



Connecting Children to the Natural World

Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

Annual Report

DECEMBER 2019 — 2020

It will come as little surprise that 2020 has been the most difficult year in the Nature Museum's six decade history; we know it's been a challenging year for you, too. But just as nature connects and sustains all living things, the connections that exist in our Nature Museum community provide the resilience, strength, and the mutual support needed to overcome adversity. We are very grateful to you for being part of it.

In so many ways the pandemic has validated and deepened our fundamental educational philosophy of nature based learning and outdoor play. Of this we are sure, beyond supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of our students in the here and now, these formative experiences instill in them lifelong emotional connections to their natural surroundings. The connections and bonds they develop run deep and will propagate the ideals of environmental stewardship across generations to come.

In this year we have been repeatedly tested, but we have responded with a spirit of resilience. Through your support, that is what we will continue to do – during this crisis and into the future. Please read this brief report and then, if you're able, make a donation using the enclosed envelope. Your gift will help ensure that no matter what challenges the Nature Museum faces moving forward, we will still be able to do what we do best – provide outstanding environmental education opportunities for children.



Sincerely,

Tom Bregman, Executive Director
Steve Bywater, Board Chair



“So many mixed feelings today at Sam’s first day of camp – first day of ANYTHING, in four months. I feel incredibly grateful that his school worked so hard and reconfigured all their normal plans and routines, in order to open in a manner that feels as safe as anything possibly can right now.

“I had talked through all of it with him ahead of time but still, at the last moment, he got scared. It’s hard not to these days, to just feel scared without even really being scared of anything particular; and more than that, to feel like this is not the ‘forward’ we want to move into. To feel like there’s nothing good to walk towards.

“The camp director was so kind to Sam, and her familiar face was a relief to him, even behind the mask. She was something good to walk towards. And it made me grateful that in all of this, in all the huge new things and tiny new things we will have to learn to do and make into habit, we still have the things that truly matter. We have familiar eyes that are smiling over the mask, and familiar voices just a tiny bit muffled. We have sunshine and sand and the shade of a big tree. We have each other, and wherever this new ‘forward’ leads us, we’ll go together.”

—Ally Paull, HHNM Member

Time to Adapt

We teach children about adaptability every day at the Nature Museum, but this year, our Environmental Educators were called upon to put those concepts into practice themselves as COVID-19 forced them to make changes to everything they do. Luckily, when faced with reopening education programs this summer under complex new guidelines and safety requirements they were undaunted.

“We know from experience that children are happiest, most engaged, and naturally curious when they are outside,” says Director of Education Jenny Brinker. “Using place-based curriculum and creative solutions we moved as much of our teaching practices outside as possible, where the children were given the opportunity to safely learn, explore, and play while immersed in nature.”

Summer camp was the first test of our Environmental Educators’ ability to adapt. While many camps across the country decided to remain closed this summer, switching to a fully outdoor model with fewer children in “pods” that were never allowed to mix allowed us to successfully run ours.

When school reopened in the fall, we changed again. With no students scheduled to visit the property for field trips and in-school programs out of the question, our educators launched the “Home School Naturalist” program, which provides weekly educational and social enrichment for remote and hybrid learners. The success of this program has been a bright spot in otherwise bleak times.

No matter what challenges lie ahead, we are prepared to



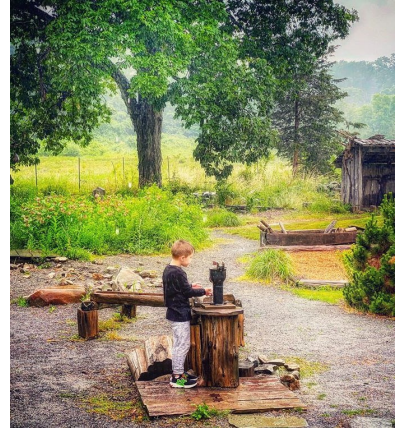
Time to grow

The Young Naturalist Preschool has always favored outdoor exploration and play, but this year that teaching philosophy has taken on new meaning, as Preschool Director Kerri Hunter explains,

“This year, we've shifted our program mainly outdoors. We still do our curriculum, but the focus of our school day is on as much time for self-directed play as possible. It feels especially important for children to have fallow time, now. How do they possibly integrate all that's happening around them otherwise? How do we hope to keep their development healthy, both physically and emotionally, without the space and time to play? And so we are giving them as much as we possibly can - as much space, and time, as they need without walls.”

Classes are slightly smaller due to the pandemic, but the children are doing well. Though fewer in number — 89 Young Naturalists this year — they seem to be getting just as much out of the time they spend with us as children did in previous years.

As always, we are grateful to the families who entrust us with the care of their children and to the children themselves whose joy and laughter reminds us of the healing power of time spent in nature.



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Time to Change

Throughout the early days of the pandemic, when the rest of the staff was furloughed or had transitioned to working from home, the team at the Wildlife Education Center (WEC) continued to provide high quality care to our animal ambassadors. Emily Nestlerode, the Director of the WEC describes those days as “tough and a little lonely,” but adds, “Staff showed up every single day for our animals, no matter what was going on in the world, and I'm proud of that.”

In addition to every day care, the WEC staff has focused on updating habitats of long-term residents and increasing the amount of enrichment options the animals are given to keep them healthy and content. We look forward to welcoming guests back to the WEC as soon as it is safe to do so.



Thank you!

Thank you for your generous support of nature education and play at the Nature Museum! Your donations make possible an array of hands-on, experiential education programs that help children and their families establish a meaningful connection to the natural world.

The shortened format of this years' Annual Report, made necessary by the fiscal realities of the pandemic, means we are unable to list our many members and supporters. Please visit our website to view the complete list.



Financial statement

The information shown below reflects Fiscal Year 20, which ran from March 1 2019 – February 29, 2020.

Operating Expenses

Education Program Costs	\$849,748	81%
Administration	\$146,870	14%
Fundraising	\$52,454	5%
Total Operating Expenses	\$1,049,071	100%

Operating Revenue

Admissions/Sales/Program Fees	\$564,132	54%
Fundraising Events	\$147,020	14%
Grants & Corporate Sponsorships	\$85,152	8%
Membership Donations	\$139,202	13%
Other Donations	\$113,735	11%
Total Operating Revenue	\$1,049,071	100%

