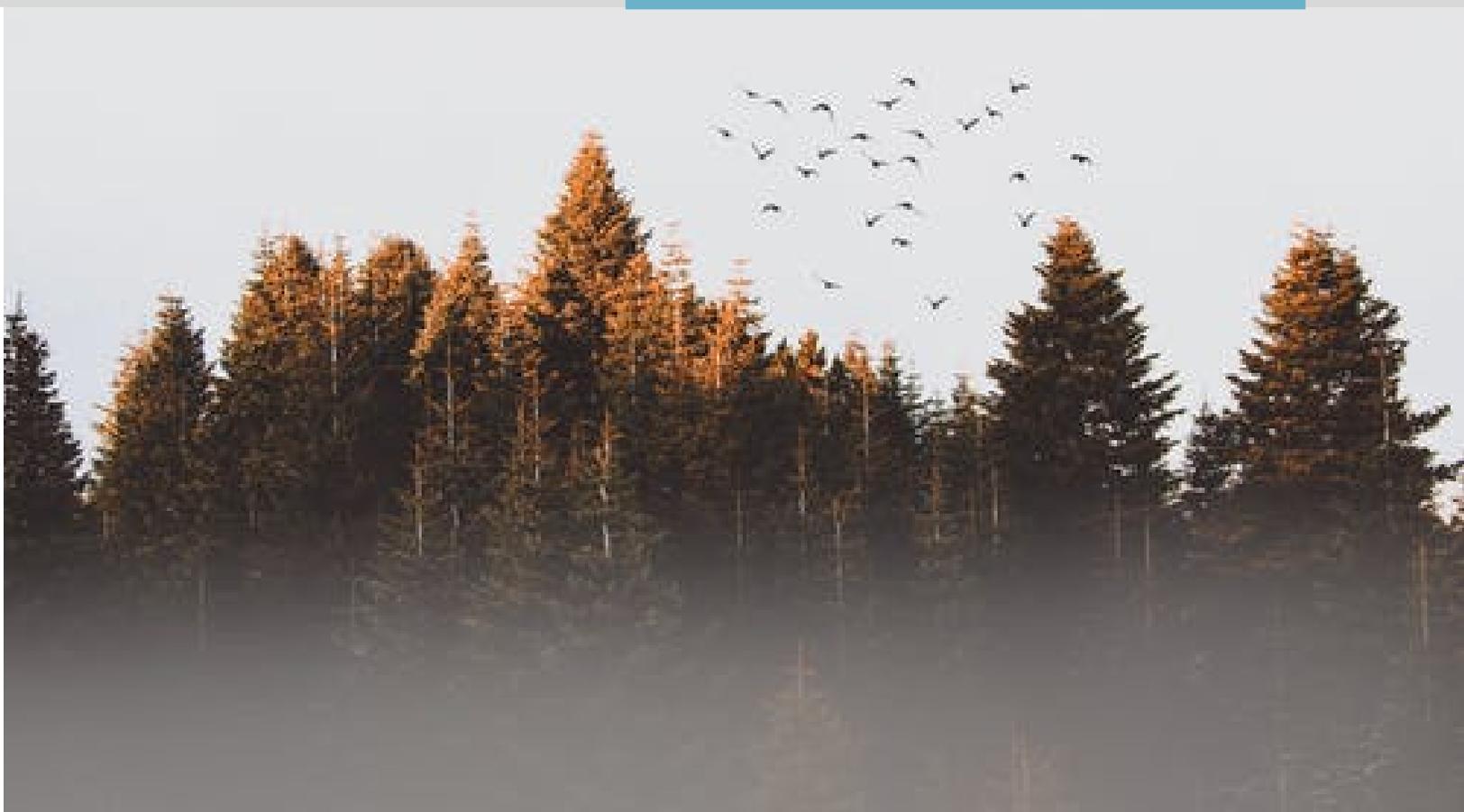

B.L.E.S.S Summer Nature Centre Report 2019

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A summary of the activities held at
the B.L.E.S.S. Nature Centre over nine
weeks



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Introduction

Location

The BLESS Nature Centre is located in St. Albert by the intersection of St. Albert Trail and Sturgeon Road. It backs onto the Sturgeon River and the Red Willow Trail System.

Objective

The objective of the Nature Centre is to provide a fun and free program to help children learn and develop an excitement about the environment.

