



**B.L.E.S.S. SUMMER  
NATURE CENTRE  
REPORT 2014**

**ABSTRACT**

A detailed summary of the games, crafts, and other activities held for 9 weeks at the B.L.E.S.S. Summer Nature Centre.

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Contents

Introduction ..... 2

    Location..... 2

    Objective ..... 2

    Design..... 2

    Materials ..... 2

Weekly Overviews..... 3

    St. Albert River City Festival ..... 3

    Canada Day ..... 3

    Week 1: Welcome Week (July 2-4) ..... 3

    Week 2: Fantastic Feathers (July 7-11) ..... 5

    Week 3: Wonderful Wildflowers (July 14-18)..... 6

    Week 4: Creepy Crawlers (July 21-25) ..... 8

    Week 5: Where’s the Water (July 28- Aug 1)..... 9

    Week 6: Wild Weather (Aug 5-8)..... 11

    Week 7: Let’s Go Green (Aug 11-15) ..... 13

    Week 8: Magnificent Mammals (Aug 18-22) ..... 14

    Week 9: Naturally Nocturnal (Aug 25-29)..... 15

Statistics ..... 17

    Attendance Overview ..... 17

Conclusion..... 18

    Repairs and Improvements..... 18

    Recommendations ..... 18

## Introduction

### Location

The Nature Centre is located at the corner of Sturgeon Road and St. Albert Trail in Red Willow Park, St. Albert, Alberta. This is an ideal location for the Nature Centre as it is in a high traffic area where many families walk, bike, and drive. The parking lot during the week always has plenty of space, and the picnic tables nearby are a popular lunch spot.

### Objective

The objective of the Nature Centre is to allow residents of St. Albert and surrounding communities to explore nature in an urban setting by providing free crafts, games, and activities during the summer months. The goal is to engage visitors and create a lifelong curiosity and appreciation for nature. As a result, this will help to foster preservation and protection of the environment in the future. Further, the nature centre helps to create awareness and appreciation for Big Lake and the Sturgeon River ecosystem.

### Design

The Nature Centre was open July 2<sup>nd</sup> – August 29<sup>th</sup> 2014, Monday- Friday, 10:00 AM – 4:30 PM except for Wednesdays when the hours were 1:00 PM – 7:30 PM. The hours were similar to previous years, with the exception of the evening hours on Wednesdays. Each week had a theme with crafts, games, and other activities related to it. On average there were 8-12 activities each week that were designed for a variety of age groups and reading levels.

This summer I was very fortunate to have my sister (Jillian Dyck) and mom (Debbie Dyck) dedicate many volunteer hours to the centre when my initial 2 volunteers fell through. My mom helped me immensely during the 2 preparation weeks in June with cleaning the cabin and helping to re arrange the furniture. Jillian shares my passion for nature and is starting her first year at U of A this fall in the Forestry program. She volunteered 35 hours of her time for 6 out of the 9 weeks. Her help was really appreciated when things got busy at the nature centre. She mainly helped kids with the crafts and outdoor games.

### Materials

The Nature Centre once again had a \$200.00 budget to run on. The money was mainly used to purchase craft and poster making supplies for the cabin. Other costs included photocopying and cleaning supplies. I had to spend slightly over the \$200.00 to purchase a broom, rug, dustpan, and tablecloths for the cabin due to the new floor. The Bellerose High School Grad Committee donated Lysol wipes, napkins, paper towel, zip lock bags and gloves to the Nature Centre. This was great as I did not have to buy any extra supplies to clean for the summer (until Street Scoops started using the bathroom).

This summer the cabin was used by Street Scoops (Ice Cream Company) on Saturdays. The employees of Street Scoops had access to the cabin to use the bathroom during the day, and overall they were very respectful of the cabin. The only problem was regarding the use of bathroom supplies. Every Monday I would find the paper towel, toilet paper, and hand soap empty. I tried to contact the City of St. Albert and Street Scoops to discuss this, as the Nature Centre runs on a very tight budget, and the cost to replace these supplies was not cheap. I unfortunately received no response, therefore, I collected bottles from my neighbours and friends to raise some more money for the Nature Centre. I also donated several rolls of paper towel and toilet paper over the summer.

At the start of the summer, I had to throw away many of the craft supplies in the cabin. I discovered that mice had made their home in the cabin over the winter and did not want kids touching anything that had had droppings on it. Hopefully with the renovations, the cabin can stay somewhat mouse free over the winter.

## Weekly Overviews

Each week the nature centre had 1-2 crafts and 6-10 activities with some held inside and some outside. Each day a colouring contest was held and the winning picture was posted on the bulletin board. A “Species of the Week” was also chosen (usually an at-risk species in Alberta) and an information pamphlet was hung on the wall for kids and parents to look through. This great to help increase awareness for species at risk in the province. Chalk and bubbles were available for use outside.

