



## The Nature Institute

Dear Readers,

When we were preparing the first issue of this publication, we were searching for a name. In the end we decided on *In Context*. The name seemed appropriate 25 years ago and it still feels right today. The word “context” is in one respect vague because it’s so general. It can mean almost anything and everything that surrounds and interacts with what we have placed in the center of our attention. When we focus on something — a particular animal or plant, a new development in science, a book of interest — we may at first isolate it from the world of which it is a part in order to begin to get to know it. We become familiar with how this plant grows and develops, or we wrestle with the ideas that a scientist presents. The danger lurking in the background of such endeavors is that we neglect to attend to how a phenomenon is itself an expression of a larger world. We need to look to its context — to the world that lets it exist and that it, in turn, contributes to. That intention lies at the basis our enduring appeal to view things “in context.”

This leads to what we could call a relational science. It is always about weaving through a variety a phenomena, which at first may seem unrelated, and seeing whether connections appear. Goethe spoke of a “zarte empirie” — a gentle or delicate empiricism. The approach is empirical because it is always about giving our careful attention to the wealth of concrete phenomena. It is about experience. And the way we form ideas should be gentle; we don’t want to force our ideas upon the world. In an active listening attitude, we want to be receptive to the meanings that show themselves in the relations we study. This leads us into open-ended inquiry in which our understanding can — and needs to — continually grow.

In this 49<sup>th</sup> issue of *In Context* you will find a variety of contributions that are rooted in this spirit. We hope you find them illuminating.

Craig Holdrege

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### *In Context*

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