

SAGATAGAN

# Seasons

THE NEWSLETTER OF SAINT JOHN'S


  
Arboretum
   
SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY AND UNIVERSITY

Spring 2011

## Happy Trees—The Joy of Art

Bryan Sieh

I used to watch Bob Ross on a regular basis as a child. There was something I loved about the “happy little trees” he painted on *The Joy of Painting* on public television. Whether it was a north woods cabin scene, or a breathtaking mountain vista, Bob painted landscapes that cast himself and his viewers into that organic existence. Bob Ross captivated me, and he always projected a confidence that told me I could be an artist too.

Over the years, art has been present in my life in many ways, and I’ve endeavored to learn several different mediums. At times, this presence has been fleeting and other times enduring. This year, it has truly rebounded in an amazing way.

I knew returning to Saint John’s as an environmental education fellow

would be a completely different experience than my college years. Although I was nervous about regressing to a chapter of my life I thought I had closed, I was inspired by the opportunity to spend my time in one of the most beautiful places I know, the Saint John’s Arboretum. I made a commitment to myself to grow personally, and having art in my life was part of that promise.

I recently enrolled in a series of Arboretum classes on watercolor painting taught by Jim Poff. Although I have a deep passion for art, especially Bob Ross, painting and drawing are two forms of art that have always challenged me. In fact, my technique might be compared to chicken scratch, or as Bob Ross might say, I make a lot of “happy mistakes.” However, with the help of Jim, and a little inspir-

ation from Bob, I took on the challenge of painting. Although I am not happy with every piece, I do have moments of brightness.

Painting promotes keen observation and has guided me to a hyperawareness of detail and color. Snow is no longer just white. When you look closely, the color of snow changes from snowy-white to reflect hues of blue and shadows of gray.

Painting can also connect us intimately with an object, and the phenomenon of life is revealed through the observation of minute details.

Those observation skills are equally critical in my pursuit of digital photography. It started innocently enough last summer. On weekly prairie walks with the staff, I would take the Arboretum digital camera and document each plant we talked about. While those early photos weren’t always beautiful, they served another important purpose. The photos allowed me to observe and learn about the plants I had seen in a way I couldn’t get out of even the best plant guides.

Photography has even given me an additional push to get outside even more often. I progressed to a higher quality point and shoot camera, and have been able to get a handful of really great images that make me proud. This summer I was lucky enough to capture my first wild orchids: a Pink lady’s slipper in Michigan and a Showy lady’s slipper in Minnesota. I am now an enthusiastic orchid fan and am keeping my eyes on a set of Yellow lady’s slippers right here in

Joy, continued on page 2

Bryan Sieh



Photographing a Gray-headed coneflower has helped Bryan learn the flower’s name. Practicing photography, painting, and drawing has helped him learn to see the whole flower.

Joy, continued from page 1

the Arboretum.

Whether learning about a few new plants, capturing that perfect new photo for the wall, or simply understanding the power of observation, art has a purpose in my life. Although I may not become the next Bob Ross, able to create a masterpiece during the course of a thirty-minute television show, art has the ability to influence lives and inspire change. We can learn something new about ourselves and each other each time we try again.

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*Bryan Sieh is the 2010-11 environmental education fellow. While awaiting spring, he has been pursuing a new passion for making pottery, while enhancing his photography skills with his new digital camera.*

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## Loon Update

Jenny Kutter

Last fall, we told you about a U.S. Geological Survey study of Common loons in the Midwest. We're excited to be a part of a study in which the goal is to improve regional and national conservation efforts for the Minnesota state bird.

The male loon breeding on Lake Sagatagan at Saint John's was captured and tagged last summer to be part of this study. "Big John," so named because of his large size, is being monitored with other loons to gain a better understanding of the movement of loons during migrations and at winter ranges.

As we gear up for spring, we'll be eagerly watching the progress of the loons' spring migration. Last I checked, "Big John" was still swimming in the Gulf of Mexico, but he'll be heading north soon.

More information and a link to the study's interactive map are available on our Web site.

