

### Seeing Nature Whole *Completion of the Course in Brazil*



At the beginning of July, Henrike and I arrived in Florianopolis, Brazil, to give the second two-week module of a course that had its first session in 2016. We were once again impressed by the participants' open-hearted and enthusiastic interest and willingness to engage in all the explorations that we guided. For us the course

was a confirmation that careful phenomenological study, which works from experience to form flexible, growing, and context-sensitive ideas, is of importance for people from many walks of life and professions. This year's practice areas were optics and visual perception on the one hand and, on the other, animals, the human being, and evolution. You might wonder how these topics could be of interest to a lawyer, an agronomist, a philosopher, an organizational consultant, a medical doctor, or an engineer—to mention a few of the professions among the participants. But they were. That is the case, at least in part, because the way we worked let participants explore and have experiences that were significant for their personal and professional lives.

At the end of the first week we did a review and one participant's remark struck everyone: "*My way of seeing has changed in this one week. I didn't really see before. I thought and then looked. Now I look and then think!*" It is this kind of shift that we hope to facilitate in our courses. Nowadays we are so caught up in our ideas and what we think we know that we rarely penetrate the veil of our pre-conceptions. When we do, the appearing world becomes alive for us in its vitality, beauty, and subtlety. Such experiences give us grounding and orientation—a sense of truthfulness that can live in our interactions with the broader world. CH



### Out and About

- Early in April, Bruno consulted at Good Water Farm, an organic microgreens farm on Long Island, New York.
- Later in April, Bruno gave a workshop and consulted at the Farm School in Athol, Massachusetts.
- Bruno also traveled to Chile at the end of April to consult at three biodynamic vineyards and at a conventional livestock farm.
- At the end of August, Henrike worked, by invitation, with the faculty at the Green Meadow Waldorf School on the significance of experiential learning in science education.
- Bruno traveled up to Avena Botanicals in Rockport, Maine, at the end of September to teach at a three-day biodynamic training program.
- In October, Craig visited the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, where he was a keynote speaker at their *Evolving Morphology* conference.

## Still Ahead

- In early November, Bruno will teach in Chestnut Ridge, New York, as part of the Pfeiffer Center's year-long biodynamic training program.
- That same weekend, Craig will go to Toronto, Canada, where he has been invited to speak at a conference put on by faith leaders concerned with the direction that our food system is going. The conference is entitled *Redesigning the Tree of Life: Synthetic Biology and the Future of Food*.
- Later in November, Bruno will speak at the Bionutrient Food Association's annual *Soil and Nutrition Conference*.
- Then in March, Craig will also teach as part of the Pfeiffer Center's biodynamic training program down in Chestnut Ridge, New York.

## 2017 Fellowship Program

Last May, the Nature Institute offered its first ever fellowship program. We welcomed six individuals from Argentina, France, India, and Scotland, who wanted to deepen their understanding and practice of Goethean science. During the first three weeks, Institute staff led seminars in phenomenology—both its practice and underlying epistemology. We worked mostly in close proximity to the Institute, while also traveling farther afield to explore the diverse landscapes of our region on weekly field trips. After these first three weeks, the fellows continued to meet with mentors and with each other to study, go on outings, and share their ongoing research.

In the end, it was a rich and rewarding experience for everyone. Individually, fellows were given the space to conduct their own research, while at the same time everyone's



learning was quickened and intensified through their shared explorations.

To give you a sense for the specificity of the fellows' work, here are the titles of their research projects:

- “Growth Forms of Trees and the Wooded Landscape”
- “Becoming a Dandelion” and “Plant Growth and Soil”
- “Landscape and People: Finding Common Ground”
- “The Form and Movement of Fishes in Relation to their Environments”
- “Unfolding Ways of Seeing—Plant Study and Art”
- “Schooling Thinking and the Senses in Relation to Education”

We thank the Evolving Science Association—our partnership with the Myrin Institute—for supporting the fellowship program. In the future we hope to offer such a program again.

