



# NaturePhile

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The Balsam Mountain Trust inspires people to be responsible stewards of the natural and cultural resources of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains through education and conservation leadership.

BMP member/owner, Tricia Dilick brought some friends by the Nature Center recently and got to experience one of the many amazing wonders of the natural world in residence at the Nature Center. In this case it was one of our bird of prey ambassadors, Cheyenne, our redbtail hawk.

Cheyenne flew for each member of Tricia's group. None of them had experienced this type of program so it was an exciting, and unexpected, adventure for them all.

The newly remodeled Nature Center is the place where your nature discovery education begins. Please come by and see us and, set up an outdoor adventure that will be to be memorable.



**In this issue:** [From the Trailhead:](#) An Eye on the Natural World and Why Your Help is So Important; [Education Mewsings:](#) Some Holiday Gift Ideas That Are Win-Wins; [AmeriCorps Update:](#) Monarchs and Kids and Fun!



## From the Trailhead:

By Michael Skinner, executive director

### An Eye on the Natural World and Why Your Help is So Important

It is so very easy to bring news of what transpires in the natural world—news of what many conservationists see as nothing but dire. Whether it's endangered species, climate change, geo-political drama-related conservation stories, etc., what I have trained myself to do is put things in perspective. After all, we can only do what we can do. For those of you who have followed the Trust during its lifetime (and for those who haven't but might be persuaded), you are surely aware that we have been a very responsible tenant on the Preserve. While it's certainly very easy to adopt a 'the-sky-is-falling' pretense, we have tried to be responsible purveyors of measured communication. And for those of you who have supported us financially, we think you agree with the way the Trust carries itself.

As we continue with the remodel of your Nature Center, we are trying to develop and create education/learning-inspired exhibits for all BMP members, and from the responses we've been getting, it seems we're on a good track.

I would like to now offer that the work we do has helped the Trust become a go-to organization—both with BMP members and their families, as well as a continuously developing group of program participants outside the Preserve. To that end, we are in our end-of-the-year fundraising mode and would like to ask each of you to consider giving generously to your Balsam Mountain Trust. We have stewarded the donations we have received from you in a responsible and strategic way over the years and will continue to do so. You can speak with any Trust staff person or any of the Trustees (most of whom are BMP owners/members) if you would like any more background on the Trust and the vital role it plays in conservation education for both BMP folks and the general public we serve. **Happy Holidays!**

BMP resident Rob Howard, center with white t-shirt, brought a gaggle of British friends to the Nature Center earlier this season to have a first-hand experience with some of the Trust's animal ambassadors (see Luna on the glove).

We hope we helped them have a brilliant experience 'across the pond', as it were.

Cheers to all!

Photo by M. Skinner





Michael took this shot of the December waning moon and Venus with a black walnut tree in the foreground. The night sky is often as amazing (if not more so) as the earthly wonders we have been provided. Looking into the heavens is certainly a way to consider how insignificant we are from a cosmological perspective and why we should do everything we can to care for the planet on which we live.

Photo by: Michael Skinner



## Education Mewsings: 'Wild' Care

By: Rose Wall, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

### Santa's Workshop Has Gone WILD! A Guide to Holiday Giving with Conservation in Mind

Wouldn't it be marvelous if the holiday gifts we purchased were not only meaningful to the people that receive them, but were gifts for wildlife and wild places as well? Check out our list of holiday gift ideas that are guaranteed to make everyone feel warm and fuzzy inside!

We've chosen the organizations below because they specialize in beautiful hand-crafted goods, yummys or other creative-fun gifts. Nearly every conservation organization sells an assortment of calendars, t-shirts, mugs, etc. to support their work. So, if there's an organization you love, head over to their website. And don't forget, backyard conservation matters too –bird or bat houses or a packet of milkweed seeds are great gifts for people that love enjoy seeing the beauty of nature in their own backyards.

#### SNOW LEOPARD TRUST

Collection includes: felted wool rugs, hot pads and coasters; hand-knitted hats and gloves, hand-embroidered napkins, cat toys and the cutest ornaments you've ever seen!

*\*On a personal note, I own the felted wool hot pads. They are thick, beautifully made and have held up through near daily use over the past ten years.*

*Makes a difference: This organization is the model for conservation commerce. They fund research and community conservation programs where snow leopards live.*

Shop here: <https://shop.snowleopard.org>



#### SNARES TO WARES

Collection includes: Wildlife sculptures made from repurposed snare wire

*Makes a difference: This project simultaneously transforms human lives and addresses the problem of wildlife poaching by empowering local Ugandan artisans to repurpose wire snares into sculptures of the wildlife that would otherwise fall victim to snaring.*

Shop here: <https://msusurplusstore.com/catalog/snares-to-wares/>



#### INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

Collection includes: Jewelry, clothing, books, prints, and more! I recommend selecting the fair trade products for hand-made jewelry and sculptures. I own the crane earrings pictured here.

