

Dear Joanne Sulkoske,

I am a naturalist going on the Wild-wood Field Trip for the first time. I learned about vegetation, animals, and the food chain.

I learned about many types of vegetation. To begin with, there is black sage. It smells really good. The cowboys, working hard, sweating, and stinking all week couldn't go to dance with the girls stinking. The cowboys put black sage on themselves and they smelled really good. Furthermore, there is the prickly pear cactus. I thought the needles on the cacti were just for protection. I didn't know they were leaves! A prey animal might want to live near a big patch of cacti. If a bird of prey enters the cacti, they may never, ever leave. Other predators are too big to fit through the cacti's small, prickly holes. Finally, there is yucca. Their leaves were used for soap, rope and sewing. The yucca bloom uses a certain type of moth. In return, the moth pollinates the flowers.

The animals at Wildwood Park are very interesting. First of all, there is the turkey vulture. He looks for food that's already been killed and eats it, he's a scavenger. The turkey vulture is related to the endangered California

Condor. The turkey vulture cleans its talons by peeing on them. Then there's the rattlesnake. It's venomous and it's best to avoid them. The baby rattlesnakes are dangerous than adults. If you're bitten by a baby, it may use all its venom. Adults would rather slither away. The only thing that eats rattlesnakes are King Snakes that do live here. I also learned about the woodrat. The woodrats love shiny things. The shiny things are put in their nest and sometimes people have found 300 or 400-year old coins in their nests. The woodrat's nest has many chambers including bathrooms, living rooms, sleeping rooms and storage rooms.

If the plants and animals aren't eaten or killed they would overcrowd the earth. That's where the food chain comes in. The plants get their energy from the sun. Plants are producers. A rabbit gets its energy from a plant. It's a consumer and herbivore. A coyote may get its energy from the rabbit. It's a consumer, too. A coyote may be eaten by a mountain lion, a consumer, carnivore and at the top of the food chain, almost. When a mountain lion dies, or any animal, it's eaten by the FBI, Fungus, bacteria, and insects or invertebrae. These animals are decomposers.

Sincerely,  
LB

Leah Muger  
Teacher - Mrs. Eby

April 5, 2019

Banyan Elementary School

Dear John Noble,

As a naturalist from Armenia, there isn't as much to observe there than in California. In Wildwood, I learned much more about the environment and how there are so many connections in nature than anyone could imagine. Thank you for the hike, and I will show you what I learned.

The food chain was the most interesting subject I learned at Wildwood. All food chains have carnivores at the top, omnivores in the middle, and herbivores at the bottom. Here's an example of a food chain: grass is eaten by rabbit, rabbit dies and is found by crow, crow eats rabbit, snake kills crow, snake eats crow. I think it is very interesting that food chains include all three types of animals: carnivores, omnivores, and herbivores.

The animals in Wildwood were also very fascinating. While I was hiking, I saw an amazing bobcat skull, snake skin, and animal prints! There are so many predators, like the coyote and the rattlesnake. There are also a lot of animals that are prey, like the woodrat and the rabbit. I discovered that female woodrats get a male to help her build the rat nest, then kicks him out. I even saw a wild red-tailed hawk before I saw the rescued one! The turkey vulture, porcupine, and opossum seemed so smart. I never knew that the porcupines' skin releases ointment if they accidentally prick themselves. Animals were already one of my favorite subjects to study, but my trip to Wildwood made animals seem more advanced than I thought!

I never knew that there are so many interesting types of plants not only in the whole world, but also in Wildwood. The wild cucumber seed pods were about the size of my fist, and the Native Americans used the seeds for jewelry and marbles. Native Americans also used the yucca plant for soap and weaved it for ropes, while they used willow branches for medicine. Hummingbirds use the willows' "fluff" to line their nests. The black and purple sages' aromas smell lovely, while the bladder plant's scent makes you scrunch up your face (that's how it got its name). Since it rained so frequently over the past few months, mustard plants and many other plants that don't usually grow in Wildwood were growing everywhere. Some plants are physically harmful, like the poison oak and sometimes cactus. Though the cactus' spines are very thorny, the cactus produces a tasty fruit called the prickly pear. The only succulent I saw was the beautiful chalk dudleya, which grows out of rocks. After the Wildwood hike, botany became one of my favorite subjects.

