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NEWMARKET

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RaptorLife helps children get in touch with nature

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IN today's world of smart phones, tablets and video games, kids are spending less time outside interacting with nature.

'Nature deficit disorder' is a phrase coined by Richard Louv in his book 'Last Child in the Woods', meaning that human beings, especially children, are spending less time outdoors resulting in higher rates of obesity and a wide range of behavioral problems. A multitude of studies have shown that spending time in nature both improves our fitness through physical activity, and our mood by reducing stress and anxiety.

In an effort to get more kids outside and engaged with nature, IRD Duhallow's RaptorLIFE project just held its third annual nature camp. A variety of fun and educational indoor and outdoor activities were organized in which the kids had abundant opportunities to learn about wildlife and engage in practical nature conservation.

The turnout was great with nearly 30 children attending the camp. While the weather was mixed over the week, this did not curb the enthusiasm of the kids. On rainy days they engaged in arts and crafts such as creating personalized

nature journals, building bug hotels for their back-gardens, and playing nature bingo. The petting and prodding of a stuffed animal display was a favorite activity!

The outdoor activities helped kids to realize the variety of living things in their surroundings. The young wildlife enthusiasts collected insects from ponds and were very impressed after seeing all the 'monsters' close up under a microscope. The kids got to practice their wildlife trapping skills by engaging in a bug hunt and small mammal trapping using live capture traps. As a result, the kids got to see and later release a variety of small mammals such as shrews, bank voles and wood mice, and were able to determine which habitats were the most diverse by the number and variety of wildlife that live there.

The week concluded with a nature walk in Island Woods where the children constructed their own bird seed-feeders and took part in a scavenger hunt.

Hopefully, these new wildlife enthusiasts had as much fun during the week as the staff at IRD Duhallow had when teaching them. If the future generation that inherits the earth is anything like these Duhallow kids, then everything should work out a right.



The stuffed animal display (above) was a great favourite for the children who took part in IRD Duhallow's RaptorLife nature camp and (right) children who took part in the camp, with their mentors.

