

THE CONNECTION

with Nature  with People  with Care

Fall 2026 Newsletter

Totally Tuber-ler

By **Catie Corkery** - *Therapeutic Nature Program Intern, Summer 2026*

Sometimes the most familiar parts of the natural world, the ones so ordinary we almost forget to think of them as nature, can lead to truly unexpected discoveries and connections. A potato turned out to be the underdog MVP (Most Valuable Potato) that no one could have expected. A seemingly unimposing food staple and underground dweller captured the attention of participants and brought smiles, laughter, and memories to everyone it met.

During one of our July programs, participants explored five destinations around the world: Massachusetts, Florida, Turkey, Peru, and Hawaii; through collections of plants, natural materials, and animals connected to each place. Tucked into the Peru box, alongside alpaca wool, lava rocks, sea sponges, and glimpses of the region's wildlife through figures, photographs, and fact sheets, was a potato. Potatoes were first domesticated in the Andes of present-day Peru and Bolivia, making it a fitting addition to our exploration. At first, I mostly overlooked it. But when given the chance to shine, shine it did.

At Advinia Care Newton-Wellesley, we work with residents in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's disease. For many, the disease has significantly affected their ability to communicate, move independently, and interact with the people and world around them. It is one of our more intensive program settings, where connection can look very different from person to person.



During one visit, I began chatting in Spanish with a woman who told me she had grown up in Peru. What are the chances?! I eagerly ran to get the Peru box.

As I showed her the contents, I pulled out the potato almost as a joke. But her eyes lit up, a smile spread across her face, and she let out a small giggle. I asked whether she used to cook with potatoes, and suddenly she was telling me about a recipe she used to make. How she would go to the market for the ingredients and, in great detail, how to prepare the dish. I sat back and let her reminisce, and we spent more than 30 minutes talking about potatoes.

After that lovely encounter, I began...*continue reading on page 3*





Dear Friends,

Fall may bring cooler temperatures and shorter days, but I've always thought of it as a season of energy and abundance. The fields are full, seeds are scattering, animals are busy preparing for what comes next and here at The Nature Connection, this time of year often feels much the same.

There is nothing particularly extraordinary about the nature that fills the stories in this newsletter. A potato. A handful of grass. These are ordinary things, easily passed by or overlooked. But given our attention, they become opportunities for curiosity, memory, discovery, and connection. We've given these stories a little more room than usual too. Enough space to slow down, take them in, and share some of the fuller context of how these seemingly simple moments become part of our work.

You'll also find our year-end numbers in these pages, and there is abundance there, too. The Nature Connection is doing more than we ever have before, reaching more people and continuing to grow the community that makes this work possible. What excites me most is that we are building that growth thoughtfully and sustainably strengthening the organization alongside the programs so that our capacity can grow with our ambitions.

I hope this newsletter gives you a chance to linger with us for a moment in the ordinary things that make it all meaningful.



Wishing you a fall full of connection,
Best,

Taylor

Taylor Eagan, Executive Director



Board of Directors

Lisa Brukilacchiho,
President
Nancy Stillman, *Vice President*
Alan Jay Rom, *Treasurer*
Jennifer Albanese, *Clerk*
Ian Agranat
Marcia Chertok
Elda Kalivioti
Rebecca Weil

Staff

Taylor Eagan, *Executive Director*
Rick Arnaud, *Development Director*
Carol Hani, *Program Coordinator*
Autumn Cutting, *Program Coordinator*
Monica Kucich, *Program Coordinator*
Bethany Burke, *Volunteer & Intern Coordinator*
Sonya Wirtanen, *Development & Communications Coordinator*



CONCORD-CARLISLE
COMMUNITY CHEST



www.nature-connection.org

info@nature-connection.org

978-369-2585



Totally Tuber-ler

...continued from front page

After that lovely encounter, I began sharing the potato at other programs. At the memory care unit The Gardens of Newbury Court, the potato once again opened the door to an unexpected connection. A nonverbal woman smiled when I revealed it, while her husband immediately thought of Van Gogh's work of art, "The Potato Eaters". This led to a connection about how he was a high school art teacher where he met his wife who was teaching French. This then led to an even longer conversation about their experience traveling to France. What started as a potato from Peru ended up with them teaching me French words and sharing their favorite spots to visit in France.

The potato struck again at Rivercrest, a long-term nursing facility, sparking a conversation about a participant's grandmother, who came from Ireland, "the land of the potatoes". We bonded over our shared Irish heritage and experiences visiting Ireland.

