love both animals and nature, so it felt like a natural fit," says Joanie. "It all boils down to a love of teaching and a love of people."

Joanie brings a wealth of professional experience to her work as a program volunteer. She was a pediatric intensive care nurse, then founded and managed a family owned business with her husband, and later became certified as a preschool teacher. Joanie understands the needs of others in a unique way. "I've learned how to work with others . . . to be sensitive to them and to their personal needs," Joanie explains. "And I've learned how to bring a person out."



Susan O'Hearn

Volunteer Joanie Caruso with "Whisper" at Groton Fest

After completing a two-day training, Joanie joined our staff-volunteer team for the Elder Service Plan of Cambridge Health Alliance. There she met Thomas, an elderly man who remained silent and withdrawn during each visit, and wore headphones. Joanie took on the challenge of getting him to talk. "Sometimes it's just about asking the right question. My husband and I enjoy fly fishing, so I asked Thomas if he enjoyed fishing and soon he was telling me about his life as a commercial fisherman. He seemed eager to tell somebody his stories." Now, when Joanie visits, Thomas takes off his headphones and engages in conversation.

(continued on page 2)

Reaching Out to Youth at Risk

This fall at **Boston's Hope** we've been having a wonderful time exploring the different ways that seeds can disperse: float, fly, or transport by ants are just some of the possibilities! The kids have had interesting insights about themselves dispersing and sprouting in a site away from their point of origin. "That way, your roots won't get all tangled up with the first plant," said one of the girls. In a November program, we enjoyed a visit with a live female turkey that we brought from Codman Farm. One of the boys described his favorite part of our hour together as "being quiet and watching."

In September, The Nature Connection started a pilot program at **Germaine Lawrence**, a residential program in Arlington that provides high quality treatment services for adolescent girls who are experiencing family, school, and social difficulties. We are working with eight to ten girls each month who are striving for greater independence within the Germaine Lawrence program. At our very first visit, we were able to share three tiny snapping turtles that a volunteer brought to us from the wild. The girls got to experience cradling the animals gently and feeding them, caring for the animals and sharing with each other.

—Kate Crosby, Program Coordinator

Current Program Sites

Boston's Hope of The Home for Little Wanderers, Dorchester
Cooperative Elder Services, Inc., Burlington
Elder Service Plan of Cambridge Health Alliance, Central Square
Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital, Bedford
Germaine Lawrence, Arlington
Katherine Kennedy Senior Center, Natick
Massachusetts Hospital School, Canton
Minute Man Arc for Human Services, Concord
Walden Street School, Concord

August 2008 – July 2009

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Dear Friends,

As the solstice approaches and the trees reveal their branches and nests, we are thankful for a year of exciting transitions at The Nature Connection. First, our new name is now official. With generous assistance from Crosby Design, Inc., we pondered many possibilities and finally chose two words. Hopefully *The Nature Connection* better expresses the scope and heart of our mission, and with a few less syllables!

After eight years with our organization, Janey Tallarida decided to move on from her position as Executive Director to pursue personal projects and other opportunities in the environmental field. Janey brought dedication, boundless energy, and passion for the natural world to her work. A search is underway for a new director, and we hope to have the position filled in the near future. Jude Aronstein has also transitioned into a new chapter in her life after eight years as program coordinator. Jude nurtured longstanding relationships with sites such as Massachusetts Hospital School, sharing her unique gifts in expressive therapies and in reaching out to youth. We miss them both, but thankfully still see them frequently at our office. We are thrilled to welcome Suzan Baltozer as our new Program Coordinator. Su brings a wide circle of talents, from expressive arts to worldly experience with indigenous peoples. You can read more about Su on page 3. Finally, we welcome former volunteer Nancy Savage to our staff as Office Assistant. With deep enthusiasm for our work, Nancy brings an artist's eye to our daily operations.

In this issue you can also read more about two new pilot sites we have added this fall: CESI Burlington's program for elders with memory loss, and Germaine Lawrence, a residential school for adolescent girls at risk. To launch our new name, we hosted a November benefit event and enjoyed an inspiring evening with actress and playwright Kaiulani Lee. Her one-woman play, "A Sense of Wonder," brought to life the passion of Rachel Carson. Not long before The Nature Connection began taking form, Carson was writing the book *Silent Spring* that would ignite the environmental movement.

I recently heard a Public Radio International news program about University of Michigan researchers who demonstrated that "interacting with nature makes you smarter." Taking a walk in the woods or simply looking at pictures of natural settings is enough to improve memory. As our New England winter settles in, may we all grow "smarter" by engaging with nature in ways that connect us with each other and this brightly turning Earth.

All Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sophie Wadsworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sophie Wadsworth, *Acting Executive Director*



Brenda Dupont

Volunteer ... continued from page 1

Joanie also brings an unusual partner along on some of the programs—her Russian Tortoise named Whisper. There are lots of things to observe and learn from Whisper, according to Joanie. "He shows us how he handles his shyness, and that we need to be gentle with him. His shell might look hard but it has nerves so that he experiences pain like a person would if someone tapped on their head," she explains to the elders. "And yet you can put him in the center of a circle and he'll walk towards you. . . It's a way he shows trust."

Another site where Joanie volunteers is Minute Man Arc's Day Habilitation Program in Concord. On one visit, Joanie watched as a vision-impaired woman held her hand out palm down and gently stroked a rabbit. "You can see that she's enjoying the feel of the rabbit. Occasionally she'll smile. She has her hand curled up at her face and she seems to relax more when she's touching one of our animals."

"The Nature Connection is a wonderful group of people working together, with each person contributing their own knowledge and experience," says Joanie. "It's a wonderful place to learn and to grow."

—Pam Driscoll, *Volunteer*

Welcome to Program Coordinator Su Baltozer

Suzan Baltozer, The Nature Connection's new program coordinator, comes to us with a world of experience—literally. While Su was born in Weymouth and currently lives in Braintree where she cares for her elderly parents, her life experience includes trips to Africa and South America where she worked with indigenous peoples, and a trip to India where she met indigenous healers and the Dalai Lama. Su's focus during these adventures was always

Traveling to West Africa and working with the Dagara tribe in Burkina Faso, Su was considered a "nature person," interpreting nature for people who had lost the sense of how to communicate with and experience nature *directly*. With the Dream Change Coalition, Su went to India to meet indigenous healers and live in a community that was "off the beaten path."

Su's next adventure will be to Ecuador in late January, to spend half the time studying plant spirit medicine in the Amazon jungle and half in the Andes Mountains helping a family of healers serve the indigenous people of that area. We look forward to the stories and understanding that Su will



Su Baltozer Shares a Forest Story at Minute Man Arc

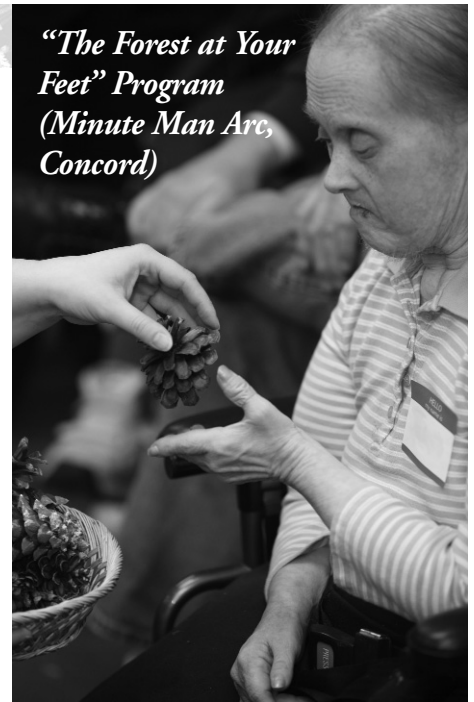
"I know deep in my heart that I have a gift to share with other people, to help them open their hearts through connecting with nature and animals. It's as if I'd written the job description myself."

bring home with her and use in future programs with youth and elders.

Closer to home, Su works at Access to Theatre in Boston as the visual arts director, helping young people of all ability levels,

disabled and not, to realize their powerful abilities to write their own stories from their own lives. Last year, the group won a President's Choice Award for excellence in working with young people.

When asked what drew her to The Nature Connection, Su said that "I know deep in my heart that I have a gift to share with other people, to help them open their hearts through connecting with nature and animals. It's as if I'd written the job description myself."

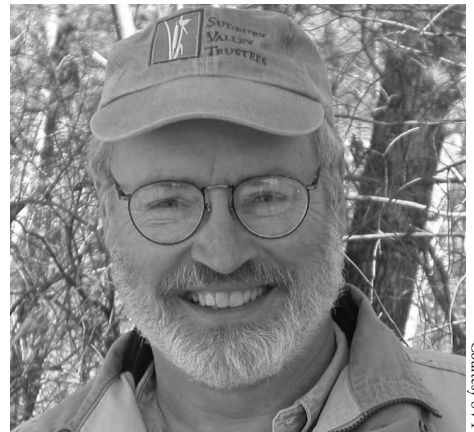


"The Forest at Your Feet" Program (Minute Man Arc, Concord)

Sue Huszar

Two New Members on Board...

The Nature Connection welcomes **Ron McAdow** to our Board. Executive Director of the Sudbury Valley Trustees, Ron's wisdom about the non-profit world brings a vital perspective to our organization. He is author of popular guidebooks including *The Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet Rivers: A Guide to Canoeing, Wildlife, and History*. We also welcome the return of **Marcia Chertok** to our Board. Most recently on staff as our Animal Care Consultant, Marcia also works as a Research Specialist in Environmental and Occupational Medicine and Epidemiology at Harvard University. She has generously given her time and talent to The Nature Connection for many years.



