

Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant #03-001W  
Environmental Education Programs and Workshops  
Illinois Audubon Society's Adams Wildlife Sanctuary

I'll admit it -- I have a good time helping children discover what's underneath a rotting log. I love to hear them squeal when they see the slugs, ants, and pillbugs. The oohs and ahs when children see prairie grass that's eight feet tall, the interest they show in galls on the goldenrod stems, and the certainty with which they tell me that the holes in leaves were made by "very hungry caterpillars" -- it all makes environmental education rewarding.

Just minutes from downtown Springfield, Adams Wildlife Sanctuary is surrounded by businesses, parking lots, and residential areas. The children living in this part of town often do not have many chances to discover nature. For many, "nature" consists of television programs about ferocious animals. Children routinely ask if there are bears or alligators in the woods. A little boy asked me if there are any carnivores at the Sanctuary. Of course there are! Not the tigers he imagined, but robins, an owl, and spiders are meat-eaters.

Children who don't have the chance to discover nature have very little reason to care about the environment. Imagine a child watching a red-bellied woodpecker peer out of its nest and fly away, returning a few minutes later with food for its young. Or finding raccoon tracks in the mud. Or looking high in the trees trying to spot squirrel's nests. Teachers report that their students talk about the things they've seen at the Sanctuary for days. For many of these children, their visit to the Sanctuary is the first time they've been in a woods.

Programs include discovery hikes (you never know what we'll discover), tree identification, insect safaris, bird identification, and owl pellet dissection. Two nature photography workshops were held this year, with members of the Springfield 35 Camera Club working with students. Programs are adapted for people with special needs. Campers in wheelchairs from the United Cerebral Palsy day camp weren't able to travel far along the trail, but they were thrilled when butterflies flitted around them. One even landed on a camper's hand! Trail guides in Braille are available for visually impaired visitors.

Programs off-site include participation in Earth Stewardship Day at the State Fair Grounds. Over 1,100 fourth graders from Sangamon County learned about the environment from a wide variety of presenters. Visits to schools may involve dissecting owl pellets (and then trying to reconstruct the skeleton of the owl's dinner), a slide presentation on backyard birds, or building our own "bird's nests" using yarn and grass. (Remember, birds use their feet and beaks to build.)

In the past year nearly 1,500 students participated in Adams Sanctuary programs. The Springfield school district has cut field trips due to lack of funds. This has resulted in fewer classes visiting the Sanctuary. Thanks to a grant from the Rotary Club of Springfield South, we were able to provide "bus scholarships" for ten classes.

I've been asked if I think that the environmental education programs offered by Adams Wildlife Sanctuary "make a difference". It depends on the definition of "make a difference". Will one visit turn thirty students into little Aldo Leopolds? Probably not. Will at least some of the children have a new appreciation of the environment? Yes. Perhaps they'll stop a friend who's about to knock a bird's nest out of a tree. Perhaps they'll remember that bats eat mosquitoes and persuade their parents to put up a bat box. Perhaps they'll want to learn more about our native prairie plants. Perhaps - who knows?

Thank you to the Wildlife Preservation Fund for helping to keep this urban nature center operating.

**PROJECT BUDGET -- #03-0001W**

	Estimated	Actual
Labor	\$7,500.00	\$7,500.00
Commodities	\$500.00	\$495.70
Travel and bus scholarships	<u>\$200.00</u>	<u>\$249.43</u>
	\$8,200.00	\$8,245.13
Funds provided by Adams	\$7,200.00	\$7,245.13
Funds provided by IWPF	\$1,000.00	\$999.70

**Funds provided by IWPF:**

Labor	\$504.00
Commodities	<u>\$495.70</u>
	\$999.70

Number of children served by Adams Wildlife Sanctuary programs -- 1,500

Number of classes/groups -- 61

Number of off-site programs -- 16

Number of children benefitting from bus scholarships -- 216

