

INSIDE: UNLOCKING A BAT CAVE MYSTERY / FORESTS UNDER SIEGE
AN EXPERIMENT IN SUSTAINABLE FISHING / JAGUARS ON THE MOVE

NATURE CONSERVANCY

SPRING 2009

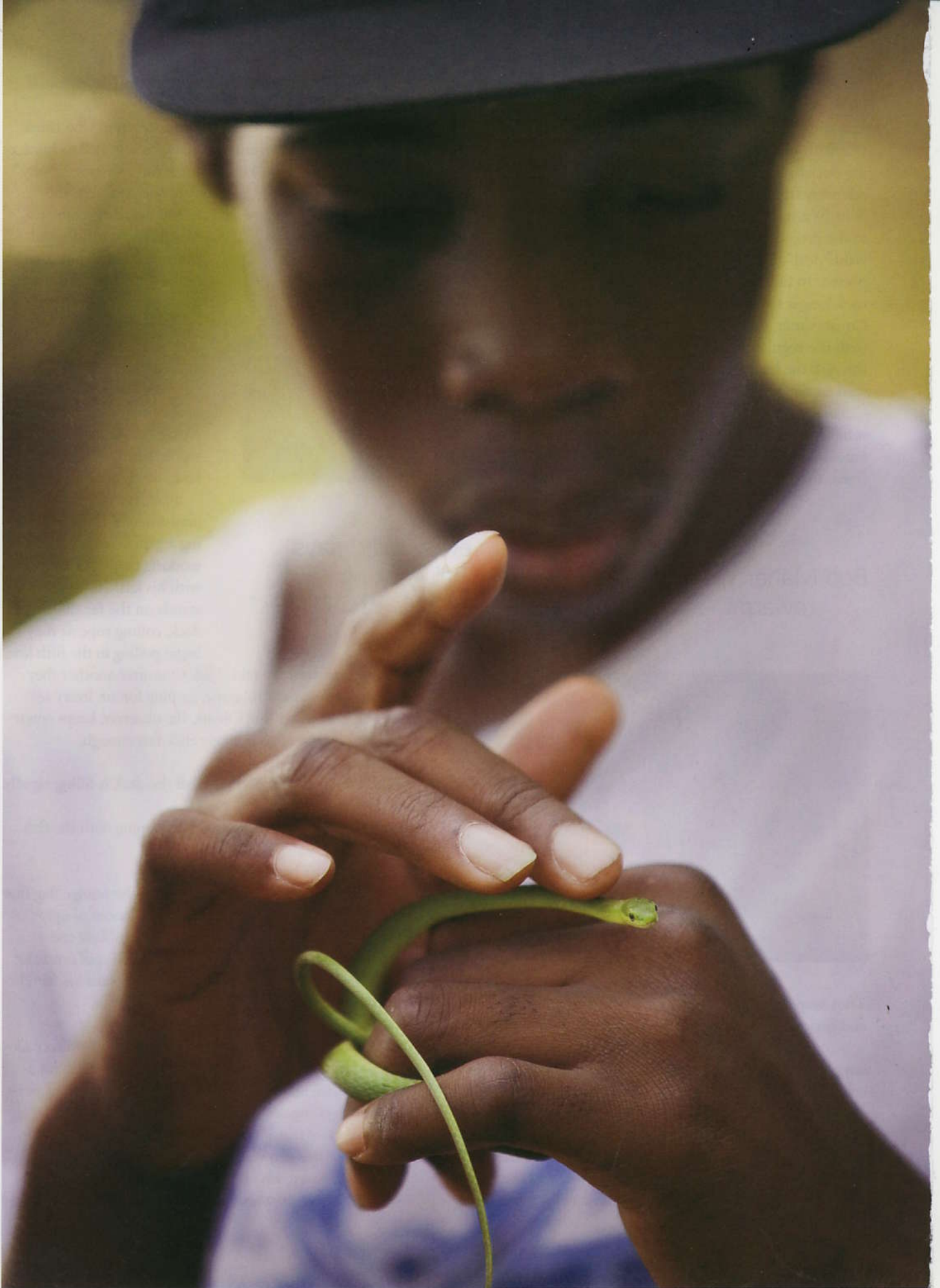


Back to Nature

GETTING KIDS OUT
OF THE CITY AND INTO THE
GREAT OUTDOORS

40019-2

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for 12 hours of work a week. The program's funding comes from Conservancy members and New York Foundation. A month outside school is their chance to have fun and... (text is mirrored and faint)

