



My name is Eddie Dengg. I created neoNaturalist.com to **inspire** curiosity about Nature, **provoke** people to get more exercise by hiking on trails in parks, and **stimulate** discussion about human-kind's place in Nature. The web site does that by providing ecology-based descriptions of hiking trails in parks, links to Nature information, and providing an opportunity to interact with naturalists and other Nature-loving folks.

I have spent lots of time outdoors. From my first long term job as a lifeguard, through years as a park planner, park ranger, biological field technician, botanist, and attorney I have been involved in land use, natural resources management, scientific studies, environmental restorations, charitable donations of land and permanent conservation restrictions, and the creation of thousands of acres of park land. I have looked at these issues from the ecological viewpoint, the economic viewpoint, the landowner rights viewpoint, the recreational viewpoint, the governmental perspective and from the shoes of a citizen. Over the years I have guided Nature hikes and given speeches about Nature and conservation to thousands of people.

As the first President of the Ohio Invasive Plant Council, I helped start that nonprofit group in order to deal with the problems caused when humans introduce invasive non-native species into natural areas. I am currently Vice President of Western Reserve Land Conservancy where I am helping to create an interconnected network of protected open space across northern Ohio. We're at 24,000 acres and counting.

In Missouri in October 2010 the members of the Natural Areas Association elected me to a three year term on its board of directors. I am now working on ways to help that group educate, inspire and provide service to those around the country who are charged with managing America's rich natural treasures.

Having lived these issues about Nature from many perspectives, and having seen the inefficacy of our current ways of both protecting land and connecting people to their natural legacy, I set out to clarify in my own mind the value of Nature to people and vice versa. That introspective exercise lead to the thoughts outlined below. I hope you find it useful and that it does inspire, provoke and stimulate you to think, and more importantly, *act* on behalf of Nature and yourself to live a more meaningful, healthy, and connected life.

*Eddie*

# neoNaturalist Manifesto

In the 1850's Henry David Thoreau made the following statement in Walden:

*"It appears to be a law that you cannot have a deep sympathy with both man and nature."*

Many people have accepted that sentiment at face value both before and after Thoreau's pencil memorialized the statement. Humankind and Nature are often perceived as mutually exclusive.

How wrong can we be? Just to be clear, from Thoreau's writing, he didn't buy into the quote above either. He just said it appears that way, not that it is that way.

Beyond surface appearance, the reality is when we are really, truly in touch with our own humanity, with our own deep-rooted reality, Humans are Nature. It is only in the disconnected, negligently ignorant state that there is a schism between people and Nature. When we look with our souls we see that we are part of an intimately intertwined organism that includes all life.

So what does any of this have to do with you? Well, bear with me a bit.

The goal of this brief manifesto is to clearly state an actionable neoNaturalist viewpoint of the world. What is a neoNaturalist? On my web site at neoNaturalist.com, I used to say that a neoNaturalist is a new kind of Naturalist. Available electronically 24 hours a day from anywhere with an internet connection. In 2004 when I first put the site up, that was enough. Over the years however, my thinking has evolved.

In order to really define what I mean by "neoNaturalist" it might be good to define what a regular old Naturalist is first.

A Naturalist (and just to be clear if you just started visiting neoNaturalist.com, I am not talking about nudists or "naturists") is simply someone who studies plants, animals or the environment. This is generally a scientific pursuit, but not necessarily in the experimental, scientist-in-white-lab-coat sense. Naturalists are more or less observers and chroniclers of the natural world. They rely on their senses and their intellects to piece together the mysteries

of what they observe. Naturalists seek the truth about Nature. A professional Naturalist takes it a step further by interpreting the world around them in order to educate others by leading hikes, giving presentations and providing opportunities to touch and learn from Nature.

While many professional and amateur Naturalists will admit to and talk a little about the spiritual side of Nature, frequently that dimension is missing because it can not be objectively studied, described and reliably repeated. Simply put, spirituality is beyond the scope of science, and therefore somewhat beyond the pale for many Naturalists. In our politically correct and scientifically-based world, there does not seem to be much room for spirit. This was not always the case.

