



# *Nature in the City News*

2022-2023 School Year  
Year End Edition



It's hard to believe the 2022-2023 school year has drawn to a close and preparation for 2023-2024 is in full swing! There is so much to celebrate from the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* program: a return to full in-person classroom learning and outdoor exploration across grades K-5 in 22 elementary schools and alternative programs, four brand new lessons developed to match the updated SCSD science curriculum, and more than 8,000 students engaged in nature-inspired and hands-on science learning during their set of three, one-hour lessons with us.

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***Exploring Nature and Science in Syracuse Across Every Season  
with Baltimore Woods Nature Center***



# The Impact of *Nature in the City*

By Whitney Lash-Marshall, Executive Director



We're celebrating 21 years of the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* program this year, an incredible accomplishment. From a pilot project at one school, to all K-5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms across 22 elementary schools and alternative programs in the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) - with amazing sponsors, partners, and teachers, this program brings new and impactful experiences to thousands of students every school year.

**From September 2022-June 2023, the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* environmental education team delivered over 30,000 hours of hands-on/minds-on natural science lessons across nearly 500 classrooms to more than 8,200 students.**

It is an honor to work with teachers to build on the engaging science labs and lessons that they deliver in their curriculum and use local examples and the greenspaces around schools and in the City of Syracuse to build connections between students and their community. As a Kindergarten teacher at Frazer shared with us, the benefit of *Nature in the City* is that "It connects [students] with information/material they may not have exposure to otherwise and expands their knowledge of the world around them." We'll continue building on that knowledge in the upcoming school year as students return at the next grade level with all new lessons and experiences! Thank you for being part of this program and making it a reality each year.



## What a Year It Has Been!

By Katie Robideau, School Programs Manager

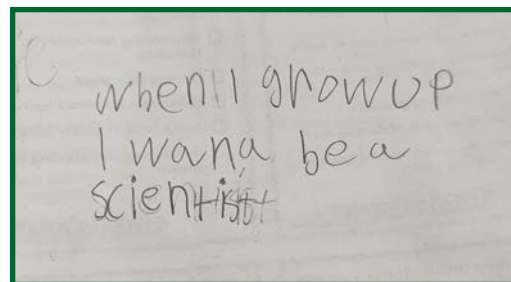


There is a lot to celebrate from this year's Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* Program! This year we returned to 100% in-person lessons and it has been wonderful having more facetime with students after adapting to the many changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Probably the biggest change this year was when third graders returned to Elmwood Park for the first time since 2019 for their final lesson to

explore Furnace Brook as stream scientists (See the full story on Page 5). We are grateful for all of the support we have received from the Syracuse City School District to help us coordinate the hundreds of visits that allow so many students to have experiences with science and nature that they won't forget.



This year, our education team was excited to design and deliver four brand new *Nature in the City* lessons across first, second, and fifth grades. The new lesson for fifth graders gave students the opportunity to explore different fields of science that were involved in the local cleanup of Onondaga Lake. Students drew incredible connections between their science unit on Mixtures and Solutions and the issue of contaminated bodies of water and had many ideas of what we can do to help clean them. Following one of these lessons at Porter Elementary, I asked a few students to share what careers in science they found the most interesting, as many careers were completely new to them (e.g. Ornithologist, Environmental Engineer, etc). Without hesitation, two of the students pointed at my *Nature in the City* t-shirt and said "We want to do *Nature in the City*! How do we do what you do?" It made me smile knowing that our program is encouraging students across the school district to not only be good stewards of their environment but is also sparking an interest in sharing their love for the natural world with others through science, STEM education and storytelling.



## The 21<sup>st</sup> Year of *Nature in the City*

Each spring, we conduct a feedback survey of participating teachers. This year, we had teachers respond from all 22 schools for a total of 169 responses.

**95%** of teachers found that *Nature in the City* visits increased student understanding of the science standards/topics.

**94%** of teachers indicated that the *Nature in the City* program enhanced and enriched their classroom instruction.

**92%** of teachers found students making connections between *Nature in the City* and FOSS material they were learning in class.

**92%** of teachers feel their students show an increased interest in the natural world as a result of our program.

**81%** of teachers reported that observing a *Nature in the City* lesson motivated them to take their class outside for lessons.

