



## The Nature Institute

Dear Friends,

There is something about November in the northern hemisphere that evokes quiet awe. It's a time of letting go, of the old drying up and falling away, of preparation for winter. The old year is dying. Yet this dying, as so many have observed, paradoxically refreshes life and nourishes its continuity.

In the plant world we see a frequent pattern: seeds become mature enough for release even as the current year's growth dies back. But death and decay will enrich and sustain the living soil, increasing the soil's capacity to support the seeds' own coming metamorphosis and to feed the living, hidden roots of perennials. This dying back and decomposition fit inside — not outside — the larger frame of life. It is a transformation that creates both space and actual nourishment for next year's abundant living.

Something similar occurs in human lives, when the work of our predecessors enriches our own. And so we are glad to share with you, in this issue, an excerpt from a 1930 book by E. S. Russell. A Scottish marine biologist, Russell strenuously resisted the “abstract and schematic account” of life that was seizing hold of biology in his day. He was convinced that “in the living thing there are in actuality no separate parts, no separate processes, for no part can be adequately characterized save in terms of its relations to the whole.” He wanted to deal concretely with “the whole cycle that is the life of the individual” organism, and to grasp its indissoluble links with previous life cycles.

We also bring you the story of a remarkable organism that can repair a genome broken into hundreds of fragments. Its self-restoring powers, while distinctive, also testify to a general truth: the genome, far from being the decisive maker of organisms, is a resource that organisms employ for their own ends.

In our news about The Nature Institute, we include two new books for good reading on the chilly nights ahead. *Leave No Child Inside*, published by Orion magazine, includes a provocative chapter by Steve. And Craig's *Thinking Like a Plant: A Living Science for Life* is now available from Lindisfarne Books. It's a guide for developing a radical new way of learning from and interacting with the natural world. Both in living and dying, plants reveal lessons for more dynamic, flexible, and fruitful ways of thinking. We hope you enjoy this issue!

Colleen Cordes

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### *In Context*

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