

B.L.E.S.S. Summer Nature Centre Year End Report

Emily Olson

2018 Nature Centre Coordinator

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Introduction

Location

The BLESS Nature Centre is located on the corner of St. Albert Trail and Sturgeon Road. The log cabin is next to the Sturgeon River and the Red Willow Trail System.

Objective

The objective of the BLESS Nature Centre is to offer a free summer program that provides fun activities for families to do together, teaches guests about nature, and fosters a curiosity and respect for the environment.

Design

The Nature Centre was open from July 3rd to August 23rd and the weekly hours were Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm and Wednesdays from 12:30 pm to 7:00 pm. Each week a new theme was presented at the cabin, along with crafts and games that helped to teach an aspect of each topic.

Materials

The budget for the summer program was \$400. I spent \$367.82 on supplies for crafts, games, and posters for each week. The majority of the money spent was on craft supplies (paint, construction paper, googly eyes, etc.). I also created new posters and games for all of the weeks so a portion of the budget was spent on that. I made use of the materials already present in the cabin and received a few craft supply donations, which helped to keep the expenses below the budget. To advertise the program, I made weekly updates in the 'What's On!' section of the St. Albert gazette and posted on the BLESS Nature Centre Facebook page multiple times per week. Both of these forums provided free way to promote the Nature Centre.

Canada day

On July 1st, I represented BLESS at the Canada Day festivities at Rotary Park in St. Albert. A table was set up near the Sturgeon River and next to the bike lock-up booth. I set up a display using a BLESS banner, animal artifacts (coyote skull, muskrat fur, beaver skull, etc.), and a Nature Centre pamphlet that was provided by Miles Constable. I gave away stickers, Canada tattoos, fruit snacks, and lollipops to those that approached the table. I provided a ladybug headband craft, a Canada day colouring sheet with the Nature Centre hours, and an aquatic insect sorting activity that families really enjoyed. I filled two containers with water and aquatic organisms

from the river and kids could use plastic cutlery to sort the critters and then try to identify them on an identification sheet. It was quite windy out so it was difficult to do some of the activities I had planned (i.e. colouring and the ladybug craft). For next year, I would recommend bringing games and activities that can withstand wind, such as the bean bag toss game that is stored in the Nature Centre. Overall, Canada day went well and I think it was worth attending the festivities. Around 35-40 families, most of them with multiple children, approached the table. Many people learned about BLESS and the Nature Centre for the first time and I think people got a good sense of what to expect at the cabin for the Summer of 2018.

Weekly Overviews

Week 1: Welcome Week/Wildlife Safety

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
02-Jul	*closed for Canada day holiday				
03-Jul	6	12	0	11	29
04-Jul	7	51	1	17	76
05-Jul	8	15	0	13	36
06-Jul	3	1	0	2	6
Total/week	24	79	1	43	147

Objective:

The Nature Centre opened for the summer on Tuesday, July 3rd. The theme for the first week was Wildlife Safety. I focused on teaching what to do when encountering injured or orphaned animals, how to safely coexist with wildlife, and actions people can take to minimize their impact on wild animals. I made posters of different baby animals and what to do when you encounter them, how humans affect wildlife, and how we can lessen our impact.

Crafts:

a) Mammal Masks

Children traced their mask of choice (raccoon, deer, or fox) onto construction paper and glued the pieces together. Each mask had 3 pieces to trace and cut out. This was difficult for some kids, so I chose to just have one craft for the week. The masks turned out really well; both kids and parents loved them.