*The fellowship was one of the most enriching experiences that I have had. It has really laid the 'foundation,' to say the least, for true observation and research in me. And I do believe that more young people should be able to access such opportunities.*

– Ritika Arya, India

*I have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time. Deepening my knowledge of the Goethean approach and observing plants were the best things that could ever happen to me. ... I had time to develop embeddedness and embodiment. My work in relation to children and teachers in educational contexts is related to these aspects. I have read a lot about it, but here I had the opportunity to 'live' these and other concepts.*

– Cecilia Eyssartier, Argentina

## Land Art at the Institute



This August, The Nature Institute was visited by international artist Axel Ewald. He came to our area as part of a larger “art convergence,” and worked for three days with a group of staff and friends, transforming a piece of land behind the Institute.

We chose a space that was once a clearing in the woods but was now being reclaimed by the forest. At first we simply approached and observed the place. We talked about it: What qualities could we experience? What kind of place was it? We walked around the clearing along its edge, then through the tangle of bushes and into the middle. We came at it from many sides—always building up pictures together, trying to characterize what lived there, what came to meet us from the place itself.

We then tried to separate the essential from the inessential. It’s a clearing in the woods—there’s a reflective, quiet quality to it, but it’s also a meeting place where two paths come together. Could we bring these qualities to the fore? Could we draw out the social aspect and still maintain the quiet inwardness? We took up our tools—scythes to cut grasses and shears to clear bushes and branches—and then, little by little, cleared away the inessential, always trying to sense the changing composition of the place, always working to protect and enhance the integrity of what lives there.

Next, we asked what elements we could bring in. We sketched the place from above and from many sides, seeing where something might be added and what it could be. Through more conversation we envisioned a bench on higher ground along one edge, and a stone fire pit in the center.

Then we finally started in. We took stones from the woods (where they lie scattered in abundance) and began a bench. We dug the beginning of a fire pit, took the clay back to the bench and added sand, straw, and water to make a simple mortar to help hold the stones together. We worked throughout this last day—with other people joining us to help mix the mud, cut boards, or lay some stones—and by the end found ourselves immensely richer. There is now a beautiful clearing in the woods where friends can come for a solitary moment and where classes can gather for observation, conversation and an occasional evening fire! Please come visit us and take a look for yourself next time you’re around.

Many thanks to Axel Ewald and everyone involved in this project. SJ



## A Month in Australia



In April, Henrike and I spent a month in Australia giving conference keynote talks, workshops, and courses in conferences for educators. As you can imagine, this was a month of rich interactions with a variety of people and places. The work began in Sydney, where we spent a week. Then we traveled a few hours north of Sydney to the Hunter Valley to contribute to a conference on “Life and Living.” From there we went to subtropical Mullumbimby, which is close to the east coast in the north of New South Wales, for a week-long conference for educators. Finally we flew across the large continent to Perth on Australia’s west coast for another conference for teachers. Both of these teacher conferences had as their main theme “Conversing with Nature: Phenomenological Engagement with the Living World.”

In between the different stations of our trip, and at the end before returning home, we had some days to explore the countryside. Here are just a few impressions.

We were deeply moved by our visit to the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney (see photo at top). A high, north-south wooded plateau has been carved by water into individual mountains that drop off in steep escarpments that separate the lush valleys from the flat mountain tops. Although the growth forms—trees, bushes, wildflowers—were “familiar,” the countless indigenous species of plants presented us with surprise after surprise. Hiking along the top of the escarpments, encountering new plants and

birds around every bend, and then intermittently gazing out into the vast blue distances, we felt carried by the life of the natural world. So many different species of eucalyptus trees! And I was particularly struck by shrubs and small trees in the genus *Banksia*, which we saw in different areas during our trip.

We were eager to encounter kangaroos, and we had to wait until the end of our trip to spend time watching these fascinating animals. We were invited by our host, Konrad Korobacz, to spend a few days south of Perth near the town of Yallingup, where western grey kangaroos seemed to be everywhere. At dawn and dusk they gathered in open spaces and grazed on the short and meager vegetation of fields and empty lots. You don’t speak of “herds” of kangaroos in Australia, but of “mobs”!

