



Nature in the City News

2025-2026 Annual Program Report

24th Year

Contents

**Pages 2-3:
Program
Highlights &
Teacher
Feedback**

**Pages 4-5:
Stories from the
Classroom**

**Page 6:
Lesson Updates**

**Page 7:
Student
Assessment
Data**

**Page 8:
Thank You to
Our Sponsors**



**Baltimore Woods
Nature Center**
Nature in your hands



Exploring Nature and Science in the City of Syracuse



Far-Reaching Impacts

By Whitney Lash-Marshall, Executive Director

I am often asked in my role to explain what the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* (NITC) program is.

Of course, part of my answer includes highlighting the hands-on experiences our Environmental Educators facilitate in K–5 classrooms across all Syracuse City School District (SCSD) elementary schools for over 8,000 students each year. Those are the moments when students discover how different seeds travel across their schoolyards, build food webs for a Cooper’s Hawk using species found right outside classrooms, and examine the intricate patterns of snowflakes in the depths of a Syracuse winter. (Check out these stories on pages 4-5).

But the other – and perhaps most important part - of my answer is what those lessons inspire *through* the experiences. We are creating moments of discovery together with teachers and students and exploring the science woven through schoolyards, neighborhoods, and the broader city. We hear eager questions from children who are looking at parts of their environment in new ways and feel comfortable enough to ask them. We watch the faces of students who were nervous to go outside transform into huge smiles. These moments of wonder, inquiry, and observation are the building blocks of deeper connections to their community and the natural world.

Thank you for planting these “seeds” in the minds of every student – seeds that will continue to grow as they explore their environment, build confidence in science, and thrive in the years ahead.

We asked teachers if *Nature in the City* enhanced and enriched their classroom instruction: **98% of K-5th grade teachers responded **YES!****

“The students enjoyed the lesson; it was great to see them demonstrate what they had learned and reinforce their learning.”

3rd grade teacher, Seymour Dual Language Academy



“We love Nature in the City and we think it aligns with curriculum very nicely. I find that the hands-on examples really help my students especially this specific group.”

4th grade teacher, Ed Smith

Celebrating *Nature in the City's* Success

By Katie Robideau, School Programs Manager

The 24th year of *Nature in the City* has come to a close, and we're reflecting on another incredible year of science discoveries, wonder, and hands-on experiences. Many thanks to everyone who makes this program possible! Your continued support allows us to bring meaningful, nature-inspired experiences to thousands of K-5 students throughout the Syracuse City School District.

This year was filled with reminders of why our work is so important. Whether it was 1st graders proudly showing off a blooming flower, students marveling at the beauty of real snowflakes, or a student enthusiastically declaring, "I can't wait to work at Baltimore Woods someday," each experience reflected the curiosity and excitement that our program brings to students.

Our dedicated education team spent time strengthening our lessons and creating new hands-on activities like our updated Maple Magic lesson (see page 6) to help students better understand scientific concepts throughout the lesson. These innovations help us to meet students where they are and encourage participation in every classroom we visit.

The feedback we receive from teachers every year also reinforces the impact of our work. An incredible 98% shared that *Nature in the City* enhances and enriches their classroom instruction, and many highlighted how our lessons effectively engage students while supporting science learning. Their partnership, along with the support of the Syracuse City School District, makes this program a success year after year.

As we move into the 25th year of *Nature in the City*, I am grateful for our amazing team, dedicated teachers, and every student who reminds us to see the wonder in the natural world. We can't wait to see what next year brings and to create even more moments of curiosity, discovery, and joy together!



3

Teacher Feedback on the 24th year of *Nature in the City*

93% of teachers felt that *Nature in the City* lessons directly support their curriculum.

88% of teachers felt that *Nature in the City* lessons increased student interest in the natural world.

94% of teachers thought the materials and hands-on activities effectively engaged their students.



"My students always enjoy the activities the Nature in the City team bring! They are always very engaging and a great connection to current science standards!"

3rd grade teacher, Van Duyn



"The students love hands on activities. Anything they can touch or feel is a great experience for city kids who may not have the exposure to nature."

