



Race and Nature in the City

ENGAGING YOUTH OF COLOUR IN NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES

A Community-based Needs Assessment for Nature Canada's NatureHood

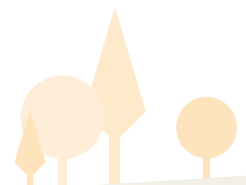
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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

Nature Canada is learning how to fulfill our commitment to anti-racism and equity in our work of discovering, defending and restoring nature.

We commissioned this research in early 2020 to help us understand if we're on the right track and what we need to do next in our work to engage young people in nature. In sharing the findings and recommendations of the report, *Race and Nature in the City*, we hope other organizations who are on a similar journey will find it thought-provoking and useful.

During the course of the research, there were world-wide protests in support of Black Lives Matter and against racial harassment of Black people in nature spaces. People like birdwatcher Christian Cooper in Central Park, New York.

There was also the pandemic when lockdowns prompted some young people in Toronto, where the research was conducted, to explore the city's ravines and other outdoor areas, many for the first time.

We were told that a focus on wilderness landscapes reinforces the misperception that you must leave the city to find nature. We need more urban partners.

We were told that fear of nature among some of the teens who participated in the research goes beyond scary bugs and poison ivy. It is fear of intruding on what is perceived as "white space" and being on the receiving end of racism. Systemic racism is a barrier to access to nature.

Race and Nature in the City contains advice Nature Canada can use to become a better ally to racialized communities and individuals. In our work to mobilize hundreds of organizations and more than 250,000 nature lovers to help protect species and land, we recognize that achieving racial justice is an ethical imperative and critical for the well-being of nature.

There are hundreds of organizations in the nature community, each with their own challenges and journeys. We invite you to read this report, to learn, to take whatever advice is useful to you, and to help us keep the conversation going. We look forward to working with you.

Signed,



Graham Saul
Directeur Exécutif/Executive Director
Nature Canada



INTRODUCTION

Since 1939, Nature Canada has been a voice for nature whose advocacy has helped protect species and vast amounts of land in Canada. Nature Canada facilitates mobilization among an extensive network of more than 900 organizations and more than 250,000 nature lovers and works to generate the political will needed for transformation. Nature Canada aims to build lasting connections between nature, people and decision makers to drive systemic change that will protect species, ecosystems and the planet for generations to come.

Nature Canada is committed to continuous action in support of equity and anti-racism as part of their work to defend and restore nature. They have acknowledged that achieving racial justice and gender equality is an ethical imperative and critical for the well-being of nature. Their goal is to take an intersectional approach which considers how power is exercised across issues of gender, age, class, ability, and culture, as well as race.

Nature Canada has an expressed desire to help address the complex barriers to nature and nature-based programming experienced by racialized communities, and

is actively working at multiple levels to better engage racialized communities in a meaningful, sustainable, and equitable way. Programmatically, Nature Canada's NatureHood program works through partnerships to connect young people to nearby urban nature, Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, and National Wildlife Areas, through nature based programming delivered through partner organizations across the country now known as Canada.

The program has a growing focus on creating nature-based programming opportunities for racialized young people and seeks to better engage racialized communities and create a more equitable NatureHood. In order to expand the boundaries of the current programmatic framework to better serve urban youth, the growth of the program needed to be grounded in the needs identified by communities. Nature Canada thus requested the researchers to conduct a Community-Based Needs Assessment to better understand the cultural and psychological barriers to nature experienced by young racialized people and provide recommendations for action to address these barriers.

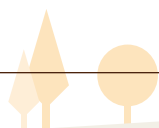
Although this needs assessment is specifically aimed to provide recommendations on how NatureHood can improve its outreach to and programs for youth of colour communities in the Greater Toronto Area, it need not be constrained to that program or region. The recommendations are applicable to groups organizing nature-based activities committed to incorporating anti-racism and equity work in their programming.

The research consisted of a literature review and environment scan; focus groups with immigrant youth; and key interviews with Indigenous leaders to explore how to link NatureHood, youth of colour and Indigenous groups in shared nature programs.

This research was commissioned in early 2020. During the course of the research, two significant events occurred and impacted the needs assessment. First, the research was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it took longer than expected to complete the needs assessment, the scope had to be scaled back, and most of the focus groups and interviews were done via Zoom, and not in-person as originally planned. Second, the research occurred in the context of the police killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the racial profiling of Christian Cooper, a Black birdwatcher in Central Park, New York. Thus, discussions on youth of colour experiences in nature were heightened by the police murders and the subsequent world-wide protests in support of Black Lives Matter and the racial harassment of Black people in nature spaces.

The report is in seven parts. This section one is the introduction and sets the context for the study. Section two is an overview of the current state of knowledge on the issues faced by immigrant youth in engaging with nature and natural landscapes in Canada. Section three is an overview of the research methods. Section four and five are discussions of the findings. Section six is the recommendations and seven is the conclusion.

From the request for proposal, the goal of the research was to provide an evidence-based, community-informed needs assessment and recommendations for meaningfully engaging racialized communities in nature and nature-based programming in urban areas.





The scope of the research was:

- Greater Toronto Area (GTA) focused, as the largest, most diverse city in Canada, with opportunity for research findings and recommendations to be used to ground work in urban centres across Canada.
- NatureHood-focused, with opportunity for findings and recommendations to inform Nature Canada and Nature Canada partners' work more broadly.

Questions to be answered:

- What is the current state of engagement of racialized communities in nature and nature-based programming?
- What are the barriers experienced to engagement?
- What motivates those that are engaged?
- What are the community-identified needs to support increased engagement?
- What are the recommendations for NatureHood moving forward?
- What is the documented process of this work – to support replication in other urban areas?

Approach to include:

- Community focus groups
- Contributions from pilot programs in GTA
- Convening proposed advisory group to contribute to research.

This study is significant as it disturbs the waters of environmental discussions in Canada – by including the experiences of youth of colour. These youth, like people of colour in general, are largely invisible in conservation conversations. Studies on immigrant youth tend to focus on the settlement and adjustment challenges they encounter. Studies on youth and nature are mostly based on white youth, and therefore ignore race as a unit of analysis. This study is a bridge between the environmental sector and the lived experiences of youth of colour in nature.



01

CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

This scan of youth of colour in nature is in three main sections. The first sets the context by highlighting the demographic shift in Canada from a predominately white society to a multicultural one. Part two reviews the literature on the barriers that block access to nature for immigrant youth. These barriers can be physical, psychological, cultural or language-based. Part three is an overview of the specific challenges faced by Black youth in nature.

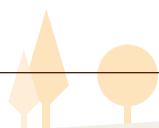
“To become naturalized is to live as if your children’s future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do,” writes Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013, p. 215). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau notes how much of Canadian identity is closely linked to the great outdoors. He mentions that “People always talk about nature, parks, and enjoying the great outdoors. Living, playing, and growing up in the open air. Camping, hiking, and swimming with friends and family” ([CBC Radio](#)). However, reports suggest that 80% of Canadians living in urban centres are pressed for time, 90% of them prefer to spend their time indoors and 30% do not participate in any nature-related activity ([Nature Brain](#)). Canadian Parks Council’s report lists eight factors that influence Canadian’s relations with nature. These include urbanization and access to nature, changing demographics, competition for our time, indoor and sedentary lifestyle, global travel accessibility, education and the outdoors, stranger danger, and fear of the outdoors (Parks Canada 2014).