### St. Albert River City Festival

This event was held on Sunday May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in the green space behind St. Albert Centre. I gathered a few buckets of aquatic invertebrates from the Sturgeon River and crayfish from Lacombe Lake. During the festival, I noticed that the booths with free giveaways, games, and/or candy had the most visitors. Therefore, when I worked Canada Day in Lion’s Park I brought the bean bag toss, candy, and stickers to give out.

### Canada Day

This year I had a booth for the nature centre at the City of St. Albert’s Canada Day celebration in Lion’s Park. I collected pond creatures (invertebrates and crayfish) for display, had a true or false game, and a bean bag toss where kids could win candy or stickers. The location of my booth was good, as it was near other children’s activities. I tried to hand out information sheets (with details about the nature centre) to as many families as possible, however many people were from out of town so this was only semi-beneficial. Overall, I do think it was more beneficial for the nature centre to be at the city’s Canada Day than in the log cabin this year. I would also suggest that BLESS set up for the River City Festival similar to Canada Day to increase the number of visitors to the booth.

### Week 1: Welcome Week (July 2-4)

#### Objective:

The objective of this week was to give visitors a taste of what was to come this summer at the Nature Centre. Due to it being a short week, it was best to not create a separate theme. Information regarding safe and responsible camping was incorporated and was well liked by visitors. In the future, I think it would be great to create a theme focused on camping, wildlife safety, and survival skills.

#### Attendance:

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
W	12	4	18	0	34	1
R	12	6	8	3	29	2
F	10	1	9	1	21	3
Total/Week	34	11	35	4	84	

## **Species of the Week: Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)**

### **Crafts:**

#### a) Pet Rock

The pet rock was a very popular craft with kids again this year. There were some leftover rocks from previous years in the cabin which were used first before I collected more. The nature centre was also very fortunate to have paint donated this year. Children decorated the rocks to look like ladybugs, bees, turtles and other animals. While their rock was drying they participated in other indoor and outdoor activities.

#### b) Popsicle stick Dragonfly

The second craft I had available for the kids was a Popsicle stick dragonfly. Children decorated one large and two small Popsicle sticks using markers, crayons and/or paint. I then assisted them with gluing the pieces together and adding glitter. I also attached a string to the top of the dragonfly so kids could hang them up if they wanted. This was slightly less popular than the pet rock but still a really fun and easy craft.

### **Activities:**

#### a) Indoor

##### i) Chipmunk Maze

Simple maze I had photocopied and put on the colouring table. Good little extra activity to have!

##### ii) Camping Safety and Boreal Forest True or False

The camping safety true or false game was new this year, and was popular with the kids. In most cases parents would read the questions and then the kids would answer. I thought it was a practical game that was important as many kids who visit the centre go camping with their family. The boreal forest true or false was also set up on another table.

##### iii) Who Am I?

Reused activity from previous years, pictures of animals were inside envelopes and kids had to guess which animal it was by looking through the little opening in on the front of the envelope.

##### iv) Steps to set up a tent worksheet

Good for parents and kids! The top of the worksheet involved ordering the 5 steps to set up a tent, and the bottom was where they drew a camping picture to enter into the colouring contest.

##### v) Nature artifacts on display

This week I had a variety of artifacts on display, as the theme was welcome week. These included: deer antlers, moose antler, owl wing, owl foot, muskrat fur, bear skull, and bird nests.

#### b) Outdoor

##### i) Pond Toss Game

##### ii) Scavenger Hunt

##### iii) Potato Sack Races

**Notes:** Overall, this week was a great start to the nature centre for the summer! Using the 3 days as a welcome week instead of an individual theme worked very well. I received many compliments on the new look of the nature centre and many kids signed up for the young naturalists program.

**Week 2: Fantastic Feathers (July 7-11)**

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to educate visitors on the many bird species we have in St. Albert, and around Big Lake. Activities focused on identification, behavior, and migration. The crafts demonstrated what we can do to help birds at home.

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	9	3	13	1	26	3
T	10	3	15	3	31	2
W	6	0	4	0	10	5
R	6	4	4	0	14	4
F	15	5	22	0	42	1
Total/Week	46	15	58	4	123	

**Species of the Week:** Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

**Crafts:**

- a) Bird Feeder  
Kids tied a piece of string to a pine cone and then used Popsicle sticks to apply sunflower seed butter to pine cones. After, the cones were then rolled in bird seed and wrapped in newspaper for easy transport home.
- b) Window Decals  
Using Mason jar and can lids, kids decorated them using yarn, fun foam, macaroni, glitter, and construction paper. A string was taped on the back of the lid so it could be hung up at home.

Both of the crafts this week were very popular and educational. The kids and parents really enjoyed that the two crafts helped birds (by providing food and preventing window collisions). I also had no problem using the sunflower seed butter as no kids are usually allergic to seeds (just nuts).