Examples of famous Naturalists include Charles Darwin, John Burroughs, John Audubon, and Roger Tory Peterson. They described, drew, studied and wrote about their observations of the physical world. Chief among the tools of these Naturalists were a sack to collect specimens, notebooks and pencils to draw what they found, and a shotgun to collect things that were too fierce or fast to be observed in the field. They documented many great things and helped to advance our knowledge of the Natural world. Biological science has been building on their shoulders ever since.

John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, had a deeply spiritual connection to Nature, and wrote of it. However, today the spiritual side of Nature is too often brushed aside because it can not be seen directly. The unenlightened still believe that humans are given dominion over Nature and have a moral imperative to deal with non-human things in whatever way we please. Setting humankind above Nature is a long-standing mistake. Likewise, setting Nature above Humankind is a distortion. We neoNaturalists believe in many ancient truths, but we have a new creed for a new time.

### **A neoNaturalist Creed**

*A neoNaturalist believes humans are an integral part of Nature. We believe the integrity of the Natural world and the integrity of Humans are inextricably linked. We believe humans not connected to Nature are not fully experiencing what it means to be human. We believe society has ignored our individual and collective connection to Nature for long enough. We believe there is a moral imperative to turn off the television, get outdoors, and ensure that not one more generation of humans forgets or loses their connection to Nature.*

*We believe that Nature is knowable through observation, but that Nature also includes dimensions that can not be directly observed in the physical world. The spirit is part of Nature and Humans even though we can not see, hear or touch it. We believe that in Nature is the salvation of humankind, and in humankind is the salvation of Nature. Humans and Nature are one and the same.*

### **So what does that mean to you?**

I can't tell you that. I would love to hear what this means to you. I am always looking for new ideas and seeking to find the nuance in old ideas. If you have feedback on the neoNaturalist Creed, feel free to send me your thoughts via twitter @neonaturalist, or by way of email to webmaster@neonaturalist.com. Maybe I will include some of your comments in a revision of this document. In the meantime, since it is my manifesto, here is what the creed means to me on a practical level. Maybe some of this will resonate with you as well.

### **Integrity**

First you will notice the words integrity and integral. In the moral sense, integrity means adhering to your principles and behaving consistently with them. In a larger sense, integrity means that something is whole in and of itself. I am using the term in both senses. In order to be a whole person of integrity, we must understand that we are each individually, and as a species, part of a bigger picture. Understanding that, we must behave in a way that is consistent with the best interests of that system. I do not mean this in a judgmental manner. There is plenty of room for debate on exactly what the right way of living is. The principle though is that we should be examining our actions and making decisions not just for our own short term gain, but for the good of Nature as well. If we pollute and kill off our natural life support systems, it will not matter how many widgets we created, how many places we have visited, or how much money we made. Destroying Nature is destroying ourselves. Caring for Nature is caring for ourselves.

### **Humanity**

Next the creed mentions humanity's connection to Nature. This is critical and most people today do not even realize what they are missing. Imagine a kid growing up in an urban setting of concrete, asphalt and high rise buildings. Imagine it is a little boy, maybe ten years old. Have his bare feet ever felt the cool morning dew dripping from grasses or goldenrod? Have his feet, his roots, ever felt the flow of a cool mountain stream. Has he dug his hands into rocks and pulled out a crayfish? Has he experienced the wonder of a cool autumn sunset with a thousand colors dancing on the surface of a lake as the sun sinks into the horizon? Has he had a chance to see in detail the cycles of the natural world of which he is part? Not likely. He has been robbed of his birthright by an accident of birth. His own parents may not have had that connection to Nature either.

This connection is a subtle thing. One trip to Niagara Falls might give a glimpse of it. The power of the falls is humbling and awe-inspiring. But it is just one experience. A short vacation to a natural area is refreshing to be sure. In order to really live in connection with Nature though, it takes daily exposure. In spite of the quote at the beginning of this document, Henry David Thoreau was in close communion with Nature, and knew this to be the case. He often spent the better part of his days walking in Nature.

