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## NEWS

### Bedford Audubon Director Ramps Up Outreach

Initiates new on-site educational programs and launches garden at Pound Ridge Elementary School.

By [Lisa Buchman](#) | [Email the author](#) | January 22, 2010

"Look at that parsley—isn't that cool?" said Jim Nordgren, tearing off a few leaves of frostbitten herbs for a nibble. "Still growing in January—that's hardy stuff."

Stepping over a row of orange carrot tops peeking out from their frozen beds, Nordgren marveled with wide eyes over the vegetable's hardiness. "See these sunflowers—they attract birds that eat insects," he said. "And over here, that's wormwood," he said, waving to a row of brittle brown foliage. "Repels rabbits and groundhogs."

The garden's "beneficial borders" prevent crop damage naturally, Nordgren explains. Healthy, pesticide-free vegetables are produced, along with a teaching opportunity for young people. Nordgren partnered with master gardener Cathy Claire and the [Cornell Cooperative Extension](#) to design the bird-friendly vegetable garden at the [Bedford Audubon Society's](#) Bylane Farm on Todd Road in Katonah.

One of several environmental education projects initiated by Nordgren, who was named Executive Director of Bedford Audubon a year ago, the garden is used as an educational tool and a resource—last year 200 pounds of produce were donated to the Katonah Community Center.

After 95 years of being run by volunteers, Bedford Audubon hired Nordgren to ramp up their educational outreach with science-based environmentalism. Bylane's visitors doubled to 3,000 in 2009, largely due to new programs he's initiated including bird walks, night migration watches, gardening classes, and a native plant garden.

And next month, he'll build a garden at Pound Ridge Elementary School, extending Bedford Audubon's work into the community.

When Nordgren learned that the endowment of Bedford Audubon's Henry Morgenthau Preserve provided two thousand dollars for environmental education in Pound Ridge, he worked with Pound Ridge Library Director Marilyn Tinter and the school community to develop a school garden.

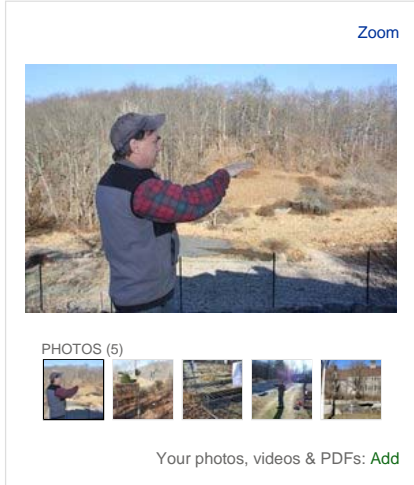
"It's another opportunity to reconnect kids with nature," said Nordgren. "Other schools in our area have successful gardens and we're excited to bring it to Pound Ridge."

The school's principal, Peter Politi, is just waiting for the snow to melt. "After attending a conference on teaching sustainability to kids, I'd been thinking of ways we could do it," said Politi. "Now our teachers, students, local garden club, neighboring nursery, PTA—we're all working together on this."

Parent volunteer and former biology professor Jennifer Lyons, along with the school's health and safety committee, surveyed teachers to design a garden that will work with existing curricula, including butterfly, sensory and "storybook" garden beds, plus a sunflower room and wooden stools donated by the PTA.

"We couldn't do it without Bedford Audubon," Lyons gratefully said. Funds will cover gardening consultant Cathy Clare, who implemented the Katonah Elementary garden, but the school will need to fundraise for the garden's maintenance.

Older students have had the opportunity to learn through Nordgren's programs, as well. Students from John Jay and Byram Hills high school completed internships last summer, and are working with him to prepare for the regional Science Olympiad.



Nordgren learned about protecting nature first-hand. During his twenty-year Wall Street career, he also worked on local environmental issues through such organizations as the Lewisboro Land Trust, Westchester Land Trust, Riverkeeper and Scenic Hudson. After retiring from finance he served a term as Lewisboro's town supervisor, and passed the nation's first inter-municipal agreement on biodiversity.

"A fancy way of saying we want to re-wild our picture-perfect backyards," Nordgren grins, gesturing toward Bylane's native plant garden, which visitors may tour with a self-guided brochure. "We can re-ribbon woods across towns for wildlife migration, one yard at a time."

To complete his career transition, Nordgren recently earned a Masters degree in Environmental Management at Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science. He hopes to use that knowledge to encourage local homeowners to plant more native species that require less water and greater return to the environment.

"You like forsythia? Try the native spicebush," he suggests. "It has a similar Springtime bloom, attracts butterflies and provides berries for the birds."

He makes it look easy to "go native," demonstrating how, if you find a species you like in their native plant garden, you can identify it on the brochure's map. He works with [Gosset Nursery](#) to make sure that they are stocking native species for local buyers.

"What we're really trying to do is re-connect people to nature," said Nordgren, who has the confidence of someone who regularly convinces people to "go green." "Studies show that people who are in nature heal faster, are more calm, less stressed and more emotionally stable."

Often it's just a matter of just unplugging, and stepping outside, he added—clearly he's given this tour before—as he opened the farmhouse's back door with a flourish to reveal a vast wintry landscape.

He pointed out a Sycamore ghost tree, towering in the middle of the field. With its white bark mottled with shades of brown, it indeed looked as if its spindly branches were reaching out to grab the nearest hiker.

"Isn't that cool?," Nordgren asked with the enthusiasm of someone who's found a second career he loves. You can't help but smile and agree. Yes, it is cool.