



HCTF Education Habitats at Home

Learn about the habitats in your own backyard!

Become a.. Nature Detective



What's going on out here?

There's a lot going on in nature all the time! It may not always seem like it at first glance, but as you become a Nature Detective, you'll start to notice more and more clues as to what is happening all around you. The trick is to use your senses and pay attention.

Here is a collection of activities that will help you build your detective skills of observation and awareness and unlock some of nature's secrets!

Sharpen your powers of observation with the leaf game!

1. In a bag, collect a variety of leaves of different shapes, colour, and sizes from on the ground near shrubs, trees, and other plants. Include one leaf per participant plus a few extra. If possible, include some leaves with signs of insect activity, blights, and other imperfections.
2. Each participant selects a leaf from the bag.
3. Study your leaf for one minute. If desired, use magnifying lenses or trace or make rubbings of the leaf. Look for bumps, irregularities, and other unique features. Remember to use all your senses (except taste) to make observations.
4. Return all leaves to the bag. Shake up the bag and dump the leaves back out. Using your observation skills, can you recognize your leaf from all the others?



Stay focused with toilet paper roll binoculars!

Watching an animal for a period of time is a great way to learn more about their behaviour. But sometimes there's so much going on that can be easy to get distracted! Here's a tool you can make to help you focus in on your target.

Materials:

- 2 empty toilet paper rolls
- String or ribbon
- White glue
- Construction paper or butcher paper
- Decorating supplies, such as markers, crayons, stickers or tissue paper (optional)

1. Glue toilet paper rolls side by side. You can use clothes pegs on either end to hold them until the glue has dried.
2. Wrap the paper around the width of the binoculars and trim off the excess paper with scissors. Glue or tape in place.
3. Decorate your binoculars however you choose! You can paint them, color them with crayons or markers, collage with tissue paper, etc.
4. Make the strap: use a hole punch or scissors to cut a small hole on the outside edge of each roll about 2 cm from the end. Measure and cut your string. Take one end of your string and thread it through the hole you made. Tie a knot to secure. Repeat with the other side of the string.
5. Explore!



It's a stakeout: get to know a special place

Find a special place outdoors where you can observe nature. Visit your spot often. Sit for 3 minutes and observe quietly. Get to know it so well that you can picture it with your eyes closed!

Take photos of your spot from the same position and angle each time you go. Notice the weather and the temperature. Look for insects and other wildlife at your special place. Sketch and record your observations in a nature journal.

Compare your journal entries and photos. How does your place change over time and over the seasons? What are your predictions for your next visit?



Look for clues: signs of wildlife

Just because you don't see wildlife doesn't mean they aren't there. If you look carefully, you'll see lots of clues. Bird nests, spider webs, a tuft of fur, scratched bark, slime trails, and poop (known as scat) are all signs of wildlife. Can you think of other signs of wildlife?

A series of footprints showing where an animal has been are known as tracks. Tracks can tell us a lot. For example: The shape can show what kind of animal it was. The size can show whether it was an adult or a young animal, and pattern of the prints (known as the gait) can show whether the animal was running or walking. Tracks are easiest to see in soft, muddy ground or snow, so look carefully after rain or snowfall!

Catching tracks

You can set a "Track Trap" by raking out a smooth layer of sand or fine soil on the ground. Add some bird seed to encourage visitors to come and leave their marks. You can also try a smaller version by setting out a tray of sand or fine soil with seeds in the center.

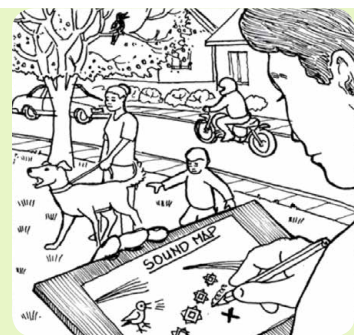


Where did you hear that? Create a sound map

You'll need a pencil and paper to draw on.

Nature can tell you a lot...if you listen. Find a comfortable place to sit outdoors. Close your eyes, listen, and count the number of different sounds you can hear. Now that you're tuned into sound, open your eyes and take out your pencil and paper.

On your sound map, "X" marks your spot. Put an "X" in the center of the page to represent your location. Each time you hear a sound, make a note of it with a symbol on the map where it was heard relative to the "X". You can choose any symbols you want to represent sounds such as pictures, musical notes, squiggly lines. Try mapping in a few locations to see what different sounds you hear. If you do this activity with a group, you can compare your maps and discuss what you heard. What's the quietest place you mapped? What was loudest? Could you hear more human or non-human noises? Where would you go to find silence?



Sound Map illustration
from the Get Outdoors!
Educator's Guide



HCTF Education has great resources for the Nature Detective! ID card sets like **Tracks and Scats** and **Hives, Webs, and Slime** will help you identify "clues" left by animals in BC (Available in English and French!).

The **Get Outdoors! Educator's Guide** includes sensory awareness activities and other ways to connect with special outdoor places.

Visit resourceroom.hctfeducation.ca

