Jared Burton: "The world was our library and its books were stones, leaves, grass, brooks and the birds and animals that shared alike with us the storms and blessings of the earth". To think of the natural environment around us as a library is a really interesting concept and metaphor and broke me out of this idea that knowledge is just encased in texts. There's something else that's out here that we can learn from.

Liesel: Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Sun : Hi, it's Sun Ezzell with the Magic Mountie podcast. We're back with another episode in our summer mini-series about favorite nature spots on campus. In this episode we'll go birdwatching with Jared Burton from the library and learn more about the flora and fauna at Mount SAC. We'll also have a chance to think about how the natural environment on campus is meaningful for students, the importance of vitamin N in all our lives and how we as a campus community might explore the concept of the natural world as a library and why. Here's Jared.

Jared Burton: My name is Jared Burton and I am a librarian here, recently tenured. My role on campus is to be a librarian. I work with faculty in different departments, including the earth sciences and music. I'm a liaison for those departments as well as physics, engineering, also fashion. I work with the Perkins Grant, so I've worked with a lot of CTE faculty. I also of course work with students who were doing the STEP program, and we still are this month. We're able to work with students for 30 minutes, kind of showing them how the library can keep them on their path to completion.

Sun : You're busy.

Jared Burton: Yeah, we stay busy. Definitely one of the things that I enjoy about Mt. SAC is the the natural environments we have. At least the landscaping and the plant life which supports a lot of biodiversity on campus, and some campuses don't have that and so we're really fortunate here to have it and not just because it's pretty and because ... it's also because it has a lot of benefits as it turns out, both psychologically and for learning and for education, for wellbeing. The more I think that we know this as faculty, the more we can incorporate those things into our instruction and into helping students to also realize the benefits that they have here on campus.

Jared Burton: We're standing outside the door of the library just looking towards the memorial fountain here. We're looking at the trees on the free speech area, Kerr's Corner where the grass is. Just standing here, I've already seen a couple of hummingbirds flying around. I wish I knew the names of these trees. That's one thing I need to figure out.

Jared Burton: We can see some gopher holes over in the grass over there, probably much to the annoyance of some of our groundskeepers. I like to walk from here on a quick break to get out of my office, which is windowless, and that's one of the things about the library. There's not a lot of natural light, which is an unfortunate thing because that does also show in studies to have a lot of benefits for studying and reading. But I like to get out of my office, my windowless office, and take ... oh see there's a black Phoebe over there, so maybe we'll head towards the black Phoebe, just cutting across the grass.

Jared Burton: So I'm also a birdwatcher, not a competitive one like you've seen maybe jokes about, but definitely was raised in my early teens to appreciate birds and I used to keep a list. I don't so much anymore. When I first started here, I was keeping a list of the birds I'd see every year on campus, but I stopped for whatever reason. I'll probably pick it up again. I do just love to observe the birds and see what's out there because they tell us a lot about what is happening in the biodiversity on campus. Right now I hear singing, a mockingbird.

Jared Burton: We're standing in the middle of the grass now here, and I'm hearing hummingbirds to my right up in the tree. And that black Phoebe flew off. But it was ... I've seen that black Phoebe actually ... oh, there it is. They're sitting on the bench there. You can see it's black on the back, and then if it turns around at all, it'll have a pale breast sort of halfway down. These are actually related to flycatchers, so what they like to do is sit in one spot and they just kinda hang out until they see something like it's doing now. It's flying, it's flying again, maybe just to reperch. Now it's all over on the music building. They like to catch little flies. So you'll see them, they'll be sitting, sitting, sitting, and then they'll kind of run out, catch something and then come back to their perch.

Jared Burton: So we move away from the Phoebe heading towards Building 9B, the Student Services Center. I'm hearing ... these birds are called bushtits and they ... yeah, there they are. They're little tiny little guys and they always travel in flocks and they're a feeding flock and ... there's a couple there. They kind of move together, sort of ... they kind of, like, I don't know how they know which way they're going to go, who's the leader? There's probably some science behind that. There's a king bird flying over.

Jared Burton: The bushtits, they travel in flocks, and what's nice about them is that when they're moving around, they often bring with them other birds. Other birds will kind of travel with them and they're basically just moving from tree to tree and gathering insects. That kingbird that flew by, actually we've had a couple pairs of them on campus and I recently saw them chasing a Cooper's hawk, which I think has a nest still over here in those sycamores by Founder's Hall. Yeah, chasing them. Just getting them, my guess, probably away from their nest, because those hawks eat other birds versus the red tails which will eat the gophers and help out the groundskeepers.