ONE SUMMER DAY IN 1971 IN YEAR OLD... (text is mirrored and faint)

BY AMY DEPUTY FOR CONSERVANCY'S JOURNAL 2004

field studies

EACH SUMMER, students from New York City abandon subways, televisions and iPods for a month of hands-on work at Conservancy preserves. Photographs by Amy Deputy
TEXT BY DANIELLE S. FURLICH

TOUCH: Allan holds a rough green snake found at the Maurice River Bluffs Preserve in southern New Jersey. "I was a tiny bit nervous," he says. "That's how the program really changed me: in my confidence."



ONE SUMMER DAY IN 1997, 16-YEAR-OLD Gladys Ruiz forced herself to walk into a colony of birds on a Long Island Nature Conservancy preserve to count chicks. She was terrified. "I had a pretty big phobia of birds," says the native of Manhattan's Lower East Side. "So to come across a colony of least terns where all they do is fly at your head—that was a little intense."

To protect herself, Ruiz carried a tall stick for the terns to attack. Still, one bird pecked Ruiz on the neck, and others defecated on her. "I freaked out," she says. A mentor helped her calm down and finish the job. The next summer Ruiz was back, a pioneer in the Conservancy's now 14-year-old Internship Program for City Youth, which provides students from the High School for Environmental Studies (HSES) in Manhattan and the Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment with month-long, paid internships at Conservancy preserves. Ruiz went on to become a ranger in Manhattan's Central Park and now runs the environmental grants program for Patagonia in the company's Portland, Oregon, store.

It was a transformation that got started when she entered HSES, the nation's first stand-alone high school to infuse environmental topics throughout the curriculum. The school, part of the New York City public school system, draws 1,500 students from all five city boroughs and all levels of academic achievement; 97 percent of its graduates go on to college. Such success is due in part to internship programs like that with the Conservancy, says Nia Rhodes Jackson, executive director of the nonprofit Friends of HSES, which organizes opportunities for students to get out into nature.

"The hands-on environmental activities that we offer to enrich the school curriculum help to keep it high interest," she says, "and help to keep kids enrolled and actively pursuing the next step."

In the summer of 2008, 30 students were divided into groups of three, matched with a mentor—usually a teacher—and sent out to work at Conservancy preserves across the Northeast. The students pulled invasive weeds, raised native plants, maintained trails, and surveyed dragonflies and piping plovers. Each group took time out to visit three colleges. For their effort, the interns were given a place to stay, a shared \$2,400 budget for food and expenses, and minimum wage

for 35 hours of work a week. The program's funding comes from Conservancy trustees and New York foundations.

A month outside stands in stark contrast to how much of America's youth spends its summer, according to recent studies. In 2008, Conservancy-funded research published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* found that people of all ages in the United States and other developed nations are spending far less time outdoors than ever before (see "Online Trend," autumn 2008). That's a worry, because most adults who feel compelled to protect the environment developed a connection to nature in their formative years, says Peter Kareiva, chief scientist for the Conservancy. "This alienation from nature is a growing—and troubling—trend worldwide," he says. Child advocacy expert Richard Louv's 2005 book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, links the lack of nature in the lives of youth to childhood trends such as the rises in obesity, attention-deficit disorders and depression.

In November 2008, the National Forum on Children and Nature—a collaboration of government, business and nonprofit leaders—endorsed the Internship Program for City Youth as one of 30 projects that creatively reconnect kids with nature. The forum is working to raise the visibility of such efforts, and the Conservancy hopes the attention will enable it to expand the program to other American cities.