Indoor activities:

a) *Habitat game*

A poster board with pictures of 4 different habitats was set out and kids had to match pictures of animals to their corresponding habitat. This game was good for all ages and helped kids to learn about the various habitats in Canada and the species that live in them.

b) *Mommy Match-up*

Kids had to match pictures of baby animals to their parents. This game was also good for all ages.

c) *Wildlife Rescue Kit*

Items were set out on the table (net, wildlife book, towel, Wildlife Hotline phone number, gloves, protective glass, cd case, plastic cup, a box, and a pipe cleaner) and guests had to place certain items in a box that they thought could be useful to save wildlife.

d) *Bearsmart Worksheet*

A colouring sheet/worksheet. Kids had to put a checkmark where they saw something Bearsmart and an X where they spotted something wrong.

e) *Colouring Contest*

Kids were asked to draw something they learned about the week's theme and enter it in the contest. Winners were randomly drawn at the end of each day and posted on the cork board the following week. This was a great incentive for kids to come back the following week!

Outdoor activities:

a) *Wildlife Way Clue Hunt*

This game was really successful and enjoyable for both parents and kids. Questions about wildlife safety and what to do in certain situations were placed all around the cabin. Guests had to answer a multiple choice question and check their answers in an attached envelope. The answer also revealed a clue to the next question. This allowed children to be active outside while learning about wildlife safety. I found this was a very effective way to teach kids.

b) *Fire cup Knockdown*

This game was from previous years. Plastic cups were placed in a pyramid shape and guests had to "put out the fire" by knocking the cups down with a ping pong ball.

c) *Bunny Hop Race*

Guests used potato sacks to hop like a bunny and race their friends. This was an easy game to set up and kids loved watching their parents hop in potato sacks!

d) Sidewalk chalk and bubbles

Week 2: What's the buzz about bees?

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
09-Jul	10	5	1	8	24
10-Jul	6	11	1	12	30
11-Jul	12	16	2	15	45
12-Jul	15	9		9	33
13-Jul	1	5	0	6	12
Total/week	44	46	4	50	144

Objective:

This week's theme was all about bees, mainly focusing on honey bees. I had posters outlining the differences between honey bees, wasps, and bumble bees. The posters also showed the honey bee lifecycle and how honey is made. I brought my own bee specimens, honey comb, and beekeeping equipment to put on display.

Crafts:

a) Bee bookmark

Kids traced a bee out of foam paper, cut it out, and glued it together onto a popsicle stick. Googly eyes and pipe cleaner antennae were added. This was a very popular craft as many guests took part in the Summer Reading Program at the library and were excited to use them in their library books!

b) Bee Headband

Kids traced and glued pieces of construction paper to make a bee headband. Googly eyes and pipe cleaner antennae were added.

Indoor activities:

a) Spelling bee game

Paper bees with pictures of various things on them were set out and kids had to put the ones that started the letter B into the 'hive' (cardboard box).

b) Who is who?

Visitors had to guess which picture was a wasp, bumble bee, and honey bee.

c) Honey bee lifecycle

This was a cut and glue spinner worksheet. Kids had to put pictures of the different stages of the honey bee lifecycle in order on a wheel and colour it in.

d) What's the buzz about bees? Quiz

This was a multiple choice quiz to test kids knowledge of bees.

e) Colouring contest

Outdoor activities:

a) Get the honey in the hive

I made a honey comb out of corrugated plastic and kids had to toss bean bags into the honey comb.

b) Waggle dance game

Kids drew a bee path with chalk while dancing to illustrate the bee waggle dance. Then a friend would follow their bee path.

c) Sidewalk chalk and bubbles

Week 3: Fantastic Flora

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
16-Jul	2	13	1	9	25
17-Jul	8	12	0	12	32
18-Jul	11	11	1	13	36
19-Jul	3	8	0	6	17
20-Jul	6	9	0	7	22
Total/week	30	53	2	47	132

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests about photosynthesis and how to identify common plants of the area. I created a poster that displayed how photosynthesis works and I also set out the plant poster from a previous year.

Crafts:

a) Tiny Greenhouse

Kids traced, cut out, and decorated a tiny greenhouse out of construction paper. Then a Ziploc bag with cotton balls, water, and grass seeds was stapled onto the back. Guests could take their tiny greenhouses home and watch the grass seeds germinate and grow. This was many of the guests' favorite craft of the summer. Each week, kids were excited to update me on how their grass was growing.

b) Tissue paper flowers

Tissue paper was glued to construction paper in the shape of a flower.

