First the children draw a variety of creatures from preserved specimens — stoneflies, mayflies, caddisflies and more. Then, equipped with this experience, they visit the stream. As they turn over rocks and find living examples, they can recognize many of them already.

Similar to playing a musical instrument or a sport, drawing is a skill to be developed. It’s not magic, and getting better at it is far more about time than talent.

During preschool and early grades, children often record their observations in pictures. As their literacy grows, the time spent drawing is often replaced by writing. Often by the time we become adults, we prefer to write rather than draw.

But many artists and science educators are helping students continue to use observational drawings, along with writing, to enrich and deepen their learning styles. Some students are happy to sit down under a tree and draw until they find living examples, they can recognize many of them already.

The challenge was to get close enough to observe the birds without disturbing them. The students were pretty confident that they could sneak up on the geese. They snaked their way single-file along the edge of the pond and then through the woods, over an old stone wall and out to a sunny, grassy bank — less than 30 feet from the geese.

The big birds were startled but soon settled down, as the children slowly found spots to sit and watch. They observed the big birds swimming and grazing, and giggled to see them hopping out on the ice — napping on one foot, heads tucked under wings.

As all the creatures settled into their places, the students opened their nature journals and sketched the geese and the late winter scene.

Drawing and writing in nature provide a time-honored technique for getting in closer touch with the outside world. Sometimes a journal page is filled with quick sketches capturing a movement or gesture; or it may be simply a list of words or a series of observations and questions. Whatever the subject, the journal becomes a rich record of places, times and experiences.

Keeping a nature journal is a simple, informal activity that families and individuals of all ages can enjoy. Some people make a small journal just for pictures and words. Soon enough the geese will be back.

The beginning of January is the perfect time to open up a blank book and begin to record the New Year in pictures and words. Soon enough the geese will be back.

As they turn over rocks and find living examples, they can recognize many of them already.