

Outside classes help etch nature in children's minds

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Nature has that magical way with children — instilling a sense of wonder, inviting exploration and stimulating the curiosity of “how and why.”

Needless to say, the need for this is perhaps greater than it ever has been. Studies continue to show that early exposure to nature pays life-long benefits. Case studies document increased performance on testing, better health, moderation of aggressive behaviors and greater creativity and problem solving. Many area schools are now involved with programs and organizations that do take classes outside.

Sycamore Land Trust is contributing to this effort. The mission of Sycamore is to save land for future generations. The growth and successes of the trust continue to build. But the commitment does not stop with protecting the lands. Sycamore also invests in today's young generation, realizing that we are building a foundation for the future.

One of the notable foresights of Sycamore Land Trust was to initiate its Li'l Hikers program four years ago. The objective was to encourage families to bring their children at a very early age on nature hikes, which would teach the love for the out-of-doors. The program has been very rewarding and successful. Four to six hikes are held during the year in all seasons, with some of these on Sycamore Land Trust properties and some on other sites.

The most recent was at the T.C. Steele State Historic Site. Here, we not only experienced the first flush of fall color developing but were treated to an educational tour of the flowers, shrubs, trees and lily ponds. With the expertise of property manager and naturalist Andrea deTarnowsky, children were treated to collecting various nuts and cones, feeling bark and leaves, and participating in a special activity of creating their own art, drawing in black and white, then coloring and water brushing. Mr. Steele would have been proud to know that the very site where he was so inspired by nature still elicits that creative expression in children today.

Sycamore Land Trust will continue to be an active community partner in saving special places and investing in that next generation. Find out all about us at SycamoreLandTrust.org and consider joining our next Li'l Hikers activity on the website.

Carroll Ritter is environmental education coordinator with Sycamore Land Trust.



Caroline Patillo-Thomson loves the big red oak at T.C. Steele State Historic Site.



Li'l Hikers are intrigued with the lily pond at T.C. Steele State Historic Site.