Amazing Animals

Activity 1: Bio-facts, Matching game and Sand Trap

1) Ask students what types of animals they might find here at Schmidt. Discuss clues animals leave behind when they have been in the area (scat, tracks, possibly bent or eaten branches/plants).

2) Show students bio-facts:

**Eastern Box Turtle Shell**: Discuss how the turtle can close up its entire shell to protect from predators. Show how the turtle’s backbone is built into its shell (underside) and have the students think about whether a turtle would survive without its shell (NO! It’s attached to its body). Can also mention that as the turtle grows, so does its shell and that its shell will actually peel/lose layers.

**Snake Skins**: DO NOT LET STUDENTS TOUCH THESE! They are incredibly delicate and will fall to pieces. Skins belong to a pair of black rat snakes that live behind our office building. As the snake grows it sheds its skin. Point out that snake is covered in scales and is dry and smooth. If you look at the skin you can tell which side is the top of the snake as the scales are smaller. The bottom of the snake has larger scales which help it to grip the ground, rocks, etc. as it moves.

**Snake skeleton**: Snakes are vertebrate. They have a backbone just like us. This is a non-venomous snake. How do we know? It does not have fangs in its skull like a venomous snake. What is the difference between poisonous and venomous? A poisonous animal produces poison/toxins through its skin. You have to ingest/eat the poisonous animal or poison to become ill (another good example is poisonous mushrooms or berries). A venomous animal produces a toxin that it must inject through a bit or sting (examples include venomous snakes, spiders and bees).

**Animal Skulls**: Allow students to guide the discussion. Can discuss the teeth of each skull and the differences: herbivores (plant eaters) have flat, smooth back teeth for chewing plants vs. omnivores (plants and meat) have a mixture of teeth and carnivores (meat eaters) have sharp canines/front teeth and razor-like back teeth for cutting through meat.
3) Next show students the cards of some of the animals they might see here. Play the matching game, asking students to work as whole group to match track to the animal (alternatively, cards can be handed out to each student and they can try and the person that has their matching animal track/animal card).

4) Lastly, have students look for animal tracks in the sand trap area. Use the informational sign and ID cards to identify the tracks. *Be sure to tell students not to walk in the sand.

Activity 2: Rabbit and Fox Tag

1) Explain that animals not only have different tracks they make because of their foot shape but they also make different patterns because they move differently.

2) Ask students for examples of some ways animals move (rabbits hop, foxes trot, snakes slither, etc.). Call on students to demonstrate how different animals move.

3) Play the rabbit/fox tag game:
Pick two students to be a fox and have everyone else be rabbits. Explain that hula hoops (previously laid out in the field) represent the rabbits’ home or “burrow”. Tell rabbits they must hop away from the foxes and find safety in their burrow. Ask a student to demonstrate what this would look like. Tell them there can only be two rabbits in one burrow and that they can only stay there for 5 seconds at most (they must count to 5 via “1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi…”). Tell the foxes they can only trot to catch the rabbits (Demonstrate trotting around on tip-toes with hands out in front). Explain that once a rabbit is tagged they must freeze and they become a tree. The game continues until all the rabbits have become trees. If there is additional time you may pick new students to be the fox.

Activity 3: Look for animals/animal signs

If there is remaining time students may go on a short walk and look for evidence of animals in the forest and in the field. Wet and muddy areas are the best places to look for animal tracks while the open fields are a good place to look for scat (particularly deer scat). If students are quiet they may come across actual animals.