

NATURE DETECTIVES

Summer 2010



What's the Big Deal about Nature? Plenty!

Nature provides air, water, food, shelter and space. We survive because of nature. All animals do. Here is how it works, at least in part, starting with the air we breathe.

Amazing air. Plants produce the oxygen in the air we breathe so without plants we'd turn blue and die. Moving air (wind) helps spread seeds for new plants. Cold air forms clouds so rain and snow will fall back to earth providing vital water for plants, animals and all other living things.

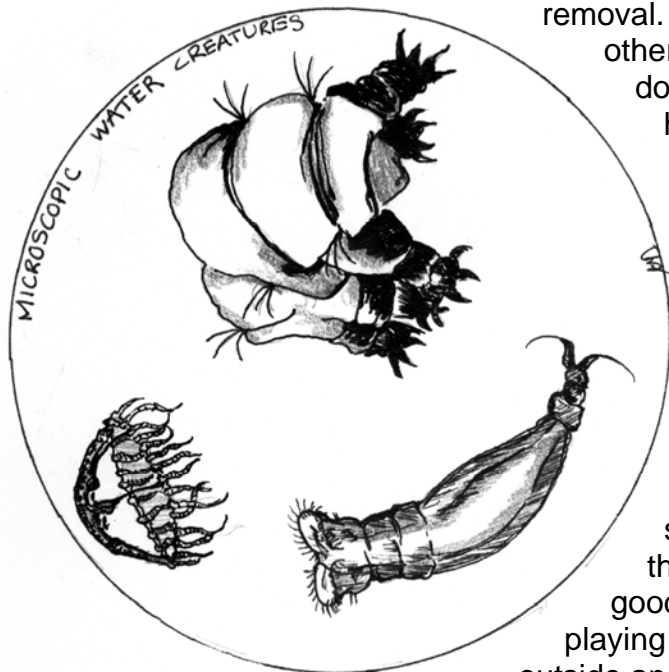
Wonderful water. Microbes in the soil remove pollutants from water as it percolates down to the underground water table. Along with streams and reservoirs, this underground natural "storage tank" is where we draw much of our clean drinking water. Nature's wetlands also scrub out pollutants from water, and they help prevent floods.

Fantastic food. Humans' first foods were simply gathered from nature. Now that we farm foods, we still need nature's bees to pollinate many of our crops. Micro-sized critters in the dirt help plants absorb nutrients making them healthier for us to eat.



Along with eating comes the necessity for regular rubbish removal. Lucky for us, bugs, bacteria, worms and other scavengers eat decaying things so we don't have yucky stuff piling up higher and higher around us.

Hooray for carrion beetles!



Secure shelter. Trees provide the lumber in a large portion of the homes that shelter us. Building materials come from rocks and metals found in nature, too.

Splendid space. For many kids some of the best times in life are spent outside, simply fooling around. Most people agree that being in natural spaces makes them feel good. It is hard to explain why we feel happy playing outside so you just might want to go outside and try it out.

Discovering Fun, Naturally

Sometimes the most fun thing to do in the outdoors, surrounded by nature, is...nothing. Really...just...sort of...nothing. For example, have you ever leaned against the rough bark of a tree and gazed up into the branches? Have you idly listened to the wind or birds or crickets? Did you lie on the grass and feel the sun on your face as you stared at clouds? Have you smelled sun-warmed dirt or the air after a rainstorm?

Few people ever witness the kinds of exciting animal scenes shown on TV, but if you spend enough time in nature, you'll make discoveries that will be all your own.

Dirt under your fingernails is often one sign you had fun just being outside.