The Pigeon Paradox theory contends that since the majority of the world population is likely to reside in urban areas, the global conservation movement’s dependence on urban nature becomes significant (Dunn et al. 2006). Connecting people to nearby nature for direct experience and interaction with nature would require improved access to nearby nature and restoration of urban ecosystems. Additionally, the portrayal of non-native and pest species would need to be carefully considered as the likelihood of exotic species in urban areas is higher (Dunn et al. 2006). There are five key drivers of change that are likely to influence the future of Canada’s nature and urban forests: “urbanization, rising rates of chronic disease, shifting cultural identity, climate change and the changing demands for community engagement” (Hotte et al. 2015, p. vii).

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Demographics

Toronto is the largest and densest Canadian city. Its current population is 2.6 million in the city proper and 6.2 million in the urban Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and it is expected that by 2035, there will be an addition of one million residents in Toronto alone ([PopulationStat](#)). Over 90% of immigrants settle in urban centres (Aizlewood et al. 2006). The GTA serves as a magnet for immigrants from around the world.



From the 2011 National Household Survey, 46% of the population in the GTA are immigrants, with newcomers comprising 32.8% of the total population (“Visible minorities” 2013).

GTA cities with high foreign-born population include Markham (58.7%), Richmond Hill (57.4%), Mississauga (53.4%), Brampton (52.3%), and Toronto (47%) ([Mississauga News 2013](#)). Most recent immigrants to Canada are from Asia and the Middle East with numbers from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean increasing. In the period 2011-2016, the top three countries of origin of immigrants are India, China, and the Philippines (Whalen 2017; Ballingall 2017). In terms of visible minority population, some cities in the region can now be classified as majority-minority with Markham having nearly 78% and Brampton 73.3%. Toronto’s visible minority population stands at 51.5% ([Whalen 2017](#)).

Youth

Youth represent 19.2% of the country’s population. Unlike the expected population increase of visible minority population, the proportion of youth is projected to fall to 18% by the year 2035. However, Canada’s youth are highly diverse with 27% of youth aged 15 – 30 years identifying as a visible minority, with Black youth being 5.4% in 2016 ([StatCan Youth](#)). Toronto’s Black population is the highest in the country at nearly 350,000 with its youth population being a little over 100,000. In the Toronto census metropolitan area the proportion of youth aged 15-30 years belonging to a visible minority group was over 55%. Some 76% of the youth in Toronto are first generation immigrants or had at least one parent who was an immigrant. Indigenous youth population is growing in the country and in Toronto they are 2% of the youth population.

Nearly 100% of youth are comfortable with technology with 93% using social networking sites. Some 67% of youth are members of groups, organizations or associations, and 48% of youth volunteer, while 71% give to a charity or a non-profit. A higher proportion of young women (70.2%) compared to young men (52.1%) have a college certificate or diploma or a Bachelor’s degree ([StatCan Youth Matters](#)). Youth health and wellbeing is a cause for concern across the country. Some 13% of youth have reported a form of disability that can be either physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental health related. Potential risks for heart disease arise due to high rates of obesity and physical inactivity. Overweight or obese youth form 40% of the youth population while only 20% of youth meet the recommended weekly dose of physical activity. In summary, Canadian youth are more diverse, educated, connected and socially engaged than previous generations, yet some are at risk of facing challenges like mental health, addictions, homelessness and feelings of exclusion.

Greenspace

Spread over 630 km², Toronto has a population density of 4,195 people per square km compared to Canada’s average of 4 people per square km (PopulationStat 2020). Toronto contains 8,000 ha of greenspace including 1,600 parks and a natural ravine system (“2018 Pressure” 2018). Estimates indicate that while 28 m² of greenspace was available per capita in the year 2018, it is expected to fall to 21 m² due to urbanization and urban intensification in the next 15 years (“2018 Pressure” 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

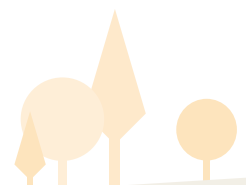
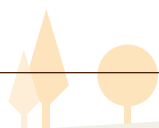
Living in reciprocity with the land is an essential teaching of the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Kimmerer 2015). “Indigenous people’s relationships with the land form an ‘ontological belonging’. Their spiritual beliefs connect them into the land and to all things of nature, which means they preserve nature intact and unimpaired. Indigenous people experience the land as a symbolic and spiritual landscape rather than only a physical environment,” (Yazdani & Lozanovska 2017, p. 82). These principles also apply to Australian Aborigines (Dudgeon et al. 2010). Other researchers argue for a global movement of Indigenous land stewardship programs (Sangha 2020).

Nature and Urbanization

It is estimated that by the year 2060 around 68% of the world’s population will be living in urban centres (United Nations, DESA 2018). Many maintain that the current global biodiversity crisis and humankind’s general lack of interest in nature is the direct result of increasing urbanization around the world (Pyle 2003; Turner et. al. 2004; Miller 2005). This is a cause for concern as studies find that urbanization is the leading cause for the increasing psychological distance between humans and nature. Conservation scholars worry that the growing disconnect between the human and natural world will be detrimental for both humans and nature, as it deprives humans of deriving the benefits from nature while at the same time lead to their lack of interest towards caring for nature. “Collective ignorance leads to collective indifference,” noted Miller (2005, p. 430). It is this indifference that worries conservation biologists who maintain that loss of contact with nature results in a cycle of lack of appreciation, diminished interest, and deprivation of benefits leading to lack of care and concern for nature (Miller 2005; Soga and Gaston 2016).

Studies show that living in cities makes children and youth unable to understand the relationships between urbanization, habitat loss and species decline (Miller 2005). This “extinction of experience” is the result of urbanization and loss of natural areas for children to play in as they grow (Pyle 1993; Miller 2005; Soga and Gaston 2016). Childhood interactions with nature and the resultant memories shape our attitudes and behaviour towards the environment.

‘Nature deficit disorder’ describes a range of behavioural problems in children due to their reduced contact with nature (Louv 2005). Children and youth are spending more time indoors than out in nature due to two main reasons: stranger danger and technological advancement. While the former fuels parents’ fear of letting their children out without supervision, the latter demotivates children from going outdoors. Growing disaffection with nature results from a lack of direct personal contact with it (Soga and Gaston 2016). Thus, disconnection with nature leads not only to loss of health and well-being benefits for humans, it also leads to lack of care and stewardship. Louv’s theory has been criticized for not considering the impact of modern (western and scientific) culture, which sets humans apart from nature, as the root cause of nature deficit disorder. Gentin (1996) and Dickson (2013) argue that our cultural mindset sets us apart from nature and our relationship with nature needs to change since we are very much a part of nature.



