

## Nature and Animal Activities

What can you do for *Fun with Children Through Nature and Animal Activities*? Here are some ideas:

1. Choose a fun-friend.
2. Take a nature walk with your fun-friend.
3. Help your fun-friend learn about seeds.
4. Help your fun-friend enjoy flowers.
5. Help your fun-friend make a terrarium.
6. Help your fun-friend get acquainted with a domestic animal.
7. Help your fun-friend learn about some birds that live in the area.
8. Help your fun-friend learn about some insects.
9. Visit with your fun-friend's parent about the things you have explored together.

After completing each activity you choose to do, write a very short story about the things you and your fun-friend have done. These stories will be your record of your 4-H project.

### A Nature Walk

Our everyday world is an exciting place for little children. They like to explore and learn about things around them. When we look around us as a child does, we sometimes discover interesting things we haven't taken time to see before. Taking a walk is a good way to discover the everyday world together.

### *Taking A Nature Walk*

Before you take your fun-friend on a walk there are certain things you should do for safety:



- Be sure your fun-friend will mind you and will stay with you on the walk.
- Be sure they know that you should stop at street crossings.
- Be sure they know other safety rules you think should be known for the area in which you would be walking.

What are some of the things of nature you will see on your walk? Look for birds, bugs, and animals. Look for different flowers, seeds, and leaves. Notice different types of trees. Pause to listen to the wind in the trees or the song of a bird. Take time to admire a beautiful sky or a flowering shrub. Point out interesting cloud formations.

Stop and look closely at the things which are most interesting to your fun-friend. Tell what you know about the things you discover.

If you walk through grass or through a field, let your fun-friend drag a piece of fuzzy fabric (such as a wool sock or piece of an old sweater) tied to the wrist with a long string. Many seeds, small bugs, or worms will cling to the fabric. After you have walked for awhile, you can look at all the interesting things that were collected on the fabric. If you have a magnifying glass, use it to look at the collection.

Your fun-friend may want to collect pretty leaves, pine or fir cones, or other bits of nature which are found on the walk. These can be shown to parents and other family members later.

When you return from your walk, help your fun-friend tell about it to a parent or other family member. The amount of help needed while telling will depend on your friend's age. Children need to learn to talk about their experiences. This is helpful later when they go to school and learn to read, write, and study more about the world around them.

You may want to get a book from the library that shows pictures and tells about the things you have seen on your nature walk. Look at it or read it with your fun-friend.

## Seeds

Seeds are fascinating to children. Children enjoy planting them and watching them grow. They may get impatient waiting for seeds to sprout, but they take great pride in having grown something themselves.

### *Learning About Seeds*

There are many activities which you can share with your fun-friend that help learning about seeds. You may do as many of the following things as you like.

Visit a seed store to see how different seeds look. Show your fun-friend pictures of the plants the seeds will become.

Collect and look at some seeds that travel such as dandelion, maple, and milkweed seeds.

Plant some rye grass seed in a pot or paper cup. These should come up within a day or two. Other seeds which will sprout quickly include wheat, beans, corn, and radishes.

Roll a damp paper towel around the inside of a glass. Put sand or crumpled paper towels inside the paper towel. Place dried beans between the paper towel and glass. Keep the sand moist, and the beans should sprout in a few days. Notice that their roots will grow down, and their stems will grow up.

Plant some seeds in a small plot which you and your friend can care for. When the seeds grow into small plants, let your friend dig up a few of them. Examine and handle them and even take them apart if you like.

You might help your friend transplant some of the small plants. Leave some of the small plants undisturbed to continue growing.

Plant a few dried beans in some soil in each of three paper cups. Give one cup water and sunshine. Put one cup in a dark place. Leave one cup unwatered. Look at the difference in the growth of the seeds with your friend.

Help your fun-friend collect an assortment of dried stems of grass and weed seeds. Help arrange the stems in a small-necked vase or bottle. Let your friend give the arrangement to his or her parent.

Can you think of other activities which would help your fun-friend learn more about seeds?

### Flowers

Children begin to notice flowers at an early age. They like the bright colors and sweet scents and enjoy picking flowers. You can help your fun-friend enjoy flowers more by learning about them together.

#### *Learning About Flowers*

The following activities will give you and your fun-friend a chance to learn about and enjoy flowers. You may do as many of them as you like. You may be able to think of other activities to do with flowers too.

Plant some flower seeds in a small plot which you and your fun-friend can care for. Let your fun-friend help you when you plant them and each time you water and care for them. Your friend can help you pick them when they bloom.

Take a walk in your neighborhood to see flowers which are blooming. Make a scrapbook of pictures of them. Help your fun-friend learn the names of some of the flowers. Remember, a child's age will determine how many flowers can be recognized and how well the names can be remembered.

Pick some flowers with your fun-friend. Explain that you need to have permission to pick some flowers. Let your fun-friend put the flowers in a vase.

Count the number of "weeds" in your neighborhood which have pretty flowers. Explain why they are considered weeds.