Indoor activities:

a) Plant Match-up

Plant specimens, descriptions of plants, and pictures were set out and guests had to match the specimens and plants to the name and descriptions.

b) Photosynthesis colouring sheet

c) Forest crossword

d) Pollen page worksheet

e) Colouring contest

Outdoor activities:

a) Plant Scavenger Hunt

Laminated lists of items were given to the guests and they had to walk along the river and check off those they found (pinecone, wild rose fruit, colourful flower, etc.).

b) Butterfly to Flower Toss

This is a bean bag toss that had been used in previous years.

c) Sidewalk chalk and bubbles

Week 4: All about Aves

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
23-Jul	8	12	0	11	31
24-Jul	6	41	2	16	65
25-Jul	6	19	1	14	40
26-Jul	1	6	0	6	13
27-Jul	13	12	2	18	45
Total/week	34	90	5	65	194

*Enchanted Forest daycare came Tuesday morning

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests about the common birds of the area and how to identify them. I reused a poster from a previous year which displayed information on basic bird anatomy and some common birds of Big Lake.

Crafts:

a) Bird Mask

A mask outline was traced and cut out. Tissue paper feathers and a construction paper beak were glued on. Kids could then add string and wear it.

b) Flying bird

A bird was made out of construction paper, similar to a paper airplane. The kids could decorate their bird with feathers, tissue paper, and googly eyes. Then the birds were taken outside to test their flight.

Indoor activities:

a) Who Am I? guessing game

I made a poster with columns of clues under paper tabs. Each column had clues for a different bird and visitors had to guess the bird before reaching the end.

b) Bird Silhouette Matching

This game was used in past years. Pictures of bird silhouettes were set out and guests had to guess the bird the silhouette belonged to.

c) Migration Marble game

This game was used last year. A maze was created on a plastic container and kids had to guide a marble through the migration.

d) Colouring contest

Outdoor activities:

a) *Predator Knockdown*

Pictures of bird predators were placed on 2L pop bottles which were filled with colourful water. Kids used softballs to try and knock down the 'predators' as a bird mom or dad would do to protect their nests.

b) *Bird Walk*

13 pictures of birds were taped outside the cabin. Guests had to identify each of the birds and write its name down on a reusable laminated sheet.

c) *Sidewalk chalk and bubbles*

Week 5: Bat-tastic

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
30-Jul	9	13	0	16	38
31-Jul	10	14	0	11	35
01-Aug	10	9	0	12	31
02-Aug	17	8	3	15	43
03-Aug	2	15	0	11	28
Total/week	48	59	3	65	175

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests about the various bats of Alberta, echolocation, bat anatomy, and general bat characteristics. I created posters of bat facts and the nine bat species of Alberta.

Crafts:

a) *Hanging bat*

A toilet paper roll was painted black and googly eyes and pipe cleaner legs were added.

b) *Bat puppet*

Little brown bat puppets were made out of paper bags and construction paper.

Indoor activities:

a) Bats, birds, or both?

Pictures of various bird, bat, or both characteristics were sorted into the 3 categories.

b) Bat Quiz

Questions about bats were glued to a poster board, with answers under a tab. Guests had to answer each question and flip the tab to see if they were correct.

c) Colouring contest

Outdoor activities:

a) Hungry Hungry Bats

Ping pong ball “insects” were placed in a basket and kids had to race to put the balls in their designated hula hoop, 1 at a time. At the end, the kids would count the balls and whoever had the most in their hula hoop won.

b) It’s Suppertime!

I made insects out of foam paper and glued them to clothes hangers. They were attached to a broomstick and hung on 2 sandwich boards. Kids had to throw ping pong balls and try to hit each of the insects to fill their ‘bat bellies’.

c) Echolocation game

Guests were blindfolded and their parents or friends would clap around them. They had to point to where the sound was coming from.

d) Sidewalk chalk and bubbles

Week 6: Wild about Wetlands!