**Activities:**

- a) Indoor
  - i) Owl Maze  
Simple maze I had photocopied and put on the colouring table. Good little extra activity to have again.
  - ii) Bird Calls on a CD to play  
I made a CD with about 20 bird calls on it. A bird call was played and visitors had to guess which bird made that sound. Very fun and educational game!
  - iii) Specialist vs. Generalists (forks, knives, spoons)

Kids selected either a fork, knife, or spoon and tried to scoop as much ‘food’ from the container into their ‘stomach’ smaller container. The knife represented a specialist species and fork/spoon generalist.

- iv) Artifacts on a table (nests, feathers, bird feet, bird wings etc.)
  - v) Marble Migration (with bird migration poster beside it)  
Reused activity from previous years. Very popular game, and a great way to talk about migration.
  - vi) Owl ID  
A poster with several owl species on it, where kids had to match the clues to the pictures. Easy, fun, and educational.
  - vii) Matching Bills to Feet  
This activity was used for the colouring contest this week. Kids had to match the bills and feet of several birds together and then colour the picture. This activity was a bit challenging for the younger ones, but it worked well overall.
  - viii) Matching Silhouettes  
Game set up on the table where names were matched to silhouettes of birds.
- b) Outdoor
- i) Bird Bingo
  - ii) Bird ID course (hooks, laminated pictures)  
This was a new game that I made this year. I laminated pictures of birds and then tapped it to a coat hanger. I made 20 in total and then hung them outside around the cabin. In previous reports it was noted that birds were difficult to spot outside due to the heat. As it was a warm week, we probably would have had the same problem. This game was good as it exposed the kids and parents to many different species and they could go hunt to find them. I would definitely recommend repeating this activity!

**Notes:** This was a great week as there were many activities for visitors to enjoy. I was disappointed in the number of visitors this week as it was significantly less according to previous records. As a result I contacted the St. Albert Leader, St. Albert Gazette (*What’s On*), and Community of St. Albert Facebook page to ask if they could help with advertising for the Nature Centre.

### Week 3: Wonderful Wildflowers (July 14-18)

**Objective:**

The goal of this week was to introduce visitors to the diversity of plant life we have in Alberta. Topics included the importance of forest fires, pine vs. spruce trees, methods of seed dispersal, basic plant identification, and coniferous vs. deciduous trees.

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	15	4	19	0	38	2
T	16	2	9	2	29	4
W	13	5	11	2	31	3
R	9	6	8	2	25	5
F	17	6	15	2	40	1

Total/Week	70	23	62	8	163	
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**Species of the Week:** Canada Anemone (*Anemone canadensis*)

**Crafts:**

- a) Plastic cups with grass seeds  
Very popular, kids enjoyed decorating their cups and then planting grass. Activity was started with a basic discussion on what plants needed to grow.
- b) Paint/decorate a vase (bottles, jars, random decorations)  
Using old jars, various decorations, and paint kids made a plant vase/keepsake jar.
- c) Coffee filter flowers (to put in decorated bottles)

**Activities:**

- a) Indoor
  - i) Leaf Rubbings  
Very popular! Kids collected as many different leaves as they could find outside and then arranged them in a picture to make a rubbing. Parents even enjoyed this activity, and I had a few of them even make a picture.
  - ii) Name the parts of the tree worksheet  
Used this as the colouring contest and it was a really fun way of learning parts of a tree. A colouring sheet about the wild rose was used for the younger ages.
  - iii) Artifacts on display (tree cookie/count the rings, seeds, leaves etc.)
  - iv) Forest Facts  
Fun and popular true or false game re used from previous years.
- b) Outdoor
  - i) Treevia  
New activity this year, I found a scavenger hunt outline, coloured it and laminated 5 copies. Each family used a washable marker to mark off their findings on the sheet.
  - ii) Wildflower Walk  
New activity this year, laminated pictures of common wildflowers of Alberta were attached to hangers hung around the outside of the cabin and surrounding area. Families were able to take a plant book out if needed to help them identify all the flowers on the walk. Since the nature centre has no plant presses, this was a great way to expose visitors to other species besides those found around the nature centre and the sturgeon river ecosystem. Really popular as kids enjoyed looking for all the hangers.
  - iii) Hug a Tree  
New game! I made new blindfolds this year for the nature centre and this activity was great for small groups. Each group would take turns blindfolding one member and leading them to a tree. The blindfolded person had to feel the tree and try to remember what the bark was like and if there were any special characteristics. The person was then lead back to the starting point and then had to guess which tree they were at. The kids had lots of fun.



**Notes:** The nature centre needs plant presses! I looked into it and it would cost about 60 cents a press plus the cost of having someone collect, identify, and make the presses. Maybe someone would volunteer their time? Also, the nature centre needs some new posters for this week. I remade one of the big display posters, but the ones that go on the wall need replacing by next summer.

**Week 4: Creepy Crawlers (July 21-25)**

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to introduce visitors to the diversity and importance of insects. Topics discussed included complete vs. incomplete metamorphosis, the importance of bees, monarch butterfly conservation, and pollination.