Kindergarten teacher, Ed Smith

Stories From the Classroom



1st Graders Enjoy the Little Things in Nature

By: Amelia Gross

Environmental Educator

While searching for seeds, the first graders were so excited to share what they found that their teachers and I were becoming (happily) overwhelmed. We couldn't take more than one step without a student running up talking incredibly fast with a maple seed, worm, or interesting piece of tree bark. I especially liked when they dragged me to look at a blooming flower, reminding their classmates NOT to pick it.



From the Bottom Up Lesson Inspires 4th Graders

By: Bailey Whiffen

Environmental Educator

During this lesson, students are asked to think about characteristics that top predator birds might have that allow them to be at the top of the food chain. As they answer, we draw a bird on the board with long sharp talons, a curved sharp beak, big strong wings, and camouflaged feathers.

Then we pull out a taxidermy Cooper's hawk to compare our drawing to the real life bird. They are always so excited and amazed at how their drawings match the bird almost perfectly!

As we went around allowing students to feel a model skull and talon of a peregrine falcon, one student got visually more excited than all the other students. Afterwards she raised her hand and asked how old she had to be to work at Baltimore Woods. Once I told her, she fist pumped her hand and said "I cannot wait"!





Discoveries in 2nd Grade

By: Rachel Ribaudo

Environmental Educator

As a part of our snowflake lesson, we teach the kids about Wilson Bentley and what he discovered about snow by taking thousands of photographs of snowflakes. Then we show them his photographs which are published in a book. In one of my classes at Bellevue, the students were stunned by the photos. Their jaws were literally dropping! It actually took me a while to convince them that the photos were pictures of real snowflakes. They were so excited about all of the cool designs!



In May and June the final *Nature in the City* lesson for 3rd graders was able to return to Elmwood Park for a stream exploration field trip thanks to Onondaga County WEP!

Over 1,300 students were transformed into stream scientists, logging a collective 2, 674 hours investigating the health of Furance Brook!



“This was the first year a student found a crayfish in the wild--- highlight of his year!”



Scan the QR code to see video highlights from these field trips!



5th graders Explore the Baltimore Woods Preserve

By: Anna Stunkel

Environmental Educator

In addition to their three, *Nature in the City* lessons, 5th graders visit the Baltimore Woods Preserve on a fall field trip to explore different ecosystems! On one trip, a small group of students was talking about ants almost the entire time. They discussed different ant species, ant predators and prey, and things they've seen ants eat. It was really special to hear how excited they were about ants, and I encouraged their teacher to have them do a group project about it. She didn't know that they had such a strong interest in this subject! Most exciting of all, we found a large Carpenter Ant at the end of the visit. Through these field trips, teachers can learn more about what their students love about nature, and hopefully this carries over into future classroom experiences.



Updating Lessons To Improve Student Learning Outcomes



Visualizing the Invisible

By: Kathryn Resanovich & Katie McLaughlin

Environmental Educators



Our Maple Magic lesson is an exciting and delicious lesson that we look forward to every spring! The students explore the life cycle of a maple tree, learn where maple syrup comes from, and even get to do a maple syrup taste test. While this lesson is a student favorite and a great connection to Central New York, last year we noticed that many students were struggling to understand how maple sap turned into maple syrup, because they haven't quite learned the phases of matter yet.

During the lesson educators show the students a pot of boiling sap but the concept of evaporation is hard for them to grasp. This year, we added an interactive activity to the lesson to help students understand the maple sugaring process a little better. We created a visual model of sap with a container of white pom poms representing water and brown pom poms representing maple sugar. The students get to see that the sap has way more water than sugar, so to turn it into the brown, delicious syrup they know and love, we have to remove a lot of the water.



The class takes turns removing "water" pom poms until our container starts to resemble syrup.

