



nature
Timothy Nowicki

IN WEBSTER'S Third New International Dictionary, natural history was defined as a former branch of knowledge embracing the study, description and classification of natural objects.

Specialization of many disciplines encompassing the study of natural history probably led them to use the word "former" in their definition. But despite the trend to specialization which has yielded valuable informa-

tion, an overall picture of our natural world is also very important.

Specialization of disciplines such as botany, ornithology, biochemistry and others has produced some very detailed results. Getting lost in those details is the danger of specialization, and it is the study of natural history that integrates details from all the disciplines into the "big picture."

The study of natural history is not

just integrating facts gleaned from textbooks and journals. It is the personal integration of field experiences that come from contact with the natural world. Field experiences stimulate all the senses and enable the observer to integrate factors that cannot be perceived while reading a textbook.

If we only get our knowledge of the natural world from textbooks, we miss the emotional and aesthetic component of field experiences. Walking under the canopy of century old beech trees incites a grandeur that comes only from personal experience. Coming face to face with a white-tailed deer or any wild animal, can impregnate in your mind an indelible image of the experience. It is these personal experiences

coupled with an integration of textbook knowledge that instills a fascination, an appreciation and love for the natural world. Love does not come from textbooks alone. And once you love something, you try and keep it.

The value of this approach to a nature study and the development of a "land ethic education" was recognized by the 84th Michigan Legislature. In 1987 it passed Public Act 147 which provides for mechanisms to incorporate nature study into our education curriculum. It encourages the use of natural areas with different habitats to teach relationships with the natural community. In a study area the students would become aware of man's past and present impact on the land.

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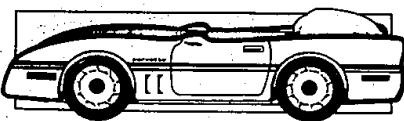
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