

Children are inherently curious. They love to explore and investigate!

Capitalize on these traits to engage your child(ren) on hikes throughout the year!

Focusing on your five senses is a great way to encourage children to explore the outdoors!

Each season in Illinois has unique events that take place year after year. Use your senses to connect with the seasons, discover annual wildlife events and learn more about our local environment. There are so many nature secrets and stories waiting to be discovered by you and your family!

- Every fall, orange and black Woolly bear caterpillars can be seen crawling around on the ground looking for a place to hibernate.
- Canada geese migrate every fall and spring, often honking as they fly.
- Great Horned Owls call to mates and nest in the wintertime.
- The winter months allow you to see through the woodlands to spot deer, overwintering birds, squirrel nests made of leaves, and to follow tracks in the snow.
- Each spring Illinois woodlands burst into a carpet of colorful wildflowers.
- Many animals, like birds and frogs, “sing” in the spring to attract a mate.
- By mid-summer, male cicadas “call”, very loudly, from the trees, to attract a mate.
- On summer nights, katydids take over the noisy night shift in the trees.
- The fragrant scents from Common milkweed blossoms fills the air each summertime.

Even if you don’t see any animals on your hike, something is always happening outside in nature, waiting to be discovered.

Become a nature detective to look for these clues and unlock the secrets and stories nature has to share!

How to Be a Nature Detective:

- Carefully observe with your eyes!
- Use your nose to detect odors and scents!
- Use your hands to touch and feel!
- Closely listen for sounds with your ears!
- Taste only your own water and snack!

Each clue you find helps you to figure out a nature secret or story.

- *What wild animals live here and what are they doing?*
- *How do plants survive the winter?*
- *Why do bees and butterflies visit flowers?*



AUTUMN

Look for:

- Falling leaves
- Leaves changing colors
- Chewed nuts
- Large and small mushrooms
- Orange and black caterpillars
- Spider webs
- Busy squirrels
- Birds migrating

Smell:

- Fresh air
- Smoke from a campfire or fireplace

Feel:

- Chilly breeze
- Prickly seeds
- Fluffy seeds

Listen for:

- Crunchy leaves
- Honking geese
- Crickets chirping



WINTER

Look for:

- Leafy nests high up in the trees
- Animal tracks & scat (poop)
- Trees with no leaves
- Bright colored overwintering birds
- Trees with needle-like leaves

Smell:

- Winter air
- Pine trees

Feel:

- Cold air
- Icy cold snow
- Tree bark

Listen for:

- Woodpeckers tapping
- Wind in the trees
- Owls calling



SPRING

Look for:

- Woodland wildflowers
- Birds nesting
- Maple (helicopter) seeds
- Fluttering butterflies
- Bird feathers
- A full moon
- Migrating birds

Smell:

- Fresh air
- Fragrant flowers
- Rain

Feel:

- Warm breezes
- Fuzzy buds or leaves
- Gentle rain

Listen for:

- Birds singing
- Frogs calling
- Buzzing bees



SUMMER

Look for:

- Huge green leaves
- Bats flying at dusk
- Moths at night
- Fast flying dragonflies
- Turtles sunning on logs
- Busy ants
- Holes in leaves
- Shooting stars

Smell:

- Fresh cut grass
- Fragrant flowers
- Rain

Feel:

- Warm sunshine
- Cool shade
- Hot air

Listen for:

- Loud buzzing in the trees during the day and at night