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	19	8	19	0	46	1
T	15	6	19	0	40	3
W	12		12	0	24	5
R	15	3	18	0	36	4
F	18	7	20	0	45	2
Total/Week	79	24	88	0	191	

**Species of the Week:** Western Blue Flag (*Iris missouriensis*)

**Crafts:**

- a) Decorate a Butterfly  
Using construction paper, glue, and other decorations, kids tried to decorate their butterfly like an Alberta species. I posted pictures of a few for them to follow, however most just ended up making their own designs.
- b) Bug Hats  
Also a popular craft. Only downside was that it required more parent/my help for kids to complete. Same idea as with the butterfly, tried to decorate their paper plate like a specific species but I ended up getting mostly ‘original’ designs.

**Activities:**

- a) Indoor
  - i) Memory  
Repeated game from previous summers. Popular with the kids. I would have a quick discussion as to what pollinators are and why they are important before we played the game.
  - ii) Artifacts on display  
Variety of posters, insects, and wasp nests on display.
  - iii) Colouring, metamorphosis word search, connect the dots worksheets  
Word search not as popular even though it was very easy. Older elementary kids enjoyed it but other than that I wouldn’t recommend repeating.

- iv) Metamorphosis match up game  
Reused game from previous years. Objective was to match the larvae with the adult species. Parents enjoyed doing it together with their kids, but was fairly difficult.
- b) Outdoor
  - i) Bug hunt  
Nets and bug boxes were used to catch insects outside.
  - ii) Insect Nature Hunt  
Scavenger hunt game similar to “Treevia” but insect themed.
  - iii) Butterfly to Flower bean bag toss  
Repeated activity, very popular as always.
  - iv) The Pollen Game  
Based on a game from previous years. I hid ping pong balls “pollen” outside and then had kids race to find all the pollen and bring it back to their “hive”

**Notes:** Overall it was another fun week at the nature centre. There was a really good balance of indoor and outdoor activities which made it easy to manage when things got busy. It would be great to have some more entomology themed posters to display. I made a new one this year to go up on the counter, but more are needed to decorate the walls with.

### Week 5: Where’s the Water (July 28- Aug 1)

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to discover the diversity of life in Big Lake, Lacombe Lake and the Sturgeon River using hands on activities.

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	17	8	20	0	45	1
T	6	1	6	0	13	5
W	12	4	11	0	27	4
R	13	5	19	3	40	2
F	11	7	13	0	31	3
Total/Week	59	25	69	3	156	

**Species of the Week:** Bull Trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*)

**Crafts:**

- a) Decorate a Fish  
This was a fun activity and it was very popular. Children traced and cut out a fish and then used various craft materials (tissue paper, craft paper, markers, crayons etc.) to decorate it. I posted pictures of various fish in Alberta and asked the kids to try and decorate their fish like one of those species. However, in the end we mostly has a lot of rainbow fish which was ok too.

b) Duck Callers

Very popular and fun activity. Using yarn, sponge, a Styrofoam cup, and tape duck callers were made. The only downside was that it required a lot of assistance so it was not a craft kids were able to really make on their own. After they were finished, I asked the parents to take their kids down to the river to see if they could call any ducks over. Although most times they were unsuccessful it was still really fun for the kids to try.

**Activities:**

a) Indoor

i) Design a Plant (Colouring contest)

For the colouring contest this week, the kids had to “design a plant.” This involved selecting a plant name off the list hanging above the craft table, and then drawing what they think the plant looks like. For the older kids I also had them write about what they think the plant does and where it lives. Some plant names included: Lady’s slipper, cat tail, butterwort, and sundew. This activity was very fun for the kids and it was great to see all the creative ideas the kids could come up with!

ii) Amphibian True or False

This was a reused trivia game from previous years. Fairly popular.

iii) Food Chain, Go Fish, Wetland Eye Spy, and Sorting Game

As always there are some kids who just can’t get enough of the nature centre! I had a few extra games/activities that kids could play if they wanted to stay longer. I didn’t have room to have these set up around the cabin the whole week, but if any kids wanted to do more activities I did offer to set more up 😊

b) Outdoor

i) Pond Toss

ii) Nest Building with baskets (then camouflage)

Using old baskets, children had to build a nest inside of their basket using the same things birds would use (string, grass, mud, twigs etc.) After they were finished, they had to hide their nest somewhere around the nature centre and get a family member or friend to find it. Before the game was started we discussed what items birds use to build nests, and what some good ideas were in terms of where and how to camouflage it. Very popular and fun activity!

iii) Pond dipping

Each morning I collected 1-2 buckets of pond critters and displayed them in buckets outside on a table. I had spoons and sorting trays for kids allowing them to get a better look at their favorite creatures. After 5-10 minutes I would give the kids a clipboard with a raindrop on it. They had to try and draw their favorite creature in the raindrop and when they were finished come inside and colour it. When finished, all the raindrops were posted on the river life board inside the cabin. By the end of the week there was a fantastic collage of all the different creatures found in the Sturgeon River. Pond dipping is always a popular and educational activity which should be continued each year. The addition of the raindrop activity was great as it really made children connect with what they were observing and made learning fun!

