Go Wild for Michigan’s Wildlife

## Wildlife Search

Adapted from: Council for Environmental Education’s Project WILD K-12 Curriculum and Activity Guide lesson Wildlife is Everywhere!

Objectives:

Students will (1) compare human and wildlife habitat, (2) generalize that wildlife is present throughout the state and world, and (3) discover wildlife belongs in any habitat it can survive in.

Description: Students will search their surroundings inside and outside for signs of wildlife and habitat.

Time: One class period.

Location: Indoors and outdoors.

Materials: Notebook and pencil. Optional: binoculars, camera, and ruler/tape measure.

### Background:

Many people think of wildlife as the large animals of Africa, such as the lion and elephant, or the large animals of the North American forests, such as the grizzly bear and elk. However, wildlife includes all animals that have not been domesticated by people.

What may be surprising is that wildlife includes the smallest animal organisms – even those that can be seen only through a microscope. Spiders, insects, reptiles, amphibians, and most species of fish, birds, and mammals may be considered wildlife. Even when animals are silent or not visible, they exist somewhere around us. Thousands of organisms live in and on human skin, hair and bodies. In fact, the organisms that inhabit human bodies play a part in human survival. Some form of animal life is always near.

Wildlife can exist in close proximity with humans, much of the time going unnoticed by people. Urban or suburban environments often provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife, both big and small.

Every environment has its characteristic organisms (including animals) and the urban setting is no exception. Many urban organisms have adjusted as their habitat has changed from undeveloped to urban. Not only have people altered the environment, the human environment has been shaped by the ecologies within which people live.

Unlike the soil, waterways, or other ecological components of the urban environment, wild animals do not create, but rather reflect, environmental quality. They are indicators of a diverse and healthy ecological community, and the positive values they impart to the urban scene and education of both old and young concerning the potential richness and quality of their environment.

By investigating habitats around their school building, students will be able to generalize that wildlife exists everywhere.

### Procedure:

1. Invite the students to explore the room looking for signs of wildlife. Ask students to observe, but not touch or disturb, any animals they may see.
2. Even in the cleanest rooms, some signs of life can be found. It might be a spider web, dead insects near lights, or insect holes along baseboards and behind books. After the search and a discussion with the students about what they might have found, introduce the idea that people and other animals share the same environment. Sometimes people do not even notice that they are sharing the environment with other living things.
3. Next, divide them into pairs or groups of three. In their notebooks, have students write their names and where they will be searching for wild animals (ex: school yard, park, etc). Students should leave space to draw a picture of a plant they see during their search. They should have a space to draw an animal they see, or signs (tracks, nest) from an animal. Students should track all the different animals they see during their search. You may also want to have the students keep a tally of different things from one category that they see, such as a tally of insects or a tally of birds.
4. Take the search for animals outside. Give each group ten to 20 minutes to complete their search. Remind students to look for indirect evidence such as tracks, webs, droppings, feathers, and nests (be sure not to harm or seriously disturb any evidence that is found). Students should also look for plants. Many wild animals use plants or may live on or near plants.
5. Discuss with the students what they found on their wildlife search and what they have learned about animals that live in the area. Emphasize that the experience shows that people and wildlife share the same environment. Ask the students to predict where different kinds of animals are found all over the earth – in the deserts, oceans, mountains, and cities. They may draw from their own experiences and talk about places they have been and have seen animals.
6. Review that people and wildlife have the same basic needs.

### Extensions:

* Conduct additional Wildlife Searches during the school year to see what different wildlife are seen in different seasons or weather. Maybe the same animals are seen no matter the season!
* Observe wildlife in yards, kitchens, neighborhoods, and city parks.
* Invent names and descriptions for the wildlife found during wildlife searches. Students can observe the animals, write descriptions, and then check their invented names and descriptions against the scientific names and information found in reference materials.
* Using state maps, look up towns, cities, and counties named after wild animals.

### Tech Tie-ins:

* Students work in small groups to use digital tools to convey results from their wildlife search.
* Collect and chart the classes cumulative data by using a computer program.

### Evaluation:

1. List some wild animals discovered during your search and give examples of where each of these animals could find food, water and shelter.
2. Can wild animals live in the same places people live? Why or why not?
3. Give examples of wild animals that live in cities or neighborhoods.