Sometimes we don't know what will capture someone's attention, spark a memory, invite laughter, or open the door to a conversation. Even the most familiar and easily overlooked pieces of the natural world have something to offer. With curiosity, humor, and a willingness to follow where someone takes us, something as ordinary as a potato can become the beginning of a meaningful connection.



Volunteer Spotlight

Fred Wersan



Fred and his wife, Paula, have lived in Concord for 40 years. He retired in 2019 after a career as a software technical writer. Fred now spends his time reading, doing crossword puzzles, gardening, contradancing, and playing fiddle, guitar, concertina, and banjo. In addition to the NC, He also volunteer at the Concord Council on Aging, and occasionally at Trustees of Reservations events.

What first inspired you to volunteer with The Nature Connection?

I attended an open house at the Emerson Umbrella and wandered into Nature Connection's office. I was looking for a volunteer activity and it seemed like a nice thing to do so I went to one of the training sessions and signed up.

Why is connecting with nature this way important to you?

I've been fortunate to travel throughout the United States as well as to places such as Africa, New Zealand, Iceland, and Costa Rica - all places of natural splendor. Sharing some of the natural world with people who are no longer able to easily experience the world and who appreciate what we bring to them is rewarding.

Can you share a moment or experience volunteering that really stayed with you?

Before a site visit, the program coordinator suggested some objects that volunteers might want to bring to the upcoming program, and a banjo was one of them. As I was playing, one of the attendees started vocalizing and kept it up through most of the time I played.

What do you wish people knew about The Nature Connection?

There are all sorts of organizations doing good work in the community that live below the public consciousness. The Nature Connection is one of them and awareness is necessary to generate the support it needs.

Favorite Quote:

A banjo will get you through times of no money, but money won't get you through times of no banjo.



Rooted in Connection

Over the past year, we've been sharing pieces of a larger story about the strategic work underway to strengthen The Nature Connection. As we think about where the organization is today and where we're headed next, there's something especially meaningful about drawing strength from our roots. Which is, in part, why we are so excited to welcome Rebecca Reynolds Weil onto the Board of Directors.

Rebecca is the daughter of our founder, Sarah Seabury Ward and was a volunteer/staff member from 1983-1993, and Executive Director 1993-2022. She says,

"The simplicity of The Nature Connection has always been about building connections, of letting a leaf or a rock tell its own story, of listening to the seasons and the wind and trees, of using all our senses to connect with the wild. There is no technology or spreadsheet needed - and this seems even more important as technology speeds up our lives - so we can slow down and savor the simple joys of looking and listening, of feeling and being.

These connections may help our human selves by giving us context, meaning and nourishment. As Rachel Carson said, 'there is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature--the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter', but profoundly, these connections can also help us be humble within the world and in this way help the world. These connections can help us remember that humans are not the center piece, that we are a community. We are part of nature, connected in and with the wild."



Left: Sarah Seabury Ward; Center: Alan Jay Rom (treasurer); Right: Rebecca Reynolds Weil

Visit us on The Green at Discover West Concord Day!



Make a Difference with a Year-End IRA Gift

Looking for a meaningful way to support the Nature Connection before the year ends? If you are 70½ or older, you should be able to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) directly from your IRA to support our mission. Your QCD can be a tax-smart year-end gift to help us continue our important work in the year ahead.

Contact your IRA administrator soon to arrange your gift, as processing can take time before December 31. Consult your tax advisor to determine whether a QCD is right for you.

Please reach out to Rick Arnaud, Development Director, at rarnaud@nature-connection.org or (978) 369-2585 with any questions about making a gift to the Nature Connection.



FY26 Impact Reporting

Supporting the Human Spirit Through Nature

430

Programs Delivered
(387 programs last year)