**Notes:** This was another great week at the nature centre. There were plenty of activities and decorations. I would recommend repeating this theme again next year and continue to be creative and add in new activities so it's not exactly the same year to year. I would not recommend keeping crayfish in the fish aquariums inside given my experience this summer. Luckily none of them escaped, but when they die (which is usually after a week) they produce an awful smell that is very difficult to clean out of the tank. Perhaps the nature centre could buy crayfish or fish from paradise pets in the future as those species are domesticated and may not die as easily. I would also highly suggest that the nature centre invest in some more up to date aquariums (or see if we could get some new ones donated) that have proper tops to cover them. Another thought I had was to perhaps grow plants inside the aquariums instead. I had a small greenhouse in the cabin and kids loved watching the plants grow week to week. Perhaps this could be done large scale in the aquariums?

### Week 6: Wild Weather (Aug 5-8)

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to teach kids about different types of weather, what the difference is between weather and climate, and how wildlife adapts to changes in weather/climate.

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
T	17	5	18	0	40	3
W	11	1	35	0	47	2
R	8	24	24	0	56	1
F	8	8	8	0	24	4
Total/Week	44	38	85	0	167	

**Species of the Week:** White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

**Crafts:**

- a) Rainbow Wand  
Great craft! Children traced two clouds onto white paper and then attached a chopstick to one of the clouds. Then 5 different coloured streamers were attached to make the 'rainbow'. This was a really fun activity and I would recommend repeating!
- b) Rain Stick  
Using toilet paper rolls, kids decorated the outside using construction paper, macaroni, markers and glitter. When finished I help them attach two pieces of wax paper to both ends using elastics. The inside of the rolls were filled with rice to make the 'rain' sound. This craft was more popular among the younger kids as they usually enjoy anything that makes noise.

**Activities:**

- a) Indoor
  - i) Matching Spring Babies

Reused activity from previous years, very popular and educational. I was very surprised how many kids thought the picture of the moose was a camel! Also, the baby goslings and ducklings were usually mixed up.

ii) Weather Quiz

New trivia game this year, had various questions related to weather ranging from very easy to moderately difficult. Usually all families would play the game with one member reading out the questions and other guessing. Also, all the answers could be found by reading the posters I made. This was good as it encouraged parents and children to read the educational material around the cabin.

iii) Colouring Contest (Colour the weather)

This week's colouring contest was especially fun as it was held outside! I gave each kid a clip board with a piece of paper and pencil. They then had to then go outside and draw a picture of the weather. When finished, I had a box of crayons outside on the picnic table for them to colour their picture with and another box inside if more space was needed. Very popular and fun!

iv) Tornado in a jar

Using soap, water, vinegar, food colouring, and glitter I made 'tornados' in old jars. When shaken, the contents in the jar would form a funnel like a tornado. The glitter inside represented all of the debris that flies around during a storm. Very popular and educational.

v) Will the Wind Blow It

Kids were given a box of items and had to sort them into two groups (yes- the wind will blow this away, and no). After sorting the items, I would turn the fan on low speed to see which items were blown off the table. Then, I would turn the fan up higher and see if anything else would fly away. Great activity for kids as they enjoyed making predictions as to which items would fly away.

vi) Seasons memory

Reused game from previous years. As always, memory games are very popular with the kids.

b) Outdoor

i) Rainbow Chip

Reused game from previous years, different colours were glued on a cue card and kids had to go outside and find something to match each colour on the card. Fun activity, and kids always enjoy scavenger hunts.

ii) Butterfly bean bag toss

**Notes:** This was a very fun week and it was great to focus on more abiotic factors of the environment compared to biotic in previous weeks. I focused the information towards different types of weather, and what causes storms, rainbows, fog etc. Overall, there are now enough activities and poster decorations in the cabin where the themed could easily be repeated and I would definitely recommend repeating in the future. I would also have to say that the rainbow wand was definitely my favorite craft of the summer 😊

## Week 7: Let's Go Green (Aug 11-15)

### Objective:

The object of this week was to make families aware of their impact on the earth, and the benefits that arise from small and simple environmentally friendly choices.

### Attendance:

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	11	3	10	4	28	4
T	12	7	10	0	29	3
W	15	4	20	1	40	1
R	10	5	8	0	23	5
F	15	9	15	0	39	2
Total/Week	63	28	63	5	159	

### Species of the Week: Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

#### Crafts:

- a) Recycled Magnets  
Using old magnets, kids decorated them using a variety of craft materials. Very fun craft and the parents really liked the idea as well. I even had a few parents making magnets to hang on their fridge.
- b) Recycled Keepsake Boxes  
Using old tea, margarine, coffee, and chocolate containers/boxes kids decorate the inside and outside to make a keepsake box. Very practical and fun craft.

Both crafts demonstrated how we can (and should) try to recycle things around our house and make them into something new! Parents were saying that they were going to have the kids decorate more magnets at home!

