

Friends of NCTC Program Activity
c. 2022 Friends of National Conservation Training Center

The Earth Is Alive!

(ages 5 and older)

*School will be starting again in many places later this month, but don't stay inside.
This is one of the BEST months to explore nature!*

Background

It's August and that means the growing season is beginning to slow down. Leaves are beginning their transition to drying out, flowers begin to fade, young adult animals are beginning to leave their family groups, and some birds begin migrating south. But there is still plenty to explore in nature before school starts again!

What You Will Need for This Project (materials and supplies)

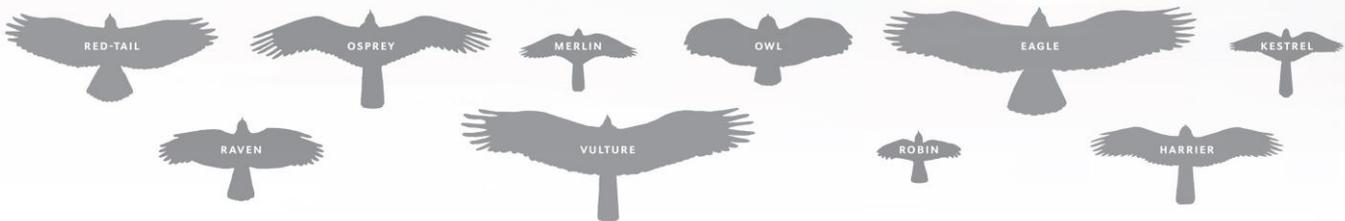
Your ears
Your eyes
Your friends
Paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons

What to Do

Take A Walk in the Wild!

Take a walk in a meadow, your backyard, or any open area. Listen for insects like grasshoppers or crickets (a raspy sound). Do you hear any birds or see them flying overhead? What about butterflies, flowers, and the plain ol' grass? There is a lot alive if you just look! Can you find any of these things?

- Birds like a Barn Swallow (look for the V-shaped tail)
- Butterflies like the Tiger Swallowtail (how do you suppose it got that name?)
- Different types of grass (is it long with a fuzzy top or more like tree branches?)
- Caterpillars on a plant (many are green, black, and yellow, but they have different patterns)



- An adult Monarch Butterfly (that may be getting ready to migrate to Mexico to spend the winter)
- A hawk (or a vulture or an eagle—you can tell the difference by their silhouette in the sky!)

Look For Lightning Bugs and Bats

Sitting outside in your own yard on a summer night, especially just as it gets dark, may reveal some things you haven't paid attention to—like fireflies and bats!