Cronon (1996) argues for the need to relate to the everyday nature that exists nearby. Dickinson (2013) urges environmental education programs to shift from cognition to the psyche, where making an emotional connection with nature is given precedence over cognitive knowledge of nature. Dickinson (2013) argues for *ecocultural conversations* as a connective communication practice to bridge the nature-culture divide. Using Rachel Carson's (1965) arguments in the book *The Sense of Wonder* that favour all sensory experiences over just visual, Dickinson argues for environmental education that provides "opportunities to experience *being with* and *of* the forests" (2016, p. 45).

From another perspective, Indigenous worldviews see humans as part of nature, sharing the land with non-human kin or relations such as the birds, lakes and trees. As Melissa K. Nelson (2008, p.4) writes in her book, *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable World*, "for humans to get along with each other and to respect our relations on the earth, we must embrace and practice cognitive and cultural pluralism (value diverse ways of thinking and being). We need to not only *tolerate* difference but respect and celebrate cultural diversity as an essential part of engendering peace." In Indigenous worldviews, human communities thrive when they live in reciprocity with nature (Goeman 2013). In other words, when humans care for nature, nature cares for them (Salmón 2000). In Indigenous worldviews, the land is not inanimate; it is alive, active, as well as a teacher (Simpson 2017). For Indigenous youth living in urban areas, connection to the land and nature in the city is seen as vital for their health and well-being (Hatala, et al. 2020). It is a key part of their resilience.

Immigrants and nature

Studies show the lower rates of participation by ethnic minority groups in sports, leisure and recreation activities when compared to white majority population (Gentin 2011; Aizlewood et al. 2006). These racially biased outcomes occur in the United States, Europe and Canada. Traditional explanations focused on the ethnic minority socio-economic status and cultures for their under participation (Kloek et al. 2017; Aizlewood et al. 2006). However, current researchers focus on how systemic barriers limit participation by immigrants and ethnic minorities and call for the creation of more diverse cultural spaces to encourage ethnic participation (Stodolska 2015; Kloek et al. 2015; Gentin 2011).

Conventional studies note that immigrants seem to prefer passive recreational activities that include socialization, such as picnics and barbecues with family and friends, over pursuing individual active recreation (Peters et al. 2010; Yazdani and Lozanovska 2017). These studies are based on the white norms, practices and idea of recreation. Mountain Equipment Co-op's recent national survey reports greater participation of people of colour as compared to white people in outdoor recreation ([Cision 2018](#)). According to this report, people of colour have 8% higher rates of participation in outdoor activities as compared to white people. They spend an average of three more hours per week outdoors compared to their white counterparts, and their engagement in active sports like climbing and snow sports is higher as is the likelihood of them jogging or running. In other activities like road cycling, camping and hiking, there appears to be greater parity between the population groups.

ACCESS TO NATURE

In practice, connecting to nature depends on access. There is ample literature that discusses physical access to nature spaces and how it may be limited for low income, diverse and marginalised communities. However, there are other factors that act as barriers to nature and limit contact with it. These include knowledge and information, economic, cultural, as well as psychological barriers.

Physical barriers

Other than distance and cost of transportation, the lack of physical access to natural spaces also occurs due to lack of knowledge about nature, about the place, and about the facilities in the place. In the City of Toronto, the lack of signs, or damaged ones, make it difficult to find and know where the trails go in ravines. Trails are created for user access but also to control user movement through space and the signage in parks tend to warn or ward people off. These measures tend to highlight the nature-culture divide and see humans as distinct from nature.

Economic barriers

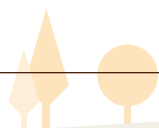
Immigrants face economic challenges and greater levels of poverty as compared to non-immigrants and in Toronto this burden is greater on racial minorities, new immigrants, and youth (Mwarigha 2002; [Toronto Foundation](#)). In terms of engaging with nature, such groups are limited by economic factors that may include cost of transportation. In some cases entry fees and user fees for various facilities may limit visits. However, with more immigrant households dependent on low paying jobs, many are deprived of the privilege of taking time for leisure activities and what time they do get they use in culturally appropriate leisure activities that might not be the norm (Stodolska 2015; Horolets 2012).

Language as a barrier

New immigrants need information that is delivered personally, in their own language and in a language that is culturally sensitive (Caidi et al. 2010). Personal contact encourages social interaction between diverse groups, and helps build trusting relationships especially for immigrants who perceive themselves as “othered” and face social isolation. Trust is an essential ingredient for immigrant integration (Bilodeau and White 2016). However, studies on volunteering amongst immigrants indicates lower levels of participation in activities that require social interaction with the host population (Kazemipur 2012). Immigrant integration is a two-way street where integration needs to be borne by both immigrant and host populations.

Culture as a barrier

Immigrants bring their cultural and social values and ways of life with them. Therefore, paying attention to “cultural differences in nature experience and appreciation” becomes essential and important in a multicultural country like Canada (Hotte et al.



2015 p. 45). The environmental movement here is dominated by white, middle-class privileged population that finds it challenging to engage diverse communities and gain from their knowledge, skills and experience (Gibson-Wood 2010; Earth Day 2012).

Outdoor recreation use and the perception of nature is strongly influenced by culture and cultural norms, but it is the normalising of the whiteness of culture that leads to issues of under-participation and under-representation of ethnic minority groups (Long et al. 2014). For example, the quintessential idea of a cottage vacation is a very white Canadian experience that does not speak to non-white immigrants, writes Elamin Abdelmehmoud in [Cottage Life](#). According to him the idea of a cottage holiday is about leisure, a luxury that few immigrants can afford. A person's status and success is also associated with owning a cottage in the country for the established white population while for immigrants the idea of success is about stable income that can buy you a roof over your head, food in your belly and a good education for your children (Abdelmehmoud 2020).

Psychological barriers

Fear of crime in public open spaces serves as a major deterrent for people to engage in outdoor activities (Madge 1997). This is especially true for women, the elderly and visible minorities that include Asians and African-Caribbean people (Madge 1997). Users may also feel discomfort if other users of the space are not seen as friendly and welcoming. In addition, in urban parks women may fear sexual attacks and racial minorities may fear race-based crimes (Madge 1997). Fear can be triggered by mugging, strangers loitering in the park, sexual attack, groups of young people, concealed areas, people approaching the children, dogs, and racial attack. Such fears reflect structural inequalities (Madge 1997). "Fear of crime might not be just evoked by one or two single attributes but rather result from multiple attributes and their interactions," note Sreetheran and van den Bosch (2014, p. 2). Individual factors such as gender and past experiences, whether direct or indirect, have a greater influence on the perception of crime than social and physical factors. There is a greater fear of crime among low income, ethnic minority communities (Sreetheran and van den Bosch 2014, p. 4).

There are many challenges that immigrant youth face in gaining access to nature. It is important to note immigrant groups are not monolithic. "Ethnic populations are not homogenous, either in race, ethnicity or class. Yet categories such as 'Black or African American' are used to characterize and reify stereotypical images of one group of people. This overlooks the fact that most minority cultures, just as is true of the 'White' culture, are composed of a combination of peoples of different backgrounds," noted Gentin (2011).

It is also crucial to note that there is no one way of being in nature. As table 1 below indicates, organizations and individuals can engage with nature by tree planting, birdwatching, hiking or community gardens.

