

Nature and Human Life



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The rapid deterioration of our natural environment, coupled with the unfortunate worldwide swing away from environmental problem solving (*e.g.*, the Kyoto Protocol, etc.) toward old-fashioned nationalism and preparations for war, only makes it more obvious than ever that environmentally-focused educational programs are badly needed. And, in fact, in Japan there has been a major increase in environmental education in the schools, especially at the elementary school level. Sadly, though, most such programs are mainly classroom-centered, often taught by teachers with little or no actual first-hand knowledge of wild nature.

Among the educational programs that actually take place in natural settings, many, if not most, focus on collecting specimens and, if the program is ocean oriented, cooking and eating things taken from the natural environment. Such old-fashioned approaches to nature education are out-of-touch with the realities of dwindling biological diversity in the 21st Century.

Students learning in the classroom about the rapid pace of species extinctions develop no personal identity with nature. It is too commonly imagined that people are somehow unique and different from nature. Actual “low-impact” studies in the natural environment are badly needed. Because our planet is made up of roughly 70% oceans, ocean education is especially urgent. However, the media-created image that the oceans are dangerous continues to hinder development of actual in-the-ocean education. Fortunately, this is changing.

For 16 years I have been conducting in-the-ocean environmental schools for children from grades 5 through high school. Minimal environmental impact is stressed, no specimens are taken nor even touched, as students make three important discoveries: (1) the oceans are fun, (2) the oceans are spectacularly interesting and (3) the oceans are of immense value. Of course, staff members are well-trained in rescue, and safety is the top priority.



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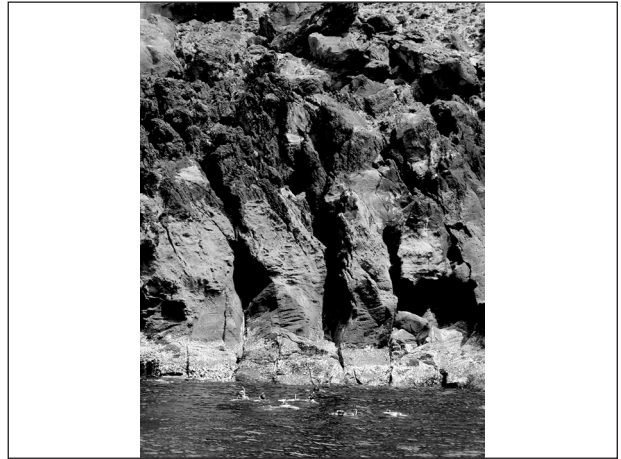
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