

# Backyard Explorers



## SUMMARY:

Learn all about the animals that share our neighborhood. Learn how to observe and photograph wildlife safely, track animals and make your own nature journal in this drop in program.

## BOOK TIE-IN:

- **Creekfinding** : a true story Martin, Jacqueline Briggs, author.  
Best & Brightest annotation: Kindergarten - 3rd grade. Mike Osterholm had a dream. He learned from a neighbor that a creek once ran through his Iowa farmland that had long been bulldozed over to make room for more corn. Mike decided to restore the creek. Friends and neighbors thought he was foolish to chase such a dream, but Mike persisted. Working from old photographs, he marked the creek's path, hired an excavator to dig out the creek bed, and gradually the water returned. Brook Creek was back, and with it, an entire ecosystem full of plants, insects, fish and birds. McGehee's scratchboard and watercolor illustrations are full of details not only of the natural world, but also the humans with their big machines who made the restoration possible. The narrative is enhanced with facts in italicized text often woven into the drawings on a blade of grass or along ripples of water. Author and illustrator notes, along with a note from Mike Osterholm, complete this story of ecological restoration.

## CONDUCTING THE PROGRAM:

This program was designed as a drop-in style program, but easily could be redesigned to have a facilitated program, as well.

- *How will the program facilitator encourage meaningful interaction with the materials?*
  - The best thing about this program is it is open-ended!
  - Encourage children to explore. Use a lot of more advanced vocabulary words and talk about their meaning.
- *How will the program facilitator invite caregiver interaction with children and with the project?*
  - Use lots of new vocabulary and explain what it means. Ask prompting questions to record the observations and use the 5 sense - what does the animal look like? What do you think it feels like? Etc. Also, encourage storytelling and use inferences to try to paint a picture of the animals life in the owl pellet dissection and in the bird cam activity.

## Grade Level Reading Skills

[Find information about GLR skills here.](#)

Our goal is to create literacy-based programs for K-3rd graders to practice and gain confidence reading, and for the caregivers in their lives to learn about DPL tools and resources, as well as ways to foster family engagement beyond the library. Literacy-based programs include activities to support one or more of the GLR Skills. Literacy-based programs can take many forms (drop-in, time specific, etc.).

*Insert activities or stations in the column's they support:*

Fluency	Background Knowledge	Comprehension	Reading Motivation	Decoding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots of great opportunities for new vocabulary! Explain new vocabulary in Owl Pellet dissection and talk about the animals tracks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have participants record their observations in their journal. Participants can also come up with a story on what the owl did that day or about the animals they observed in the Bird Cam.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observation Journal is a fun way to encourage reading and writing.</li> <li>Highlight nonfiction books as another way to engage readers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must read instructions for Owl Pellets</li> </ul>

# Program Activities

## (x) Station 1: Make an Observation Journal

- Skills Supported:
  - Reading Motivation - this is a great way to motivate children to write a program
- Activity: have each child make an observation journal. It is helpful to include templates for each of the activities so they can record their observations. Pages: Title Page (scientists name), blank pages with a box for their drawing and lines for a description
- Setup: helpful to have an assortment of supplies available, so children can design their cover. They can bind their journals with ribbon or yarn.

## (x) Station 2: Owl Pellet Dissection

### Skills Supported:

- Background Knowledge
- Activity: Request through Kit Keeper! Participants will use scientific tools to dissect an owl pellet and search for bones.
- Setup: Acrylic signs were really helpful. The kit comes with directions, so making sure there's enough copies of those too is helpful.

## (x) Station 3: Live Bird Stream

### Skills Supported:

- Comprehension
- Activity: Stream a bird cam on the ipad and have participants record their observations
  - Cam site: <https://www.audubon.org/birdcams>
  - If the birds aren't active you can also try:
    - National Zoo Cam: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/webcams>
    - Africam: <http://www.africam.com/wildlife/index.php>
- Setup: If possible, hook up iPad (or laptop) to a projector. Have colored pencils and regular pencils available to record their observations and draw what they see. You can also encourage participants to come up with a backstory for the animals and how they are interacting.

## (x) Station 4: Animal Track Observation

### Skills Supported:

- Background knowledge
- Activity: Use the printable template for participants to match the animals and the animals tracks.
- Setup: [Use a template to prep this activity ahead of time](#)

## Program Preparation

### Before the program:

1. Put requests in Kit Keeper and IT (Owl Pellets and Birding activity)
2. Create templates for observation journals
3. Make sure you have supplies ready to decorate the journals

### Budget:

- Basically free! Unless you need to purchase extra decoration supplies or yarn/ribbon to decorate and bind the Observation Journal

### Books for Display:

- Nonfiction birds: dewey 598
- Insects: 597.9

### Setup:

Create signs for stations so participants know the ideal order to complete in (the order isn't very important, except that they complete their observation journal first). You might also want to include prompts at each station. Have animal matching game available and ready to go (printable)

# Materials

## REUSABLE MATERIALS:

Supplies:

- Owl STEM kit (request through Kit Keeper)
- Animal Track matching cards
- Sponges\*
- Tempura Paint
- Butcher Paper for footprints
- iPad from IT

## DEPLETABLES:

- Observation Journal
- Supplies to decorate Observation Journal