

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

Nature Lovers Livid Over Missing Words

Robert Bateman, Canadian environmental artist, naturalist, lecturer, and self-admitted old-fogey is reported to be horrified. David Suzuki, zoologist and Canadian environmental activist says he is mystified. Both are responding to revelations of an editorial decision on the part of the Oxford University Press.

The Oxford Junior Dictionary, intended for use by children aged 7 and up, has dropped a number of words in order to make room for some newer ones. Beaver, fern, dandelion, lobster, heron, and blackberry are among the words that have been replaced by others like Blackberry, broadband, celebrity, dyslexic, and biodegradable.

It's another nail in the coffin of a whole generation we seem to be training to not go outdoors, and to lose touch with nature," rants Mr. Bateman.

The Head of Children's Dictionaries at Oxford University Press says that, "When you look back at older versions of dictionaries, there were lots of examples of flowers, for instance. That was because many children lived in semi-rural environments and saw the seasons. Nowadays, the environment has changed." In other words OUP is "getting with it."

So what is it with these opinionated Canadians? There are 1.8 billion children between the ages of 1 and 14 – if all of them suddenly got interested in nature, can you imagine the damage they could do? Indoors and plugged-in they will be safe, and so will we. No one has ever been mugged by a couch potato. If we don't tell them what's out there they won't "get involved."

On the Other Hand

Research shows how reducing emissions from deforestation cannot only help in combating climate change, but can also help the conservation of biodiversity, from amphibians and birds to primates, and the maintenance of major carbon sinks. Other benefits from investing in forests' ecosystem "infrastructure," span a range from stabilizing soils to conserving and boosting local and regional water supplies.

Consider the above paragraph, pieced together from recently published reports of the United Nations Environment Programme. On first reading you probably assumed the research was referring to some tropical rain forest, and the



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conservation of biodiversity had something to do with orangutans or endangered chameleons. I know I did.

Now take a step back, shrink the scale of reference to something you know very well, bring it closer to home, and you can see that the "research" can apply just as well in upstate New York, the parks system in Ann Arbor Michigan, or the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee. Its elements can apply to your own back/front yard, to the bit of conservation land that you steward on weekends, to the ditch planting you participated in when the Road Commission came through with their bulldozers, to the bundle of grey-dogwood that you gave to a friend because it reproduces so readily in your fence-row, to the

donation you made to the Environmental Classroom being planned in your local elementary school.

And what does it all come down to? Every thinking one of us can participate in the grand effort to conserve biodiversity, to maintain carbon sinks, and to help stabilize our soils – if not through direct hands-on action then through support of the ideas, or through monetary support and the education of the next generation.

We are not irrelevant cogs. What we say and do counts. The effects of our activities are cumulative.

What do you think? You have my address.

Maryann is Editor of the Wild Ones Journal, and comes to the position with an extensive background in environmental matters of all kinds.