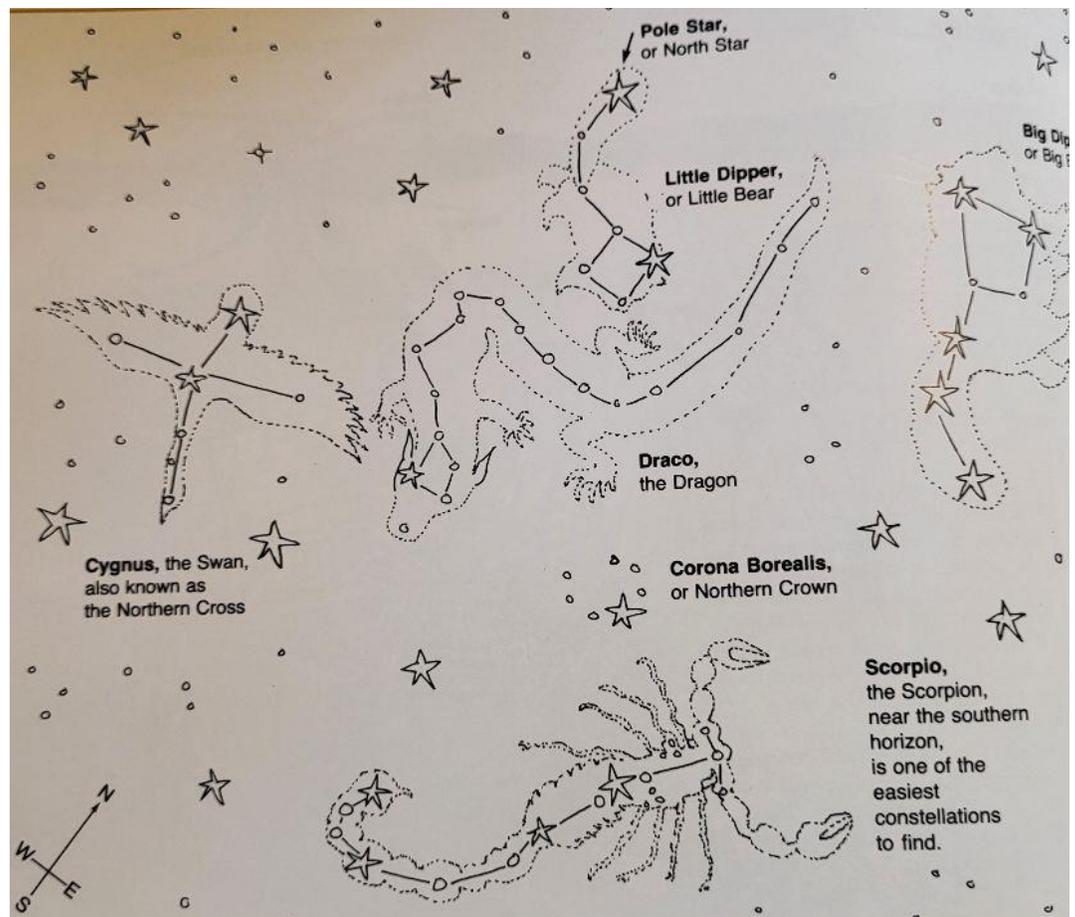
- Bats are active at twilight and will swoop around the sky as they search for insects to eat. Sometimes they are mistaken for birds, but if you look closely, you will see they aren't! Don't be afraid of them—they are just hungry and ready to eat some mosquitos!
- Lightning Bugs are one of the most common sights of a summer night. Their light is produced by a chemical reaction and different species have different flashes! Some fireflies fly in a smooth pattern while others are jerky. And the number of flashes can identify the species! If you are a male firefly, you will fly and flash in a distinctive pattern to signal to the female of the same species. The female will respond with a flash that indicates they are the same species.
- How do scientists know all this? They study them! You can too just by watching. As you get older, you may think about studying bats or fireflies as a career.

Design a Flower! (or a bird or a butterfly...)

Nature does a good job with flowers of different colors and shapes, but could you do better? You might want to design an imaginary flower! Where would this flower live? What will it look like? Does it need shade or sun? What kind of pollinator does it attract? Why is your flower perfect for a pollinator? Does your flower have a special name? Once you have created this imaginary flower, go outside and look for real flowers and compare your creativity to the real thing!

Watch the Night Sky

Summer nights in August, when the moon is not full, are the perfect time for watching the stars in the night sky. If possible, get away from street lights or on buildings. A grassy meadow or park where there are not trees and buildings is there perfect place. Look up! Ancient people saw "pictures" in the sky called constellations. Orion was a great hunter (with his dog, Sirius), Scorpio was a scorpion, and Draco a dragon. The Little Dipper is also called the Little Bear and the Big Dipper, the Big Bear. The North Star can be found at any



season of the year by looking in the direction of North and finding the end of the handle of the Little Dipper. (This image is from *Nature All Year Long* by Claire Walker Leslie, p. 36)

Just For Fun With Your Friends! Egg, Caterpillar, Butterfly Game

(This game works best with several players—the more the better!)

Bees aren't the only pollinators. Butterflies and moths move pollen from flower to flower, too. Unlike bees, butterflies and moths have the same 4-part life cycle: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis (cocoon), adult. This game uses "rock, paper, scissors" (RPS) as the basis. Remember: paper wraps rock, rock breaks scissors, scissors cut paper. Every player starts as an egg (crouched down). Two "eggs" play RPS. The winner becomes a caterpillar (crawling) and begins looking for another butterfly to play RPS. The loser stays an egg and looks for another egg. After caterpillar is chrysalis (stand up), and finally Butterfly (arms extended, flying.)

Helpful Hints for Adults

Star Tracker app is a huge help in locating stars. It is a free download.