## For the Birds: Spring Feeding Tips

- Increase your feeding of **millet mix**. The small seeds attract a variety of birds, including mourning doves and indigo buntings.
- **Niger thistle seeds** are popular for American goldfinches and redpolls.
- Cardinals, blue jays, finches, and chickadees will stop for fresh **black oil sunflower seeds** and **cardinal mixes**.
- Hummingbird or **nectar feeders** are often visited by warblers and orioles as well as hummingbirds. Tray feeders with **grape jelly**, **bananas**, or **orange halves** will also attract these sweet-loving birds.
- A shallow pool, bird bath, or other **source of water** is essential for migrating birds.
- **Keep feeders clean!** Rotate food, mix older and newer seeds, and clean feeders to prevent mold.
- **Protect birds from predators** by placing your feeders at least five feet from the ground. Feeders near brush or shrubs provide a safe hideout for cautious birds like cardinals.

Visit the MN DNR Web site for more tips:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/birdfeeding/spring/index.html>



Liam Colfell Dwyer

An iconic species, *Gavia immer*, or the Common loon, is a favorite summer resident in Minnesota. Through a U.S.G.S. study, we can track the migration of one of last summer's breeding male loons at Saint John's as he makes his spring journey from the Gulf of Mexico back to Minnesota.

# Wild About Birds

Courtney Schirmers

I wouldn't consider myself "wild" about birds (I'm more of a plant person, myself). Yet, on the day of the Avon Hills conference, my favorite annual Arboretum event, I was excited to learn about all the reasons why I should be from the energetic and bird-passionate man giving the presentation, "Wild About Songbirds."

I'm no birding expert, so when Bill Meierhofer, from the Waite Park Wild About Birds store, began talking I was soon overwhelmed, my hand cramping as I quickly flung new and exciting bird terminology onto my red spiral-bound notebook. With what seemed like pages of "birding lingo" literally flying through my head (pun definitely intended), I suddenly became aware of how little I know about Minnesota songbirds and how to attract them.

I needed to start by first understanding what species of songbirds are actually out there. Not having a bird feeder outside my dormitory window, I thought back to my childhood and the many visits to my grandparents' house in Avon, Minn. Staring out their back window at the feeder-adorned maple trees, my grandparents would fill me in on the week's recent visitors.

I remember chickadees and juncos at my grandparents' feeders, but what of all the other beautifully playful birds? All year round, we enjoy the regular company of the cardinals, chickadees, and nuthatches but eagerly await the return of our summer friends, the orioles, bluebirds, flycatchers, phoebes, warblers, swallows, and many others.

If you are looking to attract a variety of birds to your backyard, the best way to start is investing in multiple feeders. Providing



Calbe Hymer

Interested in learning more about the songbirds that come to your feeders in spring? Join the Arboretum at our annual Spring Birding Day and Plant Sale on Saturday, May 7.

different platforms and feeders decreases competition between species, such as cardinals and blue jays, and greatly increases the number of bird species present. What seemed a somewhat ludicrous idea to me at first (I mean, birds aren't that picky, right?) turns out to be one of the most important fundamentals for bird attraction.

Similar to people, different birds prefer different kinds of foods. Some, like the American goldfinch, prefer niger seeds, while others like the Northern cardinal seem partial to black-oil sunflower seeds and shelled nuts. Bill Meierhofer has observed that about half of the birds seem to prefer shelled nuts. A word of caution: keep your feeders clean and fresh! We don't like stale or moldy food, why should the birds?

Feeder placement is also quite important. A height of five feet off the ground should protect birds from most leaping felines, and small shrubbery and fresh water help birds feel comfortable and safe. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources even suggests making a small brush pile close by if your feeders are out in the open; the

protective coverage gives birds a quick hideout if large raptors or other predators are present. This is key for attracting cardinals because they are apparently one of the most cautious birds, often not advancing to a feeder if safe cover is not close in sight.

Knowing what I know now, I liken catering to songbirds to catering to my younger brother and me at the dinner table. We want a clean table, plenty of elbow room, a variety of fresh, tasty food, and of course, a setting that would require us to share as little as possible! Armed with this knowledge, I look forward to backyards that are soon filled with the color and beautiful songs of spring. Happy birding!

