The Northern Woodlands Conference is a gathering of writers, scientists, artists, and educators hosted yearly by *Northern Woodlands Magazine*. This past October, eight undergraduate Rubenstein Students attended. Departing on Saturday morning in the early hours before dawn, we began the drive to The Hulbert Outdoor Center in Fairlee, Vermont, and did not return home until well after dark the same day. The group from UVM consisted of four NR 1 students, two NR 1 TAs, and two Rubenstein Stewards.

When we arrived at the conference, the small gravel parking lot was already filled with folks who had arrived the day before and had stayed overnight in the wood cabins built in clusters surrounding the lake and main buildings. We walked up to the front porch and entered the main building to find the registration table, where we were all given folders containing information about the different sessions we could attend throughout the day. There were a wide variety of possibilities including plenary speakers, small discussion groups, activities in the surrounding woods and fields, and art sessions that would span throughout the day.

Each of us had chosen a unique combination of all the possible options, creating a schedule that aligned with our interests. Throughout the day we would find ourselves crossing paths, sometimes attending sessions together, other times not. On the van ride home, we had wonderful conversations exploring different ideas, perspectives, and opinions represented throughout the day. What it really boiled down to was how meaningful and beautiful the intersections and collaborations of nature, science, traditional ecological knowledge, and creativity can be.

The part of the conference that has really stayed with me in the months since, was the first Plenary talk of the day, which was given by Brian Pfeiffer. He began the morning with a talk entitled, “A forest on the wings of a butterfly.” He had spent the previous summer in Maine photographing rare butterflies and had prepared a four-act story as told by four butterflies. The first act – imagination – began with the Bog Elfin, a small brown butterfly found only in bogs with black spruce when they lay their eggs, and how their existence and life is so closely tied to the tree. The John Muir quote he likened to this butterfly was, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”

This tied into the second act – joy – which was embodied by the monarch butterfly, a common and easily recognized species that when fluttering around a sunny field of purple wildflowers by the ocean he described as “a 10/10 on the nature joy index.” This image starkly contrasted to the third act – despair – with a Poweshiek Skipperling which symbolized the uncertainty of extinction, and how there is rarely ever closure. The fourth and final act was hope, the caddisfly larva meticulously constructs a home on the bottom of stream beds out of tiny rock fragments that are millions of years old. This is where it will metamorphosis into its terrestrial form, only living for a mere week, which spoke to the brief yet lasting impact of nature.

This approach to sharing scientific research through a non-traditional medium of storytelling really intrigued me and led me to explore how communication and art can be woven into knowledge and scientific study.