Courtesy SVT

New Board Member Ron McAdow

driven by her passion to be with people, to see them become excited about nature and animals, and to learn how to kindle others' gifts, their fire, their heart's passion.

"When I'm in a room doing this work, I feel like I'm home, doing what I was put on this planet to do," said Su when asked what she finds most satisfying about her new job. "The Nature Connection's work is a perfect combination of nature, animals, and the interconnectedness of people."

THE CONCORD JOURNAL

Pets Get Well Wishes

By Cheryl Lecsse
Concord [October 2007]

The event seemed like any other: A refreshments table at the front, near a microphone facing rows of folding chairs set up on the Emerson Umbrella lawn. But around the perimeter bowls of water sat in the grass, set up for the event's primary audience—pets.

Residents came out Sunday with their dogs, cats, and guinea pigs in tow for the Blessing of the Animals. The event, sponsored by the Emerson Umbrella for the Arts, Animals as Intermediaries, Holy Family Parish, First Parish Unitarian and Trinity Episcopal Church, follows the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi. The blessing recognizes the universal love and care for animals and the comfort and companionship they offer.

The Rev. Austin Fleming of Holy Family Parish was one of the clergy to officiate the blessing. Fleming, who has been in Concord for 13 years, has done several animal blessings in his time. "It's a beautiful thing," he said. "They're God's creatures. They bring so much love and companionship to people."

The event piqued the interest of many who had never had their pets blessed before, including Bill and Martha Walker of Concord. The couple brought their 9-year-old Labrador retriever Ony. "It sounded interesting," said Bill of the event, adding that Ony also likes to socialize.

Martha, who has a studio in the Emerson Umbrella, said she was interested in hearing "St. Francis and the Wolf," a book by Lincoln author Jane Langton. Langton read an excerpt from her book and also signed copies.

Joellen O'Neil of Concord brought her golden retriever Phoebe, who will be 3 in December. "I love to do things with my dog," she said.



The Rev. Austin Fleming, right, offers a blessing to Jimmy Houshan's dog Cher during the Blessing of the Animals sponsored by The Nature Connection and The Emerson Umbrella

"She likes parades, art exhibits and music, and going down to downtown Concord," where business owners are known for offering treats.

By the Umbrella's front steps Barbara Willis of Acton sat with her Shepard mix, Flora. Willis, who has a studio at the Emerson Umbrella, said she had seen a blessing of the animals as part of a PBS program. "I just thought it was a neat concept," she said. Flora, 11, comes with Willis to her studio every day. "She's one of our resident dogs," she said, along with artist Sing Hanson's yellow lab Cody.

Dogs may have been in the majority, but they weren't the only pet represented. Nathaniel Cassidy, 12, brought his pet leopard geckos, Bob and Bobby Lou.

"We missed it other years," said Audrey Cassidy, Nathaniel's mother. But when Fleming announced the event in church that morning, they knew they had to bring their pets.

During the ceremony, dogs barked intermittently through the singing of a hymn celebrating God's creatures. Then clergy spread out across the lawn to individually bless each animal.

"May you eat many crickets," Fleming said as he blessed Bob and Bobby Lou. But Cassidy said she was glad the blessing was a non-denominational event, for Bobby Lou's sake. "We've decided she's a Muslim because she comes from Pakistan," she said.

Sean Sosik-Hamner



Teeney the Hedgehog (who lives with Volunteer Jane Lothian)

Owl Whisperer

Gathered,
We tread the fabric of trust your stories spin,
Holding out offerings—
Nests, shells, soft, sniffing hearts—
Tools of beauty
For tending tethered souls.

—Jane Lothian, Volunteer

Opening Doors at CESI Burlington

The Nature Connection has initiated a pilot partnership at Cooperative Elder Services, Inc. (CESI) in Burlington, an adult day health program for elders suffering from memory loss. For our first program this fall we brought gourds, ears of corn, and a variety of animals. An elderly woman named Alice has fairly advanced Alzheimer's and was not chosen to participate in the program. Alice, as it turned out, had other ideas. When the door opened for participants to enter, she walked right in on her own. Sitting silently and stoically with her hands in her lap, Alice was allowed to stay and the staff and volunteers showed her the gourds. I brought the bumpy peanut gourd for her to touch, and then it happened. "Oh my God," she exclaimed with glee, "I've never seen anything like that!" From that moment on, Alice was completely absorbed by all the elements of nature that were presented to her. She touched everything, and she loved it. Her facial expressions softened and she began to smile at her neighbor.