Explore Rocks, Clouds and Water

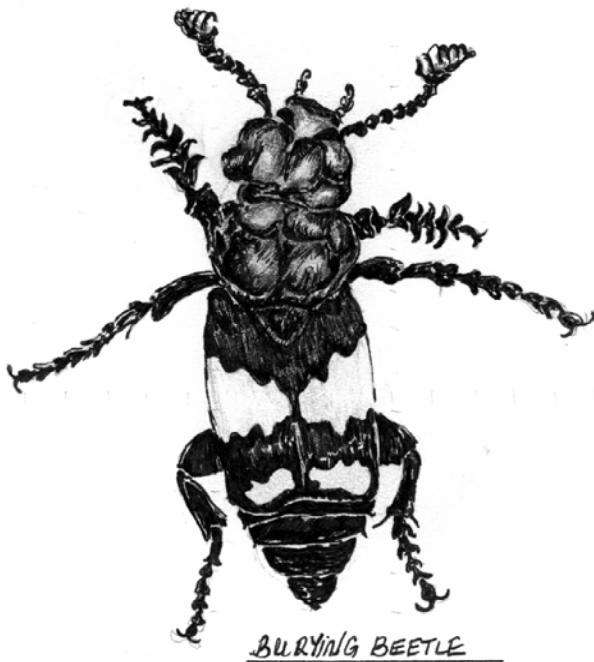
Look for your own special rock. It should fit in your pocket and be easy to carry with you. Every time you touch it, it will remind you of outdoor adventures. You might enjoy reading *Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor for rock hunting inspiration.

Turn over rocks to see what's underneath, then turn them back again in respect for the critters whose shelter you just disturbed.

Follow a beetle or ant. What are the sights and sounds in the beetle's world?

Look for shapes in the clouds or watch the clouds race across the sky and guess which will be fastest.

Make stick or leaf boats and float them in the runoff after a rainsquall.



Start a Nature Project

Plant a garden or even a single flower in a pot to tend, or fill a dish with clean water for songbirds every day.

Pick a specific thing to study such as the summer activity at a bird nest or the number of bees you can count in 10 minutes on a certain flower.

Write a poem or draw a picture while you are outside, or keep a log of what you observe when you are outdoors.



Get a Friend Involved

Go on a scavenger hunt with one friend or more. Make a list of things to find. Check them off as you see them. Your list might include: a feather, a sparkly rock, an old bone, a bug, something red, a bird song, a bird nest, an animal track.

Make a circle on the ground with a jump rope and see how many interesting things are within the circle such as bugs or unique rocks or teeny plants.

Go for a hike and count all the animal homes you see. Remember that some can be very tiny such as insect galls on leaves.

Build a make-believe, miniature fairy town from sticks, rocks, pinecones, leaves and other natural objects.

Build a fort or hideout. Trees are good for climbing, hiding behind and making into forts. Bushes often make good hiding places too.



Celebrating Dirt and Open Spaces

When you are exploring nature, look for a place with plants and dirt. Seek an area not covered with pavement or other hard surface. We often think of providing space for wildlife, but people need to have natural spaces, too.

When you are outside, remember to take care of nature. Every inch shelters living things. Every inch is important for all of us.

*I'm glad the sky is painted blue,
And the earth is painted green,
With such a lot of nice fresh air
All sandwiched in between.*

Anonymous

Find Nature – Join Nature Detectives Club

Where do you find nature? Maybe you could investigate the yard around your house or apartment. Nature discoveries can also happen in a city park or in a public open space park or forest. Boulder County Parks and Open Space has awesome places to explore from the prairie to the mountains.

Kids, ages 11 and under - join the Boulder County Parks and Open Space Nature Detectives Club! To be a member, all you have to do is visit the Open Space properties that are part of the Detectives series, find the Nature Detectives Mystery Guide for that park, and follow the guide's fun sleuthing activities as you explore.

After you have completed 3 of the 6 Mystery Guides in the series, you can send them to Parks and Open Space and receive a special prize – a sleuthing tool to use in your future nature adventures.

Visit the website, http://www.bouldercounty.org/openspace/Nature_Detectives.htm

-or-

Look for the **Nature Detectives Club Mystery Guides** at:

Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat
The Agricultural Heritage Center
Meyers Homestead at Walker Ranch
Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm
Caribou Ranch (closed until July 1)
Betasso Preserve

