

THE CONNECTION

with Nature  with People  with Care

Summer 2026 Newsletter



Growing Wings

Over several weeks this spring, teens followed the life cycle of painted lady butterflies from tiny caterpillars to chrysalis and, eventually, butterfly. These teens live at a therapeutic residential program for teenage girls with emotional and behavioral challenges, mental health disorders, and complex trauma histories.

The journey began with a program focused on observing caterpillars and exploring what participants noticed, what they knew, and what they were curious about. Through close observation, conversation, and designing their own butterfly wings, participants engaged in scientific inquiry, imaginative inquiry, and creative expression.

After watching the caterpillars crawl around their little grow cups for a while, K reflected, entirely unprompted, **"Sometimes I feel like this little caterpillar, so small, trying to go places but confined in this tiny space that I can't get out of."**



(our program coordinator,) Autumn responded, "And it still has what it needs to grow and become a butterfly."

K smiled and replied, "Yeah, and then I can spread my wings and fly!"

Over the following weeks, the group continued checking on the caterpillars as they grew, formed chrysalides, and finally emerged as butterflies.

And when the time came, K helped release one of the painted ladies outdoors, watching as it opened its wings and flew away. (Scan the QR code below to watch the butterfly release.)

Nature doesn't provide answers for us, but it often gives us a way to explore life's questions. Sometimes those moments emerge from a planned activity. Other times, they arrive unexpectedly while watching a caterpillar inch its way across a container.

Watch the butterfly release:





Dear Friends,

As this newsletter arrives, we find ourselves at the summer solstice. While often celebrated for abundance, it is also a season of growth that requires patience and trust. The planting has been done. The tending continues. Tending of our gardens, ourselves, and our communities.

In pulling this newsletter together, I love how the stories kept coming back not to what we brought to a program, but to what participants brought to the experience. A shell sparked a conversation about cultural traditions. A collection of rocks opened the door to stories from a lifetime of craftsmanship. A caterpillar prompted a personal reflection.

At The Nature Connection, nature serves as the intermediary. The shell, the stone, and the caterpillar are important, but not because they are the whole story. They create the conditions for curiosity, conversation, and connection. We create opportunities for people to bring their own experiences, knowledge, memories, and perspectives into the interaction.

As you read through these stories, I hope you'll notice the many ways participants shape our programs. Together, they remind us that community is built not only through shared experiences, but through the willingness to share a piece of ourselves with one another.



Wishing you a joyful summer,
Best,

Taylor

Taylor Eagan, Executive Director



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The Things We Carry

By Sonya Wirtanen



Most resident rooms in assisted living facilities average about 500 square feet. With limited space available, the items people choose to keep close often carry special meaning.

During a recent rocks and minerals program, I met “T”, a retired stone cutter who quickly identified many of the specimens we passed around the room. As he shared stories from his career, he asked if I would like to see some of his own rocks.

A few minutes later, he returned from his room with two large round stones resting carefully on the shelf of his walker. Each sat on a wooden stand and had been shaped and polished. “They are nearly perfect spheres,” he said proudly.

As T shared stories from his years working with stone, I couldn't help but think about the significance of the objects we choose to keep close. In a room where space is limited, these stones had earned their place.

Rocks don't often become the center of conversation. Yet on that day, a handful of minerals opened the door to stories, skills, and experiences that might otherwise have remained tucked away in T's room. What appeared to be simple stones were, for him, reminders of a lifetime spent learning, traveling, creating, and working with the natural world.



Volunteer Spotlight

Susan Curll



Susan has been volunteering with The Nature Connection for the past year and has become a dedicated and compassionate member of our volunteer team. Susan is a semi-retired philanthropist who also volunteers with her church, Meals on Wheels, and Art For All. When not lending a helping hand, Susan enjoys traveling, dancing, and trying new things.

What first inspired you to volunteer with The Nature Connection?

I came by one of your open houses and loved the sound of your work.

Why does connecting with nature in this way feel important to you personally?

I love being in nature, the change of seasons and animals. I spent my early years learning my multiplication tables on the way to Cambridge with my dad to visit his dad who was in a nursing home. I saw first hand how connection of any kind makes a difference. I also used to enjoy bringing my golden retriever to visit nursing homes.

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

I was at a facility in Ayer with the bird puppet that one of our interns made and a woman shared her story of doing marionette shows when she was younger. She really enjoyed the puppet! I recall hearing a family member nearby say that their spouse had transferred from another program site and one of the questions for the new program site was, “Does the Nature Connection visit?” thankfully the answer was, yes!

What do you wish people knew about The Nature Connection?

What a difference we make, everyone loves to see us coming. And the extreme dedication and passion of the staff, interns and volunteers.

Favorite Quote:

“Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.”



Strengthening Our Roots

As The Nature Connection continues to grow, we are making intentional investments in the systems and relationships that support our work. While our programs are what participants experience directly, there is also important work happening behind the scenes to ensure those programs remain accessible, sustainable, and available for years to come.



As part of this commitment, we are expanding our development and outreach efforts and are excited to welcome Rick Arnaud to the team. His work will help strengthen connections with donors, community partners, and supporters while building the resources needed to sustain and grow our mission.

