

Conservation Corner

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Here at Conservation, field trip season is in full swing. Do you remember a favorite field trip from your school days? On May 5, the All-Start Preschoolers explored Cooper's Cove and Whitetail Ridge. One of the many faces of nature we observed was that of a red-headed woodpecker foraging for insects among the woodlands.

As their tapping and drumming echoed across the early morning stillness, I was reminded of the Lakota Sioux legend of the first flute. Today I would like to share with you the story of The First Flute as retold in *Keepers of the Animals* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac.

Long ago, it is said, a young man saw a young woman in his village and longed to find some way to talk to her. She was the daughter of a chief, and he was too shy to approach her directly. Many men tried to court her, but she sent them all away.

One day, as the young man was hunting, he heard a sound he had never heard before, a strange yet beautiful call that sounded as if it came from the land of the spirits. He soon fell asleep and dreamed.

In his dream, a red-headed woodpecker came and sang that same strange and beautiful song. When the young man awoke, the sun was two hands high, and there, in the branches of the tree above him, was the red-headed woodpecker. The young man followed the woodpecker until it landed on the straight dead branch of a cedar tree. It began drumming with its beak on the hollow limb, which was full of holes made by the woodpecker. Just then a wind came up and blew through the hollow branch, making the song that the hunter had heard!

Now the hunter saw what he should do. He climbed the tree and carefully broke off that branch. He thanked the red-headed woodpecker for giving him this gift and then did as his dream told him. He carved the flute so that it looked like the head and open mouth of a bird. He then tied on the bird reed near the other end so when he blew into the flute it made music. He practiced long and hard, listening to the sounds of the wind and the trees, the rippling of the waters and the calls of the birds, making them all part of his playing.

Finally, he knew he was ready to visit the young woman. He stood behind her lodge and played his best song on the flute. Hearing his song, she went straight to where he was playing and stood close to him. He lifted his blanket and wrapped it around them both. And so it was that the young hunter married the chief's daughter and became a great man among his people.

Ever since, young men have learned to make and play the cedar flute in honor of the red-headed woodpecker who gave them such a special gift.