#### Activities:

- a) Indoor
  - i) Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Quiz  
New activity this year, very popular and educational for the kids and parents!
  - ii) Sorting Test  
Kids had to sort items into 3 categories (Reduce, Recycle, and Reuse). This game was different from the one outside and further enforced the fundamental principles of reducing waste.
  - iii) Matching Game (Reduce your Impact at Home)  
Matching statements to the pictures activity. More for the younger kids, but older ones enjoyed reading the facts as well. A previous version of this existed in the cabin, but was old and needed to be replaced. I laminated all of the pictures when I remade the game so hopefully it lasts for years to come!

iv) Colouring Contest

b) Outdoor

i) Pollutant Knock-out

When I first looked at the game in late June, I thought it would be able to make it one more summer. Unfortunately after Monday morning, the game was in such bad shape the signs were not able to stand up anymore. It is such a fun and educational game I really wanted it to be a part of the week so I taped the signs to old hangers and used my family's ladder golf game to hang the signs on. It worked great and it was a very popular game among the kids. For next year, the signs need to be remade totally (due to budget constraints I was not able to this year) and I would suggest making them in a sandwich board shape.

ii) Green Bingo

Reused activity from previous years, bingo sheet that focused on eco-friendly things. Very popular, although difficult to make a bingo. I let kids check off a box after a while if they did something like turn off the lights at home.

iii) Sorting Game (Reuse, Recycle, Garbage)

Outside sorting game, different from inside as I had real props and there was a garbage category. I made the game more fun by timing the kids to see how long it took them to correctly sort the items. I also used old popcorn tins to make labelled buckets for the game. These can be stored in the nature centre so future coordinators do not have to bring their own bins from home.

**Notes:** Another great week at the nature centre with lots of activities! All the games helped to reinforce key concepts of living a greener life. I would recommend repeating this theme in future summers. I would recommend trying not to discuss anything relating to global warming/climate change as some of the parents get very opinionated.

[Week 8: Magnificent Mammals \(Aug 18-22\)](#)

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to focus on local wildlife, while touching on some exotics that are often easily confused. There were many artifacts that could be used for this theme so kids had the opportunity to feel antlers, horns, fur, and skulls!

**Attendance:**

Day	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	16	8	16	0	40	1
T	7	1	7	1	16	4
W	13	6	15	0	34	2
R	5	2	3	0	10	5
F	8	6	6	2	22	3
Total/Week	49	23	47	3	122	

**Species of the Week:** Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*)

**Crafts:**

- i) Paper Bag Puppets  
Kids decorated a paper bag as their favorite mammal. Very easy and fun craft. I would recommend only using glue sticks for this craft.

**Activities:**

- a) Indoor
  - i) Herbivore, Omnivore, or Carnivore sorting  
Fun activity that really made kids consider what different animals eat.
  - ii) Guess the spots game  
Repeated activity from previous years, quick, easy, and educational. It was also great to have one activity focused on some exotic species to keep things interesting.
  - iii) Mammals vs. Non Mammals game  
Sorting game, mainly for the younger kids.
  - iv) Footprint Matching  
Excellent activity that was both fun and educational. I had two Animal Tracks of Alberta books on the table that people could use if they were stuck. I always tried to assist families with this game as it probably seemed overwhelming at the start. We discussed which animals would have long claws and why some had longer fingers, or how an animal might walk based on their tracks (flat footed or quick on toes).
  - v) Coloring Contest – Mammals of Alberta
- b) Outdoor
  - i) Deer Stalker  
Reused outdoor activity, really fun and educational. Five pictures of deer were hidden outside around the cabin and kids had to go find all 5. This usually took 10-30 minutes depending on age. The game always started with a discussion on how animals camouflage themselves from predators.
  - ii) BLESS Bingo  
Found copies of this in the filing cabinet from a previous bless event. Great scavenger hunt that tied in all themes so far!

**Notes:** This was a great week at the nature centre. There were many activities created from previous years to choose from which made planning for this week easy. Also, mammals are very popular among children, and it didn't take much work to get them excited about learning. I would recommend that next year some new posters are made for this week as the mammal/wildlife posters are really starting to age.

**Week 9: Naturally Nocturnal (Aug 25-29)**

**Objective:**

The objective of this week was to introduce visitors to the world of nocturnal animals! Activities focused on identification and behavior of these animals. Also, included in this week were a few of the favorite activities from other weeks.



**Attendance:**

Aug 25-29	Adults	Preschool	Elementary	Junior High	Total/Day	Rank
M	22	10	14	0	46	2
T	22	10	18	0	50	1
W	10	3	11	0	24	5
R	11	5	11	0	27	4
F	12	7	11	0	30	3
Total/Week	77	35	65	0	177	

**Species of the Week:** Swift Fox (*Vulpes velox*)**Crafts:**

## a) Cardboard Roll Bat or Moth

Using a toilet paper roll, construction paper, and other craft materials, kids made a bat or moth. First, kids would trace their hands onto a piece of paper and then cut them out to make the wings. After they would decorate their cardboard roll and the wings to look like either a bat or moth. This was a really easy and fun craft for all ages.