1,517

Program Participants Reached

40

Program Sites

10

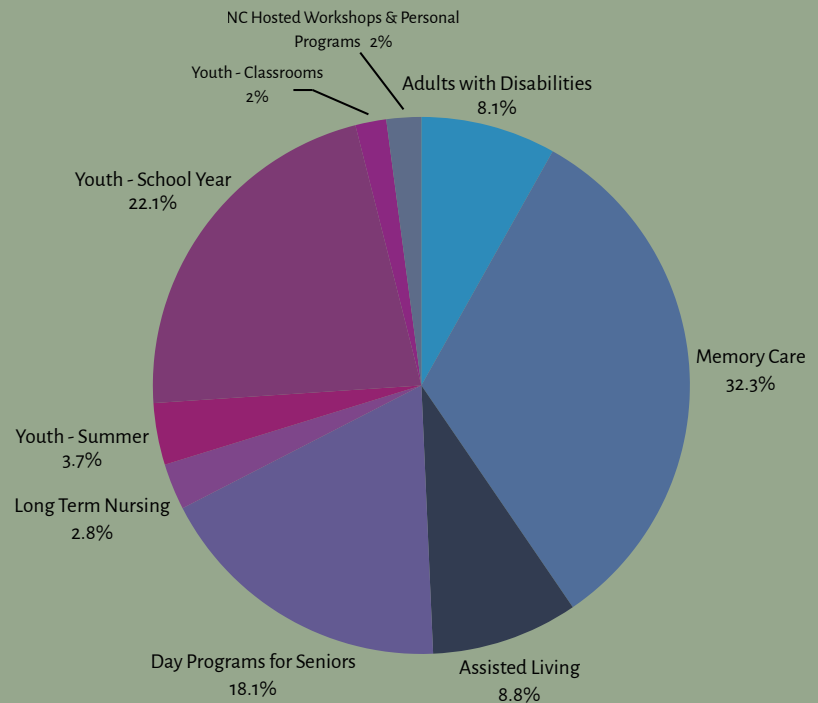
Interns

656

Program Volunteer Hours



Number of Programs by Populations:



Teen Volunteer to Intern

Building the Next Generation of Nature Connection

In the summer of 2023, The Nature Connection launched our summertime teen volunteer program, something we had been hoping to do for a long time. We had heard from teens interested in volunteering over the years, and had long wanted to create more opportunities for young people to become part of our work. That summer, we finally found a way to make it happen.

Because so much of our programming overlaps with school hours, summer opened up new possibilities. We onboard our teen volunteers together at the start of the summer, with some additional training around communication and the kinds of experiences they might encounter working alongside people living with dementia or disabilities. We then ask them to commit to three or four programs a month through July and August, enough time to really get some experience and become part of the work.

The larger strategic piece was also about beginning to build a pathway that could allow young people to grow with The Nature Connection over time. To be able to go from participant, to volunteer, to intern, and, as we grow, hopefully someday being able to support entry-level jobs. **Alex was one of our first “guinea pigs”...**



This past summer, Alex Hennighausen joined The Nature Connection team as a Therapeutic Nature Program Intern, but his journey with us started back in 2023 as one of those first teen volunteers.

He returned the next couple summers. Then, after heading across the country to attend the University of Washington in Seattle, he came back to volunteer again over winter break. Now a rising sophomore planning to major in biology, **Alex returned for a fourth summer, this time as an intern.** We asked him to share some of his thoughts on his experience:

I've had a lifelong interest in the natural sciences. I came back to do an internship with The Nature Connection so that I could make a more consistent commitment to a job I love and to learn more about the behind the scenes methodology and philosophy that goes into planning programs. I also wanted to enhance my communication skills with vulnerable and challenging populations who I hope to work with in a career in health care.

I've enjoyed getting to see participants multiple times and building relationships where I can anticipate people's interests and engagement month-to-month. I've become much more comfortable with quickly adapting to meet individual needs and accommodate people with a variety of sensory, behavioral, and cognitive differences helping to build comfort and rapport with anyone.

A big part of this has been figuring out when something isn't working and devising alternative solutions to better engage someone. I'm definitely someone who likes facts, though in lots of these moments there's "what's right" and then there's "what works in the moment" to facilitate and connect.

One of the biggest challenges has been witnessing the decline and variability that can come in the span of just a month for people living with dementia. There was a gentleman I had come to know at one of our memory care sites, and while I still had extremely warm interactions with him, it was striking to see the change over such a short period. I had to adapt in the moment when I realized my interaction with him wasn't going to be like what I fondly remembered.

Many people visiting doctors, often in unfortunate or urgent situations, are elderly or have disabilities. These are populations that can be intimidating to work with, and I'm glad to have gained this experience at Nature Connection so I can better serve any and all of my patients as I pursue a career in healthcare.



Interested in Volunteering?

Love nature and connecting with people? We're looking for volunteers to join our programs with seniors & elders throughout the community.

Join us in creating moments of curiosity, conversation, and connection!



The most important thing is a willingness to engage with people. We'll provide the training and match you with a monthly program site in your community.

