



## Sample Wildlife program outline

**Theme:** Many different kinds of wildlife live in a place like this.

**Universal themes inherent in the program:**

survival, connection, mating, fear, competition, safety

**Props:** Bear scat with seeds in it, in a tub.

Animal skins (coyote, fox, duck wings, owl wing, etc.)

**Introduction:** What do animals need to survive? (Space, food, water, air, sun, etc.)

We call the place that supplies an animal's needs its "habitat." Every kind of animal has a specific habitat, and one animal's habitat may not do for another.

OSMP is a great place to look for wildlife of many kinds because it provides a diversity of habitats, and these habitats are protected from major human alteration.

Let's go look for some of the animals that live here.

**Choosing places to stop:** Potential stops along the hike to highlight different animals and their needs (great teachable moments are left less to chance if you do a pre-hike before your program to locate good examples along the trail):

- A dead tree that makes a home for many kinds of animals
- Insects pollinating flowers
- Fruit bushes that supply food for wildlife, benefiting as the animals spread the bush's seeds (use the bear or raccoon scat)
- Animal footprints or scat (can bring rubber tracks along as backup)
- A place where you see many habitats at once and guess who lives in each one
- A circling hawk
- A foraging group of magpies
- Butterflies "mudding" at a creek or puddle

If you see something that you can relate to one of your animal skins, skulls or photos, use that as an opportunity to pull out the item and let everyone touch it while sharing information about the animal.

**What do animals eat?**

Introduce the terms omnivore, carnivore, herbivore . . . and if you want, frugivore (fruit eater), nectavore (nectar eater), insectivore (insect eater) etc.

Have kids think of examples of each. "What are humans?"

Return to this idea throughout the program when you see animals. What do they eat?

"Why is OSMP a good habitat for that kind of animal?"

**Choose from these simple activities based on what you find on the trail, or after highlighting a specific animal:**

**Carrying capacity Jam** - a very personal illustration of competition between species: How many woodpeckers (or other relevant plant or animal) can live in this forest? Draw a 4' diameter circle in the dirt and jam as many people into it as will fit. There will be much pushing, shoving and some kids will be left out. They are "dead." Discuss how limiting resources (in this case, space) create an upper limit to a species' population. Competition for limiting resources is that tight in the natural world, and many plants and animals exist right at the edge (hungry most of the time), others don't make it. Point out how they pushed and shoved to get into the circle. Do the activity again, but this time make everyone who is wearing blue become a starling, which pushes woodpeckers out of their cavity nests. Show how many of the woodpeckers were unable to find nesting space and died, and how many starlings took over their spaces in the ecosystem.

**Bat and Moth:** w/a picture of a bat, talk about how they catch insects, then do the activity.

A blindfolded kid becomes the bat, and must tag two or three kids who are moths inside a circle of the rest of the group, who become "trees." The bat can say, "bat" as often as she likes; and the moths must immediately answer, "Moth." The bat hears and catches prey by echolocation, just like real bats do. (often the moths cheat and have to be reminded to say moth; often the kid playing the bat doesn't remember to say bat and just flails around silently. They will have to be reminded sometimes until you want to scream at them, making the game drag.) At the end of the game, I tell how I heard bats once on a special bat detector. As they zeroed in on a moth to make the kill, the frequency of their pulses went up greatly: "Bat.....bat.....bat...bat...bat...bat.bat.bat.bat.batbatbat" giving them a very accurate picture. Every once and a while a smarter kid will discover this; usually, I have to model it at the end. The moths have to keep saying moth constantly and are easy to pick off. It's very effective.

**Predator Prey:** To show how animals hunt using their ears

1 - 4 students put on blindfolds and stand in the middle of a circle made by all the other students. The center students are the "mule deer" and want to avoid being eaten by the "mountain lions" that surround them in the circle.

If a blindfolded "mule deer" hears a "mt lion" as it tries to silently creep up and touch (successfully capture and eat) a "mule deer," the "mule deer" points at the noisy lion, and the lion must stop in their tracks (because in real life the deer would have heard the lion and run away) until the end of the game. Once a deer is eaten (touched) or all the lions have been heard and failed, you can let the students switch roles for a few more rounds, asking questions like, "Is it easy to be a hunter? Was it frightening being hunted?"

**Listen for your Mate:** Birds, crickets and frogs all use songs to attract mates of their own species. Sound game film canisters are in the prop room, filled with objects that make interesting and distinct sounds when rattled (sand, bells, paper clips, nothing at all,

a big pebble, etc.). There should be two of each sound. After a spiel about animal songs, hand the canisters out to your group, who (without talking) must shake the canisters and listen to find the other members of their species in the group. Have successful pairs move to one side, and demonstrate for the audience if there is one. “Here’s a species that will continue!”

**Owl and Mouse:** Blindfold one student and give small rocks to the others. Each participant throws a small rock (one at a time) in some direction around the owl. Owl must point in the direction of the sound, to show how owls can locate sounds in the pitch darkness.

**Conclusion:**

Open Space and Mountain Parks has been kept wild, no houses or shopping malls here, so all the wild animals have a real place to live.

“What can you do to help keep their home here a safe and good place for them to live?” How can you help take care of their home? “Leave No Trace” discussion appropriate for youngsters:

- “Is it okay to pick a flower or take a pretty rock home?” No, because that flower may be someone’s food and the rock may provide someone else with shelter.
- “What would happen if your dog chased a wild animal?” That causes an animal to burn precious calories and may even kill it or a baby it is carrying.
- “What happens if everyone walked off trail?”
- “Might a bear eat the plastic bag that held your sandwich if you left it behind? Would that be good for the bear?”
- “Would it be okay to bring a pretty rock home?” No, that might be an insect’s shelter from the rain.

Everything you find here builds the home these animals and plants live in. It’s our responsibility to leave it all here for them.