**Activities:**

## a) Indoor

## i) Bat Maze

Activity on the colouring table for kids to do, easy and great for all ages.

## ii) Colouring contest

## iii) Memory

## iv) Nocturnal vs. Diurnal

New game this year! Visitors has to sort pictures of animals into whether they think they were nocturnal or diurnal. All of the species used in the game are found in Alberta, which further increased their knowledge of local wildlife.

## v) Nocturnal Quiz

Another new activity! Questions related to nocturnal animals were set on the table. These included a variety of multiple choice, short answer, and true/false questions. Parents enjoyed reading the questions to their kids for them to guess the answer.

## vi) Sensory Bags

Reused activity from previous years, and worked well in this theme. Kids had to put their hand into a bag and try to guess what the object was on the inside. Really fun game always full of surprises.

## b) Outdoor

## i) Bean Bag toss

## ii) BLESS bingo

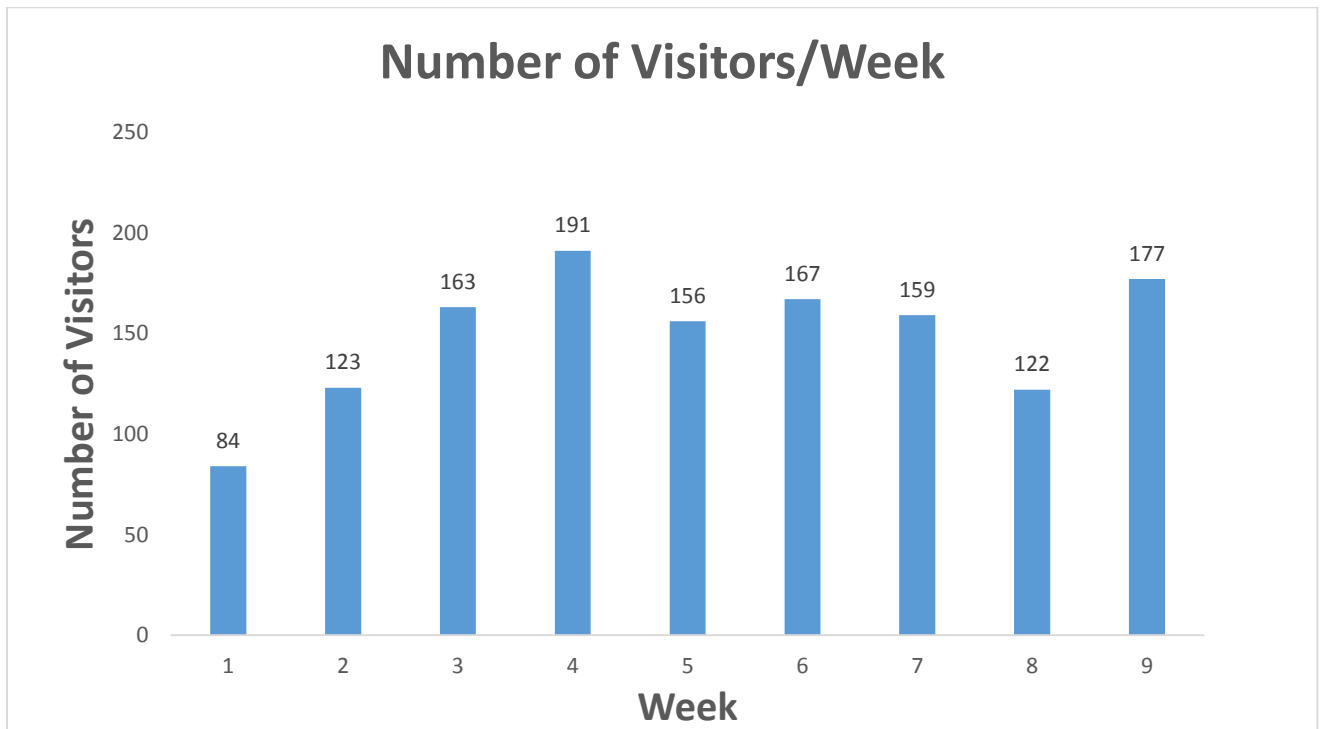
## iii) Insect catching

## iv) Potato sack races

**Notes:** Overall, this was a great last week at the nature centre! This was the first time a nocturnal theme was done, and it worked out really well. Visitors were interested in the activities and there was lots of variety to choose from. Incorporating activities from other weeks worked well as some visitors are not able to come every week. This way they still had a chance to complete an activity they missed. Recommendations for this week would be to make more nocturnal themed activities and posters. One suggestion would be to have a hands on learning station where visitors could make moth food (sugar, fruit, and juice) and then take it home so they could attract moths to look at later in the evening. Also, it would be great to have some sort of a bat echolocation game for outside.

