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New grant to expand climate change education for children

In the face of growing public concern about climate change, the Mohonk Preserve will expand its field studies program to include information on the impact of the problem on the plants and animals of the Shawangunk Mountains. This effort is possible thanks to a \$20,000 grant from HSBC Bank, N.A., which has been a key supporter of environmental education at the Preserve since 2005.

The Preserve's field studies program serves more than 3,000 children annually from dozens of area schools. Through a combination of classroom lessons and field trips to forests, fields, ponds, streams and historical sites across the Preserve, the program enhances appreciation of wildlife and the environment and an understanding of human settlement in the region.

The current grant will help educators formalize new components for the K-6 curriculum to tie natural history lessons to environmental change. Much of this information will focus on the migration, population and breeding patterns of birds – a key issue related to climate change – and rest on the work of the Preserve's Daniel Smiley Research Center, which has maintained detailed records of weather, plants and animals for the last 113 years.

"One of the most obvious signs of climate change at the Preserve, and the Hudson Valley as a whole, is a shift in the presence and behavior of birds," says Kathy Ambrosini, director of education at the Preserve. "Kids love learning about birds, so this is a great opportunity to connect what they're actually seeing outdoors with broader concerns."

The HSBC grant will also allow the Preserve to support the Bank's efforts to promote awareness and action on climate change among its employees. Several HSBC employees from regional branches will join Preserve researchers during the annual breeding bird census and Christmas bird count, and during programs to track the nesting and breeding of endangered Peregrine Falcons and other raptors.

"We're looking forward to HSBC employees joining us in our work to monitor birds, and applaud the Bank for supporting awareness on climate change," says Paul Huth, director of research at the Preserve. "There's no better way for people to understand trends than to get out on the land where it's all happening."



PHOTO BY KIM TESCHLER

Children investigating nature at the Mohonk Preserve