

Nature Up Close!

Fun Outside with Cub Scouts

University of Scouting
Pacific Skyline Council



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Any Hike can be a Nature Hike!

Enthusiastic cheerful adult leaders + Cub Scouts + fun = lifelong love of the outdoors and appreciation for the beauty of the world around them.

Nature Walk Basics Plan the walk ahead of time by using local guidebooks or online resources. Trails.com is a great resource for finding local walks and hikes in most areas. If you drive to it, be sure to file a Tour Permit with the council. **Make the Distance Age Appropriate.**

Tools Needed

- Field guides for birds - these can be picked up at the local library
- Field guides for trees, local flora and fauna - check the library for local guides
- Hike and trail guides - most every area has trail guides which list many hikes that are appropriate for children
- Backpacks - for adults and kids. Don't let the kids carry too much in their pack, make judgments based on age and individual..
- Water - bring enough for everyone
- Snacks - never leave home without them. The kids will be hungry from all of their adventures so think of packing healthy, hearty snacks that will keep them full longer: apple with peanut butter, cheese with crackers, cut up veggies and fruit.
- F, • Dress appropriately for the weather conditions - an uncomfortable kid is going to want to go home that much sooner, good outdoor shoes or boots plus layering for the weather will keep a child happier outside for a longer period of time.
- Magnifying lenses
- Bug boxes
- Basket or box for "treasures"

Make the Hike Fun

Kids of all ages love to carry a "nature basket" which they can fill with whatever treasures from nature they choose: rocks, feathers, acorns or ferns. Collecting is usually not allowed in parks. A great collection container is a gallon milk jug with part cut away, leaving a large opening but retaining the handle.

Remain flexible while hiking with kids, search for "teachable moments" that will come up unexpectedly. Make sure no one feels rushed and is given lots of time to experience the outdoors as they want to. Keep eyes, ears, noses alert and detecting. Feel things!

Use fun activities to keep them interested and moving:

- have races from one tree to the next
- have a scavenger hunt. Make a list beforehand of certain items each child has to find.
- Have a color hunt

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- Watch for animals and birds. Note what they are doing.
- Be snakes: Look down, tell what you see
- Be deer: look straight ahead or to the side. Tell what you see
- Be hawks: look up, tell what you see.
- If you were a _____ what would you be doing, eating, living?

Work With the Seasons Each season has unlimited teaching and learning opportunities for all ages.

Spring - wildflowers are abundant this time of year, especially California's state flower, the poppy. Look for colors, talk about how they are pollinated and why. Knowing names of the flowers is not important but could be fun with an appropriate guidebook. What insects can you see on the flowers? Ladybug larvae are voracious: observe them among their favorite prey, aphids. Baby shorebirds are very entertaining to watch if you are near the shore in April or May. Look for Stilts and Avocets. Be wary of snakes on warm days. Look for gophers popping up from their burrows! Lizards love the warm sun.

Summer - watch for birds, animal babies. Talk about what the animals and plants are doing this time of year. If you see an animal or bird baby that looks abandoned, don't touch. Mom probably knows where the kids are. Go to the Baylands and look for white pelicans.

Fall - leaves and acorns should be on the ground at this time. Fun to gather and compare. Leaves make fun projects for all ages: leaf rubbings, leaf people. Pine cones! Ants gathering winter food. Look for harvester ant nests on open dirt roads. You will see a "door" surrounded by grains of sand, and outside that, lots of dried plant parts the ants have discarded. Also look for the ant "highways" radiating out from the ant nest. If you are lucky, ants may be busy at work. Note what they are doing, what they are carrying in (and out!) and how they interact with each other, and with strangers they encounter. What are squirrels and chipmunks collecting? Can you spot the acorn woodpeckers preparing storage holes for individual nuts?

Winter - look for animal tracks if the area has snow. Otherwise talk about where animals go when it's cold, what they are doing there. Rainy day fun!

Rainy Day Fun!

Don't let a shower spoil a good hike! Everyone can have fun outside if they can stay reasonably dry. Decent shoes or boots are a must. Make an impromptu rain coat by cutting face and arm holes out of a big plastic garbage bag.

Look for worms. Check for life in puddles. Compare colors of wet and dry things. Watch for rainbows. Look for slugs (especially banana slugs!) and snails. Watch birds and other animals. What do they do in the rain? Look for small critters under logs and among ivy.

Nature crafts—a huge topic not discussed here, but a natural outgrowth of the nature hike.