Baltimore Woods Nature Center
Nature in your hands

Nature in the City News

September & October 2026

Welcome Back to Nature in the City!



The Baltimore Woods Nature in the City (NITC) Program is celebrating 25 years of science discoveries, wonder, and hands-on experiences in elementary schools across the Syracuse City School District in the 2026-2027 school year!



Katie Robideau
School Programs Manager

Each year of this program is filled with reminders of why our work is so important. Whether it was first 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 reflects the curiosity and excitement that our program brings to students.

The feedback we receive from teachers also reinforces the impact of our work. An incredible 98% shared that NITC enhances and enriches their classroom instruction, and many highlighted how lessons effectively engage students and support science learning. This unique partnership, along with support of the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) and our program sponsors, makes NITC a success year after year.

When Nature in the City started, it was piloted in one elementary school. Today, it reaches every K-5 classroom in all 20 elementary schools and alternative programs across the SCSD. Many thanks to everyone who has made this program possible along the way, including this newly unfolding 2026-2027 school year. We can't wait to see what this year brings as we create a whole new set of moments of curiosity, discovery, and joy together!

Early Fall NITC Lessons

Kindergarten

In their very first NITC lesson, Kindergarten students learn all about habitats and what animals need to survive. Then, they search for animals (and their homes) on an adventure around their school!

Habitat Hunt





Story from the classroom: "During Habitat Hunt at Meachem, we saw a Peregrine Falcon fly right over the class! It was very exciting to talk with the students about how this is the fastest animal on Earth, and how tall buildings in Syracuse provide homes for them."

- Anna Stunkel, Environmental Educator (she/her)

1st Grade



Journey through the Seasons

In this brand-new lesson for 1st graders, students are introduced to the four seasons and how they differ. By exploring outside, they learn how plants and animals prepare for colder weather throughout the fall.

Story from the classroom: "When playing a game during Journey through the Seasons, a class of first graders took turns putting on their best squirrel impressions: hopping, chittering, and sniffing around for their acorns. They inspired me to encourage the same creativity in future lessons."

- Lou Card, Environmental Educator (they/them)



5th Grade

This lesson goes far beyond just our city, as 5th grade students learn all about the atmosphere in their first NITC lesson of the year. After exploring the relationship between fossil fuels and carbon dioxide, students generate ideas to help protect the earth from further harm.

Hot in Here



Introducing New Educators!

This fall, we are excited to welcome two new educators to the Nature in the City Team!



Ari James (AJ) Hedges (He/Him)
Environmental Educator

AJ graduated from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) in 2026 with a degree in Forest Health. At ESF, he did a variety of jobs - spending time working for the Applied Forestry and Fire Ecology Lab and the food pantry. He recently spent a summer out in Sequoia National Park leading cave tours and then returned to Syracuse to work with Baltimore Woods.

AJ has a passion for environmental education and his favorite part of working for Nature in the City is getting to watch kids fall in love with the outdoors for the first time!

Lou Card (They/Them)
Environmental Educator



Lou graduated from SUNY ESF with a major in Environmental Education & Interpretation and a minor in Environmental Writing & Rhetoric. While at ESF, Lou discovered their passions for Dendrology (trees), Entomology (insects), and Interpretation, leading them to become a Certified Interpretive Guide.

Lou can remember the Student Conservation Association visiting their home state of New Hampshire for hands-on nature education; memories from this time have stuck with them throughout the years and helped shape their aspirations as an educator. After discovering that Baltimore Woods offers similar outreach to the youth of Syracuse, Lou joined the team this fall. Learning more and more each day, Lou has loved working alongside other educators and is excited to grow their skills as an educator and continue making nature more accessible

Nature in the City Impacts

Just last week, we wrapped up our first Kindergarten lesson of the year. Click here to see the Assessment Report on Habitat Hunt!

Looking Back

Reflections on Nature in the City: 25 Years Ago

By Patty Weisse

Former Executive Director of Baltimore Woods Nature Center



The natural world provides great models. When I started at Baltimore Woods, there were not many school programs and the place was quiet and tranquil, but with the exception of summer camp, was lacking the voices of children learning about the natural world. When we looked at the data on who used Baltimore Woods, we saw that children in Syracuse had the least access to our programs.

We were fortunate to get a grant from the Gifford Foundation to research the neighborhood nature opportunities in Syracuse. What we discovered was that it is endowed with a lovely and robust array of parks and green spaces within walking distance of the schools. Recognizing this opportunity, we put together Nature in the City.

Young children learn with their bodies as well as their minds. We were so fortunate to have educators like Katie Mulverhill, Matt Kauffman, Emma Anderson, and Carol Stokes-Cawley, who put together activity-hands-on science lessons that were linked to the state standards. The kids could learn in the parks and green spaces within walking distance of their schools. The natural world is the perfect setting for young children to learn science. Research shows that when they have frequent, positive experiences in nature, they develop a stronger sense of self and how they fit into the world. Screens do not cultivate curiosity and wonder the way Mother Nature can. We wanted children's earliest science learning experiences to lead them to think "I can do science, and it is fun."

Thank You to Our Sponsors and Partners!

- Bob Hurka & Susan Stewart
- Bernie & Valerie Carr
- Anonymous Donors & Friends

Join the growing list of sponsors!

The Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* program is only possible with the support from the Syracuse City School District and local companies, foundations, and individuals who believe in the mission of connecting students to the natural world right here in Syracuse.

Thank you to SRC, Inc., the Green Family Foundation, Bob Hurka and Susan Stewart, and Bernie & Valerie Carr for renewing their support to kick off the 25th year of the program and ensuring that every K-5th grade classroom received three, one-hour lessons with the Baltimore Woods *Nature in the City* Program this year.

YOU can be part of helping every student explore science through nature and inspire a lifelong love of learning! **Email Executive Director Whitney Lash-Marshall** to learn more about becoming a program supporter today, or for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year!