

Wildlife/Conservation Activities

Wisconsin 4-H Shooting Sports

Wisconsin Wildlife

Wisconsin has an abundant and diverse wildlife resource. We have 300-400 species of birds, 70 mammals, and about 55 reptiles and amphibians. Some species are quite rare; some are very abundant and found all over the state. Some species are hunted or trapped while others are fully protected by state and/or federal law. The first step in learning about Wisconsin wildlife is learning how to identify some common or especially important species.

Ideas:

- Assemble collections of Wisconsin wildlife by having members clip photographs from magazines, or newspapers, or print them off the internet. These can be the basis of homemade identification posters for use during meetings or at the Fair.
- Have each member pick a wild animal to learn about and then share facts with the group about its identification, behavior, or management.
- Wildlife is often identified by “sign” – tracks, hair, feathers, food remains, etc. – rather than by sight or sound. Have a scavenger hunt or group hike to find signs of wild animals. There are many excellent field guides (Peterson Field Guide Series) available on mammals, birds, nest, tracks, etc., any good bookstore or library should have them. Audio and video tapes are also available (see resource list).
- Nature centers or museums will have displays of mounted specimens to examine and help with identification skills. If you are close enough to such a facility – consider a visit.
- Each group of wild animals could easily be the subject of one or more meetings. Birds, for example, could lead to sessions on bird identification/watching, bird feeding, bird songs and calls, etc. See the Naturespace/Bird Unit.
- There are many possible guest speakers: local naturalists, members of the Wildlife Society, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) wildlife managers, Audubon Society members, etc.
- Pick a specific group of wild animals such as waterfowl, small game animals, frogs, or small mammals and learn how to separate one species from another. Remember males don’t always look like females and young animals may not look like their parents.

“It’s the Law”

One of the basic tools of wildlife management is law enforcement. Without laws and regulations on such things as hunting seasons and bag limits, many wildlife populations could and would be drastically reduced. The 3 basic purposes of wildlife laws are (1) protection of the resource (2) protection of the resource user (safety) and (3) distribution of the available resource among users.

Ideas

Invite a local game warden to speak on conservation law enforcement.

- Obtain a copy of the WDNR annual hunting regulations pamphlet. Elect a few regulations and discuss the importance and reason(s) for each one.
- Discuss what happened to species like the bison (buffalo) in the days before there were any laws.

- What species are protected? What species are not protected? Why? What are the penalties for violating wildlife laws?
- Have the members make lists of the wildlife (or even fish) related laws they have heard about. Ask them to decide which of the 3 basic purposes of laws (listed above) each one deals with.
- WDNR Hunter Education materials contain excellent information on laws and resources. Ask a local Hunter Ed instructor to talk about wildlife laws and regulations.

Wildlife Management

We can thank modern, scientific wildlife management for the abundance and diversity of wildlife we have here in Wisconsin. However, few people really understand the hows and whys of management.

Ideas:

- Many of the activities of “Project WILD” can be used by 4-H clubs (check with local school teachers).
- Have your local WDNR wildlife manager tell club members about their job.
- Visit a WDNR or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management area or refuge. Find out what species are being managed. Why? What “tools” are being used?
- Obtain some literature on basic wildlife management. The WDNR, UWEX, local NRCS office, National 4-H literature, and other sources all offer some basic brochures or fact sheets (see resource list).
- Encourage members to get involved with a simple wildlife management project such as building and erecting some birdhouses, setting up a bird feeding station or building a bush pile, or planting some food or cover producing shrubs.
- The WDNR Hunter Education manual has a chapter on the basics of wildlife management.
- Use the articles and editorials in a current edition of Wisconsin Outdoor News as the basic for a discussion of issues in wildlife management.

Wildlife Ecology

Identification of Wisconsin wildlife is only a part of a wildlife conservation project. To properly manage wildlife, be a successful hunter, or fully enjoy your interactions with wildlife requires knowledge of animal behavior, habitat needs, animal movements, foods, and other aspects of their ecology. Many of the suggested activities covered under other topics in this guide include aspects of wildlife ecology. However, there are a few other activities that deserve special attention or deserve repetition:

- The Wildlife Habitat Evaluation project and contest is available as a resource. It contains activities on wildlife habitat, food habits, and management practices.
- Project Wild activities are often directed at ecological concepts such as habitat needs. “Oh Deer” is a good example.
- Naturespace activities (birds, insects, etc.) stress ecological concepts of populations, habitat, and the effect of people.
- Owl pellets or the crops of game birds killed during the hunting season provide a wonderful opportunity to examine what a particular animal has been eating.

Hunting

Shooting skills are the basis for almost all forms of hunting. There are about ¾ of a million hunters in Wisconsin. The gun deer season is a major annual social event. There are many subjects relating to hunting that could make interesting meeting/discussion topics. There are activities on hunting in the National 4-H literature.