Thank you very much for guiding me on this marvelous hike. I hope I get to visit Wildwood again, maybe to learn even more!

Sincerely,  
L.M.

March 27, 2019

*Grand Prize Winner - 2019 Writing Contest*

Isabella Steiner

Teacher - Mrs. Tetzlaff

Banyan Elementary School

Dear Tracker Rob,

Have you ever been on a hike in Wildwood Park? If you haven't I would definitely recommend it. There is a beautiful view from the mountains. Wildwood has fifteen thousand acres of animals and wildlife. There is so much vegetation and natural resources in Wildwood Park. There are so many animals to see and study at Wildwood Park. Wildwood's food web is probably the most interesting.

First, Native Americans used a plant called mugwort to cure poison oak. Mugwort was very helpful to us on our hike. Because someone had touched poison oak and we used mugwort to cure the poison oak. Native Americans used a plant called yucca to make rope, sandals, baskets, and a lot of other important things. The Native Americans used sage to add taste to their food.

Second, there are so many animals at Wildwood Park. If you keep your eyes peeled you may find a red tailed hawk. Just because there are no red tail does not mean it's the hawk you are looking for. A very interesting animal is the wood rat. The wood rat builds a huge house out of lots and lots of sticks. Most of the time their house of sticks is hidden under a tree or something big. So watch out for these amazing shelters for the tiny animals. You can also see ticks. You will know what it is the second you spot it. These animals are not pleasant at all. If you find a small animal with eight legs and it is not a spider then it's a tick. If you find one on you do not wait you want to take them off the second you notice them and make sure you do not have them longer than twenty four hours. If it's there longer than twenty four hours they will start sucking your blood and could give you something called Lyme disease. Lyme disease is caused when a tick has a bacteria called Borrelia. Borrelia gives you a rash and makes you feel like you have the flu.

Last, there are so many amazing food chains at Wildwood Park. One of the food chains is rats are eaten by snakes, and snakes are eaten by birds. Another one would be opossums would eat ticks, then foxes, bobcats, and coyotes eat opossums. The third one would be rattlesnakes eat mice, king snakes eat rattlesnakes then a red tailed hawk eats a king snake. The last one is a bush rabbits eat grass, snakes eat a Bush Rabbits, and hawks eat snakes. This is only three of all the amazing food chains at Wildwood Park.

All and all this is why you should visit Wildwood Park. When you are on your hike keep an eye out for the mugwort, wild cucumber, and yucca. I hope you pick Wildwood park for your next hiking destination.

Sincerely,

I.S.

*Grand Prize Winner – 2019 Writing Contest*

Otto Gasowski

Teacher - Mrs. McCarthy

Westlake Elementary School

Dear Doak,

On Wednesday, March 27, 2019 my class and I took a field trip to the Wildwood Open Space. This Chaparral ecosystem is a Mediterranean climate with lots of plants and animals that depend on each other. Only 5% of the world is like this. Fires are important because some plants only spread by catching on fire. The Wildwood Open space is able to withstand fires. I felt really special going on the hike.

Throughout the hike, I learned about a lot of very cool plants. For example one of my favorites was the sage. Cowboys used it to smell good without good without taking a bath. They called it cowboy cologne. Another cool plant was the yucca plant. It is used for soap, sandals, baskets, rope, and shelters. Also, when the temp changes the color of the yucca plant changes. A very interesting plant is Chalk dudleya. It can grow in rocks that are in the sun. This plant has a chalk like substance that can keep it from getting sunburned. Also the insides of the plant are used to heal cuts. The last plant is one you want to stay away is poison oak. It would make you very itchy and that's no fun. A saying is "leaves of 3 let it be." Poison oak has berries that birds love to eat. It grows in a cool temp in shady places. In the summer the leaves are green and in the fall they are red.