Show your fun-friend how to press a flower. When it is pressed, glue it to

a piece of heavy paper to make a picture for your friend's room.

### A Terrarium

A terrarium is a little garden in a glass container. It gets its name from the Latin word *terra*, which means earth. Your fun-friends will enjoy having a terrarium or little garden of their very own. They will enjoy helping you make it, too.

#### *Making A Terrarium*

There are several types of containers you can use. The simplest one is a gallon jar with a wide mouth. You can leave it upright or turn the jar on its side.

A large fish bowl or small aquarium can also be used if it isn't being used for fish.

You will need some small rocks, some soil, and some small plants and mosses to put in the terrarium. Be sure to let your fun-friend help you gather the materials.

Arrange the materials in the terrarium as you would when planting a plant in a pot. Put a layer of small rocks on the bottom of the container for drainage, then add a layer of soil.

Plant the plants and mosses in the soil, arranging them in an attractive way. Some small rocks, twigs, or pieces of driftwood can also be added to make the arrangement more interesting.

You might add more plants that the two of you find on later walks. Carrot tops placed in a shallow lid with water make a dainty plant for a terrarium.

Help your fun-friend water the terrarium and take care of it. The garden will stay moist and need watering less often if you keep the lid on the jar. The lid should have a few large holes punched in it to allow air circulation. Add or replace plants to keep the terrarium interesting.

## Domestic Animals

Children need a variety of experiences with living things. Watching and helping care for pets and domestic animals teaches children about the way different animals live. They learn what the animals eat and how to feed them. They learn how they sleep and how they grow. Most children are interested in animals and enjoy learning more about them.

### *Getting Acquainted With An Animal*

You may already have decided upon the animal you will use in this activity. Some pets which you might have and want to use include dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, or white rats or mice. Some domestic animals you might use include horses, cows, sheep or goats. You may know of others you could use. The animal you decide to use should be friendly and gentle. It should be one you know and one who knows you. It should be one that your fun-friend is not already acquainted with.

If your fun-friend has a fear of certain animals, it would be better not to try to get acquainted with that animal. Parents will be better able to help children overcome this fear.

What are some of the things your fun-friends would want to know about the animal? They may need to be told what kind of animal it is. They will enjoy learning its name and seeing how you call the animal or talk to it.

You can show how to pet the animal. If it is small enough, you can show how to hold it and pet it.

Show your fun-friend what the animal likes to eat and how to feed it. Let your friend help you feed the animal.

Show your fun-friend where the animal sleeps and ways you can make it more comfortable. Perhaps your fun-friend can help you fix a better bed for the animal. If the animal is one that is kept in a cage, your fun-friend may enjoy helping you clean the cage.

Watch the animal. How does it play? What kinds of things does the animal like? What kinds of things would the animal not

like? Help your fun-friend learn the right way to treat an animal.

## Birds

Birds are one of the first wild creatures noticed by very young children. "Bird" is frequently one of the first words a young child will learn to say. As children grow older, birds continue to delight them. Your fun-friend will enjoy learning more about birds.

### *Learning About Birds*

One of the things your fun-friend probably has already noticed about birds is that there are many different kinds. Some of the more common ones such as robins or sparrows are probably already recognized. An older child (four to five years old) may want to know the names of others that are frequently seen in your area. A younger child (three to four years old) may only be interested in watching birds and in doing something for them.

If your fun-friend wants to learn to recognize more birds, you can point out such things as differences in their size, their coloring and markings, and the shape of their bill and feet. Differences in their songs and in their behavior are other clues you can use in learning to tell one kind of bird from another. You may want to get a bird book for children from the library to share with your fun-friend. It can help you both learn more about different kinds of birds.

Your fun-friend will enjoy knowing what the birds most often eat and how to feed them. It will be fun providing food for birds and watching them when they come to eat it. You can also point out the importance of feeding birds in the winter-time, especially when there is snow on the ground.

A simple way to provide food for birds is to decorate a tree with food for birds. Fasten foods such as pieces of bread, suet, or apples to the limbs of a small bushy tree. Make strings of popcorn, raisins or cranberries to hang on the



tree. Hang small paper cups filled with seeds, cornmeal, oatmeal, raisins, or peanut butter on the limbs. Be sure the cups are hanging close enough to the limbs for the birds to reach them when they perch on the limbs.

Other types of bird feeding stations are also simple to make. You can make one by fastening a sturdy paper plate to a window sill. Or you can brace a board between the limbs of a tree. A sturdy box lid hung from a tree limb would also make a suitable container for bird food. A suet feeder can be made by drilling holes in a board, stuffing pieces of suet in the holes, and hanging the board in a tree.

It may take several days for the birds to find the new feeding spot and feel secure enough to stop there. Be patient! It takes patience to be a successful bird-watcher.

You and your fun-friend can learn more about bird nests. Find out which birds build nests in your locality.

Notice what materials they use in building their nests, where they build them, and what the nests look like.

You and your fun-friend may enjoy providing some of these materials for the birds to use when building their nests. Your fun-friend can help you make a screen rack to hold these nesting materials.