Jared Burton: I like to walk over here towards the Common Grounds Cafe. One of the reasons I like to do this is to get out and walk and just kind of let my mind and my eyes wander up into the trees. If I've been in my email for a while or been working on a workshop lesson plan and coming out of a meeting or going to a meeting, to just kind of allow my brain to relax and kind of taking the benefits of the natural greenery. One person who's really great on campus, who has a lot of expertise in this, is Lance Heard, the Administration of Justice professor and the public safety's programs. He specializes actually in nature based stress reduction.

Jared Burton: So I usually take this path right here just to the west of the Mountie Cafe coming up here and they've got this landscaping that's just great, and as you walk up this ramp here, this is a great place to stand because you have a great vantage point of the trees to the south towards the instrumental music hall, and the Sophie B Clark Theater and you're able to ... this is just a good vantage point because you're kind of standing behind a barrier where ... a lot of stuff will happen in the trees and you're almost at eye level with them, but you don't disturb it. You don't scare them off. There's a bird up there, I can't tell what it is yet.

Jared Burton: Then this landscaping up here as we head towards the arts area, the arts building, I think it really was well thought out and there's a lot of drought tolerant species. In fact, the sustainability tours highlight this area because of the sustainability of the drought tolerant plants like this one. This tree is a Palo Verde, which means green stick in Spanish, approximately. It is a native plant to this area and the southwest, and so it's drought tolerant. It's also got this great green bark and the flowers are yellow and really pretty. I see these all over it when it's blooming and I see hummingbirds love to perch in it. If I had my phone with me right now, I would take a picture of it and use iNaturalist, which is an app that allows you to identify plants and insects and animals, if you can get a picture of them.

Jared Burton: One thing I think that's important, too, is Lance Heard, again talking about his work with nature based stress reduction. His ideas, you know, they're not just for faculty. It permeates the students as well. He talks about nature sounds in the classroom, in the background, and how that stimulates a certain amount of calm and creativity.

Jared Burton: We have a butterfly here. I don't think it's a painted lady. Those were the ones that we had so many of. It looks like a monarch, but it's so small. There's so much I don't know. He also talks about having nature visuals in the background, so flowing streams in classrooms during maybe the quiet time or group work or things like that. I think that's really important because we have to remember that not all students may have the benefit of access to natural environments where they live. They may have never visited a state park, they may not have places to go in their neighborhood where they have access to nature. It's important to remember that so when they come to Mount SAC, they're actually experiencing something maybe vastly different than what they're used to and it really has an effect on them, but then as they learn about how it can be used as sort of a tool for their own wellbeing, that could be really beneficial. And you can see how some students, you know, they react to the nature around them.

Jared Burton: When they see a squirrel, right? It's always so funny when we see squirrels and they're like, "So ..." You know it's a wild animal and it's there in their presence when it wants food from them, and that can be really thrilling and it kind of is an example of how when someone sees a natural being, whether it's a plant or an animal, and it inspires some curiosity in them and it inspires some kind of wonder in them. And I think that that's something to not just cast off as just funny, although squirrels can be pretty darn funny, it's a learning experience, too.

Jared Burton: For those of you listening, we're in the courtyard by 1B over in the arts area and this is just a fabulous place. You know, sometimes you see the students sitting out here and drawing and doing that kind of thing. There's a student over there practicing his guitar. Going back to kind of what we were talking about with students who may not have access to natural environments in their day to day lives, at least not in a way how Mount SAC provides.

Jared Burton: There is this guy who wrote a book called Last Child in the Woods and his name is Richard Louv, and he talks about how ... he came up with these phrases like a nature deficit disorder, which is a lack of time outside and how that can have detrimental effects on growth and in terms of the mind and in terms of wellbeing. Then his antidote to that is this concept of vitamin N, for nature, which is health benefits of spending time outside. He also wrote a book called The Nature Principle, which is geared less towards the child development side of things, which is where the Last Child in the Wood focuses on, but also it focuses and builds on that in the nature principle and introduces a concept called the hybrid mind. In that he says, "The more high tech we become, the more nature we need," and the goal is to, "live simultaneously in both the digital and the physical world using computers to maximize our powers to process intellectual data and natural environments to ignite all our senses to accelerate our ability to learn and to feel."

Jared Burton: "We can have the real world guide us to better research and have our research guide us to a better world". And I think it's important to note that research can mean so many things, and part of the challenge is to determine what we mean by it in context to our information seeking and information production in a given scenario. As a librarian, the question I ponder is how can we, meaning the Mount SAC Community of students, faculty, staff, and administration, learn to use our libraries, resources, and all the rich information available to us there, to be that point of connection between the real world and a better world.

Liesel: Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares and we love your comments. So please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor. We're there and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.