



Wildlife NOTES

Exploring your own backyard

The world outside your door is filled with things that buzz, tweet, squawk, flutter, scurry, build, burrow, hoot, chase, pounce, and soar. It's fun, free, available 24/7, and there's always something new! Just step outside and...

What can you do with 5 or 10 minutes?

- Listen to the wild voices you hear. Depending upon the season and time of day or night, you may hear insects buzzing, amphibians chorusing, birds calling, singing, or drumming, or other animals making a whole range of entertaining sounds.
- Watch your wild neighbors while they work, eat, and play—birds gathering nesting material, feeding on berries or insects, or splashing in your birdbath; butterflies and bees sipping nectar from flowers; squirrels storing nuts, gathering leaves, or having a good chase!
- Feel nature first-hand—capture a silky milkweed seed on the wind or a “whirlybird” maple seed twirling to the grass below; gather a few pinecones, nuts, or leaves in your hands, or compare the bark textures of different trees.



What can you do with 30 or 40 minutes?

- Identify! Try to get a good look at the creatures making the wonderful wild sounds you hear outside. Then, check out a few field guides, CDs, or websites to identify some of the species and learn more about them. Have a little fun trying to make similar sounds!
- Discover! Take time to watch the butterflies, moths, bees, bats, birds, chipmunks, rabbits, squirrels and other creatures in your yard.
- Examine! Search for seeds, nuts, feathers, or other natural objects to examine. Check your field guide to learn more about the plant or animal species they come from, or which creature may have been nibbling on them.
- Create! Use your sketchbook, journal, or camera to record your memories of the animals and plants you encounter, or write a poem about a real-life nature drama that you watch unfold.



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How to Make an Explorer's Kit

Getting children involved in nature projects is not only time well-spent together but also provides the opportunity to pass on your values of care and compassion for all living creatures.

Curious to learn more about your backyard? Putting together an Explorer's Kit is a great first step. Here's what you need to get started:

- Notepad and pencil (for sketches or journaling)
- Magnifying glass (to examine feathers, and other findings)
- Small shovel or trowel (to uncover interesting things in the soil)
- Jar with lid (to collect tiny creatures for brief observation)
- Shallow pan (to spread soil in while looking for tiny inhabitants)
- Flashlight with red cellophane (red won't disrupt night vision)
- Silver, Donald M. *One Small Square: Backyard*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993. (This is an excellent backyard nature activity book for kids—or for anyone else with outdoor curiosity!)

Now you have everything you need to help see, identify and document the plants and creatures in your yard.