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*Courtney Schirmers is a sophomore biology and environmental studies double major at the College of Saint Benedict. Birds may not be her first passion, but as an Arboretum student naturalist she's demonstrated she's already pretty wild about most all things in nature.*

# Morel Fever

John Miller

I grew up on a farm near Waseca in southern Minnesota with parents who were nature lovers. The arrival of spring each year meant Sunday afternoon outings to the local woods to admire the beauty of the spring flowers and to pick a bouquet to bring home.

On these trips my siblings and I learned, sometimes the hard way, how to identify poison ivy, nettles, briars, and burrs while also learning the names of a few of the beauties like Jack-in-the-pulpit, Showy orchid, and Lady slipper. On one of these adventures, I remember clearly dad calling us over to where he was standing among knee-high greenery exclaiming about something he had found. He had parted the dense plants with a forked stick, and there on the forest floor was my first look at a few of those beautiful golden crinkly mushrooms, the morels!

It was an exciting moment for us young'uns. We mimicked dad and oohed and ahhed at this new sight. Right then and there I caught the dreaded disease, morel fever. When we got home and each got a "little taste" of the morels fried in butter, the disease set in full force.

Fortunately, morel fever is a seasonal thing, like pollen related allergies. Why else would one start spending beautiful sunny spring days crawling through wild raspberry thickets and patches of poison ivy to find perhaps one, two, or a half dozen thumb-sized fungi (and that's on a nice day)?

One could argue that it isn't morel fever that causes us to do crazy things in the early spring, but the results of cabin fever that set in during the long Minnesota winter. Whatever the cause, I know from many years of experience that when the last remnant of the snow on the north side of the house has melted

and the lilac bushes are starting to bud in early May, I get a very strong urge to search for the elusive morel.

Novice hunters can easily be frustrated when learning where and how to begin. That is a very difficult question for someone like me, who has a bad case of the fever, to answer. Some morel hunters have taken their secrets to the grave rather than tell of their honey-holes. Even my father only broke down and told me the location of his latest "hot-spot" in his last year of life. I was finally entrusted with his secret

Minnesota, but not around here. Other common sites include old apple orchards, under pine trees, poplar trees, elm trees, and ash trees.

There is an upside to having caught this disease early in life. It means that every spring I find myself out in the woods, listening, watching, and admiring as nature puts on an awesome display of creativity. I've had the privilege of seeing newborn fawns lying still in hiding, sand-hill cranes leaping into flight nearby, eaglets flapping their wings getting ready to fly, and oh,



John Miller

Hunting for morel mushrooms, *Morchella esculenta*, is a favorite spring activity. Wherever you go to hunt, make sure you have permission before picking mushrooms or any other plants from the site! Picking mushrooms from the Arboretum is not allowed without direct permission.

because at age 89 he could no longer hike that far to find them himself.

Without divulging the exact location of the site three miles east of Lake Wobegon where I once found a nice collection, I can still give you a few tips for hunting morels. I've had the most luck over the years in places that are shaded, relatively moist, near dead elm trees. The mushrooms are usually hidden amidst the foliage and are often accompanied by poison ivy. The last couple years I have also started looking under live ash trees and have had some luck in southern

the flowers! What joy to see the new life emerge after our long winters! And, if I am lucky, I find a few of those delicious morels too.

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*John Miller is a CSB/SJU professor of computer science. The night he finished writing this he had a dream about finding a patch of morels more than a foot tall. When he took a friend to pick them, they found large fake paper ones someone had put out there to trick him. Beware morel fever, even in dreams!*

# Dante Visits the Arboretum

The epic poem, the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, completed in 1320, chronicles the author's self-imposed banishment from Florence through his allegorical journey into *inferno*, *purgatorio*, and *paradiso*. Forest imagery woven throughout the *Divine Comedy* brought to mind a fictional meeting between Author and Arboretum...

Tom Haeg

**Sagatagan Seasons:** Dante, how did you enjoy the afternoon walking our Arboretum?

**Dante Alighieri:** "I strayed into a dark forest, and the right path appeared not anywhere.... This wood, so harsh, dismal and wild, that fear at thought of it strikes now into my breast. So bitter it is, death is scarce bitterer."