Scan the QR code below and visit our website to learn more and fill out an application to get the conversation started.



nature-connection.org/volunteer



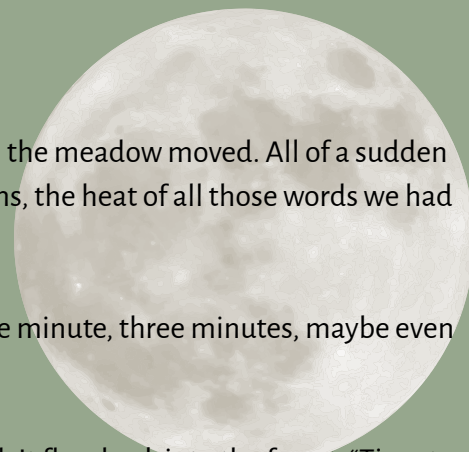
Excerpt from *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen

The owl's call came closer, from high up in the trees on the edge of the meadow. Nothing in the meadow moved. All of a sudden an owl shadow, lifted off and flew right over us. We watched silently with heat in our mouths, the heat of all those words we had not spoken. The shadow hooted again.

Pa turned on his big flashlight and caught the owl just as it was landing on a branch. For one minute, three minutes, maybe even a hundred minutes, we stared at one another.

Then the owl pumped its great wings and lifted off the branch like a shadow without sound. It flew back into the forest. "Time to go home," Pa said to me. I knew then I could talk, I could even laugh out loud. But I was a shadow as we walked home.

When you go owling you don't need words or warm or anything but hope. That's what Pa says. The kind of hope that flies on silent wings under a shining Owl Moon.



Inspire

Annual Fundraiser
Connections Between People & Nature

OCTOBER

THURSDAY **22** 5:30-8:30 PM

2026

at



82 Main St. Maynard, MA

Support The Nature Connection's annual fundraiser and *inspire your own connection to nature*. Together, we'll celebrate how nature supports the human spirit through therapeutic nature programs for people with limited access to the outdoors.



Scan code for tickets, info, and auction. Or visit:
givebutter.com/c/natureconnectioninspire2026

The Food



KUSH
MODERN MEDITERRANEAN



Dinner is catered by **Chef Saba Wahid Duffy** award-winning, **Food Network** champion and co-owner of KUSH modern Mediterranean cuisine in Somerville. With homemade apple crisp for dessert!

The Fun

Use your **complimentary drink ticket** at Sanctuaries full bar and lounge before being one of the first to see **The Nature Connection's new video launch** AND to be inspired by **Eyes on Owls'** live owl presentation.



The Cause

Bid high and bid often in the online auction on items like handyman services, mixology classes, Patagonia gear, and more to help raise critical funds. Register now and start your bidding from home!



Thank you to our FY 2026 Donors

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors, foundations, business sponsors, volunteers, and in-kind supporters who have contributed to The Nature Connection's efforts over this past year.

Support received between August 1, 2025-July 31, 2026

Individuals

\$5,000+

Carol Hani and Ian Agranat
April Noell Lyndon
Jeremy Pool

\$1,000-\$4,999

Anonymous (1)
Joanne Arnaud
Martha Dolben
Wade and Aliza Edwards
Merewyn and Alan Harrington
Edward Koenig
Wendy Leiserson
Andrea and David Meyers
Kate and Erin Moran
Nancy Stillman
Hilary Taylor
Rebecca and Henry Weil
Sophie Wadsworth and Bruce Morgan
Carol Zell and Robert Andrews

\$500-\$999

Mary Ann Gore
Sarah and Tom Lemaire
Margaret Marsh
Jonathan and Jessie Panek
Penny Rodday
Chris and Pito Salas
Nancy and Tom Shepherd
Angie Ward
Sarah Ward
Mary Jane Wuensch
Henrietta Yelle and Chris Engstrom

\$250-\$499

Cassie Arnaud and Jonathan Case
Judith Aronstein
Arra and Susan Avakian
Lisa Bell
Ellie Bemis
Sarah Brukilacchio
Carol Burnes
DJ Byrne
Marcia and Allan Chertok
Amelia Dehner
Patricia Dranoff
Deborah Gerstein
Henry and Lee Harrison
Judy Hedenberg

Polly Hernandez
Leah Kelly
Stephen Kirkland and Theodora Martin
Carol Krieger
Karl and Sarah Kussin
Valerie Lessa
Kati Oates
Grace O'Donnell
Annmarie Pinta
Bradley Richardson and Marylou Sudders
Kathleen Rusilas
Jack and Judy Scotnicki
John and Sue Stillman
Sarah and Jesse Tucker