Ideas:

- Big game mammals	- Field care of game
- Upland game birds	- Trophy hunting
- Small game	- Hunter/landowner relations
- Waterfowl	- Hunter Safety
- Choosing a gun	- Wisconsin's best hunting areas
- Animal behavior	- Predator calling
- Hunting in the western U.S.	- Duck calling
- Tracking	- Waterfowl identification
- Methods of hunting	- Sexing and aging game animals
- Outdoor survival	

The potential resources here are tremendous. A few suggestions include (in addition to the resource list).

- Local sports clubs
- Licensed guides
- Hunting equipment manufactures
- Outdoor books and “how-to” guides – sporting goods stores
- Sports shows such as the “Deer Classics” or those offered by traveling professional hunters.
- Periodicals like “Wisconsin Outdoor News”

Example: For shot gunners, waterfowl identification is absolutely necessary for a duck hunter to properly hunt under the “point system” in Wisconsin. The resource list contains several publications on waterfowl identification. Ducks Unlimited has additional information and a video tape entitled “Ducks Unlimited Video Guide to Waterfowl and Game Birds”. Why not ask your local Duck's Unlimited chapter to buy a copy for 4-H use? Magazine photos, wings or whole birds taken during the season, or an experienced duck hunter can all contribute to several interesting sessions.

The possibilities in the area of hunting are almost endless. Let your imagination go to work and if you don't hunt – talk to a hunter about some help. The future of hunting depends on a skilled, interested new generations of hunters. Most hunters will be willing to help.

Sportsmanship/Ethics

This might well be the most important subject to discuss. Hunters/landowner relations. Legal and ethical behavior and other such topics are the cornerstone of continued hunting and outdoor activity.

Ideas:

- Print and distribute “Thanks for Permission to Hunt” cards with a 4-H clover on them. Report on how hunters and landowners reacted to their use. A sample “front and back” is shown on the next page but you may customize them any way you wish.

THANK YOU FOR PERMISSION TO HUNT ON YOUR LAND!

I appreciate your hospitality and respect the privilege.

My name _____

My address _____

Vehicle Lic. # _____ Phone # _____

Vehicle Make _____ Color _____

Hunting partners _____

Form 8500-95 Rev. 8-95

Hunter Ed. Certificate # _____



Responsible hunters recognize that trespass is a serious problem and landowners need to know who, when and why others are on their land. Hunting depends on a sound relationship between hunters and landowners because wildlife, a public resource, inhabits private lands.

Landowner:

To report a trespasser call the Sheriff's Dept. No. _____

Other information: _____

In the interest of improving landowner-hunter relationships, this hunter responsibility card is provided by the Wisconsin Hunter Education Instruction Association and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Turn in poachers -- Dial 1-800-TIP-WDNR (1-800-847-9367)

- Have the members read A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold. Each chapter could be the subject of discussion at a meeting.
- Have each member create an imaginary situation and then ask them to present how they would behave in that situation. Then have the group try to decide what was the “right thing to do.” *For Example:*
 - You haven’t been able to go duck hunting at all and it is late in the season but you finally have a chance to go. You shoot 2 mallards as soon as you get to your blind. That is your limit but there are still hundreds of ducks flying around and no one else is around. What do you do?
 - You see lights in the neighbor’s field late at night and hear a gunshot. You think people are poaching deer. What do you do?
- Discuss trespass with the members. The public owns our wildlife resources but wild animals often live on private land. What kinds of problems does that create?

Game Utilization—Cooking, Tanning, Taxidermy, etc.

After an animal has been killed during a hunt, the hunter has an obligation to see that as much as possible of the animal is used. Proper field care, proper cooking, and other uses of parts of wild animals such as making buckskin from a deer hide are all interesting useful skills.

Ideas:

- UWEX has an excellent publication called “So You Got a Deer.” It deals with field care, skinning, butchering, tanning, and taxidermy.
- There are lots of good wild game cookbooks available. A game dinner for fun or fund raising could be the highlight of the year for a Shooting Sports group. If you charge a fee for your dinner, you may need a permit from the WDNR talk to you local warden.
- Find a local taxidermist to speak and demonstrate his/her skills.
- A session on home tanning of furs or leather; instructions and tanning recipes are readily available from catalogues, sporting goods stores, and taxidermists.
- Most good wild game cookbooks have chapters on field care of all sorts of wild game. Several Extension publications on game care and preparation are available (see resource list).
- Discuss the ethics of using what you kill. Is it ethical to kill for sport alone? What about trophy hunting? Do we really need wild meat anymore?

Endangered Species

The issue of endangered and threatened species has become very important in Wisconsin. Citizen awareness and support is vital to the protection and restoration of endangered species such as the timber wolf, trumpeter swan, and peregrine falcon.

Ideas:

- Discuss a list of Wisconsin’s endangered species. For each species list the factors that have resulted in such a low population. What can be done for each species? (see resource list)
- Contact the WDNR’s Bureau of Endangered Resources. They have an array of literature, slide sets, and much more. (see resource list)
- There are many licensed wildlife rehabilitators in Wisconsin. Some are associated with animal hospitals or nature centers such as the Wildlife Ark in Milwaukee or the Northwood’s Animal Hospital in Minocqua. A guest speaker on wildlife rehabilitation and its role in wildlife conservation makes a fascinating program. Also, they often have live “patients” for educational display.