**SS:** Modern literature does romanticize the forest as enchanted, but dark, no right path, harsh, dismal, wild, fear, death – why?

**DA:** My story began, let's face it, in the portal to hell. I was lost, confused, falsely accused of crimes, and banished from my home in Firenze. Not pleasant. For us, there was no "light" forest, no right path, no direction.

**DA:** You see, the ancients associated light with the sun, and the sun with the gods. Our Savior revealed himself as the Light of the World. So, in the forest, where there is no light, we experience hell, or, the absence of the Light of the World. Forests were very foreboding places – no inns, no rest stops, no interpretive centers. It was wild.

**SS:** I see. And the animals in this *inferno* forest: the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf?

**DA:** Symbols representing incontinence, violence, and fraud. They work to prevent me from scaling the hill out of the forest to reach the light in *paradiso*. But, while going through hell, I kept my faith, "... as little flowers, that by chill of night are closed, prick up their stems drooping and bent, and to the early ray [of light] reopen white."

**SS:** But aren't trees, thus forests, creatures of God?

**DA:** Certainly, "Whoever robs the tree or snaps off pieces, offends against God by a blasphemous act; it was created holy for his use."

**SS:** 14<sup>th</sup> century conservation!

**DA:** We did have a sense of land stewardship in those days as well.

**SS:** Hmm, I never made that direct connection before.

**DA:** As my guide Virgil and I exit *purgatorio*, we approach the Tree of Law, "made bare of flower and leaf on branches every one." But, with hope I also wrote, "so is preserved the seed of all good things to come."

**SS:** I understand. So, despite challenges, you were able to retain a vision of heaven.

**DA:** Yes, I met Saints Peter, John, and James in *paradiso*, as a foretaste of Christ's glory in the transfiguration and wrote, "behold some flower of the apple-spray which makes the angels for its thirst athirst and makes in heaven perpetual marriage-day."

**SS:** And this tree is likened to the tree in the Garden of Eden?

**DA:** "Know now, my son, that not the tree's mere taste was in itself cause of so hard exile, but only the ordered limit over past." In other words, Adam's sin was not gluttony, there is a special place in hell for the gluttonous, but disobedience caused by pride.

**SS:** So, if I understand you, your moral is to respect nature as a manifestation of God's gift.

**DA:** You could say that.

**SS:** Now, on the other side, you depart from our traditional image hell for something a bit, well, colder.

**DA:** Yes. The *inferno*'s abyss is a frozen tundra with no forest or trees. It is the last ring of the circle, Giudecca, the lowest point in hell reserved for Lucifer. Here, the inhabitants are "frozen spirits in the glass," glass like that of your Lake Sagatagan in the winter. There is no light, "when the nights draw down on our hemisphere...and for the wind that blew, I shrank behind." Here, Lucifer is the "Emperor of the kingdom of despair...mid-breast emerged out of the ice." As if he was in, what do you call?

**SS:** An ice-fishing hole!

**DA:** Yes. And ice-fishing, now, that's what I call hell!

[They laugh.]

**SS:** So, did you not enjoy our Arboretum?

**DA:** On the contrary. You see, the human condition, in need of redemption, must occasionally walk through a "wild" and "dark" forest. The divine is subtly revealed and contemplated in the solitude of a forest or barren lands. It is there that we will find who we are and who God is – Love.

**SS:** Anything we can add to the Arboretum?

**DA:** A leopard, lion, and a she-wolf?

[They laugh.]

**SS:** We'll talk to the Abbey about this.

[They laugh again and shake hands.]

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Tom Haeg (SJU '70) serves on the Arboretum Advisory Council. He reads the *Commedia* at least once a decade. Lucky for us, he visits the Arboretum far more often than that.

# Environmental Education—Back to Basics

Jana Graczyk

Children of the twenty-first century are subject to many rules, expectations, and constraints. Communication is often electronic, and their lives are tightly governed by schedules and routine. They may not know it, but they yearn to taste the freedom and environment that the Saint John's Arboretum encompasses.

Something magical happens when young students step into the soft prairie grasses or walk through the shadows cast on the damp ground under the large, beautiful trees in the Arboretum. The Arboretum brings many children into a world of unstructured exploration and gives them a space to think and learn.