I am not suggesting that you quit your job and take up wandering in the nearest park all day. I am suggesting that each day is sacred and new, and that you deserve to feel that energy first hand by spending reflective time outdoors regardless of the weather. A morning walk, a lunchtime hike, or an after dinner repose in the back yard is probably enough to allow you to unwind and feel more connected to Nature. It needs to be a routine daily occurrence, almost a ritual, to make it stick.

This outdoor time should be spent either alone or as a family. It should be spent without electronic gadgets, cell phones, radios or even books. Your attention should alternate between the outer world to learn about your surroundings and then inward to examine how you feel when surrounded by Nature. It is particularly important for children to have this time. It will form the basis of a strong connection to Nature later in life. If they become overwhelmed by hectic schedules and the ever-increasing pace of life, someplace deep inside they will remember the peace and solace of Nature. They must not be deprived of this. Nature is part of our humanity.

### **Natural Knowledge**

Since we are part of Nature and are surrounded by it, we should be well acquainted with its ways and means. Anything we do that is not in accord with Nature is at best temporary. Better to understand the context around us through careful observation and appropriate action rather than blindly take action at odds with Nature.

Nature observation and study is an essential part of any education. If you didn't get it as a kid, remedy it now. Get a field guide, some sturdy shoes, fill your re-usable water bottle and learn. Attend a naturalist-guided hike at a local park. Visit a National Park. Just sit in the back yard and observe. The more you learn about Nature, the more you will learn to know yourself.

### **Spirituality**

Let me start off by saying that by spirituality, I do not mean to even remotely imply religion. Nature does not discriminate on the basis of whether you are catholic or Jew, Muslim or baptist, Shinto or Mormon. Some religions have been more environmentally friendly than others, but that does not mean adherents of those religions cannot have a strong connection to Nature. So, do not take any of this to be either religious or anti-religious.

Just take it to be a statement of the transcendental vibes in Nature that you may be able to apply in your own life.

Chief among the practices of a neoNaturalist must be to trust one's own instincts. Slow down your thoughts and feel the power vastness of Nature. Feel that vastness by planting your feet firmly on the ground and opening yourself to the world. Your subconscious mind, when allowed, knows instantly the right from the wrong. Quietly examine your feelings when you are in Nature. All of the plants and animals and the soil and the sky are radiating energy that can fill you with inspiration and tranquility at the same time.

Feel God in every particle. Know that each thing you see is here by the means of a miracle, whether of creation or evolution or both, and the same vital spirit is diffused throughout all of Nature and is in you as well.

### **Salvation**

Without Nature, there is no us. Even without a proper respect for the spiritual and physical world around us, self-preservation dictates that we keep the environment healthy. We now know that forests are the source of pure air for us to breathe. We now know that wetlands are the filters for the pure water that we drink. We now know that burning fuels changes the delicate balance in the atmosphere which influences our climates.

If we know these things but do not act on that knowledge, Nature will suffer and we will suffer. Our leaders are driven by fallacies about economics and personal gain. They will do nothing except cosmetic band-aids to appease those of us with true concerns. Because we have a vacuum in our political leadership, we each must take our own individual actions to help keep the environment intact.

### **Conclusion**

First, get outdoors and educate yourself, your kids and your friends about our connection to Nature. In the oft-quoted words of Senegalese Environmentalist Baba Dioum:

*"In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught."*

Second, use you knowledge of Nature gained from observation and intuition to lead a life in harmony with long-term environmental integrity. Live in the smallest house you can stand. Drive fewer miles if you can. Try to buy and consume locally grown food and beverages. Reduce your use of packaging. Reuse things. Stop living a disposable lifestyle. In Nature, everything gets recycled. Once something has served its original purpose, recycle it or re-purpose it.

Third, find a friend, relative or stranger and get outside with them! It will brighten both your

lives and put you in closer connection with Nature and yourself.