Design

The Nature Centre was open Monday to Friday from 10:00am to 4:30pm, except on Wednesdays when it was open from 12:30pm to 7:00pm. The Nature Centre ran from July 2nd to August 30th. There was a different theme every week with corresponding crafts as well as indoor and outdoor activities.

Materials

The budget to run the Nature Centre for the summer this year was \$400. I spent \$342.27. The majority of this budget was spent on supplies for the crafts such as new paint, paper bags, markers, glue, etc. I also spent it on poster boards and costs associated with printing. I made an effort to limit expenses by using many of the materials that the Nature Centre already had such as paper plates, egg cartons, jars, toilet paper rolls, etc. I reused many of the old posters from previous years for the themes that had been done before. As in previous years, the Facebook page as well as the St. Albert Gazette were used for free advertising.

Canada Day

We planned to have a booth set up in Rotary Park for Canada Day in order to inform more people about the program that the BLESS Nature Centre would be offering over the summer. However, unfortunately the festivities at Rotary Park were cancelled this year due to the very windy and rainy weather conditions. We were told that it was a safety hazard and the event was shut down. Because the weather can be quite unpredictable around this time of year, I definitely recommend only bringing things that can withstand the wind and rain.

Weekly Overviews

Week 1: Welcome Week + Camping and Wildlife Safety – July 2-5

Objective: The objectives of this week were to welcome the children and get them familiar with the Nature Centre. Additionally, the theme was Camping and Wildlife Safety. We discussed the proper precautions one should take to be safe when camping or spending time in the outdoors.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	N/A	12	5	5	32	54
Elementary	N/A	10	11	21	4	46
Older	N/A	0	0	1	2	3
Adult	N/A	11	8	10	12	41
Total/day	N/A	33	24	37	50	144

*The nature centre was closed on Monday July 1st for Canada day

Crafts:

A) Bear Mask

The kids were able to make a bear mask using construction paper or a paper plate. I had them cut and trace ears and a nose to glue on and then a popsicle stick was attached to make the bear face into a mask. The cutting and tracing was a bit difficult for younger kids so this craft required a bit more of my help. Next time, I would definitely have some of the pieces cut out ahead of time to make it a bit quicker and easier. But this was still a very cute craft that turned out really well.

B) Toilet Paper Roll Fire

The kids cut out logs out of strips of toilet paper rolls and glued red, orange, and yellow tissue paper on top to be the flames. They then could add a little cotton ball 'marshmallow'.

Activities:

A) Indoor

- a. Camping Safety Treasure Hunt

I had five paper bags hidden throughout the cabin. Each bag had a question about camping safety. Visitors had to try to answer the question and look inside the paper bag to find the answer as well as the location of the next question.

- b. Search and find colouring page
- c. Camping Word Search
- d. Water to Fire Maze
- e. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

- a. Fire Cup Knockdown
Red Plastic Cups were stacked in pyramid shape to be the campfire. Kids then threw ping pong balls to knock over the cups and extinguish their fire.
- b. Summer Scavenger Hunt
Kids had to search outside for various items such as a dandelion, a berry, a rock, a pine needle, etc and then cross it off the sheet once each item was found.
- c. Side Walk Chalk
- d. Bubbles

Week 2: Marvellous Mammals -- July 8 -12

Objective: The objective of this week was to teach the kids about mammal characteristics and what makes a mammal different from other types of animals. We focused on more common and well known Canadian mammals.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	N/A	7	14	8	8	37
Elementary	N/A	32	18	5	11	66
Older	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Adult	N/A	14	18	5	8	45
Total/day	N/A	53	50	18	27	148

*The nature centre was closed on Monday July 8th because I was sick

Crafts:

A) Mammal Finger Puppets

Kids were able to colour and cut out finger puppets of various types of mammals. They cut out small holes in the puppet which they could stick their fingers through to be like the legs of the animal.

B) Mammal Mask

Kids could choose to make a mask of a fox, bunny, bear, raccoon, deer, or a chipmunk. They designed and coloured the mask template. They hole punched each side of the mask and attached a string or ribbon so that they could wear their masks.