One of the goals of Arboretum founder Father Paul Schwietz, OSB was to formalize the abbey's long tradition of land stewardship, education, and research. Fourteen years ago, the 2,740 acres of Saint John's Abbey land – including prairie, wetland, lake, oak savanna, and forest – was dedicated as a natural arboretum in order to do just that. Eleven years after the sudden loss of Fr. Paul, the Arboretum continues to grow and support his vision.

When the children have the opportunity to interact physically with nature, one can see their imaginations turn on – their curiosity takes over, and they become genuinely interested in what is all around them. On one freezing day in October, a classroom of young students was lead to a clearing in the forest to begin a "Bug Dig." They were now scientists, and using their scientific equipment, would investigate different insects and their habitats and food sources.

"We can't find any bugs," a frustrated and cold little scientist pointed out. Arboretum staff encouraged the class to think like bugs: *Where would you go if you were a cold bug?* The scientists continued their search, and when they started finding insects, they were very excited! They started asking questions about how bugs survive the winter, what they eat, and all about their lives. It was easy to tell that they had become completely engaged in



Richelle Cava

Thousands of students come to the Arboretum each year to explore and find answers to those ever-present scientific questions: *How?* and *Why?*

the natural world around them.

Last year the Arboretum served more than 6,500 public, private, and home school preK-12 grade students through both hands-on field trips and in-class curricula. The environmental education program is designed to expose children to outdoor experiences while enriching their understanding of the science and natural history of the world around them.

Arboretum staff works hard to make these trips valuable for the children by designing curricula to

comply with state education standards, using excellent environmental teaching supplies, offering teacher trainings, and most importantly providing a perfect environment for the most beneficial learning experience possible.

Of course every class that visits the Arboretum has a unique experience – the unpredictable nature of the outdoors can lend itself to some of the most valuable learning opportunities. Encountering science and other classroom elements where they occur in the world promotes active learning – the real life experience of stumbling upon an owl pellet, and learning about an owl's feeding habits and digestive process was one exciting adventure for a young second-grader and the rest of his classmates.

Allowing children to unplug from the technology controlling their lives and exposing them to the teachable moments that the natural world offers is as beautiful as it is beneficial. I've seen the impact a visit to the Arboretum has when a child turned to me ten minutes after getting off the bus and said, "This is the best day of my life." She had found a place to be free to let her curiosity and imagination lead her to discovery.

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*Jana Graczyk is an Arboretum student naturalist and a senior biology and Hispanic studies double major at the College of Saint Benedict. Just like the students she helps us teach, we have to ask: How? and Why? it is possible that she'll be graduating already this spring!*

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Minnesota Natural History 3rd Monday each month Lecture Series Feb.-Apr.

Free—Students (any age) & Arb members 6:30-8:00 p.m.  
\$5—Nonmembers, nonstudents

**March 21** Seeing Through the Lens, *Ken Bachofer*

**April 18** Capturing the Moment, *Tony Peroutky*

Interested in learning more about Minnesota's natural world? Join us each month during the school year for a lecture and discussion on a variety of natural history topics. This year's winter and spring lectures are a series of presentations by local nature photographers. Enjoy their beautiful images as the photographers share the stories and inspiration behind them.

## Maple Syrup Festivals Saturday, March 26 Saturday, April 2

\$10—Adult nonmembers/scouts \$1 off per person if you  
\$5—Child nonmembers/scouts pre-register by the Friday  
\$5—Adult Members before the festival you attend  
Free—Child Members (up to \$10, does not  
apply to scouts).

Join us for what has become our most popular event of the year! Sap collecting, syrup cooking, horse-drawn rides, demonstrations, and hot maple syrup sundaes await the whole family during this fun-filled event! Preregistration for families is preferred but not required. Preregistration for scout groups is required.