*Makes a difference: Work worldwide to conserve all 15 species of cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. They provide knowledge, leadership, and inspiration to engage people in resolving threats to cranes and their diverse landscapes.*

Shop here: <http://www.craneshop.org/>



## GLASS BABY

Collection includes: hand-blown, 100% sustainable glass votives and drinking glasses  
Makes a difference: Partners with Conservation International to support work with the Namunyak Wildlife Conservancy and Kenya's Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, which provides a safe place for injured elephants to heal and a home for orphaned elephants affected by poaching and the ivory trade. 10% of sales from these signature votives are donated: "home," "silver lining" and "lucky penny"

Shop here: <https://www.glassybaby.com/search?keywords=conservation%20international>



## 4 OCEAN

Collection: bracelets made from recycled materials

Makes a difference: Every bracelet purchased funds the removal of 1 pound of trash from the ocean and coastlines. In less than two years, 4ocean has removed 2,197,798 pounds of trash from oceans and coastlines.

Shop here: <https://4ocean.com/collections/all-products>



## WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

Collection includes: a variety of gifts, but our favorite are the symbolic species adoptions that include a stuffed animal and certificate – great for young nature lovers!

Makes a difference: Mission to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

Shop here: <https://gifts.worldwildlife.org/gift-center/gifts/Species-Adoptions.aspx>



## BIRDS AND BEANS COFFEE

Makes a difference: Helps to save the 2,250 family farms in Latin America that they buy from. These farms, many of which have grown coffee for over 100 years, are amazing winter refuges for neo-tropical migratory birds. Bird friendly coffee farms are also key to anchoring viable local rural economies as well as creating micro-climates rich in biodiversity.

Shop here: <https://birdsandbeanscoffee.com/buycoffee/>



## ENDANGERED SPECIES CHOCOLATE

Makes a difference: 10% of their net profits are donated annually to support partners working to save endangered species. With over \$1.3 million generated in the past three years, each chocolate purchase adds up to big support that helps wildlife thrive.

Shop here: <http://www.chocolatebar.com/> or at most local grocery stores



Do you know of other great gifts we haven't included? Please let us know so we can include them next year.



## AmeriCorps Update: Marvelous Monarchs

By Eliza Hurst, AmeriCorps Service Member

Hello everyone. I can't believe that I have been at the Trust now for three months. I have visited four schools for our Adopt-a-School program, had a program at the REACH shelter and finished the second-grade Monarch Programs. Time flies when you are having fun! Speaking of flying, the birds aren't the only flying critters that have won my heart. I have become enthralled with monarchs. These small insects migrate from as far as Canada all the way to central Mexico (this is the equivalent of a human traversing the globe—twice). They spend the winter roosting on the oyamel fir trees. There are so many butterflies on the trees they turn them from green to orange. When it starts to warm back up, they mate, then begin a long journey back north. They lay eggs, eat tons of milkweed, metamorphose... and, well, you know the drill. But that generation will not make it back to Mexico. It will be three generations before another migration, but the butterflies still know exactly what to do. This is the stuff that blows my mind.

I have been incredibly fortunate as I have had the opportunity to share this amazing story with sixty second graders at Junaluska Elementary School and Cullowhee Valley School through our Monarch Program. We discuss life cycles, migration and conservation with the students over two classroom visits. The visits include crafts, games and stories. Each class receives monarch caterpillars to raise and release. My favorite part of the program is the Symbolic Migration through Journey North, a group that tracks seasonal migrations. Each class compiles a packet of student-designed life-size monarch butterflies, a class butterfly and a class picture that is sent to an elementary school in Mexico. When the butterflies start their journey north in the spring, our classrooms will receive a similar packet from the students in Mexico. This part is important to me because I feel it helps students start to realize the (global) magnitude of environmental issues. It might start in your backyard, but it seldom stops there.

As much as I love outreach, sometimes it has you wondering if the students and teachers are appreciating the programs. After all, I am just someone who comes into the classroom twice, sometimes with a new craft or fun critter. It really warmed my heart when a little girl ran over to hug me when I walked into the classroom. She announced, "It is my favorite day when you come to my class!" A teacher from Junaluska Elementary said "...amazing program! Great materials and games!" in her evaluation of our program. One hundred percent of the teachers agreed that it complimented the NC Science Standards and engaged the students. On top of that, the students demonstrated an understanding of monarch life-cycles and conservation in their assessments.

All in all, I am feeling incredibly fortunate to share what I am passionate about with these kids. It is pretty cool to be able to walk into a classroom as a stranger, but leave as someone who was able to have such an impact on how these kids interact with the natural world. I can't wait to see what the rest of my AmeriCorps term holds!