Activities:

A) Indoor

a. Mammal or Not Sorting Game

Kids had to try and decide whether certain traits (eg. laying eggs, having fur) belonged to mammals or not and sort them into the correct category.

b. Antler Matching Game

Kids had to try to match the antlers to the type of animal they came from (bison, deer, pronghorn, or bison). This was a fun game and the kids enjoyed being able to see what the real antlers look like up close

c. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Rabbit Race

This was a potato sack race. Kids had to get in their potato sacks and hop like a bunny to the finish line!

b. Mammal BINGO Scavenger Hunt

I hid pictures of mammals hidden all over the inside and outside of the cabin. Kids had to find the pictures and cross the animal off their BINGO sheet. They had to get five in a row to get a BINGO but most tried to find all 10 pictures.

c. Side Walk Chalk

d. Bubbles

Week 3: Fantastic Flocks -- July 15 -19

Objective: The objective was to teach the children about different types of birds that are found in the area.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	7	7	12	5	2	33
Elementary	8	8	14	6	1	37
Older	0	0	0	2	0	2
Adult	14	12	18	5	2	51
Total/day	29	27	44	18	5	123

Crafts:

A) Pinecone Birdfeeder

Kids chose a pinecone and tied a string onto it so that it could be hung from a tree. They covered the pinecone with nut-free peanut butter and rolled it around in birdseed. Everyone really enjoyed this craft. It was definitely one of the messier crafts, but the kids had lots of fun making their birdfeeders. Many kids were even excited to tell me in the following weeks that they had seen some birds eating from their feeders!

B) Paper Bag Owl

Kids cut and traced out eyes, wings, and a beak out of construction paper. These were then glued onto the paper bag. The kids could then decorate their bird by colouring it or adding feathers. This craft was a bit more time consuming as the younger kids needed more help with the cutting and tracing, but it went well with the birdfeeder craft which was quicker and easier. Overall, this was a fun craft that turned out really well.

Activities:

A) Indoor

a. Who am I? guessing game

This was reused from last year. Kids read clues about different birds from a poster and had to see if they could guess the species

b. Feet-Body-Bills Puzzle Game

Kids had to put together pictures of different birds by matching the heads to the body to the feet.

c. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Build a Nest Game

Kids had to try and collect as many different items that they thought a bird might use to make a nest (leaves, sticks, etc.). This was a really great game and many of the kids had fun actually trying to build their nests outside!

b. Migration Game

This activity was like a life sized board game. The kids were birds trying to migrate south for the winter. They rolled a large dice and moved that number of spaces along the board. The spaces would either have a positive action that would make them move forward (eg. finding some berries) or a negative action that made them move back spaces (eg. running into a predator, being caught in a storm). Once they made it to the end, they had safely completed their migration!

c. Sidewalk Chalk

d. Bubbles

Week 4: Incredible Insects - July 22- 26

Objective: The objective of this week was to introduce different types of insects as well as the benefits they provide for their environment such as pollination.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	10	5	11	4	8	38
Elementary	11	11	12	13	10	57
Older	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adult	11	8	16	10	10	55
Total/day	32	24	39	27	28	150

Crafts:

A) Butterfly Suncatcher

Different coloured pieces of tissue paper were glued onto a sheet of wax paper in the shape of butterfly wings. This created a stained glass effect. Then, a black butterfly outline made out of construction paper was glued over top. The kids also hole punched the butterfly and tied a ribbon or string through the hole so that the butterfly could be hung near a window. This was definitely a favourite craft that ended up looking so pretty when it was complete.

B) Bead Caterpillar

Kids could thread beads onto a pipe cleaner to create a little caterpillar. Pipe cleaner antennae were added, and kids could also choose to colour and cut out a leaf for their caterpillars. This was a very quick and easy craft that even the very young kids could do. It worked well to have this craft the same week as the more complex suncatcher craft.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Insect Memory Match

Plastic insects were hidden under cups, each had a matching pair. Kids were to pick up two cups at a time and try to find the two matching bugs.

b. Metamorphosis Match- Up Poster

Visitors were to match the larva to the adult on a large poster. This game was fun and educational for older kids, but could be challenging for younger kids.

c. Insect Word Search

d. Grasshopper Maze

e. 'Where Insects Live' Matching Worksheet

f. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Pollination Bean Bag Toss

A bean bag toss game when kids had to try to throw the bug bean bags onto the flower so that it could be 'pollinated.'

b. Pollen Game

I had paper flowers set up on the ground with pom-poms representing the pollen. Kids had to use a spoon to try and transfer the 'pollen' from one flower to another to show how pollination works.

c. Insect Scavenger Hunt

Kids had to try and search for different types of insects outside

d. Sidewalk Chalk

e. Bubbles

Week 5: Go Green -- July 29 – August 2

Objective: To discuss ways that we can each individually help make a difference by making environmentally friendly choices. Plastic pollution was a large focus of this week.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	7	9	8	7	5	36
Elementary	5	8	9	4	10	36
Older	2	1	0	0	0	3
Adult	8	9	12	5	10	44
Total/day	22	27	29	16	25	119

Crafts

A) Recycled Egg Carton Turtle

Kids painted a piece of an egg carton green to be the turtle shell. Once it was dry, arms, legs, and a tail made out of foam were glued on. A pom-pom head with googly eyes was then added.

