

Who's Sharing Our Space?

We think of wildlife as being in the woods or “away” somewhere but wildlife often visit and live in the same places we do—we just don't always see them. Most wildlife avoid interaction with humans and many are also nocturnal. One way to find out what wildlife may be visiting your own schoolyard is to set up a motion-triggered wildlife camera. Students can make observations about the types of species that visit their school site, and do comparisons to study when wildlife are seen at different times of day/night, and how sightings change seasonally.

GRADES: All

INTENDED OUTCOMES: Head, Heart, Feet

SUGGESTED SUPPLIES:

- Motion-triggered camera. These can be purchased from \$60 to over \$200. Some common suppliers are Cuddeback, Stealth, Reconyx, and Bushnell.
- Rechargeable batteries and battery charger
- Memory cards for camera
- Computer to view photos

Suggested steps and/or focus for each grade level:

GENERAL

- Select a site at your school or a nearby location where you think wildlife may travel. This could be anything from squirrels and rabbits to raccoons and larger animals. Look for signs (track, scat), possible animal trails, possible food sources, etc. You will also need a location where your camera can be mounted, preferably to a tree trunk or post.
- Set up your camera with preferred settings. Some offer choices of how often the shutter clicks, date/time stamp, location stamp, and some have a video option as well. Keep in mind that the video function will use up the batteries much quicker.
- Set a schedule with your students as to when and how often you plan to check the camera.

ECE-3rd GRADE

- Ask children what animals they have seen in their yards at home, or at school. What animals do they think might live on their school grounds?
- Have them think about why we might not always see animals that live here (nocturnal, scared of people, etc.)
- Tell them we have a way to spy on wildlife. They can help you decide where to place the camera and help you retrieve the memory card. As the teacher or leader, you can show them the photos each time and help them identify what they see.
- Have them think about why that animal lives there—What is it eating? Where does it sleep?

4th GRADE - MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Divide students into teams. Have some responsible for checking the camera and viewing data. Others can identify species or be responsible for setting up a database for the results. Or, student groups can rotate through various responsibilities.
- Create hypotheses. What do the students wonder about? When are animals seen most often? What changes do they expect to see and why? What habitat requirements do wildlife need to survive?

HIGH SCHOOL

- In addition to above, students can do comparisons with other school or sites that have cameras. What do they expect to observe that's different from other locations? How do they think wildlife behavior will change in different seasons? Are there individual animals that can be identified from markings?

TIPS AND TRICKS

- If a motion-triggered camera is inaccessible, try modifying the activity to rely on student observations of wildlife presence: tracks, scat, tree markings, etc.
 - This can lead to important conversations about wildlife corridors and human impact on animal habitats and natural spaces
 - How can we be respectful stewards of shared environments?
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