Table 1: Ways that organizations engage with nature

NATURE

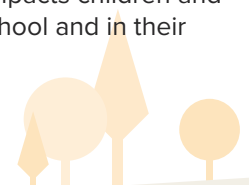
Conservation	Education	Recreation	Health and Wellness	Food
Tree planting	Outdoor workshops	Camping	Meditation	Community garden
Nature restoration	Citizen science	Biking	Mindfulness	Urban orchards
Stewardship	Bird watching	Hiking	Nature-based arts	Food forests
Trail management	Tree and Plant ID workshops	Canoeing		Foraging groups
	English language learning	Fishing		
		Survival skills		
		Walking tours		

Knowledge as barrier

Knowledge, or rather lack of knowledge, serves as a factor that limits immigrants' engagement with urban nature and outdoor leisure pursuits (Horolets 2012; Bustamante et al. 2011). Immigrants' social networks influence their knowledge about nature and nature-based activities, with many believing in word of mouth as a trustworthy source of information (Rothe et al. 2010). Yu and Berryman (1996) report, "lack of knowledge about sites or information about activities prevented them from being more active in recreation" (p. 263). Similar barriers related to knowledge regarding transportation, clothing, financing, and language served as barriers to wintertime outdoor physical activity participation by Somali youth in Maine (Rothe et al. 2010). Guardians of these youth were frustrated with the lack of information about opportunities, safety, and participation strategies and therefore reluctant to let their children participate. Low levels of participation by immigrant children in summer residential camps results from lack of knowledge of camp managers regarding immigrant issues and lack of specific outreach strategies (Bustamante 2010).

Immigrant youth and nature

Early childhood experiences in nature and their impact on later human-nature relations has been well scrutinised by scholars in the field of conservation and environmental education. However, most of these studies do not include experiences of immigrant youth and children. The few studies that target immigrant children and youth, and their experience with outdoor nature and leisure, highlight the role of nature in their socio-cultural adaptation in the host country (Hordyk et al. 2015; Bustamante 2008). Studies on immigrant youth are heavily biased towards education and career, indicating a significant gap in understanding immigrant youth in the context of urban nature and conservation studies. The immigration and settlement process impacts children and youth as they struggle to understand the changes at home, in school and in their



everyday lives. Hordyk et al.'s (2015) study suggests that 'nature nurtures' and this is especially valuable for helping immigrant children and youth as they struggle to find and make their own place in a new country. However, their access to nature is greatly influenced by their caregivers (parents and teachers) and peers and decisions they make about engaging with nature (Hordyk et al. 2015; Bustamante 2008; Rothe et al. 2010). Bustamante's study on parents of immigrant children attending residential camps indicates that racial composition and visible representations of race are important for parents to consider before sending their children to camps so as not to negatively impact their sense of inclusion and belonging (2010).

Recreation and leisure studies on immigrants are also limited (Stodolska and Yi, 2003). Leisure for immigrant youth is mediated by their familial culture as well as the mainstream culture of the country they find themselves in. Leisure for South Asian youth centers around the family, starting with the immediate family, and then including extended family, followed by friends (Tirone and Pedlar 2000). With age and time of residence in the new country, as youth get comfortable, they try to break family restrictions and join more mainstream leisure activities with most reporting gaining from integrating the "best of both worlds" in their lives. Other studies on South Asian youth find that girls in these families are more constrained with family rules and values than boys (Carrington et al. 1987). A study of newly arrived Chinese adolescents in New York City found ethnicity and culture to strongly influence their leisure activities which are in sharp contrast to the American concept of leisure (Yu and Berryman 1996). Often this makes it difficult for Chinese youth to acculturate and they tend to remain in their culture groups, other than when they participate in organised sports. Outdoor activities for these youth included walking for pleasure and picnics with Chinese friends. More than their own culture serving as a barrier, studies find intolerance and prejudice from the dominant group negatively impacts the choices youth make regarding leisure activities they engage in (Tirone and Pedlar 2000; Tirone 1999; Yu and Berryman 1996).

Black Youth and Nature

Black youth have a more complicated relationship to nature compared to other youth of colour. This relationship is undergirded by slavery and its after-life (Hartman 2008). In the Canadian nationalist imagination, we are the land of the Great Outdoors or the Great White North. Images of endless forests, canoeing along lakes and rivers, and snow-covered landscapes are icons of the country. These images are captured in the paintings by the Group of Seven, as well as featured in marketing and tourism campaigns.

The images are based on three assumptions which are grounded in race. First, that nature in Canada is pristine and was free of people. This is untrue – it erases Indigenous people and their ownership of the land, and their on-going struggles to reclaim it (Tuck & Yang 2012). National and provincial parks were created to protect nature, and the first step in the process was to remove Indigenous people from their land (Thorpe 2012).

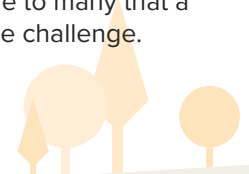
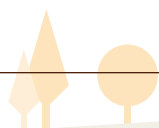
Second, nature is seen as neutral or a transparent space that is open to everyone (McKittrick 2006). Seeing nature in this way hides how race shapes what is considered to be natural, who it benefits and who is best suited to be in that space (Finney 2014).



For instance, in Canada and the United States, outdoor recreation clubs were created to halt the softening up of white men due to city life (Solnit 2001). Spending time in the wilderness recharged both the body and hearty masculinity. In time the gender restrictions were muted as women were allowed to join men in wilderness recreation. However, the racial restrictions have not changed much. Furthermore, environmentalism is overwhelmingly white (Scott 2018). Whether it is conservation, forestry or outdoor recreation, the fields are dominated by a river of white faces, and the absence of Black ones. It is only in 2018 that Mountain Equipment Coop, the iconic retailer of outdoor dreams and equipment, started to show diverse models in its advertising.

Third, the absence of Black people in environmentalism in Canada continues the erasure of Black people from the history of the country (Walcott 2003), including 200 years of slavery (Cooper 2007). When and where Black people are mentioned, it is usually in the context of either new immigrants or as fugitives fleeing slavery in the United States via the Underground Railroad. In either case it maintains the image of Canada as a haven for Black people. Moreover, in the white imagination Black people belong in the city. Those who venture into the wilderness are seen as a surprise or as out of place. In other words, nature spaces are coded as white spaces for white people (Finney 2014).

Black people's experience in nature can be fun, restorative, and at the same time tinged with the fear of race-based violence from white people. For instance, Christian Cooper was birdwatching in Central Park when he asked a white woman to put her dog on the leash to protect ground-nesting birds (Scott 2020). The woman had ignored the posted signs to do so. In response to Cooper, she called the police, lying that her life was being threatened by an African American man. The incident was posted on social media and it went viral. Christian Cooper could have easily ended up like George Floyd – dead at the hands of the police. In Canada, on his six-week cycling trip across the country, Phillip Morgan was constantly asked what he was doing and where was he *really* from (Morgan 2019). It was inconceivable to many that a Black man, a Canadian, was in nature simply because he liked the challenge.





