

Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office Supports Summer Camps

Article by Terri Jacobson, Wildlife Biologist and Environmental Education Specialist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Summer camps are one way to connect children with nature. Through partnerships, the Mississippi Ecological Services Field Office (MFO) has been actively involved with a number of summer camps for kids. Over the years, field staff has conducted camp programs on snakes, bears, bats, endangered species, bird watching, observing nature, identifying night animals by sound and many other topics. Presenting these camp programs, the Service has traveled to northeastern Mississippi at Crows Neck Environmental Education Center, in the delta at Tara Wildlife, on the coast at Grand Bay National Estuarine Reserve, and locally at church camps and the Clinton Community Nature Center near Jackson. And, for the last four years, the field office has become even more active in the summer camp arena with five great camps ...

Camp Rainbow: For the first time, this summer, the MFO participated in the Camp Rainbow retreat at Henry S. Jacobs Park located near Utica. Camp Rainbow is an annual, five day, four night summer camp sponsored by the American Cancer Society and is open to patients six to 17 years old. The camp offers a stimulating environment that is designed to meet the special needs of children undergoing treatment or who had a cancer diagnosis in the past. Various activities ensure that there is something for everyone, including fishing, hiking, archery, boating, arts and crafts, dancing and even a talent show. The camping experience gives children diagnosed with cancer a chance to meet others affected by cancer, to bolster their self-esteem and confidence, and provide a fun time outdoors.



Private lands biologist, Jeffrey Lee, teaches archery at Camp Rainbow. Photo credit: Dr. Joe Bumgardner



Seining for fish at the Wildlife & Fisheries Summer Camp. Photo credit: Terri Jacobson

Wildlife & Fisheries Summer Camp: The MFO helped plan the first Wildlife & Fisheries Summer Camp in 2007 and has helped since. This annual camp is hosted by Mississippi State University Extension Service, Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Aquaculture at Mississippi State University, and Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is one of the main field sites and provides wildlife experts as program presenters. The camp is intergenerational, providing an opportunity for children as well as their parents, grandparents or guardian to attend. Teachers can earn continuing education credit by attending camp also. It is a residential camp with the campers and adults staying overnight at a university dormitory. The camp schedule is packed with activities! Campers are up at dawn and don't get back to their rooms till after dark. Activities have included boater safety, hunter education, wildlife briefings, birding, nature study, river ecology and fish trapping, seining and electro-fishing, fly-tying and fishing, archery and bow fishing, wildlife tracking, radio telemetry, rifle, shotgun and muzzle-loader shooting, tomahawk throwing, deer or beaver necropsy, GPS and geocaching, and even scuba diving.

Bug and Plant Camp: In 2008 the MFO became involved in the long-running annual Bug and Plant Camp. Students and adults who are interested in entomology have come from all over the United States and Canada to attend this camp in Mississippi. This is another intergenerational residential week-long camp sponsored by Mississippi State University Extension Service and the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, Mississippi State University. This camp focuses on insect and plant interactions. Campers learn all about collecting insects – how to catch, spread, pin, identify and label. Programs are presented on special topics like insectivorous plants, bee keeping, honey tasting, endangered butterflies, pollination, insect borne diseases, mosquito monitoring and forensic entomology. A new activity this year was maggot art!



Collecting aquatic insects at Bug & Plant Camp. Photo credit: Terri Jacobson, USFWS



Having fun outside at Nature Detectives Camp. Photo credit: Terri Jacobson, USFWS

Nature Detectives Camp: In partnership with Millsaps College in Jackson, MFO started a Nature Detectives Camp in 2009. The day camp uses *The Private Eye* project as a foundation for hands-on, interactive, inquiry-based learning. The nature detectives use jeweler's loupes to examine nature up close while taking notes and drawing in their journals. We find natural objects outside to study like sweet gum balls, flowers, pine cones and pill bugs. Campers also start their own nature museum collections. Swayze McDearman, a Service teen volunteer helps with the camp. Swayze said "the two highlights of camp are worm day and insect day. The campers get really excited interacting with the wiggling worms or when they catch their first angry bee, buzzing in a net."

Birding Camp for Kids: In 2010, the MFO collaborated with Millsap College, the Jackson Audubon Society and Wild Birds Unlimited to pull together the first birding day camp for kids in the state. The campers identify birds by sight and sound while learning fun avian facts. Through engaging activities and discussion, campers learn about habitat needs, adaptation, migration and bird conservation. Three of the campers' favorite activities are all from *Flying Wild: An Educator's Guide to Celebrating Birds*. The campers love to race in the "Food for the Brood" or flap their wings in "The Great Migration Challenge" and use bird beaks in "Fill the Bill" activities. This year, campers made a habitat mobile and a feathered bird mask; last year they decorated their own field guide bag and planted sunflower seeds in small peat pots which they took home. All campers leave with their own bird identification field guide, International Migratory Bird Day posters and a three-ring binder packed full of information.



Two campers are identifying a duck wing at Bird Camp for Kids. Photo credit: Terri Jacobson

Jennifer Tompkins of Millsaps College is pleased to host both the Bird and Nature Detectives camps and says “the College is excited about the partnership with the Service and is thrilled with the opportunity of connecting children to nature.” Jennifer’s daughter even attended the Nature Detectives camp where she made exciting discoveries with her Private Eye’s jeweler’s loupe and enjoyed all the nature journaling activities.

Over the past four years, the following MFO staff assisted or led programs and activities at summer camps: botanist Scott Wiggers, GIS specialist Ryan Theel, private lands biologist Jeffrey Lee and wildlife biologists Terri Jacobson, Linda LaClaire and Kathy Lunceford.

Here are a few more camp photographs:



Nature Detectives using their jeweler’s loupes and working on their journaling skills.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson



Tomahawk throwing at Wildlife & Fisheries Camp.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson



Pine beetle larva found during Bug & Plant Camp.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson



Two biologists and camper using bird identification field guide.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson



Campers show off their bird masks.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson



Caught a fish at Wildlife & Fisheries Camp.

Photo credit: Terri Jacobson