B) Recycled Egg Carton Whale

Kids painted a piece of an egg carton blue to be the whale's body. Googly eyes were added, as well as a foam tail and fins. Next, kids chose blue pipe cleaners to stick into the top of their whale to be the water spout. Similar to the turtle craft, this craft took some time waiting for the glue and paint to dry. However, they turned out really well and this is a nice craft using recycled materials already found in the nature centre.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Reduce your Impact Matching Game

This game is a large poster that was reused from previous years. The kids had to match the environmentally friendly action to a picture that represented it.

b. Go Green Memory Match

This game was reused from previous years. Pictures of Earth day things were taped to recycled frozen juice can lids and guests played a memory matching game with them. This game was super fun and many kids played multiple times!

c. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Toss Game**

I had bean bags with various actions on them such as shutting off the lights, using a reusable bag, etc. The kids had to decide whether that was an example of reducing, reusing, or recycling and then toss the bean bag into the correct hula hoop. This game was very fun for all ages as well as educational.

b. **Green BINGO**

This scavenger hunt was reused from previous years. Kids had to look around for people doing environmentally friendly actions (picking up litter, riding a bike, etc.)

c. **Sidewalk Chalk**

d. **Bubbles**

Week 6: Leaf Life -- August 5-9

Objective: This week was all about different plants! The objective was to teach kids about different types of plants found in the area and why they are important, to their environment.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	N/A	5	6	4	8	23
Elementary	N/A	6	16	4	8	34
Older	N/A	1	1	0	0	2
Adult	N/A	9	14	6	8	37
Total/day	N/A	21	37	14	24	96

*The nature centre was closed on Monday August 5th for the long weekend

Crafts

A) **Plant Grass**

Kids could decorate a paper cup with markers, stickers, and ribbon. Then grass seed was planted in the cup. This has been a favourite craft for multiple years. Kids were very excited the next week to tell me that their grass had sprouted!

B) **Coffee Filter Flower**

Kids drew all over a coffee filter with markers. Then the coffee filter was sprayed with water to make the colours spread. Once it dried, a pipe cleaner stem and leaves were added.

C) Leaf Rubbings

Kids went outside and collected various leaves. The leaves were placed under a blank paper and the kids then coloured over the paper with a crayon to reveal a leaf print! This was a fun activity that very much impressed some of the younger kids who hadn't seen it done before.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Plant Matching Game

Kids had to match different plant specimens to the picture of that plant

b. Plant Word Search

c. Plant Maze

d. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Flower Beanbag Toss

b. Plant BINGO Scavenger Hunt

I hid pictures of plants all over the inside and outside of the cabin. Kids had to find five in a row to get a BINGO but most tried to find all 10 pictures.

c. Sidewalk Chalk

d. Bubbles

Week 7: Scales n' Slime -- August 12- 16

Objective: Teach kids about the special characteristics of reptiles and amphibians that makes them different from other animals.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	5	9	13	5	3	35
Elementary	6	8	14	10	3	41
Older	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adult	5	7	16	14	5	47
Total/day	16	24	43	29	11	123

Crafts

A) Paper Chain Snake

Kids taped strips of construction paper into loops to make a chain. Then a head, googly eyes, and a forked tongue were attached to the front of the chain. A little tail was also added to the end of the snake.

