

## **SUMMER NATURE CENTRE 2007**

### **Location**

The Nature Centre is located in the log cabin along St. Albert Trail and Sturgeon Road. Again like mentioned in previous reports this location seems to be a great spot since it is located near the Red Willow Park trail. Visitors were usually just out for a walk, jog, or bike ride and they came across the cabin and wanted to see what we were all about. The log cabin is also visible from St. Albert trail where many visitors said they had passed and always wondered what we were.

### **Dates and Hours of Operation**

This year's Nature Centre dates and hours were July 3 – August 18, Tuesdays to Saturdays, 11:00 am – 4:00 pm. These hours stayed consistent for each day which made the times easily remembered by visitors. These times also worked well for the Centre, we usually always had visitors throughout these times. Some visitors would show up around 10:00 am thinking the Centre was open because of the hours from last year, 10:00 am – 3:30 pm. Closing the Centre at or around 4:00 worked as well because visitors were usually heading home to start or have dinner. Looking at previous reports it said the centre was open almost everyday for some of the years and I think having a two day break gives the employee time to their self which I feel is needed. Having the Sunday and Monday closed at the centre probably works best for the employee as well as visitors. Many people leave for the weekend and having the Monday closed allows people to get settled back at home from their vacation.

### **Staffing**

This year I was the only staff member working at the Summer Nature Centre. Pat Collins dropped by almost everyday to make sure the centre was running okay and to make sure I did not have any problems, this was helpful for when I had a few question, he always made sure to find out and get back to me as soon as possible.

### **Advertising and Signage**

Advertising included dropping off flyers to the St. Albert Museum, Fountain Park Pool, and Servus Place. A flyer was also forwarded to the Tourist Information Centre. Pat Collins helped me with getting flyers to some of the schools as well; he printed them off and contacted the protestant elementary schools just before they left school for their summer break. An example of the flyer is in Appendix B. Flyers were also dropped off to the Gazette and Saint City News in hopes they

would be interested to come down to the Nature Centre to write articles and take pictures. The Gazette showed up a number of times to the Centre taking pictures and asking questions. I also did write-ups for each themed week that was sent to the Gazette to be put in their "What's On" section. Visitors mentioned they knew we were open from seeing the pictures and articles in the newspaper.

Two open signs and two Big Lake Environmental Support Society signs were hung on the front and the back of the log cabin everyday. There was a Nature Centre Open sign with an advertisement of free water inside placed out along the Red Willow Trail. Another sign was placed along Sturgeon Road at the entrance to the parking lot. These signs were helpful for grabbing people's attention.

### **Material, Supplies, and Specimen**

The Nature Centre needed some supplies before starting such as markers, construction paper, pencil crayons, pencils, tape, glue, pipe cleaners, etc. B.L.E.S.S. supplied me with \$200.00 to buy supplies and prizes for the Nature Centre. I used \$189.97 of the \$200.00 and I think this amount worked well. If there were more prizes given out the budget would need to be a bit bigger. Dollar stores worked best for prizes, Dollarama was the best dollar store in St. Albert for prizes, they always had a wide selection of toys and everything in the store was a dollar. Some of the other dollar stores had toys that were more than a dollar which would add up leaving fewer prizes for the kids.

Other supplies for the Nature Centre were borrowed. Dan Stoker supplied many of the specimen used each week as well as nets to catch aquatic life. Some specimens were my own which I brought into the cabin for the kids to see. I also used some supplies from when I was at collage such as identification books and a bird, frog, and mammal sound CD.

The live specimens used at the Nature Centre were the Crayfish and aquatic life. Dan Stoker and I collected Crayfish from Lacombe Lake and aquatic life from Lacombe Lake, Sturgeon River, Grandin Pond, and a large pond along St. Albert trail just after the Wal-Mart and Save-On-Foods. Live Specimens are the most attractive aspect of the Nature Centre to kids and other visitors.

My cell phone was also an important item to have at the cabin, used for emergencies as well as contacting any groups who planned on visiting the Nature Centre.

### **Visitor Information**

## Age

The age group the Nature Centre seemed to attract was both kids and adults. There were a larger total of kids that visited the Centre but there were always adults interested in the Nature Centre who visited as well. Refer to the table and chart in Appendix A.

## Days of the Week

The busiest day of the week was Tuesday, due to the new activities for the new theme of the week. I expected Saturday to be the busiest because of the Farmer's Market being on at the same time but this may also be the reason for the decrease in numbers. Refer to the table and chart in Appendix A.

## Time of Day

The time of day did not seem to have an effect on the amount of visitors. Most days seemed to be steady with the odd day having bursts of more people at a time, usually due to larger groups showing up such as Daycares.

## Weather

Weather was probably the number one factor that affected the amount of visitors in a day. At the beginning of the program most of the days were hot in around 30°C. This was great weather but some days were almost too hot for some of the kids. At the end of July and beginning of August temperatures dropped and we received a lot of rain. Not many people showed up when it was rainy outside and most of the activities were inside for the kids. Mid August temperatures seemed to be right in the middle making it ideal for kids to visit the Centre with no rain and temperatures around low to mid 20°C.

## Time Spent

Kids who had signed up for the program usually stayed until they finished all the activities, around half an hour to an hour and a half. Some would even stay for most of the day. One time drop-ins did not stay as long, they would usually check the cabin out and do one or two activities, around ten minutes to half an hour.