We spent hours watching their movements and interactions. The seemingly effortless bounding of fleeing kangaroos took our breath away—the large rear legs release like springs, the massive tail extends and swings up and down as the animal floats through the air until it touches ground for a moment before the next bound. When it “walks,” a kangaroo uses its tail as a fifth limb; it leans forward onto its short front legs and, with the support of front legs and tail, it lifts its hind legs forward. The encounters with kangaroos certainly planted a seed in me for a new whole-organism study! CH



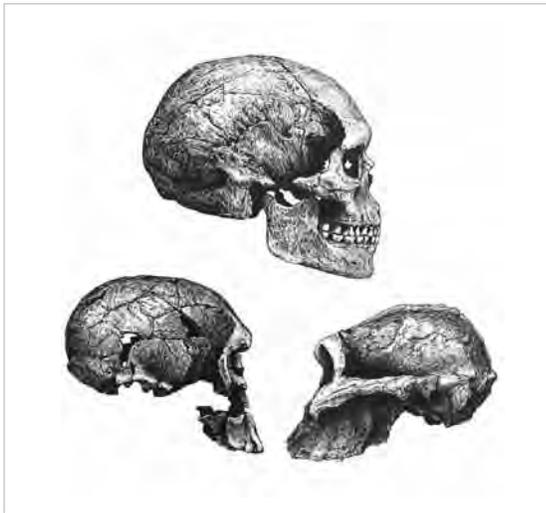
Above: A flowering branch of *Banksia integrifolia* in the Yuraygir National Park on the Pacific coast of Australia. The photo shows the flower heads in bud stage (lower right) and in different stages of unfolding. The uppermost flower head is in full bloom. The woody “cone” contains the dried fruit capsules that have already released their seeds.



## New Publications

### *Two New Resources on Evolution and Development*

Craig has created a kit on human evolution for educators teaching at the high school and undergraduate levels. It is entitled ***Diversity in Human Fossil History: A Teaching Unit on Hominid Evolution***. Human evolution can be one of the most fascinating topics in school, but, unfortunately, the complex reality is often overly simplified into a linear view of the process.



This set of teaching materials illustrates in a vivid, yet still concise way the complexity and patterns of human-becoming as revealed in fossil skulls. It provides methods and materials (including 30 powerful copies of original drawings of representative hominid skulls) for weaving experiential, inquiry-based activities into a course on evolution in ways that spark fresh insights and help students themselves practice the work of exploratory science. You can view and purchase the kit through our website.

We have also recently published Craig's newest monograph, ***Do Frogs Come From Tadpoles?*** as part of The Nature Institute Perspectives series. This beautifully illustrated study is based on three articles on the frog from *In Context* #33, 34, and 35. Through closely attending to the phenomena of amphibian development, Craig shows that evolution is in reality a creative process, and not simply the inevitable product of lifeless mechanisms. The result is a concrete example of how one can begin to understand, as well as teach, natural science in a truly holistic and living way. The booklet can be purchased from our online bookstore or by contacting the Institute.

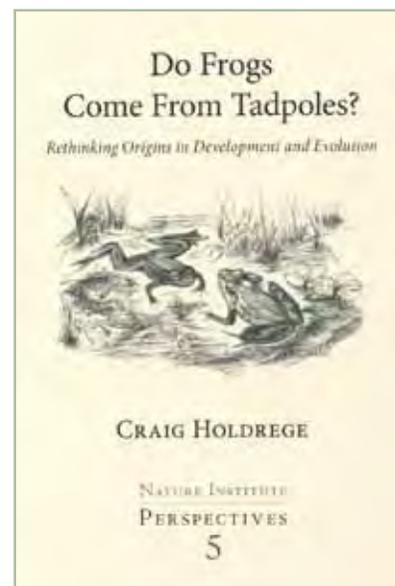
**In other publication news:** Our ability to explain and promote rigorously holistic approaches is increasingly being recognized and sought after by other publishers. Craig Holdrege, Steve Talbott, and Bruno Follador have each had major articles either commissioned or reprinted by respected publications.