Rick is a strategic advancement professional with 20+ years of experience in the field. His connection to nature runs deep, as most of his professional career has been in the environmental nonprofit arena. A Concord native, with strong ties to the Mount Washington Valley as well, he is thrilled to “be back home” to raise awareness of and funds for The Nature Connection.

“Even before coming here, I had personal experience of the importance of treating people with dementia with compassion and the value in providing them joyful moments. Now, after both observing and participating in The Nature Connection’s inspiring programs, I’m honored and excited to play a part in improving people’s lives, even if it’s only for one hour at a time. Our work matters – everyone deserves an opportunity to enjoy and experience nature, and we provide that basic human right, intentionally and organically.”

Two Rivers

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thy summer voice, Musketaquit,
Repeats the music of the rain;
But sweeter rivers pulsing flit
Through thee, as thou through the Concord Plain.
Thou in thy narrow banks art pent:
The stream I love unbounded goes
Through flood and sea and firmament;
Through light, through life, it forward flows.
I see the inundation sweet,
I hear the spending of the steam
Through years, through men, through Nature fleet,
Through love and thought, through power and dream.
Musketaquit, a goblin strong,
Of shard and flint makes jewels gay;
They lose their grief who hear his song,
And where he winds is the day of day.
So forth and brighter fares my stream,—
Who drink it shall not thirst again;
No darkness taints its equal gleam,
And ages drop in it like rain.

Annual Fundraiser Inspire

Connections Between People & Nature

SAVE THE DATE

10.22.2026

at Sanctuary in Maynard, MA

Enjoy animals, dinner, drinks, live music, and an auction, all in support of creating meaningful experiences that *inspire* connection with nature, with people, with care.



*Tickets go on sale
in September*



Natural Material Spotlight

The Wonder of Whelk

You may recognize a whelk shell as the one people hold to their ear to "hear the ocean," but have you ever wondered where they come from? Whelks are predatory sea snails found along the eastern seaboard, growing up to 8 inches long. Their shells are made of calcium carbonate and grow with them throughout their lives.

This season, we've been exploring one of the whelk's most fascinating features: their eggs. Female whelks lay fertilized eggs in long strands of quarter-sized capsules attached to the seafloor. After about nine months of development, tiny whelks emerge from these protective cases and begin life in the ocean.

When the empty egg cases wash ashore, they form long, coiled strands known as "mermaid's necklaces". During programs, participants are encouraged to shake these dried capsules and discover the tiny whelk shells hidden inside. It's a wonderful sensory and natural history experience that reveals how closely a baby whelk resembles its adult form.

One of the most memorable moments so far this season came when a participant from Haiti shared another way whelk shells can be used. As participants explored the shells, he explained that in his community, large whelk shells are turned into horns for communication. He showed us exactly where a small hole would need to be drilled and demonstrated how to position the shell and blow into it. What began as a conversation about marine life quickly became an opportunity for cultural sharing, reminding us that every program is shaped not only by the materials we bring, but by the knowledge and experiences participants bring with them.

If you find yourself on a beach this summer, take time to explore the treasures at your feet. A shell, a strand of egg cases, or a weathered piece of seaweed can open the door to questions, discoveries, and even unexpected conversations.



Legacy Giving

A planned gift is a powerful way to support the future of The Nature Connection while creating a lasting legacy of connection, curiosity, and care for others.

Whether through a will, trust, retirement account, or beneficiary designation on donor advised funds, your gift can help ensure that nature-based opportunities for learning, reflection, and wellbeing remain available for generations to come.

Learn more about planned giving on our website:
nature-connection.org/planned-giving



Summer Interns

Join us in welcoming program interns:

Ginjer Doherty a public health masters candidate from Boston University, **Jennifer Gao** a clinical psychology major from Tufts University, **Irini Eliopoulos** (right) a public health & health sciences major from UMass Amherst, **Catie Corkery** (left) a psychology major and environmental Health Minor major from Colby College, **Alex Hennighausen** (center) a biology major from University of Washington, and animal care intern: **Ari Afar**, a Biology major at Brandeis University.



This amazing group of six interns play a vital role at The Nature Connection, helping us expand our reach while bringing fresh ideas, energy, and enthusiasm to our programs. Through hands-on experience in therapeutic programming, animal care, and community engagement, undergraduate and graduate students gain valuable professional skills while supporting our mission.

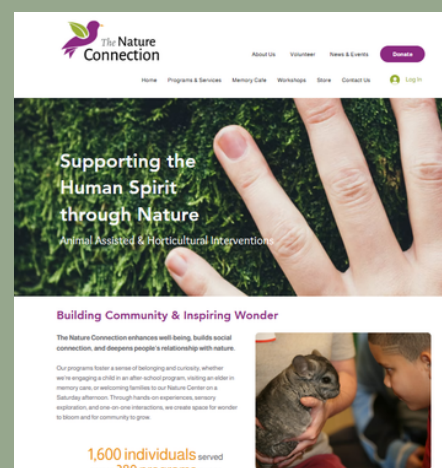
We are grateful for the partnerships that make these opportunities possible and are excited to welcome each of them to our team this summer.

New Nature Connection Website!

Explore our refreshed website to learn about programs, upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and ways to support The Nature Connection.

Same website address, new look:

www.nature-connection.org



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