



Learn about our nature-based programming at: www.creamaine.org

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Cathance River Education Alliance
PO Box 187
Topsham, Maine
04086



SPRING 2022

What's Inside: Important Insects | Headstart Collaboration | and more!

Are You as Smart as a Second Grader?

CREA School Programs

This spring, several hundred elementary students are learning with CREA through guided exploration of the natural world. Fourth graders trace how the Ecology Center gets power from the sun, and measure wind, light, and water energy with special tools. Fifth graders discover how the Earth's systems (hydrosphere, biosphere, geosphere, and atmosphere) interact to create the unique environment that is the Preserve.

Second graders cap off a year-long study of animals by exploring CREA's skulls, animal pelts, mounts, and other animal artifacts to assess what makes each group of animals unique. They also compare pond and forest habitats at the Preserve to see how the animals living in these habitats are different. Youngsters leave these sessions bubbling with enthusiasm and a better understanding of the natural world. What is the state of your nature knowledge? Are you as smart as a second grader?



SAVE THE DATE - 2022 ANNUAL MEETING

Monday, June 27, 2022 | Rain date: June 28, 2022

4:30 - 5:30 pm

On the deck at 179 Neptune Drive - Brunswick, ME

Join us for a round up of the past year, a look at school and camp programs, and election of officers. Then we'll adjourn to Flight Deck for beer and pizza.



Restoring the Little Things That Run the World

© Doug Tallamy

Insects get a bad rap. Yes, there are some annoying biting and stinging ones, but most insects don't bother us if we don't bother them. As it turns out, they happen to be essential to the health of the biosphere - the living parts of the earth. Truly, everything is connected. Insects pollinate most of our flowering plants, they are the foundation of the food web that produces the 'charismatic megafauna' (birds, amphibians, mammals, etc) we love to see in our landscapes, they consume dead plant and animal matter (thank goodness, so we're not neck high in debris), and more. We really can't improve on the intricate complexity of natural systems as they evolved over millions of years, and insects are an integral part of those systems.

CREA's audience learned all about this in a riveting and information-packed talk by nationally-known

author and professor Doug Tallamy in March. Over 250 people registered for the live (virtual) presentation, and over 160 have since watched the recording on our website.

We strongly encourage you to watch Doug's presentation or read our summary of his main points on the News page of our website and related resources. His incredible photos of birds bringing caterpillars to their young reveal the essential connection between birds and insects. Most of the photos are from his own 10-acre property. After Doug and his wife re-vegetated the former hayfield with native trees and plants, it now supports over 1,000 species of moths and 60 species of breeding birds!

The best part of Doug's presentation is his positive message that we can make a real

difference in bolstering insect populations. He gives us tangible, achievable actions we can take. See below for those actions, but you should watch him deliver the message. It will transform you into an insect-appreciating warrior!

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Cut your lawn in half
- Plant for specialist bees
- Remove invasive plants
- Use keystone plants (like oaks)
- Landscape for caterpillars
- Reduce light pollution
- Oppose mosquito spraying
- Minimize use of insecticides
- Don't use bug zappers



Our mission is to deepen ecological awareness through nature-based learning among students, educators, and the public; to promote environmental stewardship; and to foster wise use of the Cathance River Nature Preserve.

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A Message from Our Leadership



Ellen Bennett,
Board Chair



Caroline Eliot,
Executive Director

This year, we celebrated Earth Day on April 22 by co-hosting a ‘clean-up’ at Brunswick Landing with Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust. But in our world, the reality is, every day is Earth Day. Every day, we work to help you connect with the natural world.

This winter, we got people of all ages outdoors at full moon lantern walks, solstice gatherings, and snowshoe outings. We got hands dirty planting native seeds and making seed bombs at the Ecology Center. We offered tangible ways to take action on climate in our mid-winter climate series. And we hosted presentations about everything from beavers to bugs (okay, ‘insects’) - curating topics that inform and inspire a growing appreciation for the immeasurable value of the natural world to us and future generations.

This programming stirred an uptick in membership so we must be doing something right! To top that, CREA camp filled within 45 minutes of opening camp registration, and we’re delighted to be planning another fun-packed, nature-filled summer for our youngsters.

We are grateful for the partnerships that make our work possible. Especially you, our members, who are the bedrock upon which our programs sit. In this newsletter, you’ll read about our new pilot project with Midcoast Headstart and some of our spring work with longstanding school district partners. We’re also grateful for our longstanding association with Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, with whom we developed the climate series and regularly co-host events.

Just as the verdant shoots pushing out of branches and soil this spring rely on an intricate network of systems to make their growth possible, we need all of our partners to do this work. Thank you for your ongoing support and we hope you get lots of time outside this summer!

“Doug’s talk was fabulous... Thanks again for the great amount of time, energy, enthusiasm and intelligence that you are putting into each one of these programs. Even those of us who have been thinking about this subject for many years learned a great deal and have new directions to go in our gardens and yards.”

Susan Weems, Participant



CREA Forms Partnership with Midcoast Headstart

In December of 2020, CREA was awarded a \$5,000 grant from the Frances Dewing Foundation, funding a pilot program to help preschool staff learn how to guide preschoolers in structured and unstructured play outside, ideally, in a natural setting. COVID delayed the start of the project because preschools were significantly disrupted by frequent closures and staff shortages, but it finally got underway in recent months.

CREA Educators Sarah Rodgers and Carey Truebe were delighted to engage Midcoast Maine Community Action for this project, working with three Headstart classrooms in Bath and Brunswick. They modeled how to lead outdoor activities that include movement (essential for this age group) and tactile activities using natural materials (good for fine motor skills). They hosted Animal Olympics, prompting the children to move and jump like various animals. After this active session, the teacher reported that her preschool boys – who usually never nap – all napped that day!

They introduced the Mystery Bag (“Can you tell what it is by feeling it?”), compared different types of evergreen boughs (“Can you take off just one needle?”), and dissected acorns. The power of nature to enthrall was evident – one child who initially struggled to pay attention or

follow directions spent 20 minutes dissecting his acorn, and found tiny white worms inside!

Sarah and Carey also led a two-hour workshop on outdoor learning for the preschool teachers and an administrator, sharing strategies for managing youngsters outdoors and engaging them in activities that are both fun and developmentally beneficial. All agreed that building more outdoor time into their week would be very good for the youngsters.

CREA Board Member Sue Reed, recently retired from the Maine Department of Education as its Early Childhood Specialist, supported this effort with valuable

“Very young children are natural explorers and always curious about the world around them. Getting them into nature early in their lives is key to all aspects of their development and important to nurturing lifelong respect for the outdoor environment.”

Sue Reed
CREA Board Member
and retired early childhood specialist



insights regarding the needs of children in this critical developmental stage. For example, based on her recommendation, one movement activity was a running game modeled after Red Light/Green Light, except it was called Fast Wind/Slow Wind/Wind Stops! Games that give preschoolers a chance to practice ‘freezing’ helps them learn how to control their bodies and their behavior.

This project is complemented by another, funded by the Alfred M. Senter Fund, in which CREA Camp Director Jenny Mueller is leading nature-based story sessions - including related movement activities and crafts - at the same three Headstart locations. This partnership reinforces the importance of outdoor, nature-based play to the youngest among us – so get the youngsters in your life outdoors, exploring and discovering!

THANK YOU BUSINESS SUPPORTERS & GRANTORS



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