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
06-Aug	* closed for the holiday				
07-Aug	5	27	0	9	41
08-Aug	3	16	1	11	31
09-Aug	6	14	1	7	28
10-Aug	12	7	0	9	28
Total/week	26	64	2	36	128

*Enchanted Forest daycare came Tuesday morning.

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests various wetland types, the importance of wetlands, and wetland biodiversity. Posters with general information and the benefits of wetlands were put on display.

Crafts:

a) Fly in the frog

A toilet paper roll was stapled shut on one end and painted green. Googley eyes, and construction paper legs and tongue were added. A cardboard fly and string were attached and kids could then try to get the fly into the frogs mouth.

b) Butterfly painting

Kids painted half of a butterfly and folded their paper to transfer their design on the other side.

Indoor activities:

a) Pop bottle experiment

Three pop bottles were set out on their sides, with a hole cut in the top side. One was filled with dirt and rocks, another with leaf litter and dirt, and the third with moss and grass in dirt. Guests were asked to pour water in each of the pop bottles and the water would drain out the mouth of the bottle. This was to show the benefits of wetlands and how plants help to prevent erosion and provide us with clean drinking water. This experiment was great and guests were amazed at the results.

b) Pond Crossword

c) Insect go fish

d) Colouring contest

Outdoor activities:

a) Frog in the pond bean bag toss

This was similar to the Butterfly and Flower Toss used in Week 3.

b) Wild About Wetlands Scavenger Hunt

Pictures of common wetland animals and plants were taped around the outside of the cabin. Guests had to find each of the pictures and cross it off on their reusable laminated sheet with the same pictures.

c) Frog Hop Race

Pictures of lily pads were placed on the grass in a circle and held down with tent pegs. Kids had to put on a potato sack and hop to each of the lily pads.

d) *Pin the Fish on the Heron*

This game is similar to 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey'. A picture of a heron was taped to a wall of the cabin and a guest was blindfolded. They would have to try and get the paper fish onto the heron's mouth.

e) *Sidewalk chalk and bubbles*

Week 7: Crazy Carnivores and Unbelievable Ungulates

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
13-Aug	2	7	0	8	17
14-Aug	7	9	1	12	29
15-Aug	2	5	1	7	15
16-Aug	6	22	1	9	38
17-Aug	*closed because I was sick				
Total/week	17	43	3	36	99

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests about carnivores and ungulates and the differences between these two orders of mammals. I created posters of ungulate and carnivore facts and examples.

Crafts:

a) *Paper plate carnivores*

Paper plates were folded into a triangle and face parts were glued on to be either a wolf or a fox. Guests could choose to glue a chopstick on the back and use it as a mask or a puppet.

b) *Handprint moose headband*

Guest traced their hands and 2 circles onto a piece of construction paper. The pieces were cut out and glued together to be a moose face, attached to a black strip of paper, and worn as a headband.

Indoor activities:

a) *Carnivore, Ungulate, or Both?*

Pictures of various carnivore, ungulate, or both characteristics were sorted into the 3 categories.

b) *Smell Matching game*

This game was to show how some animals use their sense of smell to find food. Film canisters were filled with chocolate, cinnamon, lemon, grass, and pine needles. Guests were blindfolded and had to guess what was in the canisters. This was a really popular game and guests had a lot of fun guessing what they were smelling.

c) *Guess the Animal Artifact*

Various furs, antlers/horns, and skulls were set out and guests had to guess which animal the artifacts came from.

d) *Colouring contest*

Outdoor activities:

a) *Clue Hunt*

Descriptions of different carnivores and ungulates were placed outside the cabin. Guests had to guess the animal and whether it is a carnivore or an ungulate for a clue to the next question.

b) *Deer Stalker*

This game was used from previous years. Deer pictures were camouflaged around the cabin and guests had to find all 5 of them.