## Statistics

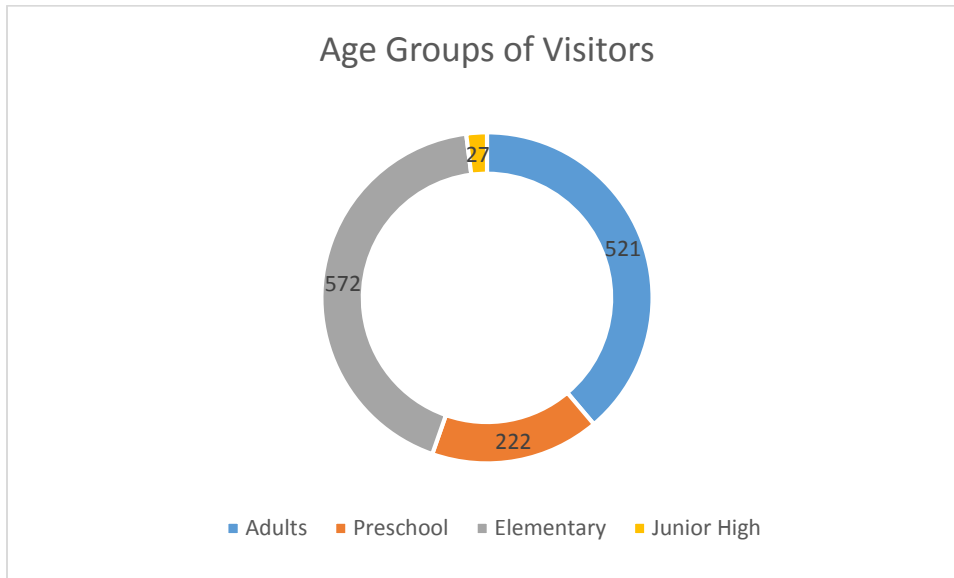
### Attendance Overview



The total number of visitors this summer at the nature centre was 1342. The busiest week of the summer was week 4 (Creepy Crawlers). This was also the first week that the nature centre was featured in the *What's On* section of the St. Albert Gazette perhaps explaining the increase in attendance. Week 8 experienced a decrease in visitors, perhaps due to families taking vacation before the end of the summer. Week 9 was very busy which was unexpected as I thought most people would be busy with back to school preparations. Monday and Fridays were always the busiest days of the week.

This summer the nature centre was open 1:00 PM-7:30 PM on Wednesdays. The purpose of the evening hours was to accommodate parents who worked during the day or if kids were involved in other day camps during the day they could still stop by Wednesday evenings. Overall, the evening hours worked well, and I received lots of positive feedback from visitors regarding the evening hours. I would recommend that the nature centre have evening hours at least one day a week next summer, and

perhaps maybe trying a different day as well. Thursdays on average were the least busy, so maybe this would be a good day to also try evening hours.



This summer, there were significantly more elementary aged kids visiting compared to preschool. Many adults who visited Red Willow Park would stop at the nature centre for some water, to use the washroom, or to look at the displays.

## Conclusion

### Repairs and Improvements

Over the past few years, the log cabin has been a great place for the nature centre. At the beginning of the summer, the nature centre was not in the best state. Many things such as the grass seed, soil, fabric, and other supplies were not put away properly from the previous summer. As a result, many supplies had to be discarded as children should not be handling materials that were contaminated by mice droppings. Also, there was an extreme amount of mice droppings found throughout the rest of the cabin. Once the floor was replaced in June 2014, I did not come across any evidence of mice the rest of the summer. However, the exterior of the cabin is severely rotting in places and need to be repaired. This would also help to ensure that mice do not make their home in the cabin once again this winter.

Other small improvements needed for the cabin include painting the white tables and the bathroom. The tables are very chipped and are in need of a new coat of paint. The bathroom walls are also looking a bit rough, and could really use a new coat of paint as well. Also, a new shelf will eventually be needed to store all of the containers on, as it is not very stable.

### Recommendations

The nature centre would really benefit from a larger budget to run the program. As stated before, some new posters for the cabin would be great, and I would recommend purchasing posters and laminating them so they are able to last for many years. Also, a larger budget would ensure the nature centre remains competitive with other programs around St. Albert. If B.L.E.S.S. is unable to allocate additional

funds to the nature centre, perhaps fundraisers could be held to help generate the money needed. The programs ran at the Grain Elevator Park suggested that each visitor donate \$2 each time they visit. I would not suggest the nature centre ask for donations each time people visit, but maybe we could make visitors more aware of the fact that the nature centre runs on a very small budget and any donations are greatly appreciated. I would also recommend that future coordinators meet with the Grain Elevator Park staff as it was mentioned few times this summer that the nature centre and grain elevators had some of the same crafts and activities.

Overall, 2014 was very successful for the B.L.E.S.S. Summer Nature Centre. With a few improvements each year, the nature centre continue to be a popular destination for summer fun in St. Albert.