


# Our Trip to Concourse Lake Park

There are many opportunities to investigate wildlife (animal or otherwise) in the outdoors. Here are a few rules of thumb for caring for wildlife you find outdoors and a few tips for investigating safely with your students. This is not an exhaustive list! Please do your homework and be fully prepared for any trip you take outside your school walls with your students!



## General safety tips

- If you can, visit the site on your own before you take your students. You can scout out good places to stop and talk, any safety issues, and become comfortable with the location before you have the distraction of your students.
- Make sure to frequently review any rules, expectations and tasks with the students prior to the trip. The day of the trip is NOT the best time to introduce them!
- Make sure you know where your students are at all times and how many you have brought with you on the trip. If you have at least one additional chaperone in addition to yourself (highly recommended), one of you should always be at the end of the line and one should always be at the front.
- Make a game of keeping track of the students. Give everyone a number and count off periodically.
- Prepare for the weather and the environment. Make sure your students (and their parents) are informed before the trip of the predicted weather and bring the correct gear (sunblock, coats, hats, etc.). Remember, bring layers. You can always take a jacket off, but if you don't have it, it can't help you. Make sure the students have sturdy shoes
- Make sure everyone has water, especially during the warmer months.
- Bring a first aid kit and make sure you know any medical needs that your students may have—especially any bee allergies.
- Always wash your hands after investigating outdoors.
- In areas where there are ticks and mosquitoes, encourage students to wear long pants. Check for ticks at the end of the walk.

## Some common plants and animals to AVOID (not an exhaustive list)

POISON IVY: Leaves of three? Let it be. It also has a “fuzzy” vine that it uses to attach itself to posts, trees and the like. Touching the vine can cause a rash just as the leaves do.

POISON OAK: similar to above, but not common in PA

STINGING NETTLE

BEES AND WASPS: The worst thing anyone can do if a bee or wasp lands on them or flies near them is to run, scream and swat. This tends to aggravate the animal and encourages it sting. The best response is to slowly walk away if it flies near you. If it lands on a student, have them stay calm and calmly brush the animal off with a piece of paper. Bees and wasps are really fascinating animals and worth observing from a distance!

**NEVER TASTE ANY PLANTS IN THE OUTDOORS!**

## Respecting Nature

- Leave everything you find exactly where you found it. This includes rocks, sticks, leaves, as well as wildlife.
- If you are looking under a rock or a log (which is great!) always pull the rock or the log towards you. If there is something under it you don't want to meet, you will have the rock/log between you and the animal. Gently place the rock or log back in the exact spot. The rock/log is a habitat for all the species living under it and moving it permanently can affect their ability to survive.
- It is not necessary to touch the plants and animals you are observing. Many activities can be done simply by standing still and watching what an animal does for a period of time or closely looking at the surface of a plant.
- Do not allow students to pluck leaves off the trees and other plants. Besides the fact that some are poisonous, it is important to teach the students respect for all living things. Plants need their leaves just as we need our hands and eyes.
- Stay on the trail! This helps avoid getting lost as well as reduces encounters with things like ticks, poison ivy, and thorns.
- Please don't leave any trash behind including candy wrappers and tissues.

## Keeping Students Engaged

When stopping to talk with your students, try to make sure you are facing the sun. That way the sun is in your eyes and not your students.

Give out "coolness points" or a name of your choosing. To encourage the students to observe their surrounding closely, have them look for unique things in the environment that others might have noticed. Each time the point a find to you and the rest of the group, they can earn a point. Winners get a small prize at the end of the hike. You are the judge of the "coolness" factor (i.e. a green leaf probably doesn't count!).

"Find something that is..." Tell the students that periodically you will be asking them to find something along the trail that fits a category you will call out. They must find something along the trail (without going off it!) that matches the category. For example: "find something that is made of wood." "Find something that is older than 100 years (a rock or a large tree)." "Find something that makes its own food."