### What is the most beneficial part of the program for students?

*"The look on their faces when they get to experience the nature and wonder that is all around them in their everyday lives."*

- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Van Duyn Elementary School

*"Learning from a different person/people that are experts in the field."*

- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, Franklin Elementary School

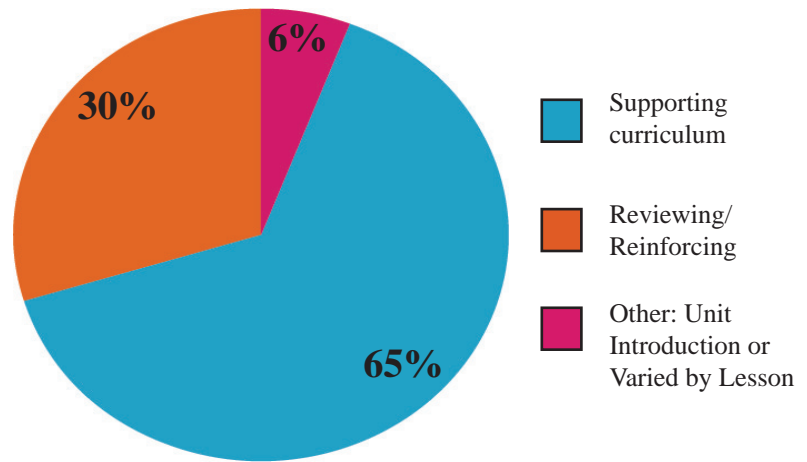
*"My students don't get to experience nature very much, but they do with Nature in the City, especially when we take the field trip to Baltimore Woods. Also, the hands-on materials that they bring in really brings the learning to a whole new level."*

- 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Delaware Elementary School



Over the past several years, *Nature in the City* lessons have been updated to align with the SCSD Science Curriculum and their FOSS science unit materials.

Teachers shared how the lessons connected:



*"I love how this program reinforces the idea that students can study nature anywhere, and they point out the places in their schoolyard and neighborhood where they can find examples. It goes well with the FOSS lessons."*

- Kindergarten teacher, McKinley-Brighton Elementary School

## Exploring Ecosystems: Making Connections



Last fall over 1,300 SCSD 5<sup>th</sup> graders visited Baltimore Woods Nature Center for an Ecosystem Exploration field trip. Students took in new sights and sounds hiking to different ecosystems to explore plants, animals, and food webs. It also set the stage for their third and final *Nature in the City* lesson in the spring investigating the urban ecosystem around their school. A teacher from Porter Elementary shared the importance of these experiences:

*"This program was wonderful for my students! It absolutely fostered an appreciation for and interest in the natural world. My students especially loved the field trip to Baltimore Woods . . . I loved that I was able to use that shared experience with them as a concrete example when talking about other topics throughout the year (food webs in science, and even during ELA to discuss what a forest setting would be like). The hands-on activities in the lessons supported my students in developing a deeper understanding of our science topics. Thank you!"*



# Stories from the Classroom: January – June Highlights

## Animals in Motion

By The Environmental Education Team

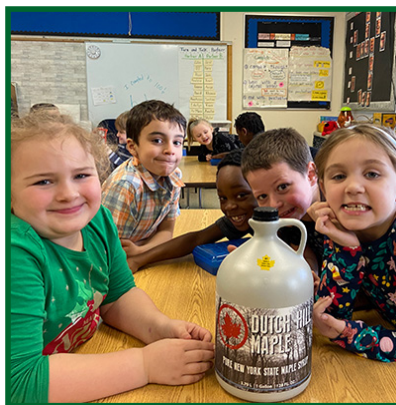


Have you ever heard a group of Kindergarteners walking? It is usually far from silent! But during the Animals in Motion lesson, students learn how to walk just like a fox: silently, so they can sneak up on their prey. Students observe a taxidermied gray fox up close and try to mimic its footsteps during a listening game to see if a “fox” can detect which fellow student

was a “mouse” moving around the circle. In February, students at Porter Elementary were walking so carefully that their peers couldn’t guess who the mouse was! After the game, students take turns bravely reaching into a series of three bags to try to guess what is inside. Using their sense of touch, they discover feathers and other artifacts that represent animals with other unique types of movement, and then act them out themselves!

## Maple Magic

By The Environmental Education Team



As snow melts and daylight lengthens, one of the earliest signs of spring begins - the sap is flowing! It’s also the sign that first graders will begin a very special investigation into how that sap can become delicious maple syrup. From tapping trees to boiling sap and transforming its water from a liquid to a gas, students have questions about every step of

the process - and are amazed that syrup comes from trees they might find around their school! To ‘sweeten’ the lesson, students conduct a blind taste test to see if they can tell the difference between real maple syrup (generously provided by Dutch Hill Maple) and maple-flavored corn syrup. Only 25% of students correctly guessed which sample was the real maple syrup, but there was overwhelming agreement that it was delicious!

