



Updates from the Trail: November 2023

Katie's Thoughts from the Trail: The Importance of Place-based Learning

This past month, the 4th graders from Eddy Elementary School had their annual fall visit at the Hay Conservation Center to become soil scientists and tree detectives for the day. In collaboration with Mass Audubon, BCT staff and volunteers led four small student groups on a hike through the woods. Students were excited to be out of the classroom and to experience the wonders of the forest using all of their senses from sight to touch to sound.

I had the chance to lead a group of students down the Rhododendron trail. As we emerged from the tunnel of Rhododendrons and into the Beech grove, I asked the students to take a look at what was above them. Immediately, the students were dazzled by the brilliant display of yellows and oranges from the Beech canopy against the bright blue sky. The students stood there in awe, mouths wide open, taking in that special moment with the trees. From that point on, the students were especially eager to learn more about the unique characteristics of the Beech trees from their smooth silvery bark to their saw-toothed simple leaves, to their broad yellow canopy swaying in the autumn air.



Students and chaperones admiring the Beech canopy.

After being introduced to basic tree characteristics, students took a closer look at the trees around them. By feeling the different textures of bark, smelling the differences between white pine and spruce needles, and seeing up close the differences between a black and white oak leaf, students were really able to share a personal connection with this part of the forest. This sense of place is so important when it comes to learning. The students' observations were insightful, and with guided questions, they were able to explore and genuinely question other aspects of the forest throughout the rest of our hike.



Students feeling the smooth bark of the Beech tree.

Upon our return to the school bus, in addition to begging to return to the Hay Conservation Center, students, teachers, and chaperones alike were all excited to share their newly learned knowledge with their fellow peers. I am certain that most of these kids will be dragging their parents outside to demonstrate their newly learned identification and deduction skills, which is fantastic. Brewster Conservation Trust and Mass Audubon hope to continue this tradition with Eddy Elementary and we encourage all to explore a favorite outdoor place in a new light. Take it all in: the sights up and down, the sounds, and smells. Developing this appreciation, a sense of wonder, for our natural spaces is key to personal stewardship and environmental responsibility.