

C Mass Audubon *Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts*

Connections

July–September 2016

A Newsletter for the Members of Mass Audubon

Celebrating 100 years of Wildlife Sanctuaries



Sam Jaffe's Metamorphosis

By Michael P. O'Connor

Long before he was the “Caterpillar Guy,” Sam Jaffe was a bug kid. And Jaffe largely credits Mass Audubon’s wildlife sanctuaries for his boyhood interest in insects, which has burgeoned into a successful career as a nature educator and ambassador for the outdoors.

“The sanctuaries provided context and background for so much of what I do,” says Jaffe, creator of The Caterpillar Lab, which encourages people, particularly youth, to connect with nature in their communities through live caterpillar educational programs and research initiatives.

As a child, his parents took him to Drumlin Farm in Lincoln. By the time he was 11 or 12, he was attending Wildwood overnight camp (then located in Gardner, MA).

“We would take a van from Wildwood to Lake Wampanoag Wildlife Sanctuary, where there was this huge field full of milkweed. That’s where I saw my first mantis fly, which resembles a mix of a praying mantis and a wasp,” recalls Jaffe, now 33. “It’s also where I met other people my age who were really curious about nature and invested in a similar way.”

Nowadays, Jaffe can also be found exploring Wachusett Meadow in Princeton. And he especially enjoys those sanctuaries where he conducts his programs, including the Museum of American Bird Art in Canton, which earlier this year hosted his “Life on the Leaf Edge” photography exhibit of astounding caterpillar images.

“To this day, I credit Mass Audubon for much of my growth,” says Jaffe. “Initially as a naturalist, but perhaps more important, as an educator aiming to engage other young people.”



The Path to Leadership in Lowell

While our wildlife sanctuaries have physical borders, the work each one does often extends far beyond those boundaries. Drumlin Farm’s outreach in Lowell is a good example.

In 2005 Drumlin Farm and the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust joined forces to offer after-school environmental programming in Lowell. As the partnership developed, our educators were able to reach more Lowell youth through a variety of programs including Spindle City Corps (SCC) summer program. Among the participants was Bora Poun.

Bora, whose family came to Lowell from Cambodia, always enjoyed being outside but knew little about conservation. “When they first brought us together, they asked ‘What does it mean to conserve?’” Bora told a group at the 2014 Land Trust Rally. “As a kid, I thought it meant going around hugging and watering trees.”

His involvement in SCC led to his becoming an inaugural member of the Lowell Leaders in Stewardship (LLS), a year-round after-school environmental education program that formed in 2014 thanks to funding from the Lowell Public Schools and the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s Youthreach Initiative.

As part of SCC and LLS, Bora often took the lead in the removal of non-native species, planting of flowers for

pollinators, and river stewardship. “Bora has always been a hard-working team member,” says Sally Farrow, Drumlin Farm’s Outreach Coordinator. “These programs provided Bora with the opportunity to develop his confidence and leadership skills, which enabled him to become an excellent teacher and role model for young students in Lowell.”

Today, Bora attends UMass Lowell and works for Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust as an after-school teacher and mentor to the next generation.

Bora concluded his speech at the Rally by saying: “Now when I am asked ‘What does it mean to conserve?’ I can finally say it’s about finding that fine balance between humans and nature and learning to get along.”

Thanks to Bora, more young students are following in his footsteps, serving to protect Lowell’s river and green spaces for future generations.



More Online!

Learn more about Drumlin Farm’s work in Lowell, and hear the LLS students speak at massaudubon.org/drumlin.