B) Handprint Frog

The kids traced their hands on a piece of green construction paper and cut it out. The hand was turned upside down and two eyes were glued on. Next, kids drew a mouth on the frog. Then, a piece of red paper was rolled up to make a curly tongue which was then glued on.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Slime Station

I brought in some slime for kids to play with. We talked about how amphibians make a slimy mucous to protect their skin and they had to try to make a reptile or amphibian out of the slime.

b. Reptile or Amphibian Sorting Game

Visitors sorted pictures of animals into one of three categories: reptile, amphibian, or neither.

c. Reptile Word Search

d. Snake Maze

e. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Frog Hopscotch

This was a frog themed hopscotch game. The kids were the frogs and had to jump from lily pad to lily pad.

b. Chameleon Camouflage Hunt

I had pictures of different coloured chameleons hidden all around the inside and outside of the cabin. They were all camouflaged according to their colour (eg. a pink chameleon hidden on a pink tablecloth). The kids had to try and find all of them and cross them off the sheet. This was a fun way to teach kids who may not know what camouflage is!

c. Sidewalk Chalk

d. Bubbles

Week 8: Brilliant Biomes-- August 19-23

Objective: Teach kids what a biome is and discuss the difference between the major biomes (tundra, desert, forest, grasslands, etc.) and what species live in each.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	6	4	5	4	9	28
Elementary	4	9	8	3	10	34
Older	1	0	1	0	0	2
Adult	3	9	12	8	12	44
Total/day	14	22	26	15	31	108

Crafts

A) Forest in a Jar

Kids built a mini forest in a jar by decorating it with fake leaves, moss, trees, flowers, rocks, pinecones, etc. Bug stickers could also be added to the forest. This was a new craft I tried out this year and I think it was a lot of fun for kids. I was impressed with how the forests turned out.

B) Arctic Tundra Snowglobe

Kids started by making an arctic tundra scene on a paper plate by drawing, and gluing on some pictures of arctic animals. Then, a pinch of 'snow' (tiny pieces of white paper) was placed on top their scene. The kids completed their globes by gluing another paper plate on top that had a large hole cut out of it that was covered by plastic wrap.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Who Lives Where Sorting Game

Kids had to sort pictures of various animals into which biome they live in. Desert, Arctic tundra, grasslands, or the forest.

b. Desert Maze

c. Biomes Word Search

d. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Bless BINGO

b. Animal Charades

The kids had to get someone to guess which animal they were by acting it out. They were allowed to say where the animal lives as a hint eg. "I live in the forest, arctic, etc."

c. Side Walk Chalk

d. Bubbles

Week 9: Wet n' Wild -- August 26-30

Objective: The objective of this week was to introduce various types of aquatic, water-based ecosystems such as rivers, lakes, ponds, etc.

Attendance:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total/week
Under 5	4	14	8	5	6	37
Elementary	31	15	8	9	6	69
Older	0	0	0	2	1	3
Adult	8	15	10	8	13	54
Total/day	43	44	26	24	26	163

Crafts

A) Popsicle Stick Dragonfly

Colourful pieces of tissue paper were glued onto paper dragonfly wings. Then the wings were glued onto a popsicle stick body. Finally, googly eyes were added.

B) Fingerprint Fish

Kids cut out an outline of a fish and added scales by making fingerprints all over the fish using an ink pad. They could then finish decorating their fish by adding googly eyes or drawing/colouring on it.

Activities

A) Indoor

a. Pond Dipping

I collected different invertebrates from the river each morning for the kids to look at and try to identify

b. Wetland Eye Spy

This game was reused from previous years. Visitors had to try to find all the items from the list on a wetland poster

c. Wetland Matching Game

Match the picture of a wetland species to its name

d. Who Lives Where Sorting Game

Kids had to sort pictures of aquatic species into ocean, river, or lake/pond

e. Fish Puzzles

f. Wet n' Wild Word Search

g. Pond Maze

h. Colouring Contest

B) Outdoor

a. Go Fishing

Kids had to use a toy magnetic fishing rod to fish the plastic fish out of a small kiddie pool