Butterfly
dinner

02

METHODOLOGY

There are different ways of knowing and different notions of what counts as knowledge. A basic principle of this needs assessment was that the lived experience, or the life-world, of the participants is knowledge. A second principle was that the research is ethical, and that consenting to the research is a process. On a practical level this meant that at the start of each focus group and interview participants were asked to confirm that they understood the goals of the study, were willing to participate and agreed to be recorded. They were free to withdraw from the study at any point. A precis of the final report will be available to all who took part in the research. The main research methods were focus groups and interviews and each of these is discussed below. The two researchers are insiders to the people of colour communities – one is Black and the other is South Asian from India. Being insiders, and sharing some cultural values, increased the comfort level of the participants in the research.

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus groups were held with community organizations working with youth of colour and which had a social justice orientation. We compiled a list of 30 community groups that met the basic criteria and half of these were contacted via email. We aimed to do five focus groups, from five different immigrant communities, to capture the variety of experiences of immigrant youth in nature.

The research began just as the Covid-19 pandemic started. As many agencies were adjusting to this new reality, they did not have the time, focus or resources to participate in the needs assessment. In the end, we did the focus groups with those who responded. The organizations received a small honorarium for assisting with the research. The initial plan was to do five focus groups in an outdoor setting such as a city park or ravine. However, due to Covid-19 challenges, we were only able to do four focus groups: two were held outdoors (with masks and social distancing) and two were completed via Zoom.

The focus group participants were recruited by the community organizations. Each focus group had an average of 10 participants and lasted about an hour. Participants received a small honorarium for taking part in the research. The sessions were recorded and later were partially transcribed for analysis.

The following is an overview of each focus group:

Access Point on Danforth: This is a large multi-service agency which acts as a community hub in Scarborough in the eastern edge of Toronto. It serves clients living in a low income neighbourhood, with limited services for its large immigrant population. The focus group was organized through the Garden Coordinator and

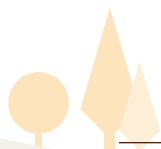


Green Access Community Animator and it was held in a community garden which is in a large city park and overlooks a ravine. The majority of the participants were from Bangladesh and one each from Nepal and Afghanistan. This group was mainly male, Muslim, and high school students aged 14 to 19 years.

Youth Leadership of East York: This is a grassroots youth group organized by youth activists in the east edge of Toronto in a similar neighbourhood as Access Point on Danforth. The focus group was held in a city park close to a ravine. The participants were mainly from the Pakistani community, and with one each from Sudan and Sri Lanka. Most were Muslim and most were female. They were high school or first year university students, aged 16 to 20 years.

Find Your Path Canada: This is an established grassroots organization which is led by university students. Its mission is to empower first generation students who are Black and people of colour to meet their full academic potential. The organization is in the northwestern edge of Toronto, in a poor neighbourhood with limited services for its high immigrant population. The focus group was held via Zoom. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 24 years, were mostly female, and most were university students. Four were from Nigeria, two from Somalia, one each from Ethiopia, Egypt, India and Bangladesh. The group was a mixture of Muslims and Christians.

CultureLink Settlement and Community Services: This is a large and established settlement agency, with 70 multicultural staff serving about 12,000 multicultural clients each year. The agency runs several youth programs including nature-based ones.



The focus group was held via Zoom. The participants were from Iraq, Iran, Somalia and Syria. They were male and female, and a mixture of high school and university students.

All focus group discussions were guided by the following questions:

1. When you think about nature, what does it mean to you?
2. What is the nature like in your neighbourhood?
3. How often do you go to the nature areas that you mention?
4. What do you like about the nature in your neighbourhood?
5. What don't you like about the nature in your neighbourhood?
6. What would encourage you to spend more time in the nature in your neighbourhood?
7. What other nature areas or things would you like to see or visit?
8. Any other comments about nature or nature in your neighbourhood?

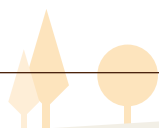
INTERVIEWS

The second research method was interviews with Indigenous leaders involved in environmental education programs. The interviews explored how to bring Indigenous knowledge into NatureHood programs in the city, and how to create links between Indigenous and immigrant communities using urban nature as a bridge. The interviewees received a small honorarium for sharing their knowledge. The plan was to do three interviews, and two were completed due to the coronavirus pandemic challenges. The interviews were done via Zoom; they were recorded and later partially transcribed for analysis. Each interview lasted about an hour. The interviewees were:

Catherine Tammaro. She is a Wyandot multi-disciplinary artist in visual art, design and music. She is a seated Tradition Keeper for the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation, and has served as Indigenous artist in residence and Visiting Elder for many projects and organizations.

Rebecca Beaulne-Stuebing. She is a PhD student in Social Justice Education at University of Toronto. She is a member of Indigenous Land Stewardship Circle project in High Park.

Prompts for the interview conversations included: when you think about nature, what does it mean to you; how to connect immigrant youth to nature while respecting the Indigenous history of the land; and how to build relationships with Indigenous agencies in the environmental sectors.





03

PARTNERSHIPS, FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This is in two sections, the first being an assessment of the current partnerships and social media images of NatureHood. The second section contains findings from the focus groups organized under the themes of nature comprises, placing nature, activities, attributes, and emotions.

CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA OBSERVATIONS

On the NatureHood website, the stated goals are to connect urban residents, particularly young people and their families, to nearby nature. However, there is an unstated funding restriction whereby partners admitted to the NatureHood program are required to have field trips to nearby Migratory Bird Sanctuaries and National Wildlife Areas, some of which are nearby or within city limits but others are as much as an hour's drive away. This creates a disconnect between the other stated goal of NatureHood which is to address barriers to accessing nature.

If the idea is to connect youth to nature in their local area, then the paucity of city-based partners is a major obstacle. Most Canadians live in cities. A number of the partners are conservation organizations located away from the city. Furthermore, the dominance of conservation groups reflect a particular view of nature, which is based on the idea that nature lies outside of the city. This in turn reflects a Euro-Western philosophical orientation which sees humans as separate from nature.

As part of the research, we also examined which groups are present, or absent, from the social media profile of Nature Canada and NatureHood. This is important as websites and social media are often the first form of contact with organizations. We examined the first 100 images with people in them on the main Twitter handle of the organization @NatureCanada. The images were tweeted over a five-month period from August 9, 2020 to January 8, 2021. Of the 100 images, 67 per cent showed white people and 33 per cent showed people of colour including Indigenous nations. Thus, from the Twitter feed white people are the majority and people of colour are the minority in the images.

We found three specific NatureHood images with people among the 100 tweets with people, and all were of people of colour in nature settings. One image was of a group of Muslim women, another of a Black group and the third was of a multi-cultural group of children. These NatureHood images are closer to the demographic reality of Toronto and other large Canadian cities.

The focus groups and the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis; that is we located and examined common threads across the data. The five main themes are organized in Table 2 below. We have paraphrased, and edited for clarity, some quotes from each of the focus groups to give the flavour of the discussions in each theme.

