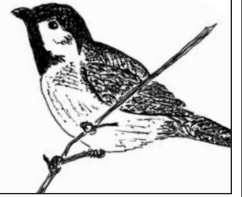




Fiddleheads and Feathers



The Newsletter of the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation, Ltd.

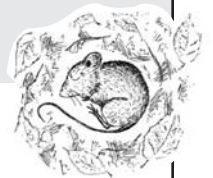
January 2011

Greetings *and* Happy Holidays!

It has been another good year for the MGAEF. Our endowment continues to inch back up and we were able to support all our programs doing our part to overcome "nature-deficit" disorder among children world-wide. Our focus continues to be both local and global. Locally, we maintain our strong support for environmental education, sending Clarence, Buffalo and Newark students to important outdoor experiences. Globally, we awarded two curriculum development grants this year to programs in Kenya. Both awards will enable broad impacts on multiple schools. This is the 15th year of our Environmental Curriculum Grant program and the program continues to do good work all over the US and the world. Over the last 15 years, we have given 35 grants to teachers working in locations from upstate New York to overseas, including Bangladesh, Kenya and Chile. In each of these locations teachers and students have felt the touch of Melinda and her Foundation through our support of creative projects designed by innovative and inspiring teachers.

We realize that you get many worthy requests for donations, but please consider us when you make your charitable donations this year. Our funds go to directly benefit many projects both close to home in Clarence, Buffalo, Newark and Onondaga County, as well as worldwide. We thank you for your support and wish you the best in this new year.

Daniel Ardia, President



Clarence Nature Center Update

It is hard to believe that it was only about eight years ago that the Clarence Nature Center was only an idea in the minds of a few visionary individuals. At the time, the old Thunderbird Ridge Girl Scout Camp was shuttered and the natural area on the Onondaga Escarpment was not protected. Since then, the area has been transformed into a vibrant environmental education center and a critical protected natural area in the town of Clarence.

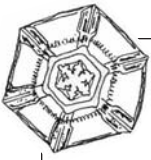
Over the eight years since inception, the education building itself has taken form with a cozy and efficient indoor space and the development of multiple trails. The Clarence School District uses the center in its teaching to provide students with a natural laboratory. Other community groups hold meetings here, and local citizens are able to walk the trails to explore nature and gain an appreciation for our natural environment.

The MGAEF provided initial support to the project by supporting the development of environmental curricula in the school district to enhance the learning possibility of the center. We are proud to continue to assist this wonderful venture in every way we can.



Clarence High School students explore the Clarence Nature Center (photo from Clarence School District)





From Primates to Ocean: 2010 Environmental Curriculum Award Winners



In 2010, we again had a difficult time deciding which inspiring proposals to fund. We eventually chose four projects to support, from over 90 proposals. They are:

Colobus Trust, Kenya

Our international focus continues with Colobus Trust, Kenya. The Colobus Trust is a small non-profit conservation organization designed to promote the conservation, preservation and protection of primates like the rare Angolan Colobus monkey (*Colobus angolensis palliatus*) and its coastal forest habitat in southern Kenya (www.colobustrust.org). This grass-roots group supports research, promotes sustainability, and works to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. Our funds will go to support their environmental education program by helping carry out 33 workshops each school year, each with approximately 30 children in attendance. Their innovative approach is to work first with eight-year olds and then to have them return when they are in secondary school. The Education Program concentrates on schools where The Colobus Trust focuses on its conservation activities, with the core education pool comprising of thirty three local and district schools. Our funds cover supplies, transportation, and staff.

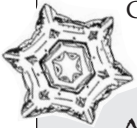
Newport Bay Eelgrass Project

An innovative program that integrates field and classroom is the Newport Bay Eelgrass Project run by the Orange County Coastkeepers in Costa Mesa, CA. This program with 6th-12th

grade students was conceived as a response to the need for more public awareness and research on eelgrass in Newport Bay. The project currently involves school field trips. Our funds will go to develop an in-class portion of the project, involving cultivating eelgrass in classrooms. The focus will be on integrating class and field activities in low-income schools. Our review committee thought the project was "a well thought-out, existing and successful project. MGAEF funding would help them create useful new elements in their curriculum and implementation and the program has a clear experimental component as well as an emphasis on observation and later stewardship."

Ecological Society for Eastern Africa

A second strong proposal from Kenya was from the Ecological Society for Eastern Africa in Nairobi. The ESEA is a scientific society founded by ecologists to improve information and outreach relating to ecology in Eastern Africa. ESEA seeks to promote sustainable development through wise use of the natural resources for prosperity and future of the people of Eastern Africa. They do this through high quality research, education, technological innovations, information and resource sharing. Our funds will support a project on biodiversity and its role in the environment. The proposed activities are broad and diverse and include tree planting, field excursions, fish-farming, nature walks, building a bird bath. Our committee liked "the focus on biodiversity, conservation, & creating young agents of change".