\$249 and below

Anonymous Donor Accounts
Frann Addison and Rob Gogan
Jenn and Charlie Albanese
Rick Arnaud
Lisa Bailey
Kayla Bain
Anne and David Ball
Alexander Bartol
David Bearg and Katy Blair
Tina and Steven Bloom
Dianne and Robert Brooks
Lisa Brukilacchio
Bethany Burke
Alycia Busz
T. Taylor Cahill
Janice Carter
Joan Clement
Karen Cohen
Catherine Collins
Anne and Mary Coneeney
Susan Curl
Aiyana and Michael Currie
Autumn Cutting
Beth Johnson Cutting
Shona and Lincoln Daley
Susan Dearborn
Kate Dehaven
Nancy Dickson
Dan and Terry Doherty
Karen Dooley
Jane and Dennis Downey
Julie Dunn
Bram Eagan
Mike Eagan
Gladys and Douglas Edwards

Jennifer Emerson
Benjamin Evans
Barbara Feehrer
Harriet Feinberg
Helen Fitts
Kathleen Fleming
Nora Frank and Walter Houseman
Janna Frelich
Harriet Gabbert
Mark Gailus
Dr. and Mrs. Robert M. Glorioso
Paul Goldberg
Jean Goldsberry
Amy Graves and Anne Cowie
Terry Greene and Lizbeth Radcliffe
Jennifer Griffith
Deborah Harding
Lisa Harsip
Aneta Hazen
Thomas Healey
Hans Heilman and Nancy Shephard
Barbara Hoffman
Nick Holmes
Sidney Holmes
Robin Humes
Frank Infante
Meg Ito
Miriam Jaffe
Margo and David Jay
Pam Joshi
Michael Judelson
Richard Kaiser
Elda Kalivioti
Lynn Kaufman
Beth Kelly
Alyson Kennedy
Margot Kimball
Josey Kirkland
David Kleinschmidt
and Katherine Olney
Nancy Kuziemski

Elizabeth Lassen
Ellen Leigh
Joanne Lemire
Barbara and Nate Liskov
Peter LoConte
Susan MacDougall
Natalie MacKnight
Jean Maestre and James McAuliffe
Joseph and Patti Malloy
Jeanette and Robert Mastromattei
Wendy Matusovich
Brian McCormick
Amanda McMahan
Stacy McWalter
Roberta Messina
Sandra Mika
Dorcas Miller
Melissa Mills
Hanna Moog
Peter Mosbach
John Nackey
Nadezhda Nedelcheva
Anna Nerenberg
Jeanne and Kenneth Nevard
Susan Oman and Michael Decker
Margaret Paquette
Karen Pfautz
Joni Pillow
Hope Raymond
Jennifer Reilly
Nevene Reynolds





Mary Rogers
 Alan and Suzanne Rom
 Samantha Rose
 Jean Rosenberg
 Debra Kramer Rutter
 Amy Schwartz
 Emily Schadler
 Karen Scott
 Nola Sheffer
 Scott Simpson
 Smith Family Charitable Fund
 Beverly Smith
 David Smith
 Cindy Sorensen
 Emily Speagle
 Elaine Spencer
 Lynne and Jeff Stone
 Rosemary Sullivan
 Susan Ticknor
 Steve Tobin and Nancy Hartle
 Rosanne Trolan
 Vitor Ungari
 Jason Walsh
 Ruth and Norm Weeks
 Jeanne and Steven Wentzell
 Julia Whiteneck
 Robin Wilkerson and Steve Atlas
 Sonya Wirtanen

Foundations

Concord Carlisle Foundation
 Cummings Foundation
 The Fieldstone Foundation
 The Gould Charitable Foundation
 Massachusetts Cultural Council
 Universal Participation Initiative (MCC)
 ReDirect
 Red Lion Foundation

2025 Inspire Sponsors

Brown & Brown, PC
 Eastern Bank
 Mary Ann Gore
 Karl and Sarah Kussin
 April Noell Lydon
 Middlesex Savings Bank
 Sullivan Tire and Auto
 Sophie Wadsworth Consulting, LLC
 Sarah Ward
 West Acton Villageworks

Thank
 you!

