

Editor's Letter

When I was a child in Louisiana, we lived in a heavily wooded area that served as a playground for my five siblings and me. Our backyard consisted of two acres of woods that connected to the surrounding forest and we spent most of our free time, especially in the summer, exploring, looking for crawdads, fish, and tadpoles in creeks, and just running through the woods.

Looking back, I can't imagine parents allowing such a thing now, but we never encountered anyone else and we were usually all together. Our father was a Boy Scoutmaster (probably because he had five daughters) and he was constantly calling us outside to see something (a woodpecker, a copperhead under a piece of tin, a praying mantis). He made sure we could tell the difference between poison-

ous and nonpoisonous snakes and never harmed anything that didn't pose any danger to us.

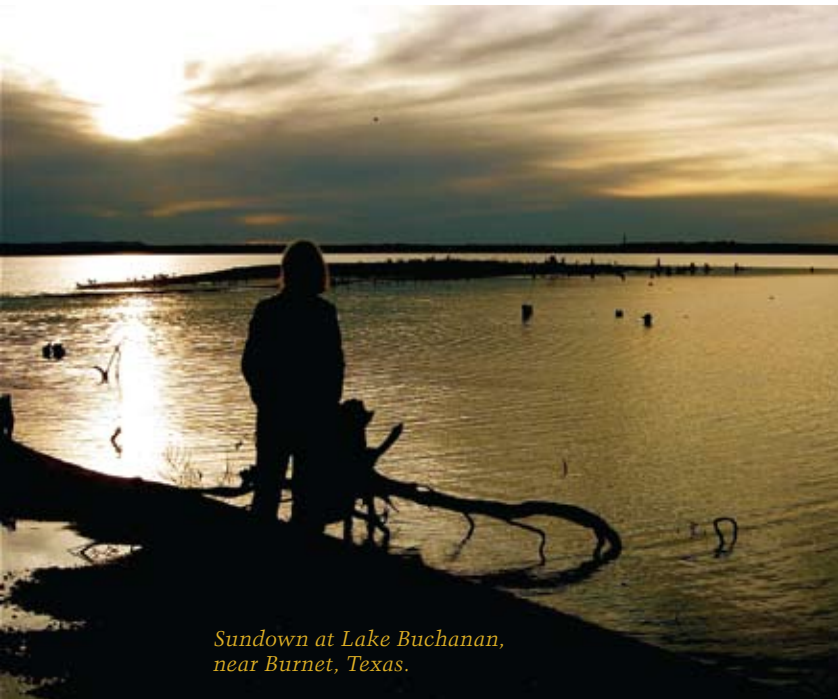
During our adventures in the woods, I would often find injured birds and bring them back to the house where I would try to save them. These living birds were the very first things I ever drew and painted from nature. Getting to see them up close and realizing how wondrous and beautiful they were began my lifelong interest in birds.

In an effort to have my students become more aware of the natural world, this year my emphasis has been on birds, starting with the native birds we can see from our school grounds. We're making clay birds, bird tiles, metal tooling birds

(see Miranda Nelken's article in this issue), birdhouses, and painted, printed, and collaged birds.

I'm concerned that our students may not have the opportunities to develop a similar relationship to nature to the one I was able to develop as a child, especially with the compelling distractions of video games, cell phones, iPods, and other technological gadgets. Yet as art teachers, we are in a great position to do something about this.

We can share exemplars of art that depict the natural world from prehistory to contemporary times. We can guide students to explore their natural surroundings. We can bring in nonliving natural objects and living creatures for students to study, draw, paint, and model firsthand. We can help make students aware of ecological issues that affect them and the planet both now and in the future. And we can make ourselves more aware and open to the natural beauty around us. We hope the articles offered herein will inspire you to guide your students through the natural world.



*Sundown at Lake Buchanan,
near Burnet, Texas.*