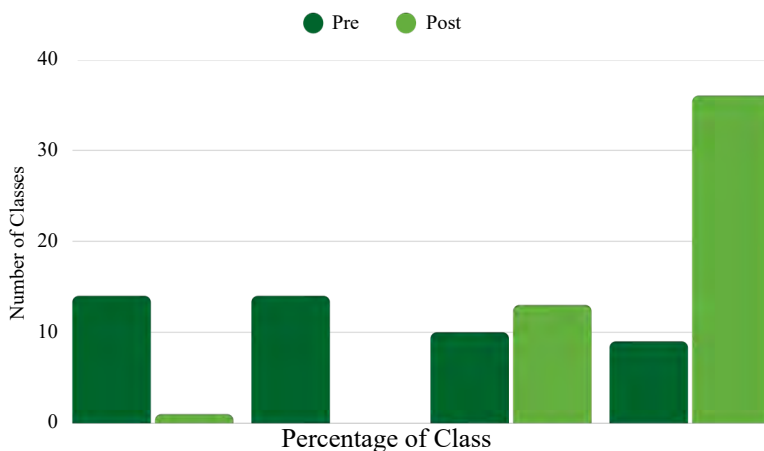
The students love being a part of the sugaring process while connecting this activity back to the boiling pot of sap we showed them earlier to understand the concept of evaporation a little more. It was also a great way to add more movement and hands-on student involvement into the lesson. Teachers made many comments about loving this visual addition as an explanation that helped students learn in visual and tactile ways. We're excited to begin this sweet lesson again soon!

Each K-5th grade classroom receives three *Nature in the City* lessons throughout the year. The lessons are designed to be connected to their science standards and to reinforce core science concepts and vocabulary.

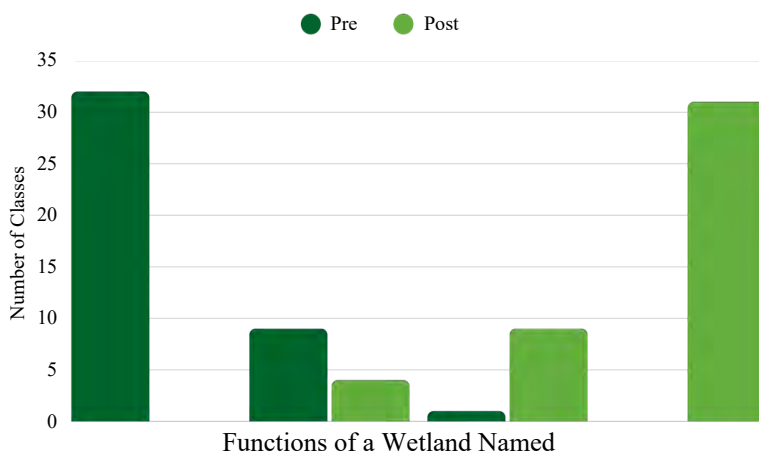
Before each lesson, *Nature in the City* educators ask students questions about what they remember from past lessons, which helps our team assess how the program is reaching the students. Additionally this year, we added a comparative question that is asked before and after the lesson, relating to the lesson's topic. We were able to gain perspective on the students learning outcomes during each lesson and if our material and activities were adequate in enforcing the learning objectives.



We asked 1st grade students if they knew where maple syrup comes from, both before and after the NITC lesson, Maple Magic.



We asked 5th grade students if they could name the three main functions of a wetland: biodiversity, erosion control, and pollution control, before and after the NITC lesson, Wetland Wonders.



Thank you to our partners and sponsors for making ⁸
the 2025-2026 *Nature in the City* program possible!



Supporting all schools.



Supporting third grade programs in all schools.



GREEN FAMILY
FOUNDATION



*Supporting McKinley Brighton Elementary
School and Frazer Pre-K-8 School*

**Bob Hurka &
Susan Stewart**

Supporting Delaware Elementary



*Supporting Franklin
Pre-K-8 School*



Supporting Webster Elementary School



JIM AND JULI BOEHEIM
FOUNDATION

*Supporting Ed Smith
Pre-K-8 School*

**Auer Family
Foundation**



*Supporting HW Smith
Pre-K-8 School*



Bernie Carr

Katie Doucette

**Anonymous
Donors**



We look forward to working with you for the 2026-2027 *Nature in the City* program!

Contact: Whitney Lash-Marshall, Executive Director
whitney@baltimorewoods.org

Baltimore Woods Nature Center 4007 Bishop Hill Road, Marcellus, NY 13108
(315) 673-1350 baltimorewoods.org