## Breakfast for Birds

By Anna Stunkel, Environmental Educator

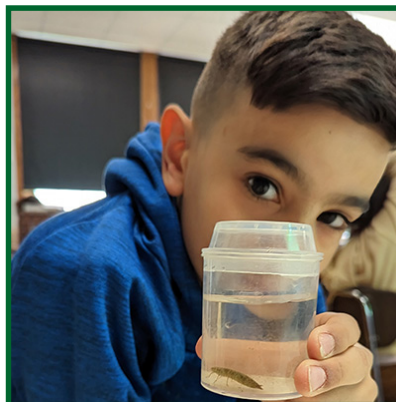


On a beautiful, sunny March day at Franklin Elementary, second grade students were very excited to look for birds in their schoolyard! The first class got to see a Northern Cardinal cheerily singing in a tree right away when we got outside. We discovered House Sparrow nests in some of the vents under the school windows. A sparrow was sitting in a nearby tree,

too, so the students had a chance to look with their binoculars. Each time a bird flew by overhead - including gulls, crows, Mourning Doves, a v-shaped flock of Canada Geese, and a Red-tailed Hawk soaring on thermals, students would run excitedly to get a closer look! Students enjoyed thinking about what these birds might eat and acting out some of their movements. As we walked back to the classroom one student exclaimed, “binoculars are magical!”

## Creatures of the Deep

By Bridget Jones, Environmental Educator



Third graders know the importance of clean water, and in May and June they got to meet some creatures that rely on it right in their classroom. Educators brought special aquatic invertebrate guests from the pond at Baltimore Woods Nature Center in Marcellus to each classroom to explore adaptations and life cycles. Students at

Salem Hyde were especially amazed with dragonfly nymphs! At first, it seemed unbelievable that such small, strange bugs were highly adapted hunters. Then, while watching a nymph move using jet propulsion, one group saw it shoot out its lower jaw to catch something in the water! Fascinated, the students used their hands to mimic the dragonfly’s jaw, imagining what it would be like to catch food that way. Seeing these unique creatures up close sparked new interest in parts of nature typically hidden from the students’ sight.

**“The most beneficial part of *Nature in the City* is the hands-on games students get to play and experience during their time with *Nature in the City*. My kids loved pretending to be birds and getting a chance to use their beaks to collect food.”**

**- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Porter Elementary School**



## A Special Guest Students Won't Forget

By Lizzy Suzedell, Environmental Educator

For their final *Nature in the City* lesson this spring, Kindergarteners played a game where they had to decide if different objects we brought in were alive or not. For the final round, we reveal that we have brought a real living creature to visit them! They are suddenly very surprised: "Wait, you have a real animal?!". As I prepare the area, students guess what animal it could be: "Is it a dog? A fish? A snake?"

I let the students know that their guest is afraid of loud noises and sudden movements, so we need to whisper and stay still. They understand, but they're barely able to contain their excitement as they wait. When I bring out the creature, their faces light up more than I thought was possible. "Awww, a turtle!" they whisper with huge smiles. It's one of our three rescued Eastern Box Turtles, named Geronimo, Lucy, and Mr. T, who last visited Kindergarten classrooms across the SCSD back in 2019.

I introduce the box turtle, which gets its name because of its ability to hide in its shell and almost completely close it - like a box!, and share information about where they live and what they eat. Students wonder "How old is it?" (possibly 30+ years old) and "Can it get out of its shell?" (no - their shell is connected to their spine) and continue to ask questions up until the end of the lesson, where I'm still giving them answers as I'm walking out the door.

The curiosity and joy that comes from seeing a real, living creature of nature is something so special to share with the kids, and something they remember for years to come. Dozens of students in grades 3-5 could still recall meeting the turtle in-person or virtually, and we have even met high school and college students who still remember the special *Nature in the City* guest they met in Kindergarten, too.



## The Return of Save the Rain Field Trips to Elmwood Park

By Whitney Lash-Marshall, Executive Director

Thanks to Onondaga County Save the Rain, all third graders across the Syracuse City School District have the unique opportunity to take what they learned in their first two *Nature in the City* lessons about the water cycle, the Onondaga Lake Watershed, pollution, green infrastructure, and adaptations of aquatic macroinvertebrates that live in freshwater habitats of Syracuse and apply it during an off-site field trip to Elmwood Park as stream scientists.

Students eagerly get off the bus and walk toward the beautiful Furnace Brook, a place many of them have visited for sports or family picnics. But this time they have a special task: investigate the water quality of the stream that will eventually flow to Onondaga Lake. Initial observations are usually that the water is clean - it is clear and we can see fish swimming. But students also point out where there is trash pollution - they immediately want to help clean it up!



One way scientists evaluate water quality is by sampling for aquatic macroinvertebrates. Some - like mayfly larvae - are pollution sensitive, and cannot survive where water is contaminated. Others, like the leech, are tolerant of pollution and have a wider range of habitats. Armed with rubber boots and D-nets, students head into the stream to try to sample, eagerly searching their net for anything moving to add to the class tally. Discovering more pollution sensitive species leads to a higher score as we compare different sections of the stream. Scholars from Delaware Elementary School even got to sample with Save the Rain Project Coordinator Jed Walsh (above).

The good news? Furnace Brook got good to excellent ratings by our third-grade scientists this year, an outcome that Onondaga County Save the Rain is working to continue achieving across the City!



## Thank you to our partners and sponsors for making the 2022-2023 *Nature in the City* program possible!



Save the Rain



Supporting 3<sup>rd</sup> grade programs

nationalgrid

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