

With hundreds of species living in NYC, the chances of encountering wildlife in the Big Apple are high. WildlifeNYC is a campaign launched by the City of New York to increase public awareness about the city's wildlife. These educational activities have been designed as part of the campaign to foster an awareness about urban wildlife and promote **coexistence**. They can be used by classroom teachers, informal and outdoor educators, scout leaders, afterschool groups, and even parents. The structure and format are flexible; facilitators can adapt them to fit their needs and location.

Working through the educational activities, students will understand that cities have wildlife as varied and diverse as the people living there. Urban wildlife education provides tools for mitigating human-wildlife conflict and promoting **coexistence**. **Coexisting** means living together peacefully in a shared space. Students are guided to make discoveries and develop solutions to real world **coexistence** scenarios. These educational activities will showcase urban wildlife's diversity, and encourage students to think critically and creatively about **coexistence**.

Learning objectives include:

- Understanding wildlife is an important and valuable part of a healthy urban environment.
- Recognizing that cities are diverse ecosystems that include people and wildlife.
- Observing how humans have a direct or indirect impact on urban wildlife.
- Investigating the impact personal choices have on urban wildlife.
- Introducing civic and community action ideas to empower older students.

After using any of these activities, please share your work! How has this activity been received by you and your students? All constructive feedback is welcome; please email us at wildlifeunit@parks.nyc.gov and include "Education" in the subject line.

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEARNING IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Be Safe

If you are new to working outdoors or will be in a new location, schedule a site visit prior to working with your students. Observe how areas are being used and where you might want to explore. Locate sites where students can explore without limitations. Select an exploration area that has landmarks which can be utilized as boundaries. Park benches, hedges, or gravel paths are a few examples.

Within these boundaries, consider the following to ensure safe student exploration:

- Plants or animals that present a risk. (poison ivy, briars, thorns, hornet nests, etc.)
- Busy streets or bike paths.
- Ponds/streams with steep, deep shorelines or areas with fast currents.
- Tricky terrain. (wet mud, uneven ground, rock outcroppings that are enticing to climb, etc.)

These areas do not need to be avoided completely. Can your group identify these concerns and explore around them? Increasing student awareness of outdoor risks is also an important life lesson.

Keep walking distance in mind. Can your group comfortably walk to and from exploration areas? Plan the length and location of your exploration to suit your students' limits and enthusiasm.

Students should be prepared and encouraged to get dirty. Allow students to clean up at the conclusion of the activity, and do a tick check. Alone or as a group, everyone should check clothing and skin for ticks. Look for dark, tear-drop shapes the size of a poppy seed or smaller. If found on clothing, brush them off. If found on skin, use tweezers to pinch the tick's head and remove. Tick checks should be routine when enjoying the outdoors, even in New York City.

Be Respectful

It is important to leave the exploration area exactly as it was found and leave no trace of your presence. Be considerate of others who use the area and respect it as the "home" of wildlife. If students overturn a rock looking for bugs, they should return it to its original spot afterwards. If students dig holes in the dirt, they should fill them back in. Students should not pick flowers or leaves, as these are food sources for wildlife. Most importantly, bring all garbage and materials back with you.

Be Curious

As the facilitator, bring a positive attitude, excitement, and curiosity. Your enthusiasm towards being outside can be contagious. Encourage students to ask questions about the places they are exploring and attempt to find answers. Use all of your senses as you explore. Most of all, have fun! Exploring and learning in a new environment should be an exciting and inspiring activity.

GUIDELINES FOR COEXISTENCE

Coexisting with wildlife in urban environments requires us to be aware of the species living among us and to alter our behavior accordingly. The following are basic guidelines for **coexisting** with urban wildlife. As the facilitator, use these guidelines to reinforce and guide student discussions.

1. Observe wildlife from a distance. Wildlife are exactly that—wild. The best way to ensure both your safety and the animal's is to keep your distance.
2. Do not feed wildlife. Wildlife can become a nuisance if people unknowingly or deliberately feed them. Feeding causes wildlife to lose their natural hunting instincts and approach humans for food.
3. Store all food and garbage in animal-proof containers. Urban wildlife are very resourceful and will find ways into unsecured trash bins and pet food containers.
4. Protect your pets. Walk dogs on a leash and keep cats inside for safety. Also make sure pets' vaccinations are up-to-date.
5. Seal potential den locations. Block access to areas of your home, garage, or outdoor shed where wildlife might make their homes.
6. When you find healthy young or baby wildlife, remember: If you care, leave it there. Just like human parents, mom and dad are usually close by and can give the best care for their young.
7. Wildlife can be seen day or night. Some nocturnal species like raccoons, coyotes, and opossums can be seen out during the day. This does not mean they are dangerous or are carrying rabies.

During the activities, keep these guidelines in mind. At times, non-coexistence solutions may be offered, such as “remove wildlife” or “take it to nature.” Discuss these type of solutions further. For example, removing wildlife may be stressful for the animal and opens the habitat for another species to enter. Would this solve the conflict, or create a new one? Study the conflict and discuss where and why it is taking place. How can wildlife be discouraged from being in the conflict area? Is there a human activity attracting urban wildlife?

Basic background information is also provided for several common urban wildlife species found in New York City. You can also visit the WildlifeNYC website for additional information on urban wildlife and **coexistence** guidelines.

EXPLORER REFLECTIONS

Set aside time after each outdoor exploration for students to reflect upon their experiences and create a nature journal. This allows students to express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences, and serves as a source for students to return to for information. Journals come in a variety of styles and sizes: written or pictorial; single sheets of paper or small booklets with multiple pages. Entries can be completely student-driven or focused by the facilitator for students to reflect on their experiences. For example: If you were a bird, where would you decide to build a nest and how? As a coyote living in this neighborhood, how would you avoid people? Journaling allows students to revisit the experience and digest what they observed.

Engage your Community

For Grades 3-12, each activity includes an extension which integrates ideas for civic engagement. Students will work together and create ways to share the information they have learned with others outside of their learning group or class. By educating their local community, students are shown that they can make a difference and create positive change. Empower your students to speak up and share their voices.