Meanwhile, a new group of New York high school students is preparing for a summer outdoors. What they will learn—and do—no doubt will be as enlightening as the experiences of the interns last year. In pictures and their own words, here's how two groups spent their 2008 summer:

Shelly Chariah (17), Angelica Guerrerro (15) and Soojong Kim (15) joined HSES teacher Jenna Hunter at several preserves across New York state, including two weeks in the Adirondacks. Meanwhile, Allan Adams (17), Amit Bhowmick (18), Ersane John (17), Paul Knudsen (18), Victor Medina (18) and Jesus Melendez (17) joined mentors Andrew Brezinski and Phillip Davis at the Conservancy's Delaware Bayshores project in southern New Jersey.

Welcome to summer.

"I actually thought
I would not
like the country.
It was so quiet
out there ...

But actually, there was a lot
to do—more to do out
there than in the city ...

one house we
stayed in had a lake
in the back of it.

It had a hiking trail.

It had fishing.

You could never
say you
were bored,
even though
we didn't have TV."

—SHELLY

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SAVOR: Shelly identifies breakfast—later baked into muffins—while thinning trees at the Clintonville Pine Barrens Preserve.

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“I’ve been in the woods. I’ve been in the forest. That’s the stuff that gets people more aware. The visual effect of seeing a devastated forest is what really sparks that light bulb. That’s what the Conservancy internship did for me: It turned that light bulb on. And it has not gone out ever since because it is a fluorescent bulb.”
—VICTOR

DOCUMENT: Ersane, Amit, Paul and Jesus listen to instructions for their dragonfly survey (top, left to right). Victor stalks dragonflies on the wing (middle) and shows off a male Eastern pondhawk (bottom).

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MONITOR: Jesus holds tight on his way to check a nest of young osprey at Dennis Creek Fish and Wildlife Management Area.

“It was so beautiful.
 The first day we
 went to the Bayshores,
 I was amazed.
 It was like someone made
 a painting for everyone to see,
 and it looked so awesome.
 I really had never
 seen something like that.
 I was like, Wow.
 Really. I stared at the
 estuary until the
 mentors said it was
 time to go out.
 I just stared at it for
 the first day.”

—JESUS

H 0019-8



CLIMB: Shelly, Angelica and Soojong (left to right) share a joke after an impromptu rock climb on Owls Head Mountain.

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“The things I did for
 the first time:
 First time I was away
 from home for that long a time.
 First time I went canoeing.
 First time I went camping.
 First time I went
 rock climbing.
 First time I hiked.
 First time I built something.
 First time I was on
 top of a mountain.
 There were definitely a lot of first times.
 First time I built a fire.
 It was a very accomplishing trip.”

—ANGELICA

H 2019-10

“Everybody we met
knew stuff
we didn’t even know,
like what kind of tree was
that, what kind of butterfly was that.
And it was like, Wow,
you know all that stuff?”

We were just clueless
to what we were even looking at. They had
to tell us, this is this,
this is that. I learned white pine,
pitch pine,
types of butterflies,
invasive species.
I learned a lot.”

—ANGELICA



HELP: Mentor Jenna helps pull out a white pine to make space for pitch pines. “The girls were such hard workers,” she says.

H0019-11

The work was
not boring
like the
for me to do
something
There was always



PERSEVERE: Angelica pauses as the group ascends the 5,114-foot Algonquin Peak, the second-highest mountain in New York.

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WALTER CONTEFRANCA / SHUTTERSTOCK

“There was always something for me to do. Like, the work was not boring. The work was interesting. I was helping nature. To come back to the city, to just sit home on the couch and be lazy? It was terrible. I felt homesick for somewhere that wasn’t even my home!”
 —ERSANE



Just west of Madison, you could hardly tell it wasn't supposed to be there. It felt like a ghostly presence, a memory of a place that had once been.

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ENJOY: Ersane demonstrates that if you hold a dragonfly long enough, it won't immediately fly away when you release it.

PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]