Look for evidence of wildlife. Humans tend to be loud no matter how quiet we ask our students to be and animals tend to hide when they hear us. The best way to look for wildlife is to look for the signs that they have left behind. Some signs to search for include scat (droppings); chewed leaves, twigs or nuts; nests, feathers; bones; and tracks.

Take advantage of the teachable moment. If something amazing happens (a hawk swoops down and catches a squirrel for instance) don't be afraid to stop your lesson and enjoy the show!

## Things to Bring

Some things are always good to have on hand when taking students on a nature walk

- Magnifying glasses
- Journals
- Camera
- Field guides
- Extra water
- Binoculars
- First aid kit/any medications your students may need

## Common animals you may encounter

**MILLIPEDES:** Decomposers. Most eat dead, decaying plant matter. Most types in PA are small although some African varieties can be a foot long. Have 2 pairs of legs per body segment. They have between 50 and 200 legs. They will not bite. However, they do exude a foul tasting/smelling liquid. Different types have different liquids. Make sure students wash their hands after touching millipedes and do not put their fingers in their mouths after touching them.

**CENTIPEDES:** Carnivores; they eat other invertebrates. Most of the ones in our area are small. Some are brightly colored. They can bite. Best to observe rather than touch.

**EARTHWORMS:** A perennial favorite. Many children love to investigate worms. Remember that if a worm becomes too dried out it will die so keep them moist. Too much handling by a person can cause the skin to dry out.

**PILLBUGS AND SOW BUGS:** These similar, and harmless, looking animals are crustaceans (like a crab or a lobster). Pillbugs (also known as Roly-polies) can roll into a ball. Sowbugs cannot roll up into a ball.

**SPIDERS:** Most spiders in our area are harmless to humans. However, the black widow can be found under logs and rocks in our area. Learn to identify black widows with their red hourglass on their belly (abdomen). They are rather large spiders; about the size of a dime. Spiders can be amazing animals to watch. It is fun to look for them and observe them just using your eyes. Looking for webs is a great activity. Make a spider web more visible by spraying it with water.

**HARVESTMEN OR DADDYLONG LEGS:** Not spiders but they are Arachnids. There is an urban legend that these animals are very venomous. This is NOT true. They are absolutely harmless to humans. However, their legs pop off easily so tell the children to be gentle.

**BEES AND WASPS:** Be careful with children who have allergies to bees. The worst thing anyone can do when approached by any type of bee is begin screaming and waving ones arms. Bees are much more likely to sting when they feel threatened. Staying calm and walking slowly away from the bee is your best bet. If one lands on a child, gently brush it off with a magazine. No swatting! Honeybees are truly fascinating animals and, again, watching them from a safe distance on a flower can be a wonderful experience.

**PIGEONS:** Pigeons are great to watch and imitate! They come in so many different colors and they have so many complex behaviors to investigate. They are not “dirty” and they are not likely to spread any diseases to children just by watching them!

**ROBINS:** They don’t just eat worms! Male and female robins look very similar to each other although the male is a bit darker colored. Although we associate robins with spring, many populations stay in the Philadelphia area year round. Robin nests are often made with lots of mud.

**STARLINGS AND HOUSE SPARROWS:** Two additional birds that you might find in your area. Starlings are a robin sized black bird with a yellow bill and short tail. House sparrows are small russet birds with a grey chest. The male House sparrow is more colorful than the female. Starlings are great sound mimics and you may hear a number of different calls, whistles, and noise coming from their mouths!

**SQUIRRELS:** A fun mammal to watch. They are rodents, which means that their incisors (their front teeth) never stop growing. All the better to chew with! Look for squirrel nests in trees (large balls of twigs and leaves) especially in the winter months.

**ANTS:** Ants are another perennial favorite of children. Some can sting or bite so they are best to watch. Please make sure that children are not smashing down the ant colonies! Spend some time watching ants on the move. They often follow one behind the other in the search of food. If one ant found a good source of food, they leave a scent trail behind them for other ants to follow. Try putting a little bit of food out no too far from an ant colony. How long does it take the ants to find it? How much can an ant carry?