c) *Sidewalk chalk and bubbles*

Week 8: Earth Week

Attendance:

Date	Young	Elementary	Older	Adults	Total/day
20-Aug	9	15	1	15	40
21-Aug	13	8	0	12	33
22-Aug	14	4	0	13	31
23-Aug	6	8	2	6	22
Total/week	42	35	1	46	126

Objective:

The objective of this week was to teach guests how they can reduce their ecological footprints, about the global plastic waste problem, and about the three R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle). I made a poster with facts about plastic and another with ways to reduce your ecological footprint.

Crafts:

a) *Sun catchers*

Coffee filters were coloured with markers, sprayed with water, and glued to a paper plate with the middle cut out.

b) *Egg carton ocean animals*

Egg cartons were painted and foam paper was used to turn them into a whale, octopus, or turtle. Guests enjoyed this craft. They were a bit difficult for some of the children but they turned out really well in the end.

Indoor activities:

a) *Ways I can reduce, reuse, recycle worksheet*

b) *Go Green Memory game*

Pictures of Earth day things were taped to recycled frozen juice can lids and guests played a memory matching game with them.

c) *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle sort game*

Pictures of items or actions were sorted into the 3 categories.

Outdoor activities:

a) *Go Green board game*

A life size board game made from corrugated plastic was set up outside. Earth day 'actions' were taped to a several of the squares and if it was a good action (i.e. turning off the water while brushing your teeth), the player got to move forward a number of spaces. If the action was bad (i.e. forgetting to turn off the lights), the player had to move back a number of spaces.

b) *Ocean Clean-up*

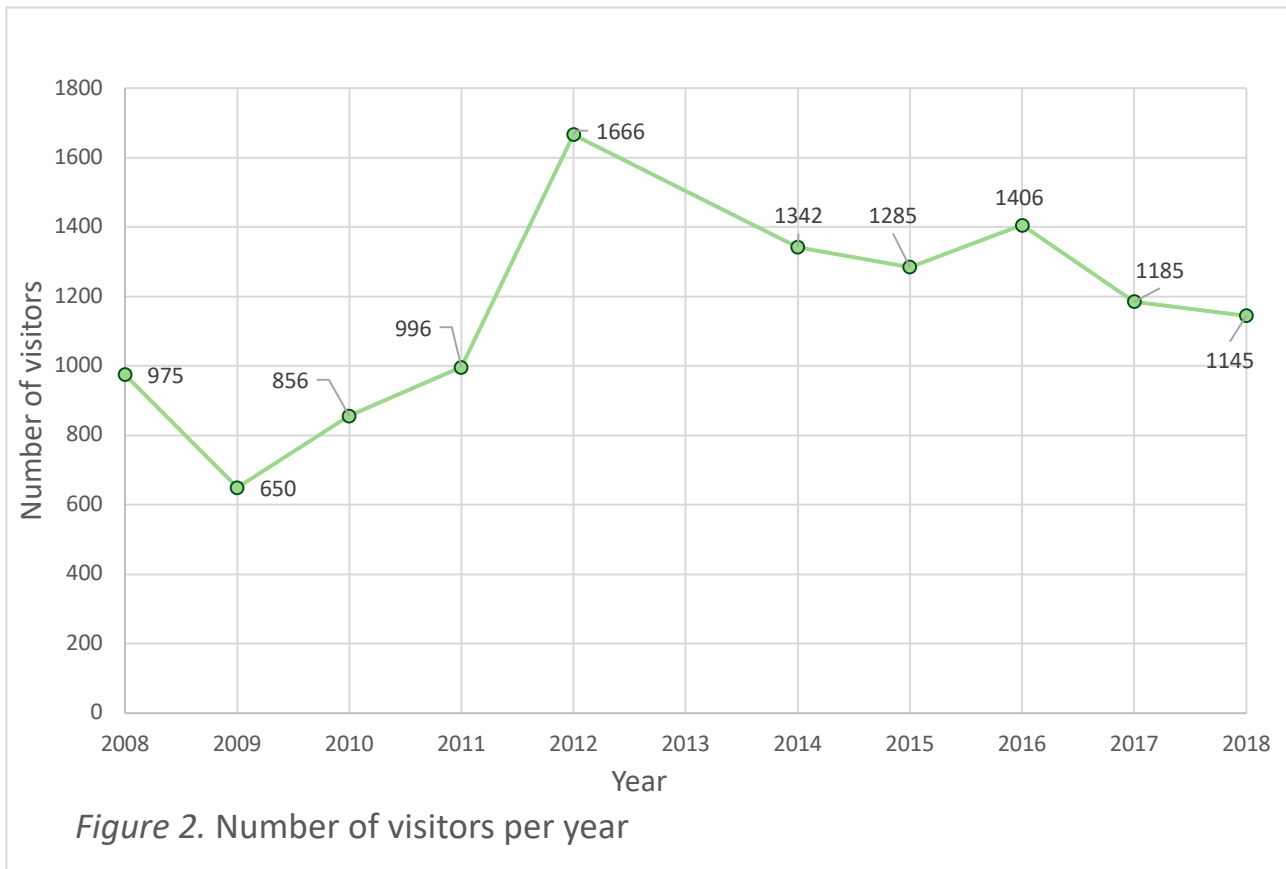
Fake fish and 'garbage' items (i.e. pop bottles, cans, and plastic bags) were placed in a kiddie pool. Guests had to 'fish' out the garbage, leaving the fish in the pool.