In their newest issue (Fall 2017) the popular progressive magazine, *Utne Reader*, republished Craig's article "Meeting Nature as a Presence: Aldo Leopold and the Deeper Nature of Nature" from last fall's *In Context*. The *Reader* has a broad appeal with a total monthly audience, for its print and online versions, of about 275,000. You can pick up that issue on newsstands or download the article online at <http://natureinstitute.org/pub/ic/ic36/leopold.pdf>.

Another of last fall's *In Context* articles, Bruno's piece "Soil, Culture, and Responsibility," was also republished, this time in the summer issue of *Lilipoh*. In his article, Bruno looks back on what has been called "the most severe environmental catastrophe in the entire history of the white man on this continent"—the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. You can find it on our website at <http://natureinstitute.org/pub/ic/ic36/dustbowl.pdf>.

The Worldwatch Institute, one of the world's leading environmental think tanks, also included in its 2017 book, *Earth Ed: Rethinking Education on a Changing Planet*, a short essay from the Institute about the new Ecospheric Studies initiative in which Craig is participating. (See "Fall Events at The Nature Institute" on the following page.)

Steve's article, "Evolution and the Purposes of Life" appeared in the winter 2017 issue of *The New Atlantis*. It is available at <http://thenewatlantis.com/publications/evolution-and-the-purposes-of-life>.



## Fall Events at The Nature Institute

### **Do Frogs Come From Tadpoles? (September 22)**

*Talk by Craig Holdrege, book signing, and refreshments*

### **Animal and Human Morphology and the Idea of Freedom (September 30)**

*Workshop with Craig Holdrege and Henrike Holdrege*

*“The agreement within the whole makes every creature what it is. The human being is a human being through the whole gestalt as well as through the last segment of the little toe. And so it is that every creature is one tone, one shade of a great harmony that one must study as a whole if the particulars are not to become dead letters.” – GOETHE*

By comparing skulls and skeletons of various animals with that of the human being, we will work to discover how each part is revelatory of the nature of the whole being.

### **Where Do We Come From? The Question of Origins and Ancestors in Evolution (October 27)**

*Talk by Craig Holdrege*

### **Teaching Human Evolution: Diversity and Origins (October 28)**

*Workshop with Craig Holdrege for biology teachers and others interested in human evolution*

This all-day workshop builds on the previous evening’s talk. We will work with a “teaching kit” that Craig has designed for classroom use in high school and college. It provides methods and materials for weaving experiential, inquiry-based student activities into a course on evolution in ways that spark fresh insights. The question “Where do we come from?” will appear in a fundamentally new light.

### **Fun Fall Work on The Nature Institute Grounds (November 4)**

Please join us to prepare the grounds of The Nature Institute for the winter. Refreshments and good cheer will be provided! Please let us know in advance if you plan to volunteer.

### **Working on Ecosphere Studies at The Nature Institute (November 6 & 7)**

In 2015, Wes Jackson of the Land Institute in Kansas initiated an ambitious project to transform higher education by working to develop higher education curricula that would help to re-orient education around a worldview that prioritizes the understanding and protection of the ecosphere. Craig was asked to be one of the founding faculty members, whose task it is to explore how such a radical re-focusing of educational priorities could occur. A variety of meetings have taken place, and in November two core members of the ecosphere initiative, Aubrey Streit Krug and Bill Vitek, will come to The Nature Institute for two days. The main question to be discussed is how to develop intensive, experiential workshops to help students develop and apply an ecospheric perspective.

### **Celebrating Henry David Thoreau at Two Hundred: the Path Ahead (November 13)**

*Talk by Christina Root*

On the 200th anniversary of his birth, Henry David Thoreau continues to inspire and guide us politically, spiritually, and ecologically. This talk will explore Thoreau’s great gifts as a writer, his ability to embody the life of nature in his language, and to help us to get a sense of the whole without resorting to abstraction.

For more information about fall and winter events, please visit our Calendar of Events:  
<http://natureinstitute.org/calendar>.

*2018 WINTER COURSE AND A NEW PROGRAM— See announcement on back cover*