Backyard Naturalist Lessons! - Fun and educational lessons you can enjoy in your own backyard!

**CAMOUFLAGE CRITTERS!**

For Pre-K - 2nd grade students

Objectives:

* Kids will learn what camouflage is and how it helps animals survive in their habitats
* students observe how successful camouflage is through a creative and exploratory activity at home

Materials:

* crayons
* butterfly coloring sheet
* assorted small plastic toy animals (bugs, frogs, lizards, reptiles etc.)
* scissors

Lesson Plan:

1) Ask your child if they know what camouflage is. Have they heard of it before? If they have, ask them to define it as best they can.

 **Camouflage**: an animal's natural coloring that helps it blend in with its surroundings

2) Animals that are camouflaged are designed to hide in plain sight within their habitat. These animals have the same colors as the places they live. Look outside in your backyard. What colors in nature do you see?

 - grey and brown (tree trunks, broken twigs, small stones)

 - greens (new leaves, grasses, evergreen trees and shrubs)

 - light browns (dry, old fallen leaves)

 - dark brown (fallen pinecones)

 - black (soil)

 - grey (gravel)

3) Animals are camouflaged in nature because it helps them survive in some way. Animals survive in their habitat by obtaining four resources in their habitat: FOOD, WATER, SHELTER, and SPACE. When animals find these things in their habitat, they are able to survive, grow, and reproduce!

4) In these links, you will learn some ways that camouflage helps different animals

- Eastern Screech Owl - uses camouflage to blend in during the day and stay hidden from prey. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Screech-Owl/media-browser/60389751>

- Northern Walking Stick - shaped and colored to look like a twig on a tree in order to hide from predators. <https://www.insectidentification.org/insect-description.asp?identification=Northern-Walkingstick>

- Eastern Box Turtle - camouflage helps female turtles hide while laying eggs in soft soil on the forest floor.

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/eastern-box-turtle>

- White-tailed Deer - young deer, or fawns, have a spotted pattern on their backs helps them camouflage among low vegetation. Adults' coloring helps them blend in along forest edges and grasses. <https://nhpbs.org/natureworks/whitetaileddeer.htm>

Activity:

1) If you have any small plastic animals, have your child do a camouflage animal find! Tell your child to close their eyes. Hide camouflaged animals in plain sight in a specific section of your yard. Places could include:

 - in your garden

 - one end length of backyard lawn

 - around the tallest trees in your yard

 - in and around a gravel/rocky walkway

Have your child walk through the area ONE TIME to start. They should do so with their hands behind their back, so they do not pick anything up at first. The idea is for them to try and SEE the animals as they walk by. If you have more than one child (have them keep the number of animals they see to themselves, until all are finished).

Ask your child, how many animals they found. If below the correct number, have them walk through slowly again, this time picking up the animals as they go.

2) Use the butterfly coloring sheet to have them test their knowledge of camouflage. Ask them to look outside and (secretly) pick a place in the yard they would like to hide the butterfly they will be coloring. They have to color it as best they can to match the area they will hide it on. They are welcome to draw outside the lines in order to achieve this. Make sure they color in everything!

When they have finished coloring, they can cut out their butterfly with scissors. Now they must hide their butterfly from you or each other. Make sure to do this in plain sight - do not hide it under or below anything in nature. After they do this, try to find each camouflaged butterfly in your yard! How long will it take you to find them?

Repeat this activity as often as you like!

*For more infromation on our other programs throughout the year, please contact:*

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