

# EDITORIAL

## What the Environment Needs Is a Good Audience



### Ecoviews

by  
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As my granddaughter, Allison, began her first year of college at the end of summer, I had the same thought most parents and grandparents have.

"Where did the time go, and was it well spent?"

One thinks of cherished childhood memories. For me, some environmental moments come to mind, as she proved to be an audience that appreciates the offerings of nature and the outdoors.

A gratifying experience in environmental education is taking a child for a stroll in the woods, alongside a stream, or even in your backyard to look for interesting objects of na-

ture. Endless adventures are waiting to unfold.

When she was 2, we went into the backyard after a rain shower. She was delighted with the little gray spider I showed her tucked away in a hole in a tree. Birds aplenty fluttered around in the trees, and she cocked her head at the whistling sound made by the wings of a departing pair of mourning doves.

We found a gray shrew beneath a board I had placed in the backyard to lure small creatures. She was fascinated as the shrew scampered through one of its tunnels, the top exposed after the board was lifted. I'm not sure as a 2-year-old she appreciated my explanation that shrews are our smallest mammals, have voracious appetites for insects and grubs, and that this kind has saliva that can paralyze prey when it bites it.

Nonetheless, Allison was an excellent audience, eager for whatever we might discover next. Her favorite treat

involved trees. Playing the grade school prank, I bumped a medium-size tree while she was under it. She was at first startled and then delighted.

"It's raining, Grandpa. The sun is shining, but the tree is raining."

Perhaps I should have been able to predict that before we left the yard that day, we would have to make every tree in the yard "rain."

Another adventure commenced when one of our neighborhood screech owls laid eggs in a box mounted on an oak tree in the backyard. The excitement of having these nocturnal flying predators around never wanes. Their whinnying sound during mating season is one of the eeriest yet most beautiful sounds to be heard at night. (I still wonder why we call them "screech" owls.)

Those owls presented another opportunity to have an outdoor adventure when they had babies. I scaled the ladder with Allison. She marveled

at the pair of downy white puffballs that sat in the box, staring back at us with big yellow eyes that were getting larger each day. She also noted that there sure were "a lot of redbird feathers in the box."

Once when we were taking our dog for a walk, I anticipated that the high point would be when the dog decided a squirrel he saw was taunting him. It can be fun to watch, and the squirrel always wins. We, however, were rewarded by something different. We found a snapping turtle. What could make a routine dog-walking trip on a Saturday morning more enjoyable for a child? Finding a turtle is always exciting. Asking the obvious question, why was a snapping turtle taking a stroll through the woods a half mile from the nearest pond, added an intellectual dimension to the adventure. Allison was thrilled, as was I, when she later proclaimed the turtle discovery to have

been the most exciting event of the day.

Good audiences are essential if we are to develop and maintain the attitude that the natural world is the most exciting entertainment we have. We need enthusiastic audiences to help sustain our environment. A good start is to help children find as much excitement outdoors as they do in front of TVs, cell phones and computers. I knew I was on the right path 15 years ago when I heard, "Let's go outside and make the trees rain again, Grandpa."

Time well spent.

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