

Conservation Corner

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We had a great time at Jr. Naturalist Camp last week – time well spent as we traveled Back to Nature via stories and searches to uncover some of nature's secrets right here in Pocahontas County. On Tuesday we looked at dragonflies and butterflies, those winged hunters and flying flowers of summer. We also discovered different flight patterns as twelve-spotted dragonflies fly in formation across the pasture or solitary Monarchs float on the breeze. In the craft room, we enjoyed creating butterflies with water diffusing paper and dragonflies with maple seeds and sticks. In the park, we walk-read Scott Russell Sanders' *Crawdad Creek* and searched for butterflies & dragonflies.

On Wednesday we turned our attention to two of the least understood and most feared animals – the spiders and snakes. In the park we pantomimed Iza Trapani's *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* and searched for spiders and snakes while in the Nature Center we watched a barn spider spin its web and painted wooden snakes. Each student also took home a recycled wine bottle dish to hold some of nature's smaller secrets.

We all enjoyed our annual field trip on Thursday. This year's adventure landed us in the Dickinson County Nature Center at Kenu Park in Okoboji. We started our day in their new Pollinator Paradise addition as we watched honeybees returning to the hive with filled pollen sacs, collected milkweed leaves for their Monarch caterpillar nursery, and climbed in and out of the Honeycomb Climber.

After lunch on the patio, it was time to explore their natural playscape – the size of a football field! We enjoyed hiking to the overview, crossing the swinging bridge, exploring the underground tunnels, and rolling large wooden spools up and down a slope. The oak savanna provided a perfect, cool place to spend a summer afternoon.

Then it was back to the Nature Center for a meet and greet with some of their animal ambassadors. We met Itsy-Bitsy, at 25 years much larger and older than our young fox snake! We also met Rosy, a stunning rose-colored large corn snake, and Honey, an African pygmy hedgehog, new experiences for many of us. We learned that hedgehogs are native to Europe, Asia, and Africa and named for their hedgerow habitat and piglike snout. Rosy is the smallest of the 17 species of hedgehogs. They are solitary, nocturnal insectivore mammals covered in tiny, non-barbed spines. I'm still looking for the right adjective to describe it.

Pocahontas Conservation would like to thank everyone who helped with our camp this summer.

We appreciate our camp leaders Cynthia Hoffman and students Brooklyn, Nicole, and Emma, our field trip chaperones Ashley Egertsen, Sarah Hohensee, and Phyllis Malacek, as well as our bus driver Ernie Campidilli. Special thanks to Dickinson CCB Naturalists Bryanna Kuhlman and Ashley Hansen who took time out of their busy day to share their secrets and treasures with us. Stop in for a visit next time you're in the Iowa Great Lakes area!