Also, in the hike we learned about the animals that live basically in my backyard. One I really liked was the snake. I really liked the snake because it is cold blooded and they like the sun. If you leave them alone they will leave you alone. One bug that I hate is the tick. The tick will latch on to an animal and suck its blood until it's the size of a watermelon seed. There are also 2 big cats, the bobcat and the mountain lion. They are very different in size, color and diet. The mountain lion is bigger than the bobcat. The bobcat eats smaller things like rabbits and mountain lions eat stuff like deer. Another animal is an owl. There are a couple types of owls, the horned owl, swooping owl, burrow owl, etc. Also, The wood rat nest. There are many rooms in the nest including bedrooms and bathrooms. The males live in trees and females in nests.

Lastly, I had really fun at the workshops, but my favorite was the ranger one. They showed us cool tools like axe, heavy duty rake, gas powered wheelbarrow, chainsaw, and a wench. Someone in our class got to put on some gear and hold a chainsaw. Also I got to pull my friend Jackson (AKA rock) on a piece of wood with a wench. They told us how they took down homeless camps, maintenance on the trails, and keeping us safe.

On the hike I had a really great time and I want to go on it with my friends and family. I felt really special going on the trail and that this type of place is very rare. That's one of the coolest things ever.

Sincerely, OG

3/27/19

*Grand Prize Winner - 2019 Writing Contest*

Auden Chan

Teacher - Mrs. Sublette

Westlake Hills Elementary School

Dear John,

Thank you very much for teaching me about the distinct varieties of plants and animals in this environment, and guiding me through the one mile hike. To this day, I will never forget this adventurous field trip around Wildwood, and the remarkable sights I saw.

The day I heard that fourth grade was going to Wildwood I got really excited. Although I have been to Wildwood many times with my family, I enjoyed the hike and I learned countless fascinating facts. For example, I learned about two different flowers called a Lupin and Parry's Phacelia. Parry's Phacelia is a blue and purple color. A Lupin can be many colors such as pink, purple, blue, red, white, and yellow. To add to that, I learned that mugwort grows near poison oak and mugwort helps prevent poison oak. Along the way down the trail, we saw various plants such as: buckwheat; black sage; and black mustard. We saw a lot of black mustard down the trail because, you explained that the Europeans planted the black mustard seeds, so when the Europeans came back they would follow the trail of yellow on their way back. Also, I did not know that black sage was called "Cowboy Cologne". Further on, I learned that there was such thing as a wild cucumber, but you can not eat it because a wild cucumber is poisonous. Also wild cucumbers have numerous seed chambers and this fascinated me.

After taking the breathtaking one mile hike we did rotations. First, my group and I did a rotation about safety in parks or in any life preserving area. What we learned about was that if you ever get lost stay where you are so then the park rangers can find you with a search dog and always stay on the trail. Later we learned about animals that live in California's ecosystems. We learned about Gomez the turkey vulture; Kalessi the red tailed hawk; Emma the opossum; Pand Hazel the squirrel. I learned that turkey vultures urinate on their feet to clean their feet and they throw up if they just ate and if a predator is coming ate them so the turkey vulture is lighter and is able to fly faster. Another, fact about the turkey vulture is that you will see a white "v" on the bottom of the bird. Also, I learned that opossums can grow over 1 foot because I only saw one opossum which was only 5 inches.

After, we learned about animals we learned what not to do in a recreational area. For example,; do not litter; do not let your dog off the leash; do not eat random plants; do not capture random animals; do not speed on your bike down a trail; do not listen to music while biking; do not pet a pedestrian's horse without asking. Near the end of the day, we ate lunch at a park.

Sadly, when the day was over we had to leave Wildwood and go home.

Forever I shall treasure this memory and share it with my loved ones.

Sincerely,  
A.N.Z.C