## Program

## Description

This year at the Summer Nature Centre we ran the Young Naturalist Program. Kids would come within the first five weeks to sign up; the kids would have to finish twelve activities over at least three different themed weeks. This would ensure the kids would gain information over more than just one category. Kids would sign up by writing their name on one of the posters prepared for keeping records. The posters had a column for names and each week, kids would complete the activities and for each completed they would receive a sticker to be put in the corresponding week column. Activities focused on grades two to five but any age could come to the Centre and participate.

The program ran over seven weeks, each with a different theme. The first week was an introduction to all the other weeks; it was called Down to Earth. There were activities about mammals, birds, plants, trees, water, and bugs. The following weeks were Backyard Birds n' Birds of Prey, Trees n' Plants, Little Critters, Water Creatures, Quacks n' Honks, and Mammals. Each week focused all the activities and crafts on the main theme.

The kids who signed up for the Young Naturalist Program would usually show up every week with missing maybe one or two weeks due to family vacations. There were many drop-in visitors who showed up one or two times throughout the summer who played the activities or made the crafts.

Every time kids would visit the Centre they could enter the weekly draw which I drew two names every Friday. Kids loved getting prizes which I think was one of the reasons they came to the Nature Centre. This would be one of the strong features that attracted kids. I had a clear prize box in the Centre so kids could see the prizes they could win.

At the end of the program in the last two weeks, I handed out Young Naturalist Certificates and a prize to each child who finished the program. Some kids who did not sign up for the program but showed up quite often received prizes for being frequent visitors.

## Outcome

Over the course of the program we had a total of 1102 visitors, 714 were kids and 388 were adults. There were 92 kids who signed up for the program and 36 of these kids successfully completed the program. The rest of the visitors were drop-ins.

Compared to last years totals, this year had fewer visitors; this could be due to less advertising, weather, and/or the program was a week longer last year.

Overall the program seemed to be a success, kids enjoyed coming to the Nature Centre and parents commented many times how they felt this centre was a great place to have open during the summer for the kids. They compared it to the John Jansen Nature Centre a few times saying how it is a great place for the kids to get close to nature. They also commented on how everything being free was a bonus. It's a good place the kids can go to on their own if they are out on a walk or bike ride with friends.

### Activities

The list of activities for each week is listed in Appendix A. The popular activities and crafts were:

- Aquatic Life Observe
- Parachuting Spiders
- Bug Hunt
- Scavenger Hunt
- Specimen Games
- Crayfish and Snail Observe

These are activities that I would recommend to be repeated throughout other years since these were activities kids looked forward to at the Nature Centre. Any activities that kids had the chance to interact with live or real life features in nature were the most attractive.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the summer I worked at the Nature Centre by myself which works fine but it does not give any leverage to helping all the kids. If kids came with parents there was always help if needed, the only problem would be when there were no parents around for help. Most kids like to spend their time running around doing the outside activities such as catching aquatic bugs from the river. The only way the kids were allowed to go to the river was if they were with an adult, if I was the only one here it made it hard to please the kids and help them catch bugs. I think having another employee during the summer would help out a great deal. Finding volunteers was hard especially with the job market being the way it was this year, not many people will volunteer when they have the opportunity to do a similar job and get paid. Planning the activities in the first few weeks can also be a one person job since there are many activities in the cabin that can be used but I think two minds are greater than one for planning new activities especially if there are returning kids the next year.

A few parents came to see if their children, about twelve to fifteen years old, could help with volunteering. This was good for having help with younger kids but sometimes the young volunteers would goof off making them not helpful but just another kid to watch over. If volunteers come to the Centre to help I think there should be an age limit. This volunteer situation could maybe be solved with hiring another summer employee for help even if it's not for the whole day. Another recommendation would be to clean out the log cabin. It is much cluttered with games and supplies. This is good for having different games and activities to choose from but while the program is running it is hard to organize supplies. If there was a storage area the supplies could be taken too while the program runs that would solve the problem.

Less important recommendations would be to get the City or someone to come to the cabin to trim the shrubs in the front of the cabin. They are over grown for the area they are in, they need trimming; main reason for this is they have grown over the bench making it hard to sit on.

Another recommendation that would help improve the Nature Centre would be to have more live specimen. Kids absolutely love seeing live creatures, they are fascinated by them. The crayfish are great to have but if there is any way of getting other creatures to the centre for the kids I think this would be a huge attraction. Fish, frogs, or other amphibians would be an asset but I think if possible there could be a small mammal such as a squirrel it would be great for the kids to see up close. Of course these animals would have to be tame but if there was a way of making this possible it would be very successful.

## **CONCLUSTION**

The B.L.E.S.S. Summer Nature Centre had a successful summer. Kids and adults enjoyed coming to the centre to play games, make crafts, and to learn more about the environment we live in. The information in the log cabin about B.L.E.S.S was popular with most of the adults who came by to visit. Many people were interested in Big Lake and they wanted to go visit the site. Most of the kids and some of the adults learned something new everyday. Overall the summer program was successful with making the community aware with what is found in our area and what we need to protect to ensure future generations can experience the beauty of our environment like we do.

## **RESOURCES FOR ACTIVITIES, GAMES, AND CRAFTS**

Barwise J. 1997. Aqualta's Water Education Activity Guide

Bernhard A. 2000. Freshwater Pond Coloring Book.

Ducks Unlimited. Wetland Wild Activity Book. Green Wing Ducks Unlimited.

Herridge D, Moore N. 1992. Explorations of Science.

Soffer R. 1996. North American Ducks, Geese, and Swans.

Wishart P, Hayley D. 1994. Knee High Nature: Fall A Guide to Nature, Activities, and Fun.