Awareness of the Environment – Level 3
BALANCE OF NATURE

Wildlife is very closely interrelated, and all species have some role in keeping the plan of nature operating properly. You have probably heard of the "balance of nature." This term applies to the idea that all forms of life have a purpose in nature and that all creatures contribute to the plan, keeping it in balance. In a cycle of life in nature, for instance, let's consider the oak tree. An oak tree produces acorns, which serve as food for the squirrel, which is in turn caught and eaten by the fox. The fox, in turn, is caught and eaten by a bobcat which later dies of a natural disease. The earth, producing nutrients for the soil, which in turn provide food for an oak tree, gradually absorbs the bobcat's body and the cycle begins again. This is a simplified example, but it illustrates the interdependence of nature in general. In addition to the above, also consider that the acorns serve to propagate the oak tree, that fleas line on the body of the squirrel, that the fox helps to keep the local rabbit population in check, and that the bobcat distributes plan seeds by means of burrs which stick to its coat of fur and fall to the ground perhaps a great distance from where they were picked up. These seeds produce plants that serve as food for other local animals and birds. The procession is endless.

Wild animals are a natural resource. If we are to leave these and other natural resources in good condition for future generations, we must care for them and not waste them.

Observing and getting to know about animals means more tan just seeing and identifying them. To really study them you must observe all facets of their life, their environment and their development. You must watch how they live, how they feed and what they eat, how they protect themselves, where they live and how they raise and train their young. Doing all this requires much patience. You must go where the animals are at the time they are there. This means that you may have to get up very early or stay up very late to observe a certain animal in its natural surroundings. There may be some animals that you will never see in your lifetime in their natural habitat.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air; over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ... Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food and to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground; every thing that has breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made and it was very good and there was evening and there was morning the sixth day.

The Circles of Life

The balance of nature is not only in the form of plant to animal but it is from plant to plant. Let's take the oak tree again. The oak tree not only produces acorns but also produces leaves. The leaves grow and produce energy for the tree to live. The leaves convert sunlight to plant food with a byproduct of producing oxygen. The leaves produce food for the tree during the spring, summer and into the fall. Then the leaves fall from the tree and decompose on the forest floor turning into food for the tree for the next growing season. The circle of life is evident in the fruit and in the leaves of the tree. When the tree reaches the end of its life, the tree dies or ceases to grow. The

dead tree can provide homes for owls, raccoons, porcupines and numerous other insects. These will occupy the tree until the tree falls to the ground when it starts to decompose and return nutrients to the soil to support new trees.

Nature also supports itself with the by providing other circles to support life. Let's take water. Most plants are dependent on rain for the water to sustain life. Rain is made up of small water droplets that fall from the skies from what we call clouds. Clouds are made up of water vapor that is cooled and condensed in the upper atmospheres. When the water vapor becomes to heavy for the cloud to hold onto it falls to earth in the form of rain or snow. The water vapor comes from the evaporation that takes place over larger bodies of water. The sun and or wind causes the water to evaporate or turn into a gaseous state and become airborne. It travels in the atmosphere until it reaches cooler air and then condenses to form clouds and then rain. The rain falls to the earth and is either absorbed by the earth or runs off into streams and rivers that return it to the large bodies of water to start the cycle all over again.

In nature we have many cycles working all the time together. We need to understand these cycles such that we can use them to our benefit and not interrupt them to the detriment of future generations.