## Scout Days at the Maple Saturday, March 26 Syrup Festivals Saturday, April 2

\$10—Adults Pre-registration for  
\$5—Scouts and children (ages 4-17) scouts is required.  
Free—Children (ages 3 & under)

Bring your Boy and Girl Scouts to the Maple Syrup Festivals, and they can receive a "Saint John's Maple Syrup" patch! Participate in activities including sap collecting, syrup cooking, demonstrations, and hot maple syrup sundaes to earn your patch! Did your troop come last year? Join us again to get the new 2011 patch!

## Fruit at the Finish Triathlon

\$17 per person, early registration  
\$22 per person, late registration

**Saturday, April 30**

April 1-22  
April 23-30

"Orange you gonna do it? Give it all you ApriCOT!" Compete individually or in teams of three in this annual fruit-themed triathlon. Swim 0.75K, run 6K, and bike 23K in this event hosted by the Peer Resource Program, Outdoor Leadership Center, and Arboretum. Participants receive a t-shirt with this year's fruit-based slogan, and a pancake breakfast after the race! Check our Web site for more details.

## Spring Birding Day

\$12—Arboretum members  
\$16—Nonmembers  
Includes meals.

**Saturday, May 7**

5:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m., OR  
8:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.  
Pre-registration preferred.

Spend a morning hiking through the Arboretum woods with birders during peak migration. Early risers will be stunned by the abundance of birds active early in the day. Coffee and rolls will be served at 8:00 a.m., lunch and compilation of the bird lists at 12:00 p.m.

## 7th Annual Plant & Garden Tool Sale

**Saturday, May 7**

8:30 a.m.—12:00 p.m.  
Or until sold out!

Welcome spring by stocking up at our annual plant and garden tool sale. Arboretum members receive 50% off on all items. Memberships are available for purchase on the day of the sale.

## MN Master Naturalist Volunteer Training: Prairies & Potholes

\$200 per person

**Monday through Friday  
August 8—12**

9:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

The MN Master Naturalist program is akin to the Master Gardener program and is geared toward adults who are curious and enjoy learning about the natural world and sharing their knowledge with others. Complete a week-long 40-hour course at the Arboretum, studying natural history, environmental interpretation, and conservation stewardship on the prairie. For more information, visit the Arboretum Web site.

To volunteer, register, or get more information about Arboretum events, please call (320) 363-3163 or e-mail [arboretum@csbsju.edu](mailto:arboretum@csbsju.edu). Find us on the Web at [www.csbsju.edu/arboretum](http://www.csbsju.edu/arboretum)

### Arboretum Staff:

Thomas Kroll, *Director/Land Manager*  
Sarah Gainey, *Assistant Director/  
Environmental Education Coordinator*  
John O'Reilly, *Assistant Director/  
Environmental Education Coordinator*  
Jenny Kutter, *Department Coordinator*  
Bryan Sieh, *Environmental Education Fellow*  
Dan Vogel, *Forest Technician*

### Student Staff:

1 Office Assistant  
2 Land Laborers  
6 Student Naturalists  
14 Outdoor Leadership Center Staff  
16 Student Naturalist Aides  
30 Peer Resource Program Facilitators

### Arboretum Advisory Council:

Terri Barreiro	John Geissler	Bob Russell
John Benschoter	Tom Haeg	Stephen Saupe
Mike Connolly	Troy Knight	Tom Wicks
Scott Daninger	Glenn Miller	
Kari Dombrovski	Greg Miller, OSB	
Emily Franklin	Janette Monear	

# Seasons

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Arboretum

SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY AND UNIVERSITY

Spring 2011

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## Plant & Tool Sale

8:30 a.m.—Noon  
(or until sold out!)

## Saturday, May 7

- 5:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.
- 8:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m. OR
- 1:30 p.m. — 4:30 p.m.



## Spring Birding Day

**Saint John's Arboretum** encompasses the lakes, prairie, oak savannah, and woodland in the 2,740 acres surrounding Saint John's Abbey and University.

**Our Vision**  
Saint John's Arboretum celebrates the unique beauty and richness of God's creation in central Minnesota and fosters the Benedictine tradition of land stewardship, education, and environmental respect.

- Our Mission**
- Preserve native plant and wildlife communities of the Arboretum lands
  - Provide opportunities for education and research
  - Model practices of sustainable land use
  - Make accessible a natural environment that invites spiritual renewal

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