Table 2: Themes in the Focus Group Discussion

Themes	Examples
Nature comprises	Trees, birds, animals, bugs, biodiversity, ecosystems
Placing nature	Outside of house, valley, trails
Activities	Barbeque, hiking, biking
Attributes	Cleanliness, dirty
Emotions/Feelings	Peaceful, harmony, fear

NATURE COMPRISES

The focus group participants had a variety of perspectives on what nature consisted of, ranging from biodiversity, to ecosystems to urban nature. The groups showed a sophisticated understanding of the impact of climate change, pollution, and extinction of nature. Comments from the focus group included:

- When I think of nature I think of natural things that we as humans didn't create, disrupt, or put there. Also ecosystems that work together to provide for each other and support each other.
- I see the colour green. But sadly in the city it is hard to see greenery in the city. I also see nature as different ecosystems, different lives like animals trying to live in the city – doing their best to survive.
- When I think of nature the first thing that comes to mind is the need for preservation, because as we know global warming, climate change is a really big problem in our world. We see millions and millions of animals going extinct because of the state of our world today. So when I think of nature it is something that needs to be preserved and taken care of because it affects us in many ways – in more ways that we actually might know.
- Where I live we have a huge forest and a golf course. There's a lot of nature and all that. I see a deer. It's very nice, beautiful, calming.
- I think of all the complexity and all the life there is. Photosynthesis... It's not replaceable. Nature is something that we have to live with, we have

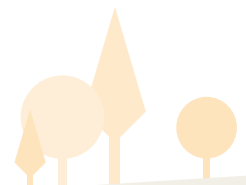
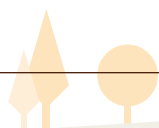
to help preserve it. We have to help keep it alive. We can't just let nature be there. Can't build parks around it. We have to actually preserve it and leave it for our future generations. Nature is slowly dying. We see how climate change, pollution, plastic – everything is kind of killing it off. So it's our duty right now to do what we can to preserve this beautiful resource that we need forever.

PLACING NATURE

In this study most of the youth live in apartments, and therefore did not mention a front or back garden as part of nature, or city trees as part of an urban forest. Youth living in houses or in richer neighbourhoods might have given a different range of answers. What nature is called had different meanings for some youth. For instance, the 'woods' did not always evoke positive feelings, rather for some of the youth it triggered fear, or the sense of not knowing what to do there. The youth in this study located nature as places that are usually inaccessible to them, either physically or psychologically.

There were distinct gender differences in how far the youth travelled when in nature. The male youth mentioned riding bicycles through the ravines or along distant nature trails. Female youth did not mention cycling. On the other hand, Covid-19 had encouraged some of the youth to explore nature, including nearby trails, which they had previously ignored or were unaware of. These are sample comments:

- We have a valley and honestly I find it so beautiful and calming, but at the same time my mum finds it a little bit dangerous so I can't explore it the way I want to.
- There's a trail a few minutes away from my house. But I never went there before the quarantine.
- I live close to the Humber River but I never went there until I got my dog. There's a big soccer field there, it's busy in the summer. In the winter, not a single soul is there. The soccer field is a racial divide in my area. There's a heavy police presence in our area and in our parks, because there are less white people here.
- If I had been exposed to nature when I was younger I would go there more. Now at 21 I feel old that if I go into the woods I don't know what plants to touch or not touch. If I grew up in nature I would spend more time in nature.
- I have a negative connotation with the word woods. The word itself is scary. As children we are told don't go into the woods, remember what happened to Little Red Riding Hood? The woods is scary.
- I don't know what to do in the woods, but I know what to do in a park or greenspace. These are a lot more inviting than a big trail. I like the word greenspace.



ATTRIBUTES

The attributes included discussions on dirt and cleanliness in nature. Three of the four focus groups mentioned that cleanliness affected how they saw nature. Places with lots of litter were seen as dirty, unwelcoming, or potentially dangerous. Comments from the focus group include:

- Nature in my neighbourhood is for the most part kept okay, but sometimes it's not as I see litter around in the forest and stuff. But there are places where there is no litter and stuff.
- My neighbourhood does not have that much litter where we live. It's a good place to spend your time seeing all these beautiful things like the garden over here. And there's Taylor Creek over there and you can just stroll down to it.
- Behind the apartment buildings where there are plants and trees, you always see garbage and all of that stuff piled up. I can see it from the back of my apartment, the build up of plastic bags and all sorts of garbage like growing in one area where all the trees and plants are. That's just uncomfortable. That's something I feel that should be worked on you know. Keeping it clean. Not just places like this but behind buildings as well.
- Sometimes the smell. I don't know how to explain it but sometimes when you go to the park there's this weird smell. When people don't clean up after themselves, when they have picnics and all, they leave everything there so it's usually dirty and it does leave a smell. When you go to more open areas like this, I mean there's not that like you see anything or smell any dirt.

EMOTIONS

All the focus group participants mentioned that nature can be peaceful and that it can also be filled with fear. The emotions can be triggered by plants, animals or people. The fear of people is more accurately the fear of white people. These are sample comments:

- Behind my building there's a big ravine, basically the forest, and I don't really go down there because it's dirty and we see animals sometimes like raccoons. But we don't usually go down there. Other than that the other big part of nature would be like this big park. I've been down there like once, a few years ago, but that was because the trails they're not safe. I feel scared.
- I guess it could come from ignorance, like maybe they don't know what if there's poison ivy, or something like that they might not know what it is but they touch it anyways. Also fears like of animal attacks and stuff like that, I guess. And trails this side are not that clear. If you fall from the top ooh, it's bad. Like tumble down, tumble down. Yeah, so I guess fear for life.
- We wanted to go to the valley like a week ago, and my mother was with us and my sister had to pray namaz. But my mother said, "No, don't pray

namaz here” because she was just scared. She was just scared. I don’t know why but she was scared of her praying namaz there.

- Due to Covid people have been going up north, to less populated places, especially rural areas where there are more white people or not that many POC, not so much racial diversity. Then it can be a bit intimidating. I don’t know why. They’re probably not even doing anything. Sometimes you feel out of the place – they’re looking at you. You might be something weird or something – I don’t know. But in Toronto I’ve never felt like that before, and usually you’re not going to feel like that because there are many people of different colours in the community that I live in, so you do feel at home. But when you go to a place where you’re a minority, then definitely it feels a bit intimidating.
- Nature here is like a *Get Out* movie. I have lots of family in Kenya and we go into nature often. I have a place there and everyone looks like me.

ACTIVITIES IN NATURE

All the focus groups mentioned that while they liked the idea of going into nature for its own sake, they would go more often if there were other activities that they could do there. These activities ranged from guided walks, films, community cooking to gardening workshops.

Many of the youth commented that they were forced to reduce the time spent in nature, as they grew older, due to pressures to study. They had to maintain high grades in order to pursue professional jobs such as engineering, medicine and law. The youth knew people of colour in these fields and felt that they were accessible and rewarding. In contrast, they did not see or know people of colour in environmentalism, and therefore thought that the field was less professional and closed to people who looked like them. Comments from the focus group include:

- If there was an actual program or something with someone leading that walk or hike – someone who knows what’s down there and everything like the trails. If someone they knew was leading them, the parents would like that. They wouldn’t really care. They’d feel safe.
- Have an awareness program, but make sure we have food, because to be honest if we have food people are coming for sure. Food is an incentive for learning and receiving knowledge on how to help themselves and the community.
- There are many films that have to do with preserving nature or are nature friendly. Have a community movie night or something – movies are fun.
- Organise workshops on how to garden or how to start gardening – a lot of people want to but don’t know how to start. Garden mentoring workshops and also provide gardening tools and seeds – that motivates you.
- For someone to show the trails and take people down there instead of just telling them about the trails. Show people the different things that are there such as trails, waterfall, mountain bike trails – there’s a lot one can do down there, it’s just that we don’t know about it.