c) *Sidewalk chalk and bubbles*

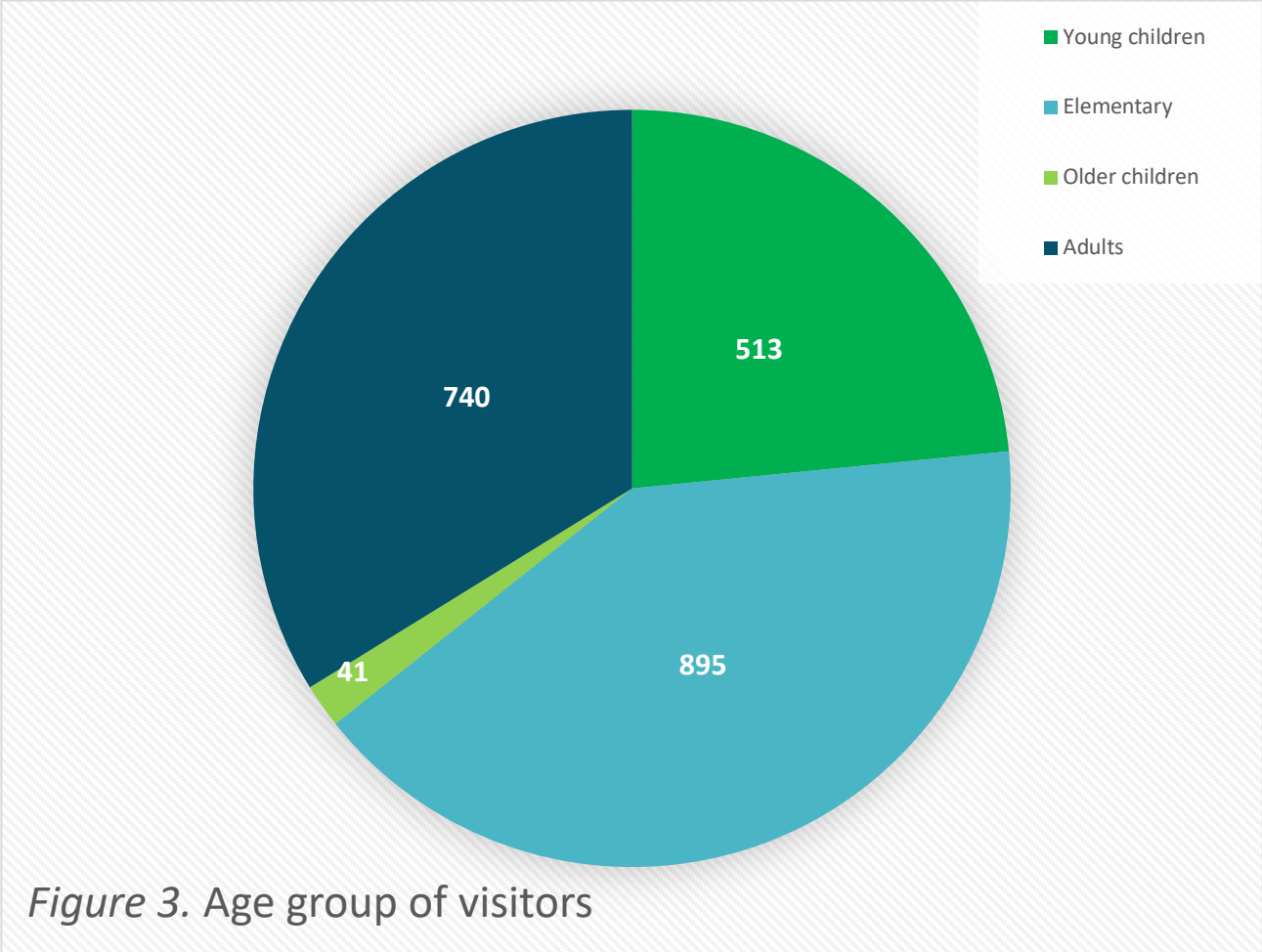
Attendance Overview:



