

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alligator River/Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge
P. O. Box 1969
Manteo, North Carolina 27954

Contact: Bonnie Strawser - 252-473-1131



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News Release

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Columbia Middle School "Connects" with Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge through Digital Photography

While many children would rather spend a Saturday in November playing sports or hanging out in their neighborhood with friends, ten students from Columbia Middle School decided to tag along on a trip to Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge with their Science teacher, Pat Armstrong. A month earlier, Refuge Visitor Services Specialist Cindy Heffley met with Mrs. Armstrong to plan activities to connect Columbia Middle School students with nature. A trip to Creef Cut Trail was planned. Since there were no trail-specific handouts for Creef Cut Trail, the students took on the task of creating one.

Using digital cameras the refuge had purchased with regional grant funds, the children split up into three groups. Each group selected a specific category to capture on their cameras; animals, plants and other. Along the way, Heffley provided an overview of the refuge and its mission. The groups discovered many things to photograph for each of the categories. Most items were easy to put in a category. When the students came upon a strange-looking item on the trail, they learned it was bear scat and had a discussion as to which category it belonged. Since there is water beside the trail, an occasional wet footprint was found and identified. The three girls in the "other" group were delighted when they realized "other" included folks fishing at the accessible overlook. After asking if they could take a picture, the students were busy snapping shots of the anglers. Heffley commented, "It was very enjoyable to see the students interacting with older visitors. Actually, it was hard to tell who enjoyed the exchange more—the students or the anglers."

The highlight of the morning was the appearance of a mother bear and her cub walking across the trail. When reaching the spot where they had crossed, the students were thrilled to see a large footprint on top of an active anthill.

The students will be presenting a program to the Tyrrell County Board of Education, as well as creating handouts about the trail. However, it will not be all work and no play for the group. In addition to the field trips, refuge staff will be visiting the school with programs for the Science Club, and a canoe trip on one of the refuge paddling trails will be a special treat in the spring.



Columbia Middle School Science teacher, Pat Armstrong, and students in the Science Club pose at the beginning of Creef Cut Wildlife Trail after spending the morning "capturing the trail" with digital cameras. For more information about "connecting" with Alligator River or other National Wildlife Refuges in eastern North Carolina, contact Cindy_Heffley@fws.gov or call 252-987-1118.
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