



## The Nature Institute

Dear Readers,

At The Nature Institute we have always had two complementary and often intertwined ways of working. One can be seen in our deep commitment to giving concerted attention to natural phenomena. Through phenomenological studies we hope to articulate and bring awareness to the living qualities we can discover everywhere around us. This practice is a central feature of our courses and workshops, and it drives many research projects. During a fellowship at the institute last spring, Ceinwen Smith carried out a careful and engaging study of the coming-to-color and form in some of our native trees. Her article in this issue (p. 5) lets you participate in her process and insights.

Complementing this engagement with the living world is our way of examining contemporary research in biology. Here we are not directly observing the natural world. Rather, we are studying researchers' findings and their conceptual frameworks. We want to take seriously and see what the wealth of often highly technical research into the minutiae of living organisms can show us. This frequently involves the not-so-easy task of distinguishing between the findings and the assumptions or interpretations of the researchers. We often find ourselves holding at bay the conceptual biases in order to let the findings speak in more living ways. This has long been the focus of Stephen Talbott's work. In his feature article in this issue (p.17), he describes two areas of research in molecular biology that show the remarkable — and hardly fathomable — flexibility and coordination of micro-activities that facilitate the healthy and responsive existence of an organism as a whole. His central question is: How can we adequately conceive of the wisdom-at-work in living beings, a wisdom that reaches into the depth of its physiological processes?

In this spirit, Ryan Shea reviews a book in this issue, *Properties of Life: Toward a Theory of Organismic Biology* (2023) by Bernd Rosslenbroich (p.3), that wants to show how the findings of modern biology can lead to a more holistic and organismic view of life that transcends prevailing mechanistic frameworks.

Our current research project concerned with the question of "Intelligence in Nature" weaves together direct observation of natural phenomena with critical consideration of the anthropomorphic conceptions that often frame the discussion of plant intelligence in current scientific literature. The feature article by Jon McAlice and myself (p.11) introduces the topic and how we are approaching it. In this project we spend many hours both observing plants and discussing articles on plant intelligence in our weekly research meetings. We have become increasingly aware of how important it is to be conscious of one's own perspectives and to realize what a given perspective can illuminate and what its limitations are. This helps us to heighten conscious flexibility in thought so that we are more able to practice what Goethe called "delicate empiricism." Greater mobility of mind can allow the qualities of plants or other beings to reveal themselves in ways that we might otherwise overlook.

*Craig Holdrege*

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