Staff and aids from CESI who were on hand could not believe what they were seeing and hearing at the end of the program when Alice asked them when we were going to return. She left with a huge smile on her face while telling her daughter all about her experience. Arlene Parillo, a social worker at CESI, said "I was completely blown away. . . . We didn't think Alice would respond to that environment. We had an expectation, and she proved us wrong, and I love it!"

The lesson for the CESI staff and all of us that day was to never make assumptions about the abilities of any individual. With the right approach and the right touch, we can break through to anyone, on any level, and make a difference.

—Suzan Baltozer, Program Coordinator

Swan Gourd Comes to CESI Burlington



Arlene Parillo



Julia Summers

Nest in Progress

Our permanent home for owls is flying along, if not soaring. With generous pro-bono assistance from volunteers Joanie and Ray Caruso, the plans have gone from a few sketches to computerized drawings by IT guru David Caruso (Joanie and Ray's son). Program coordinator Kate Crosby is ushering the project through permitting and getting bids for land clearing and construction. The "mews," with capacity for up to three birds of prey, will be built on the property of one of our board members who has generously offered to provide land beside her Acton home. This will allow us to care for our birds locally, bringing them on more programs. VINS (Vermont Institute of Natural Science), particularly staff member Allison Stark, has provided much advice on owl housing design. Funding is moving forward with recent grant support from The Harpley Foundation and The Fuller Foundation, Inc. We're still looking to swoop in on additional funds for this project, so keep your eagle, or owl eyes out on that one!

Our Thanks and Appreciation for Your Support

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and the arts to people!*

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- Cartop Carrier (please call for details)
- DVD Projector & Screen

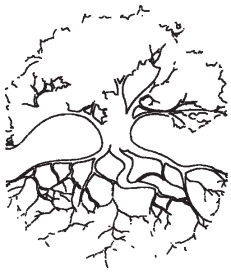
Jeanne Wentzell
Paul and Gray Wexelblat
Emily Wheeler
Barbara and George Whitesides
Steve Atlas and Robin Wilkerson
Ava Williams
Greg Martin and Astrid Williams
Claire Willis
Barbara and Jim Willis
Elissa Freud and Steven Willis
William and Ann Wilson
Bryan Windmiller
Suzanne and Roger Winsby
Paula Wisniewski
Edith Woolley
Anne and Tom Yeomans

Ronni Olitsky and Jeffery Young
Michael and Roxanne Zak
Robert Andrews and Carol Zell
Robert Zevin
Linda and Jerry Zindler



massculturalcouncil.org

*We have made every effort to be
accurate and complete. Please accept
our apologies and call us with cor-
rections at (978) 369-2585.*



The Nature Connection

P.O. Box 155
Concord, MA 01742

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Permit #516

Calendar



Photo: Courtesy Wolf Conservation Center

Call of the Wolf

March 2009

The Alcott School • Concord, MA

*Two Sunday programs—
stayed tuned for exact date and times!*

Join the Wolf Conservation Center of South Salem, NY and their six-year old Arctic gray wolf, Atka. This program, for adults and children alike, will include an awe-inspiring, up-close encounter with this important but misunderstood predator.

Musketaquid Earth Day

Saturday, May 2, 10:45 am Parade, Lowell Road Boat Launch

11:30-2:00 Festival, Emerson Umbrella Center for the Arts, 40 Stow St., Concord, MA

Parade through Concord Center and to the Earth Day Festival at the Emerson Umbrella. Join The Nature Connection in the parade, bring your dog, or take part in the festival as we publicly unveil our new name!

Turtle Walk with Bryan Windmiller

Saturday, May 16, 10:30 am-12:00 noon

Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Concord, MA

Explore with The Nature Connection and Bryan Windmiller again this spring as we look for live turtles and enjoy the fascinating nature of Great Meadows. A professional wildlife ecologist since 1987, Bryan's research includes human impact on vernal pool amphibians, and the conservation of Blanding's turtles. Walk is free. Meet at Great Meadows, end of Monsen Rd. off Rte. 62.



Tom Rush in Concert to Benefit The Nature Connection

Saturday May 30 • 8:00 pm concert / 7:00 pm reception

Emerson Umbrella Center for the Arts, 40 Stow St., Concord, MA

Tom Rush is one of the great folk singer/songwriters of the past 48 years. Fellow musician James Taylor has said, "*Tom was not only one of my early heroes, but also one of my main influences.*"

Stay tuned for ticket information!

Friends & Neighbors Night: The Nature Connection Annual Meeting

Thursday June 25, 6:00-7:30 pm

Emerson Umbrella Center for the Arts, 40 Stow St., Concord, MA

A great opportunity to learn about our nature programs, meet our staff, volunteers and board, and get to know friends & neighbors.

OUR MISSION IS TO SUPPORT THE HUMAN SPIRIT BY OFFERING AND BUILDING CONNECTIONS
BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.