## Afterword: Three Things you can do to get in closer contact with Nature

### 1. Live Deliberately

*"I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately, I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, To put to rout all that was not life and not when I had come to die discover that I had not lived."* Henry David Thoreau ([Walden](#)).

To me, living deliberately means to live life with your mind wide open. [Understand life. Nature, and where you fit in.](#) Too many times people live on autopilot. They awaken to the sound of an alarm clock because they must be at their workplace at an arbitrarily set standard time. They drink coffee (or my favorite, Mountain Dew) to give them the strength to meet their day. They eat lunch at noon because that is when everyone else does it. They work 40 or 60 hours per week because it is expected and because they need the money to live. They arrive home overwhelmed and exhausted. They watch TV until going to sleep when they start their cycle over again.

In a deliberate life, one in tune with reality, we would awaken to the sound of [birds](#) singing after just the right amount of sleep. We would be ready to do our thing without caffeine or the electronic coaxing of an alarm. We would rise early in the summer and sleep later in winter. Humans are to some extent keyed in to light cycles and the seasons. We would eat when we were hungry. If we think it out, we would be much better off to acknowledge that fact and then live that way.

Think about the way we eat. I can get berries at just about any time of the year. In the spring, the strawberries are the best. They are [locally grown](#), fresh and in season. I can get them the rest of the year. But, they have been picked too early in order to keep them "fresh" through a long shipment. They don't taste quite the same. Something is not quite right. A life lived by default is the same way.

You may be able to show up at work the same time day in and day out. You may be able to go through the motions. Wouldn't you rather do things in their proper season and savor them all the more because of that? Winter strawberries just aren't that good.

Understanding how we fit into Nature, how our natural inclinations interact with and fit into the cycle of things, allows us to live more deliberately. Don't accept someone else's version of reality just because it is there. Do some hard work of your own. Explore a ravine. [Hike a trail](#). Sit in a cold stream. Feel how these experiences change you. Think about why. What do you learn? Where do you fit into it all? We each have our own path through Nature. We either know it and live it, or we are lost.



What is your path?

Once you know. Live from that place of knowledge. Live a life consistent with your internal compass. Don't listen to what others say you should do. Do what you know to be right. That is the way of Nature, and humans are an integral part of Nature. By virtue of being you, you have the right to reach your full potential. Now get outside and get to know yourself and your own Nature.

## 2. Hike like Thoreau and Muir

*An early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day.* Henry David Thoreau

*In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.* John Muir

You might not be lucky enough or adventurous enough to be able to trek around in Yosemite every day like Muir. You might never set foot in Concord to be able to travel around Walden Pond like Thoreau. Or maybe you do get to those things.

Doesn't matter. I've been to Yosemite and many of our greatest and oldest National Parks. Had some great transcendental moments, including a really enlivening one at the [Mariposa Grove](#). But I have also enjoyed Nature at its finest in the [Cuyahoga Valley National Park](#), one of the newest national parks in an urban area of northern Ohio. No mountains. No fabled ponds. Just near and dear Nature at its finest.

It doesn't matter where you experience Nature. It only matters that you do. My best days start out with a short hike around my own suburban yard where I might encounter wild turkeys, a herd of deer, six different species of woodpeckers, barred owls, or an occasional screeching red-tailed hawk. No Half dome, El Capitan or Yosemite Falls in sight.

Getting outdoors and hiking in your own backyard, a nearby local, state, or national Park, or any other natural area is essential to good health. Sure, you can get increase your stamina, decrease your risk of cardiovascular disease, and lose weight by exercising on an elliptical trainer. Sure, you can reduce your blood pressure, increase your concentration and reduce the impacts of stress in your life by meditating in your bedroom or in the office. These activities might help keep you physically fit and mentally calm. But, they are like looking at photos of the beach instead of feeling the sand between your toes and the surf on your skin. No comparison.