04

INTERVIEWS: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Similar to the focus groups, the interviews were examined using a thematic analysis to find common threads across the data. The following are paraphrased samples of the comments.

NATURE COMPRISES

- Everything. Everyone that is alive, that is more-than-human. I think about everything on the land, the water, everything that lives in the water. I even think about the soil, the micro-organism that are in the soil. These are every living being that I am related to.
- Nature is the foundational reality for every being on this planet. I think of incredible sustenance, nourishment, support, the ground of our being. I think of us in relation to all of our kin, whether they are animal, vegetable, or mineral. All of the nations, all of the people. And I think of all of nature as my relatives, whether it's a pool of water, a trickling brook, or a tree standing tall or a cloud. I am in love with and in relations to every aspect of what that means.
- We need to be in nature. To stop thinking of it as a resource to extract. To be open that we are part of it. We are certainly not above it.
- Nature is the source of our real wealth. Not money. Respect it.

IMMIGRANT YOUTH, NATURE AND INDIGENOUS RELATIONS

We asked the interviewees for their thoughts on how to connect immigrant youth to nature while respecting the Indigenous history of the land.

- It's not just about respecting the history, it's also about our presence. What are people's current relations to Indigenous people? The relationships might not be there yet, but it's also about what knowledge have they sought out? Are they aware of whose territory are they living on, is there an understanding of some of the Indigenous-led land based initiatives that are happening in their area?

- Just having a respectful relationship with the land is critical. This is just as important as understanding who the Indigenous people are, the treaties, the on-going disputes in the place that you are living, what are the initiatives for land back, the movements locally that are led by Indigenous people? Just as important is us all coming together making changes at a large-scale to protect our Earth, the entire planet from our behaviour. We need a better relationship with the Earth, there is an urgency to the environment. We can't wait to build these relationships and build these bridges. Many things are possible but all of these take relationships.
- To be respectful of Indigenous teaching is to not co-opt them. To not say you know how to do them or that you understand what they are. It is to ask somebody, to come into relationship with them, in the same way that you come into relationship with nature. It's all about relationships. It's all about kinship. And to be respectful when people say no. Like nature, Indigenous people and their teaching are not commodities.
- There is a whiteness in environmental organizations and in environmental education. We are still fighting to get Indigenous science recognised as science, especially in ecology and environmental education.

ACTIVITIES IN NATURE

The interviewees mentioned a range of activities to bridge the nature experiences of youth of colour and Indigenous communities. These included guided walks, visits to medicine gardens and collaborations between agencies.

- Let Indigenous people take immigrants for walks in the woods. They get to know each other and to share knowledge.
- There are a lot of Indigenous led gardens across the city including the High Park oak savannah landscape. For me it's really powerful when I see people of colour, Black folks, engaging with Earth work with Indigenous people. I think the way that happens is through relationships, through neighbourhoods, people getting to know each other and inviting someone out to join.
- What can also make things happen is collaboration between organizations. Going around the city, Earth works can include gardening, harvesting and medicine walks. Some ceremonies too that are in relationship to the land. It is not that everything is wide open, but as long as the relationships are genuine it bodes well for what is possible.
- Crawford Lake has reconstructed longhouses there. It is a beautiful place to see the lake and pre-contact Indigenous life.
- Learn to observe and pay attention to nature, this is land stewardship. Go out for an hour every day and note what you see in nature.





05 RECOMMENDATIONS

The under-representation of people of colour in environmentalism and in the nature-sector is the key thread that runs through the recommendations. It influences, for instance, how the youth of colour felt when they ventured into nature, their views on environmental careers and the activities they would like to do in nature. The under-representation is a symptom of the larger issue of the lack of diversity, equity and inclusion in the environmental sector.

The recommendations are set against this stark backdrop. It is acknowledged that the role of Nature Canada's NatureHood program is as a connector and a partner, rather than a direct provider of nature-based activities, and also that Nature Canada wants to facilitate conversations about the issues identified. These recommendations can be implemented by any environmental or nature group.

PARTNERSHIPS:

1. **City-based Partnerships.** City-based partnerships makes it easier for racialized communities to participate in nature-based programs. It is difficult for them to do so with groups located outside of cities. Therefore, increasing city-based partnerships, and doing so with agencies serving racialized communities, will make it easier to engage youth of colour in nature-based activities.
2. **Urban Ecology.** Developing city-based partnerships also means developing urban ecology programs. These programs would underline that cities and nature are linked and are not separate spheres of existence. The urban ecology programs should also reflect different worldviews of what constitutes nature and should incorporate principles of Indigenous land stewardship.
3. **Volunteer Hours.** Many of the high school youth were concerned with earning volunteer hours as part of their civic services curriculum. This presents an opportunity for nature groups to work with schools, or partner with organizations that already have school-based programs, to run an urban ecology program where youth of colour can volunteer.
4. **Youth Agencies Collaboration.** The possibility of collaboration between immigrant and Indigenous organizations should be explored further. It is important that the collaboration benefits both partners, is geared to their current capacity, and that it is supported by additional resources to ensure its success.

REPRESENTATION IN COMMUNICATIONS:

5. **Concern for Conservation.** The focus groups emphasized that youth of colour are interested in conservation and protecting the environment. They are aware and knowledgeable of the issues involved. However, as youth of colour are usually absent from media representation of the environmental sector they were discouraged from having their voice heard. This is an opportunity for nature groups to showcase youth of colour as environmental voices. It could be as simple as using multicultural names on general environment topics or showing more of these youth on social media. However, if it stops here it risks being seen as tokenism.
6. **Environmental Careers.** The youth had little information or exposure to the variety of careers in the conservation, outdoor recreation or environmental sectors. They felt that if they had this information it would be easier for them to convince their parents that a walk in the woods or studying environmental subjects were worthwhile and could be a rewarding career choice. This presents an opportunity for organizations to develop a series of profiles of people working in the sector. The profiles must be of people of colour, otherwise they will not interest or convince the youth.
7. **Variety of Natural Landscapes.** Wilderness landscapes are emphasized as the ideal and iconic natural landscapes in Canada and in conservation. The youth of colour are alienated from wilderness landscapes as they are seen as too far, too dangerous, too expensive, and too white. This is an opportunity to show a variety of urban nature landscapes in publications and social media. These can range from a community garden, a city park or a pond. These urban landscapes must not be seen as less than or inferior to wilderness landscapes.
8. **Increase Diversity in Social Media.** Including more people of colour, as say profiles or experts, in the organization's social media is a small step in supporting equity initiatives.

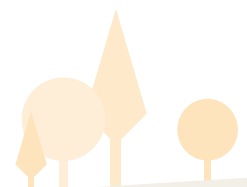
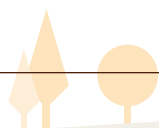
NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES:

9. **Guided Walks and Hikes.** Youth of colour are interested and want to explore the wilder nature spaces in their neighbourhood. However, they would be more willing to do so in guided walks or hikes led by either people from their community or by walk leaders who are also people of colour.
10. **Gender and Guided Walks.** A variety of guided walks should be offered to reflect the gender norms in different communities. Thus, some walks should be for women only, some for men only, and some should be mixed genders. The walk leader for the female groups should also be female.