Africana Community Rehabilitation Organization trains youth to be environmental stewards with assistance from the MGAEF

In 2010, we provided support for an ecological training and environmental awareness project sponsored by the Africana Community Rehabilitation Organization (ACRO) based in Moshi, Tanzania. A training program on ecology and environmental conservation was launched at the school area. Students were taught with the necessary knowledge to help in the management of Kilombero river fishery ecosystem, which is not stable due to seasonal floods and unregulated human fishing activities. The objective of the training module was to build capacity of twelve ambassador students on ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. The program aims to address environmental issues in the fishing community with the view of avoiding environmental degradation and fish overexploitation along the Kilombero river. A study tour was made to fishing camps so that every student was able to learn about fish abundances through data collection

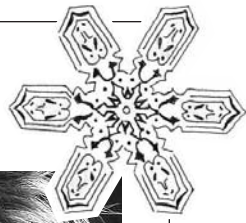
and identification, with the goal of understanding the importance of energy flow of the ecosystem, and hence the need to restore species diversity. Project Director, Simon William Mwakalinga, said the project was proceeding very well and that our support was instrumental to allow this recent expansion of their educational outreach. In particular, he found that other head teachers request the program in their schools because they said it was so interesting, educational and had positive impact. ACRO realizes that they need to establish a permanent program to expand our mission to other schools, to make conservation sustainable and achieve the Millennium Development Goal on poverty eradication through ecosystem approaches to fisheries management. MGAEF funds were instrumental to support the pilot program described here.



Fishing camp



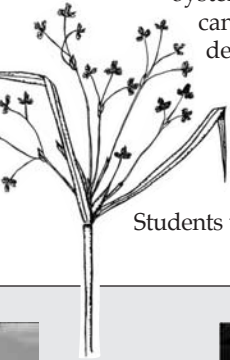
The elders who answered questions on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).



Scientific Study of Oysters on the York River

Our final award went to support the project, a Scientific Study of Oysters on the York River, in Williamsburg, VA. As part of the adolescent Montessori curriculum, students will explore oyster-raising in the York River in order to gain a practical understanding of environmental science as part of the school's aquaculture focus. The Williamsburg Montessori Middle School, housed at the Watermen's Museum in Yorktown, Virginia, will conduct a student-run oyster aquaculture experiment from its pier extending into the York River. Participants will learn responsible stewardship and develop an understanding of the vital role the oyster plays in the sustainability of the Chesapeake Bay. They will develop techniques to design and build interpretive exhibits for school classes and museum visitors, in order to take an active role in outreach and education at school and at public events in which environmental sustainability issues are featured. Students will learn how to grow oysters and will study the various conditions that

can affect their growth including temperature, depth and water clarity. Students will apply the scientific method in the "backyard" of the classroom and have a guiding role in developing the central research questions for the study. Students will predict outcomes, then compare and evaluate the actual results from their study. Students will then design exhibits and share their findings



Endangered Colobus Monkey

with the school groups and at public events over the course of the school year. We loved the focus on the scientific method and the community outreach aspects.



Ecological training and awareness raising at Lupiro primary school, Morogoro Tanzania.



Small mesh-sized fish catch landed at the beach



Students at the ACRO



Illegal small mesh-sized fishing gear which has the adverse effect to the ecosystem of the fishery.



Update from Camp Rushford

We would love to share the excitement of student feedback after receiving our support to attend DEC Conservation Education camps. Please enjoy the letter from Jonathan and the quotes from Ryan below! The last line of Jonathan's letter says it all... and we are very grateful to our donors for your support.



Campers at Camp Rushford and their camp counselors

My Week at Camp Rushford

Hello! My name is Jonathan Cybulski, and I live in Buffalo, New York. I am thirteen years old, and currently attend public school #91.

When I was at Camp Rushford, I had the most spectacular time! The camp was so beautiful and everyone was so friendly. I felt instantly at home. I participated in team building activities where I learned how to make a fire, and how to build a shelter. I really enjoyed the campout I went on. We made our own sleeping shelter out of trees, rope, and tarp. I was really happy that we slept outside under the stars for a night. My favorite part of camp was the bog! It was awesome, it was so squishy, and felt like I was walking on a water bed. It was so cool!

I would like to thank everyone at the foundation who made the trip possible, and all the staff members who made my stay great. I had an amazing time and it was really fun. I made so many wonderful memories from my week at camp Rushford that are sure to last a lifetime.



Jonathan Cybulski, from Buffalo Public School #1



Austin Geiger, a Clarence MS Student who attended Camp Rushford. Austin told us "It was amazing how much fun I had" and about how the camps "teach kids how to respect, help, and learn about the environment."

Please Help Us Save Trees!

If you no longer wish to receive our newsletter, please send an email to Suzanne Murphy at SGMurphy17@aol.com. Thank you!