b. Frog-to-Pond Bean Bag Toss

c. Pin the Fish on the Heron

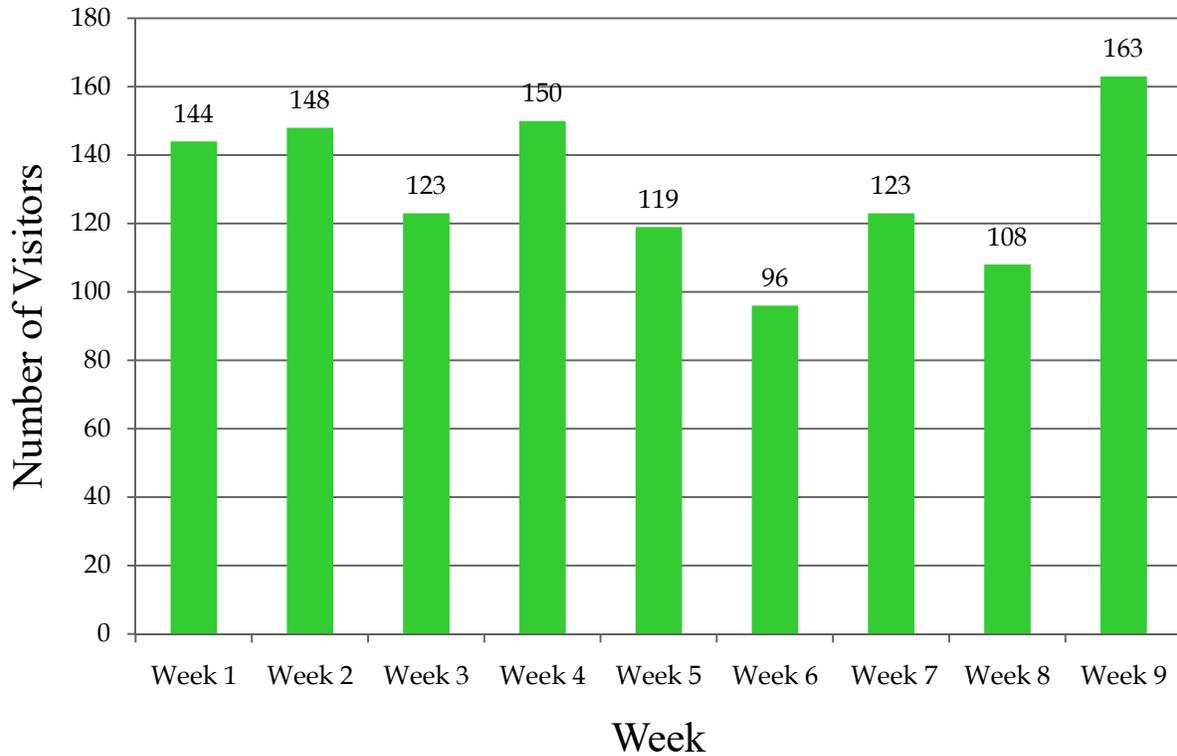
This game was also used in previous years. Very similar to pin the tail on the donkey, the kids had to try to attach the fish on the heron's beak while blindfolded