11. **Youth-led Walks.** Training youth of colour to lead walks in their neighbourhood will encourage their engagement with nature. Linking this to gaining civic service hours in school might make it more appealing to the youth.
12. **Indigenous-led Walks.** Walks led by Indigenous people can encourage youth of colour to explore nature from an Indigenous perspective, as well as learn about the continuous Indigenous presence in the country.
13. **Community Gardens.** The youth felt this was a good way of engaging with nature, growing food, as well as building community bonds. If volunteering in community gardens is linked to earning civic education service hours, then the youth felt it would be a winning combination.
14. **Indigenous-led Gardens.** Visiting Indigenous-led gardens would allow immigrant youth to develop knowledge about Indigenous perspectives on nature, as well as learn about the importance of certain plants and landscapes in Indigenous medicine and foods and culture.
15. **Drop-in Outdoor Nature Programs.** The youth were interested in a variety of nature activities in the outdoors. These include nature-based films, guided walks, plant and seed distribution and workshops, and games for younger children and their families. These activities should emphasize that nature is fun and a part of life in the city.

AWARENESS:

16. **Fear of Nature.** Many of the youth were wary of encountering perceived harmful bugs, plants and animals in nature. For instance, ticks, raccoons and poison ivy. This fear of nature could be lessened by guided walks and by providing appropriate online and published information. Some of the information could include, for example, bug sprays that are available and how to use them.
17. **Fear of Encountering White People in Nature.** The youth were wary of encountering white people in wilder natural spaces. Concerns were around being on the receiving end of the white gaze, racist comments or physical violence. For visibly Muslim youth, the fears were around their dress or wearing hijabs. For Black youth, the fear was around their skin colour. The fear of white people reflects the bigger issue of systemic racism in outdoor spaces. That is, when nature and the great outdoors are seen as white spaces, people of colour who venture there are seen as out of place, or as intruders. The lack of people of colour in nature organizations, social media feeds and publications, reinforces the whiteness of the space. Addressing the media representation and hiring people of colour staff to lead nature-based initiatives is a first step in tackling racism in nature spaces.



18. **Clean-up Campaigns.** This was one of the most frequent ways of engaging with nature that the youth mentioned (especially those in the predominantly Muslim focus group). The concern about cleanliness in nature spaces reflects a cultural preference, in some communities, for garden-like spaces rather than, say, a wilder natural landscape. While the clean-ups are a great idea, we are concerned with the optics of such activities. That is, a group of youth of colour, cleaning up a space that is associated with white people, and which is most likely to be used by them. Therefore, these aspects should be considered carefully when organizing clean-up campaigns.
19. **Preparing and Sharing Food.** Food can play a key role in drawing communities together. The youth noted that providing food at outdoor activities can be an added incentive for attending nature events. If barbecues, baking or other ways of cooking food is encouraged, more families are likely to attend and to stay longer.

OPPORTUNITIES:

20. **Access to Other Natural Landscapes in the City.** There are opportunities to capitalize on the desire to see other natural landscapes in the same city. For instance, the youth in the east end were curious about High Park in the west end, a place that they have not visited even though it is accessible by public transit. Likewise those in the west end were curious about Rouge Urban National Park. Both groups were interested in visiting the lake. This presents an opportunity for nature programming to use the ravines, large parks and conservation areas in the city as their standard sites and as part of an urban ecology program.
21. **Access to Natural Landscapes outside the City.** There is also a desire among racialized youth to visit out-of-the-city traditional wilderness areas such as provincial parks. However, they were concerned about their safety due to race-based encounters outside the city. Acknowledging these concerns, and having trip leaders from people of colour communities may reassure the youth. These trips are also an opportunity to visit Indigenous-led nature spaces, such as Crawford Lake.
22. **Covid-19 Shift.** All the focus groups mentioned that they were spending more time in nature, including venturing into unfamiliar trails and ravines, due to the pandemic. The need to escape the lockdown for a few hours pushed the youth to venture out of their comfort zone in nature. This presents an opportunity for the nature-sector to build on this new interest in nature in multicultural communities.

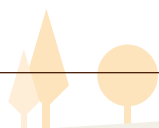


06

CONCLUSION

This needs assessment examined how to engage youth of colour in nature-based activities such as those offered by NatureHood. Youth of colour are interested in nature, but are hindered as they rarely see people like themselves in environmental groups, nature activities, or nature-related media. The lack of representation reinforces the perception that nature is a white space and is for white people. The recommendations provide NatureHood with concrete steps to increase the participation of youth of colour in nature-based programming, as well as suggestions on connecting youth of colour to Indigenous perspectives on nature.

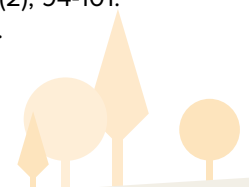
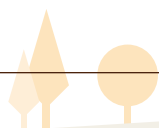
Youth of colour communities are not monolithic. Further research may add nuance or a different cultural lens on the meaning of nature and how it is experienced. In addition, while it was outside the scope of the needs assessment to examine youth of colour understandings of Indigenous perspectives on nature, we feel that this topic is ripe for further study.



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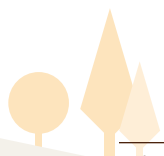
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APPENDIX: THE CONSULTANTS

Jacqueline L. Scott

Jacqueline L. Scott is a PhD student at the University of Toronto, Department of Social Justice Education. Prior to returning to school, she was a consultant specializing in community-based research. Jacqueline is a certified hike leader with two outdoors recreation clubs. This research builds on the work that she has been doing for several years in outdoors communities. Her work has been published in many places including The Conversation, CBC Player's Own Voice and the Greenbelt Foundation. Jacqueline is also a speaker, giving webinars for groups such as Bowdoin College Library, York University and Canadian Parks Collective for Innovation and Leadership. She has given numerous radio, television and print interviews on the Black experience in outdoor recreation. Contact: Twitter @BlackOutdoors1. Blog: BlackOutdoors.wordpress.com

Ambika Tenneti

Ambika Tenneti is a PhD candidate in Daniels Forestry, University of Toronto. Her research is focused on engaging recent immigrants in urban forest stewardship. In India she worked with local, community-based organizations in rural and remote areas and with national-level research-based agencies in large cities. Her experience working with Indigenous and forest-dwelling communities in India transformed her understanding of sustainable living and of learning. Since moving to Toronto, she has volunteered with many public and non-profit organizations such as the City of Toronto, LEAF, and 10,000 Trees, working towards enhancing community engagement in the urban forest and stewardship. As a Rivers Rising Ambassador with Toronto Green Community, she has led and coordinated neighbourhood walks in an effort to bring in a fresh perspective to our understanding of Toronto's diverse neighbourhoods. A recent citizen, she is passionate about engaging newcomers to Canada with environmental and civic issues and volunteers with CultureLink to meet that goal.



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