Hiking not only encompasses all of the health benefits of regular physical exercise and meditation. Walking in Nature strengthens the body and mind while also connecting the spirit to the world around you. Feet on the ground allow you to feel and connect with the energy of the earth. Your eyes are soothed by the blue sky and the green leaves or the

white snow. Your nose picks up subtle scents of the season. Your ears can hear the [music of Nature](#): rustling leaves, melodious birdsong, the whisper of a stream or roar of a waterfall. You can almost taste the energy in Nature on a hike. Your subconscious and your spiritual side need connection to Nature.

You may go out into Nature for diversion or exercise, but you will go back home with more than you bargained for. In every bit of nature you encounter, there is potential for a memory of a deep and abiding connection to God. Within that falling leaf or that flake of snow, the spirit of Nature is embodied as much as it is in the Bald Eagle I saw today.

Start out today with a good dose of Nature by hiking. Make it a deliberate hike. Purposely look for your connection to Nature. It is there, just waiting for you to open your eyes and step outside.

### **3. Visit Local Parks Frequently**

Any area has its own unique energy. You can feel it if you try. This character is right there for all to see, but it is actually much more than meets the eye.

One of the best ways to get to know the vibe of the local Nature is to visit many different nearby parks or Nature preserves. You will see a variety of habitats. You will notice the results of different management techniques being implemented by the park managers. You will feel the energy of the Earth being reflected differently in the plants, animals, topography, and watercourses.

You will feel the respect or disrespect for Nature that has been expressed by past generations in the area. If you are in an area where most of the forests are growing on abandoned corn fields, you can feel the tired soil and struggling trees. You will see the sparsity of wildflowers. What humans do is reflected in the landscape. The landscape in turn impacts how humans feel and act.

Get to a park. Feel the Nature of your own area. Is it lacking in some way? Can you feel the pulse of the Earth? Is something out of balance? If it is, chances are you will feel that imbalance in your own life. For example, driving by a toxic waste dump or landfill can make you feel uncomfortable. Right? Now, imagine living next to one. Wouldn't that subtly or not so subtly color everything you do? Over time, our environment shapes us just as much as our human interactions do.

We just don't notice it.

The old Nature vs Nurture argument becomes Nature and Nurture. We are nurtured by the Nature around us. The natural world allows us to grow and develop. We are deeply

part of it and it is deeply intertwined with our being. Just like your childhood home brings up certain feelings and memories, so too does Nature. The closer we get to Nature and the longer we spend immersed in it, the more intense, meaningful and real those feelings and memories become. And, it is those feelings and memories that allow us to fully function as humans. Being born as part of Nature and then living our lives apart from Nature is part of the modern human condition, but it doesn't have to be. A dog that has his tail and ears docked as a puppy might not miss them as an adult, but there is something missing whether the dog knows it or not.

Humans apart from Nature are just like that poor dog who doesn't know what it is like to wag his tail or shake his floppy ears.

Don't be that dog. Get out to a park and explore Nature. Alone or with your kids. With human friends or your dog. Nature is out there waiting for you to come to the park.

## About the Logo

The neoNaturalist.com logo consists of four parts, plus the name. First is the blue sphere second is the green leaves, third is the water-ripple under the sphere, and fourth is the reflection beneath the ripple.



The blue sphere represents Earth, water, clean air, natural cycles, and the connection of all Nature in a never ending circle.

The green leaves, in addition to their obvious appearance, can be looked at as an unfolding of life, as they have the appearance of the cotyledons of a newly sprouted seed. They also give the illusion of motion as they flow round the blue sphere. This represents movement along a trail or path. The fact that there are three leaves arranged in a circle is also a nod to the conventional symbol for ecology or recycling with its three arrows indicating a cycle.

The ripple is an indication that our entire human and natural existence relies upon water. The health of our blue sphere and green leaves relies on and sits upon our clean water.

The reflection represents repetitive patterns in Nature, cycles of Nature, and duality. it is also just another shape of a leaf. The whole blue sphere of life reflected in a leaf.

The blue and green color scheme simply represents land, air and water. Together, all of these factors add up to an interconnected reality based on natural cycles and complex interrelationships among all aspects of the earth. You are one of those aspects! Now, get outside and live a natural life!