

Cape Cod Bird Club Conservation Fund

Title: Sketches of Nature – Environmental education through art

Overall Goal/Objective: The objective of this project is to engage Université Chrétienne du Nord d'Haïti (UCNH) School of Fine Arts students with nature through directed activities of sketching nature and composing poetry and songs, and help them pass these skills along to children in the surrounding community through an art and nature workshop that they plan and direct. The ultimate goal is to link participants to nature to increase their awareness of the environment and conservation needs.

At UCNH (15 miles from Haiti's second largest city of Cap Haitien) I teach ecology and biology to agriculture students, and lead informal ecology programs at schools in the surrounding community. I have found that UCNH's School of Fine Arts students are just as interested in the natural world as my agriculture students, and have an additional drive of wanting to creatively express themselves through art, music, and drama. These are ideal situations for engaging children in environmental education.

I am requesting funds for supplies to lead a program in which the Fine Arts students explore the environment through art, music, and poetry, and then design and hold an environmental workshop for children age 6 – 10 (elementary school). The children will gain skills in exploring the arts, learn about the environment, and have art and songs to bring to their families to share environmental awareness. The university students will showcase the results of this program at the university's annual Agricultural Day Fair held on Haiti's May 1 national holiday. They will show their art and other products, and children from the workshop will be encouraged to attend with their families.

This program will tie together two important issues that need addressing in Haiti - environmental protection and education. The common narrative about Haiti is its deforestation and the resulting environmental degradation including erosion, poor water quality, and food insecurity. While in general Haitians realize these problems exist and make life difficult, environmental education to counteract or remedy these problems is lacking. The World Bank reports that only 29% of 1st graders will graduate with high school degrees, while USAID indicates that over 50% of teachers lack basic teaching qualifications. Most schools do not have educational materials, and learning is by rote memorization. Illiteracy is over 60%. Given these constraints, environmental education is not a priority. In every class I have taught from grade 1 through 13 there are students who actively use sling shots to kill birds. Both adults and children say they do not like hawks because they kill chickens (though science shows that introduced rodents make up a greater percentage of hawk diet). Encouraging children to observe nature through art is one step towards helping them appreciate nature and a step towards conservation.

The UCNH campus is an ideal location to educate students of all ages about nature. Strands of trees have been protected throughout the university's history due to the foresight of its founders and subsequent leaders. Before its inception as a seminary in the 1940s, superstition surrounded a portion of the land and trees were not cut down. Thus today the campus supports a forest community reminiscent of the native rainforest, such as bromeliads and other epiphytes, lianas and vines, buttressed roots, and a dense canopy. This is very attractive to birds and UCNH hosts many endemic species such as the palmchat, Hispaniolan lizard cuckoo, Hispaniolan woodpecker, and most notably the Hispaniolan parakeet and white-necked crow, both of which are listed as vulnerable (IUCN red list) as their numbers are decreasing throughout Haiti. UCNH also provides important habitat for North American warblers that winter in Haiti. I will lead the Fine Arts students to closely observe these ties between the habitat and the birds, and guide them in teaching children about the nature found in their own communities. Research indicates that students will be more likely to want to learn more about the

natural environment and begin to conserve it after they have observed the intricacies and interconnectedness of it.

Specific Action: This project consists of two parts – Part 1. Using art to expose the Fine Arts students to the nature that surrounds them on campus. Part 2. Helping these students transfer their new insights and observation skills to children.

Part 1. This will build on three ecology sessions I had for the Fine Arts program in February 2019. Twelve students voluntarily attended these two-hour sessions in which I covered the importance of the birds of Haiti and how to identify them. This included excursions outside with binoculars. I will invite these twelve students to continue their informal study of ecology by participating in 2 two-hour programs focused on art. During the first session I will supply each student with a sketch book and set of colored and graphite pencils and lead the group in sketching the birds and other wildlife outside on campus. I will give them an assignment of continuing with the sketches, and/or composing music or poetry about nature. We will meet for a second session to share and discuss their art and new insights they have about the environment surrounding them. We will then plan an environmental workshop for the local school children.

Part 2. This will be the children’s workshop, to be held on a Saturday morning in a classroom on campus. We will invite 20-30 school children, ages 6-10, to participate. While the university students will design the ultimate plan, we will begin with a short presentation of the birds and their importance. I will suggest that each art student leads 2-3 children on an excursion on campus to quietly sit and observe and draw nature. We will supply paper and colored pencils to the children. We will conclude with the children sharing and discussing their art, the university students leading songs, and a snack for everyone. Children will keep their art work to share with family and friends. After the children leave I will meet with the university students for an additional 20 minutes to ask their insights, and to plan an art and nature booth for the May 1 Ag Day fair on campus.

These activities will help both university students and children increase their environmental awareness, and give them a mechanism, their art, to share this information with students and others throughout the community.

Budget:

students	items	cost	#	total
university	Sketch book	6	12	72
university	Prismacolor pencils - box of 24	20	12	240
university	Artist's Loft™ Fundamentals™ Sketching & Drawing Set	6	12	72
university	pencil box/pouch	6	12	72
children	White Cardstock Paper by Recollections™, 8.5" x 11" (50 sheets)	2	5	10
children	Crayola color pencils - box of 24	8	4	32
everyone	snacks	2	50	100

total \$598

Matching funds or resources: I will provide my time and pay for the transport of supplies in a checked airline bag (\$70). Classroom space will be provided at no cost by UCNH.

Timetable: As I will need to buy all these supplies in the US, I will purchase them during my yearly visit to Pennsylvania in December 2019, and bring them to Haiti in checked luggage.

Year	Dates	Activities
2019	Dec. week 1-2	Recruit Fine Art students, talk with school teachers & recruit children, order supplies
2020	Feb. week 1-2	2 sessions with Fine Art students
	Feb. week 3-4	1 children's program
	March	Submit initial report to Cape Cod club
	1 May	Agriculture Day booth
	mid-May	Submit final report to Cape Cod club

Continuity: I think this initial project will create interest and momentum for continuing it or variations of it with additional groups of students. If the Fine Arts students remain interested, we can continue holding the programs once or twice a month with different groups of children. The children's color pencils will last for many sessions, and it will be inexpensive for me to purchase new paper for them. If I am able to obtain another set of art supplies I will be able to replicate the entire project with a different group of Fine Arts students, or even my ecology students.

Implementing institution: As I will need to purchase these supplies in the US, I will manage the funds and submit the final report. I will coordinate with UCNH administration for classroom use and scheduling time with the university students.

Université Chrétienne du Nord d'Haïti (UCNH), National Rt 1, Haut Limbe, Haiti, <https://ucnh.org/>

Project officer: Debbie Baker. Since 2009 I have taught ecology programs in schools and communities in Haiti. In 2012 I began spending 5 months in Haiti every year to teach ecology and other classes at universities. I involve university students in all my environmental outreach so that they can do these activities when I am in the US. In the US I work at the Kansas Biological Survey as an aquatic ecologist where I manage field research on lakes, rivers, and wetlands in the central plains. This includes proposal writing, budget management, data analyses, and report writing.

Contact information while in the US April – October: 1804 Miller Dr. Lawrence KS 66044, 785-865-3727

In Haiti: 509-3152-2018, naturesphoto@hotmail.com



Debbie Baker with children's environmental club she ran in Haiti's Central Plateau, 2016.