

Field Notes Summer -- 2022

Reflections on three years as a Hopkins Forest Educator

One of the reasons I chose to come to Williams was for the opportunity to be a Hopkins Forest Educator. A formative part of my childhood was when my mom would drop me and my twin sister off at our local nature center after school, and the coolest person in the world would let us traipse through the woods, where I learned the crunch of the leaves underfoot and felt the spikiness of the sweetgum ball or the smoothness of the rocks. I wanted to continue her legacy of spreading joy through learning about salamanders and trees, and I was so excited to start as an educator my sophomore year.



Regina identifying a quartzite stone with fourth graders.

Watching eyes grow wide and smiles begin on the faces of first graders, when we tell them we can go off the path to explore the stream or gently flip over a log to find a slug, has been a highlight of my Williams experience. We learn from each other; I try to impart to students values of reverence and respect for the forest and for the scientists who work in HMF, and the students reinvigorate me with a sense of wonder that is often lost after hours in the library or in the lab.



Can you spot the object of his gaze?

When kids are scared – of bears, bees, or maybe monsters– they’ve asked me to hold their hand so we can brave the forest together. It makes my heart sing to know that I can provide comfort, and hopefully change their perspective on what is scary in the future. Hawks, snakes, salamanders, or mayfly larvae are not creepy crawlies, but parts of the same world that make up the grocery store or their classrooms. It’s a challenging lesson that needs to be relearned every time we go out in “nature”: that this space is just as real and important as Sawyer Library or Williamstown Elementary school. I hope that we Educators were able to do a small part of that, and help shape the worldview of some tiny humans.

I am so excited to see what educators come up with next, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to do in person (and remote – check out Eva Castagna’s ’22 and my Journey through Time Escape Room on the educators page) learning for three wonderful years. I send gratitude to Jennifer Swoap, Renee Schiek, and the awe-inspiring Drew Jones.

— Regina Fink, Williams ’22.5



Visiting the stream with Arielle.



Answer to above.