Figure 1 shows the weekly attendance at the Nature centre. The total number of visitors at the Nature Centre this summer was 1145 and the average number of visitors per week was 143 people. Attendance reached its highest in the mid-summer, with the 4th week being the highest at 194 guests. Visitation decreased in the last 3 weeks, with the 7th week being the lowest. This was due to the smokey conditions from the wildfires in BC and Nature Centre being closed on the Friday of the 7th week.



The total number of guests decreased from last year, as seen in *Figure 2*, but this summer’s program was 1 week shorter than previous years. The attendance for the first 8 weeks of last summer was lower than the 8 weeks of this summer (1090 to 1145), so visitation slightly increased.



Elementary aged children were the most frequent visitors to the cabin, followed by adults, and younger children, respectively, as seen in *Figure 3*. Typically, multiple children were accompanied by 1 adult. Some adults visited the cabin as they were walking through the park, checking out what the Nature Centre provided. Many large groups (daycares) visited the cabin this summer, which were mainly comprised of elementary aged children.

Conclusion:

The 2018 summer program at the BLESS Nature Centre was a success. Both parents and children enjoyed coming to the cabin to learn about the week's theme and participate in the activities. Most of the guests visited the cabin routinely and it was fun get to know the families who came by each week.

Many families had visited the cabin in previous years. One of my main goals for the program was to teach guests about new topics that had not been previously explored at the Nature Centre. I used my past experiences, education, and personal interests to create a program that I was passionate about. I believe this really made the summer program successful and enjoyable for visitors.

Through executing the program, I found many activities to be successful and some that could be improved upon. I discovered within the first couple of weeks that the outdoor games were very popular, especially the clue and scavenger hunts. The clue hunts were great for all ages and were a fun way for guests to enjoy playing outside while learning at the same time. I developed/provided worksheets, crossword puzzles, and quizzes for some of the themes and found many of the kids were not too interested in them. Kids really enjoyed the crafts, colouring contest, and the games so I would suggest focusing resources on those types of activities.

I really enjoyed the summer at the Nature Centre. This program is great way for families to spend time together and a fun way for people to learn about nature. Children were eager to learn each week and participate in all the activities. Many parents said it made their summer and kids always looked forward to coming to the cabin each week.