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SUMMER ECOLOGY PROGRAM NEWSLETTER
BY RITA CALANDRESA, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

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Greetings! Here is what we've been up to at Sheldrake during weeks 4 & 5!

Week #4

ASK ME ABOUT...

Close up and in Person Tom the Turtle! Tom is counselor Andrea's pet turtle who visits us every year. Take a look at him with his new friend Stephanie in the picture on the right. The kids helped to find him slugs, his absolute favorite treat. We learned that turtles are Reptiles and that there are at least two kinds of turtles living at Sheldrake: painted turtles and a large snapping turtle. We've often seen the painted turtles sunning themselves on their favorite branch that sticks up out of the pond. We've yet to see the large but elusive snapper.



The Shore Because we spend so much time on the shore of Long Island Sound in the summer, I added this new topic to the calendar. Kids examined shells, sea glass, a molt of a horseshoe crab, whelk egg cases, barnacles and other treasures you might find at the shore. We talked about how animals adapt to the tides and can live half the time under water and half exposed to the air. Nearby and worthwhile if your kids want to learn more about the Long Island Sound and its creatures: The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, CT.

Camouflage & Defense We talked about the different ways that animals avoid being eaten. Many animals can blend into their surroundings and a number of insects can stay still and look like they are a tree branch or leaf. Bright colors often signal to predators "I'm poisonous, don't eat me!" Zebras have very definite black and white markings, and when they travel together, their stripes camouflage them by making it unclear where one zebra ends and another one begins! This is a great topic to explore further with your child.

Dragonflies This time of year we see MANY dragonflies at the pond! When we went ponding, we got to see dragonfly larvae that hatch from eggs, grow underwater and then spend the rest of their lives airborne. In addition to being beautiful insects and expert fliers, dragonflies are harmless to people and help us by eating mosquitos!



Ponding II On our second trip investigating the tiny pond critters, we saw many of the same insect larvae that we saw previously. Our guest Beatrice Weinberger actually found a crayfish, which is an unusual find!

Week #5

ASK ME ABOUT...

Butterflies & Moths We visited the garden where we were able to view butterflies sipping nectar from flowers. We made a butterfly out of popsicle sticks with coffee filters for wings. By using washable markers and spraying the paper wings with a plant mister we got lovely soft colors. Even though butterflies look so fragile, many of them migrate extremely long distances.

Awake at Night We talked about the animals at Sheldrake who are active at night. Lots of kids knew about bats, owls, racoons and skunks. We learned the word "nocturnal" and that many animals hunt at night because there is less competition for prey. Also, we talked about the special senses that animals use in the dark - bat echolocation, larger eyes, heightened sense of smell, etc.



Animal Tracks We talked about how animals leave evidence of where they've traveled. We made our own interpretations of various animal tracks with paint. One of the best times to look for animal tracks in a wooded area is after it has snowed - something to keep in mind this winter!

Rockhounds We learned that the three types of rocks - igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic - are grouped by how they are formed. On our trek, we noticed different rocks and looked closely with our magnifiers. For our craft we made pet rocks out of polished river rocks - there was a lot of creativity in evidence!



My Sheldrake Animal A really fun-filled day! The kids picked a favorite animal and talked about why they chose it, what it eats and where it lives. The counselors used their face-painting talents to transform the kids into their favorite animal.

Also this week, our special guest, local professional photographer Bill Wang, helped the kids to look more closely at nature. Each child chose a natural object to photograph with an extreme close-up lens. Bill printed out the photographs and the kids got to take their photo home on the very same day. Following is a collage of all the photos. Please enjoy! If you want to visit Bill's website, it is bwangphoto.com.

PS: OH! THE DRAMA!!!

One of the fun activities we've done this summer is putting on puppet eco-dramas. The kids get to pick the part each counselor will play. We flip one of the picnic tables over on its side and that is "the theater." We use simple cut-outs of animals, raindrops, whatever, to act out a short play that relates to the topic of the day. Although the show doesn't have fancy puppets or sets, the kids pay attention and think it is hilarious to see their counselors take part. Better yet, they understand the concepts that were presented!

Topics for week #6: recycling, ponding III, Native Americans, seasons and nature appreciation.





Have fun trying to guess the item for each picture! Let us know your guesses!

Above are the photos that Bill Wang helped the kids photograph with an extreme close-up lens. From left to right for each row, here are the names of the campers whose photographs appear above.

1. Charlie, Ryan, Lola
2. Daisy, Mackenzie, Jake
3. Ari, Billy, Alex
4. Brandon, Matthew, James
5. Kevin, Mark, Alexandra