End of Fiscal Year Financial Report From Executive Director

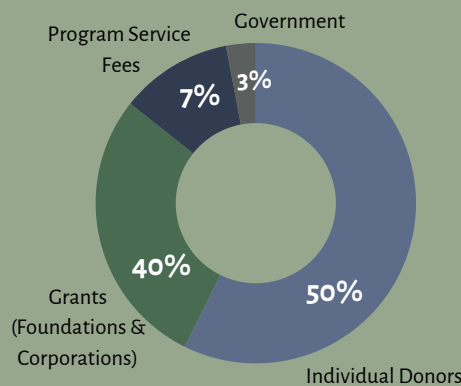
The Nature Connection ended this fiscal year in an extraordinarily strong financial position, with approximately \$136,000 in net income. There is a lot of story behind that number. Most exciting to me is that **50% of our revenue came from individual donors; people who chose to invest in this work and in the people and communities we serve.** We also saw a modest increase in program revenue, another encouraging sign as we continue to strengthen and diversify the ways our work is supported.

Our unusually large surplus this year also reflects a significant investment made specifically to help The Nature Connection grow. Rather than simply funding more programs today, that investment gives us some breathing room to build the community of support that can sustain more programs tomorrow. Over the coming year, we expect to draw on this funding as an on-ramp: investing in development and communications, introducing more people to The Nature Connection, and growing the base of supporters who will carry this work forward. As Sonya, our Development and Communications Coordinator, recently put it, "Once people know about us, of course they want to support us - who wouldn't? But first, we need to let them know we're here."

And there is so much more we are ready to do. The demand, ideas, partnerships, and opportunities are already here; our task now is to build the financial support that allows us to meet them sustainably.

Supporting The Nature Connection is, at its heart, an investment in the human spirit: in connection, curiosity, belonging, and the opportunity to experience ourselves as part of the natural world. That is no small thing. I am thrilled to see The Nature Connection continuing to build the financial strength that will allow us to back and bring that experience to many more people in the years ahead.

FY26 Revenue: \$484,414

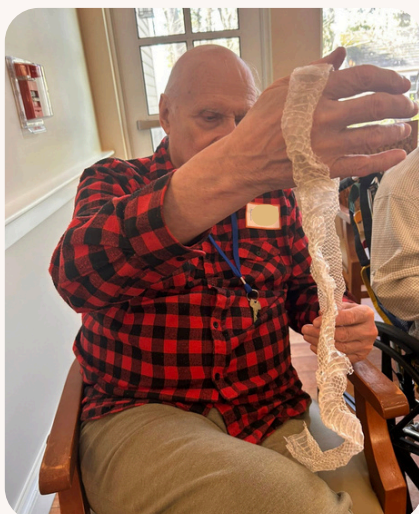


FY26 Expense: \$348,366

Programs (68%): \$236,962
 Development (26%): \$91,540
 Management & Administration (6%): \$19,863

FY26 Net Income: \$136,047

**Preliminary results for all FY26 data*



Natural Material Spotlight

Letting the Grass Grow

By Monica Kucich, Program Coordinator

One day in early August, I was walking my dog through an open field, part mowed and part left wild, where the tall grasses had gone to seed. I looked closer. I noticed just how different they were: bushy golden tails, dark spirals winding up central shafts, spiky green ovals, and delicate sprays that looked almost like tiny fireworks. Naturally, I began picking them as I walked, and by the time I reached my car, I had collected seven different varieties and found the inspiration for my next program.

We're often asked where our program materials come from. The truth is, after a while at The Nature Connection, it becomes difficult to venture outside without coming back with pockets and hands full of treasures to share. A walk through a field is a gold mine.

Those grasses became the inspiration for my Field and Farm program, celebrating the abundance of late summer. Some participants shared my delight in nature's diversity, while others simply enjoyed the tickly feeling of grass moving over their skin. An unremarkable sprig of crabgrass took one participant back to childhood as she twirled it between her fingers. Timothy grass caught the eye of another participant. He had grown up on a farm and knew it like an old friend.

So many of the grasses we see are cropped short by weekly mowing, never given the chance to show their true colors. And yet, there is so much beauty in the carefree abundance of mature grasses. The wheat, corn, and oats we eat all come from grasses that have been cultivated over time to favor their seeds over their blades. That abundance doesn't go unnoticed by the many animals that enjoy it, too.

Grasshoppers, mice, and birds all share in the bounty.

Left undisturbed, fields become vibrant ecosystems, supporting a diversity of life that a closely cropped lawn never could. We got to explore that ecosystem together during this magical moment before the wind, rain, and snow do their work and begin the cycle again. See you next summer, grasses! We've enjoyed your golden beauty and extravagant fare.



PO Box 155 | Concord, MA 01742

978-369-2585

www.nature-connection.org



**Supporting the human spirit by
offering and building
connections between people and
the natural world since 1983.**