d. Sidewalk Chalk

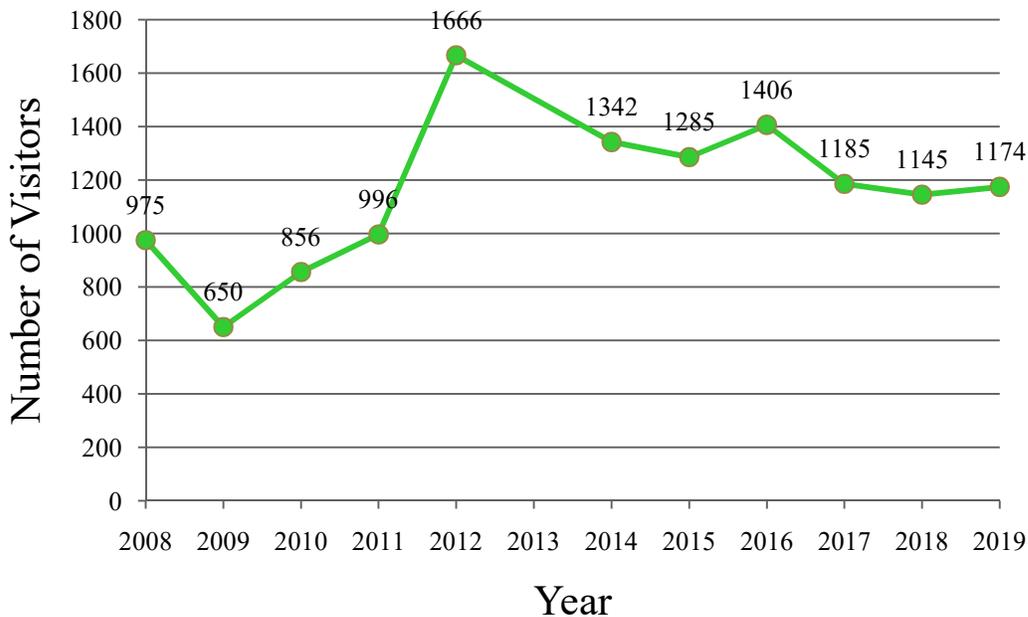
e. Bubbles

Statistics

Attendance Overview

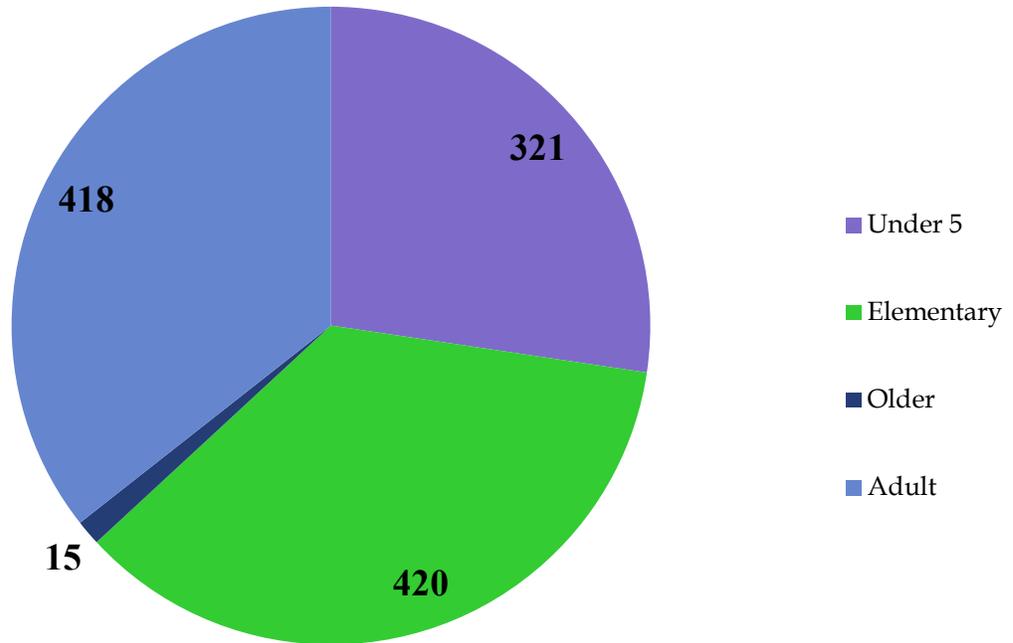


The total number of visitors at the Nature Centre this year was 1174. This is slightly higher than last year which had 1145 visitors. The very last week had the most visitors at 163. This is likely because it was the last week and many people wanted to come one last time before the nature centre closed for the fall. Week 6, had the lowest number of visitors at 96. This was expected, as the beginning of August seems to be when many families take vacations. Also, the nature centre was only open for four days that week due to the long weekend.



Our total attendance did increase from last year, however, it seems to be fairly consistent with the numbers from the past two years. Overall, I was very happy with the turnout this summer as we were usually quite busy throughout each week. It was very wet and rainy with 54 days of rain over the course of the summer which likely affected the attendance. Also, we weren't able to promote the nature centre on Canada day as in previous years, so that could have affected the number of people who heard about us as well. We did use the St. Albert Gazette as well as my weekly posts on the Facebook page, however, in the future I think attendance could be increased by getting more exposure. There were numerous people who mentioned that they had no idea what the log cabin was for even though they had passed by it many times. Many even said that they didn't know it existed at all! Potentially getting some signage or even posting flyers up might help to get more people interested who may not have heard about it.

Age Groups of Visitors



As with previous years, most of the attendance consisted of elementary aged kids, followed by adults as they accompanied the children. Typically adults would bring at least two children in most cases. There were also a few daycare groups that came this summer which usually consisted of elementary aged children.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe this summer was a huge success. A large majority of the visitors came back time and time again to check out the new activities each week. I received a lot of positive feedback from both parents and children throughout the summer. Many parents mentioned that their kids eagerly looked forward to coming back each week.

For the future, it is worth noting that the crafts are by far the most popular activity. I quickly found out that scavenger hunts and the colouring contest were also favourites. As the age range can be quite widespread, I found it worked well to have some more difficult activities for older children in addition to more simple ones for the younger kids. Having a more simple craft to go along with a more time-consuming one for example.

This program is a wonderful way to get children interested and excited about nature. It is incredibly important to get kids to care about and respect the environment and this program accomplishes that in a fun and informative way. It gives kids a basic background on various environmental topics and helps them develop basic skills that they will need for school while still being fun and entertaining. Overall, the nature centre is a fun, free, educational way for families to spend their time over the summer months.