

Nature, Science and Health



Wildlife

Have you ever watched a hawk soar over a meadow, caught a glimpse of a fox while hiking, seen wildflowers rustle in the breeze, or watched a fish break the calm surface of the water? You can make wildlife observations in your own backyard, a town wood lot, a city street, a national park, a forest, or a field. You can study animals and their habitats with binoculars, a camera, a tape recorder, or a sketch pad, or simply relax and feel the peace that comes from being in the outdoors.

Each interest project contains activities which are organized into four different categories: Skill Builders, Technology, Service Projects, and Career Exploration. By doing these activities, you will gain insights about yourself—your strengths and weaknesses, your likes and dislikes. You will have a range of new experiences, and you will develop valuable skills and expertise in specific areas. *To earn an interest project award, you must complete at least seven activities as follows: two Skill Builders activities; one Technology activity; one service project activity; one Career Exploration activity; Two activities from any category that you choose.*

Skill Builders

1. Find a natural area such as a forested park, a meadow, or a pond that you can use as a field ecology study site. Visit the site and take time to conduct some observations. What did you see, hear, smell, or feel? Record the date, time of day, temperature, and weather conditions.
2. Identify as many of the flowers, shrubs, and trees at a field ecology study site as you can. Sketch some of them in a field guide to identify them; record their names alongside your sketches.
3. Identify and record the names of animals you see, or find signs of, at a field ecology study site. Look carefully for and learn to recognize animal tracks. Be able to name at least three. Try to follow the trail of an animal in mud, sand, or snow and see if you can tell what it was doing (walking, running, etc.) You may wish to photograph the tracks or make plaster casts so you can show them to younger girls.
4. Select a specific animal to observe at a field ecology study site. Record the date, time, location, and weather conditions at the time of your observation. Create an ethogram, a detailed record of animal behavior, by putting down categories of behavior on a chart: for example, walk, run, rest, play. Observe for about 20 minutes. Note when the behaviors occur at regular times (for example, 30 seconds or one minute). Also note how the animal interacts with others of its kind and with other species of animals.

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5. Put up several bird houses. Find out the box dimensions and entrance hole sizes for the species you wish to attract. You can either make them yourself or purchase them. Discover why it is beneficial to have birds living nearby.
6. Conduct an experiment to show how a plant reacts to its environment (either at a field ecology site or in your home). Think carefully about what environmental conditions you want to test. Record and/or illustrate what happens during your experiment. Be careful not to injure the plant.

Technology

1. Learn about how wildlife biologists study animals in the field. What types of equipment do they use and how? Is different equipment used for animals of the land, air, or water?
2. Choose three species from any of the following categories for in-depth study: birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, trees, herbaceous plants. Use current computer technology (CD-ROMs, online encyclopedias, Web sites of wildlife organizations, etc.) to help you answer the following questions: What are the species' habitat requirements? What is its life history? How does it fit into the food chain? Is it threatened or endangered? If so, why?
3. Research how documentaries about wildlife are produced. Discuss ethical and practical issues related to photographing, filming, or recording animals in their natural surroundings.
4. Find out how insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides travel through an ecosystem. Create a visual display that shows the hazards of using these chemicals for both wildlife and people. Investigate alternatives to these products and suggest their use to family or friends who have a garden.

Service Projects

1. Teach the meaning of the following italicized words to younger Girl Scouts by creating a game that uses the words: predator, prey, plant life, herbivore, carnivore, omnivore, scavenger, decomposer, wildlife community, food web.
2. Contact a local wildlife agency, bird club, or nature center to volunteer your services. You could participate in a project to restore a wildlife habitat by planting trees, erecting wood duck nesting boxes, building dens, or cleaning a section of a stream or vacant lot. Involve other Girl Scouts in the project. Record your results as you carry out the project.
3. Help make a nature trail at your Girl Scout camp or local park accessible to more people. For example, design a set of trail markers with information about a plant, animal, or rock formation that can be easily read by someone in a wheelchair. Another idea is to produce an audiotape that a visually impaired person can use along the same nature trail to help inform her of the special feature each marker highlights.

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4. Examine your own values and beliefs related to wildlife and the environment and evaluate possible actions you could take. With a group of Girl Scouts, discuss an environmental issue important in your area or broader issue, such as hunting, acid rain, or the logging of forests.
5. With the cooperation of your Girl Scout council, survey one campsite. Inventory the property by listing the kinds of plants and animals found there. Highlight threatened or endangered species and the problems they face. Organize a group of Girl Scouts to create an endangered species bulletin board at the campsite to raise awareness among other Girl Scouts about the plight of the species on the property and elsewhere in the country or world.

Career Exploration

1. Brainstorm five career choices involving wildlife and the environment. Contact government agencies and other organizations that might employ people in such careers and interview one of them. How did she get into this field? What does she do on a daily basis?
2. Investigate what it means to be an ethnobotanist or cultural ecologist. Or explore another career that combines knowledge of wildlife and people. Arrange to interview someone and ask her what species she studies, what her background and training are, etc.
3. Arrange to shadow a wildlife biologist or naturalist for part of a day to learn about the job.
4. Investigate laws that protect wildlife around the world. How effective are these laws in regulating trade? Which group of people benefits from the sale of wildlife products? Pick an animal species affected by the trade in wildlife products (for example, the African elephant hunted for its ivory or the snow leopard hunted for its fur) and write a story or a play about it. Share it with or show it to younger Girl Scouts.

And Beyond

Once you discover the fantastic variety of wildlife, from butterflies to grizzly bears, you'll want to go further by trying these related interest projects:

- Pets
- Plant Life
- Outdoor Survival
- All About Birds
- Eco-Action
- Digging Through the Past

This badge can be found in the book *Interest Projects for girls 11 - 17*, page 80. This text has been reproduced with permission from Girl Scouts of the USA—this document may not be copied or reproduced in any way.