#### *Making A Screen Rack*

First, make a wooden frame about 12 inches square. This can be made by lashing sticks together or by nailing one-inch boards together to form the square. Or, you can use a cigar box with the top and bottom removed for the framework.

Next, stretch 1 and 1/2 inch wire mesh or hardware cloth over the frame and tack it securely in place. If you use wire mesh, be sure to turn the sharp edges so they won't cut your fingers or hurt your fun-friend.

Finally, collect bits of cotton, pieces of yarn and string, cloth straps, small feathers, strips of paper, wood shavings, straw and grass. Stick these materials into the mesh. Hang the rack in a tree or in an area where you have seen birds gather.

Robins, thrushes, and swallows also need soft mud for their nests. Perhaps you and your fun-friend could mix some and put it in a shallow pan near the rack.

If you know of a nearby bird nest, you may point it out to your fun-friend. You may both enjoy watching *from a distance* the changing activities of the birds around the nest. Explain to your fun-friends why you must *never* get too close to the nest while the bird family is using it.

During the hot summer months it is good to provide a shallow pan of water for birds to drink and to bathe in. This will help the birds, and it will give you and your fun-friend another chance to watch them.

You and your friend can have some make-believe activities about birds. Have your friend pretend to be a bird--

hop like a bird, eat like a bird--or act out the things you have seen a bird do.

### Insects

Most children are very curious about the "bugs" and insects they see. They like to look for them in their yard or near their home. They enjoy collecting them in jars and watching them. They usually have lots of questions about the insects they see. Your fun-friend will enjoy having you help find out more about insects.

#### *Learning About Insects*

Insects are an important part of our natural world. There are many different kinds of insects. Some insects may be harmful. Others are harmless and even useful to us. You may want to get a book for children about insects from the library to share with your fun-friend. It can help you both learn more about the insects you see.

Some insects shouldn't be touched. Point out these to your fun-friend. However, you should try not to make children afraid.

Did you and your fun-friend see some insects when you were on your nature walk? Has your fun-friend asked you questions at other times about some other insects? If so, you may know of some things your fun-friend will especially enjoy learning about insects.

Here are some other activities you and your fun-friend might enjoy.

Fix a collection jar in which you and your fun-friend can keep some insects you find. Use a quart jar that has a screw lid

with a removable center. Remove the center and replace it with a piece of fine screen wire or net fabric. Or, punch some tiny holes in a regular lid. Put some of the plant materials (such as grass, leaves, and twigs) found near the insects in the jar with the insects. Put a few drops of water on the leaves in the jar.

If you have a magnifying glass, you and your fun-friend will want to use it. Children enjoy examining the bugs they find.

Watch ants traveling to and from their ant hill. Be careful not to stand or sit in their way. Drop some tiny crumbs of bread and watch what they do with the food.

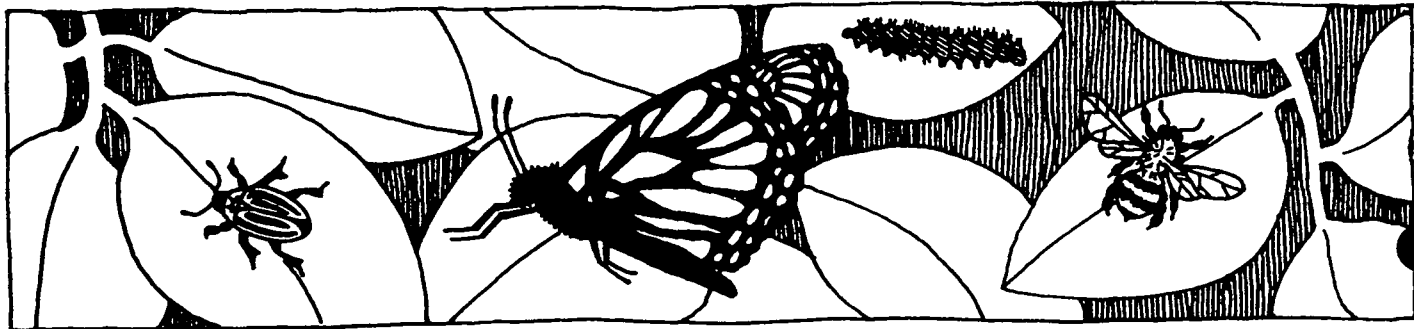
Keep a record of the different colors of moths and butterflies you see.

Look for caterpillars and watch them crawl. Notice how many legs they have. Do you know what kind of moth or butterfly the different caterpillars will become?

Collect one or more cocoons or some leaves with insect eggs on them. Put them in a collection jar. Watch the cocoons or eggs opening. Be sure to keep the screened lid securely fastened--your may have collected the eggs of a spider or harmful insect.

Watch bees collecting nectar and pollen from flowers. If possible, look at some bee hives. Share some honey made by bees with your fun-friend.

Can you think of other activities which would help your fun-friend learn about insects?



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