

ABSTRACT

What we leave behind us will be placed into the care of the next generation; our land will be put in their trust. My project was based on the needs of the children. There is concern in Connecticut that the youths are spending more time online than outdoors. The knowledge of conservation is shrinking among the younger generation, and to ensure conservation of our natural resources and our children's health we must teach them. The Skiff Mountain Nature Safari Trail exposes kids to nature in a fun and creative way. It teaches them about the organisms that live near them and how to coexist with these species. The trail also connects families with the local Land Trust, and it reinforces the fact that humans play a major role in preserving and managing biodiversity within their own local communities. A 0.8 mile trail suitable for children was created on the Skiff Mountain Preserve in Kent, Connecticut. Using ArcGIS and Google Earth, trail maps were created to help guide families through the trail. The trail features the organisms that have been documented on the property. Recognizing that people do not always see these animals every time they go on a walk, cartoon animals were cut out and painted onto wood and placed around the trail. This, accompanied with informative signs, gave the children a chance to see and learn about the animals on the property. Becoming familiar with the images of the animals, children will be able to identify the real organism on the trail or even in their own backyard. By making this trail I learned how hard it was to create a legacy. To make an entire system based on education and my own research involved sacrifice and taught me self-discipline. Taking time out of my hectic schedule, especially my free time was not always easy or fun but with help from my wonderful teacher, advisor, and Kent Land Trust Board Member, Laurie Doss, we were successful.

INTRODUCTION

The Kent Land Trust acquired the Skiff Mountain Preserve to prevent it from becoming a housing development in 2002. Since then Marvelwood School students have primarily used this property for scientific research projects primarily focusing on birds or amphibians. "I noticed a lot of people who would try and join us to help us with our bird banding projects were having trouble finding their way to our sites," Laurie Doss, science department chair. The idea for the UCONN NRC Academy project was to develop a formal trail system to assist volunteer researchers and more importantly expand access to community members of all ages in order to enhance their natural experience of the property. To better educate the public about the incredible biodiversity on the property, we must begin with the children.

Too many children today are plugged in, staying inside, with no exercise and limited access to nature. It is important to introduce conservation to young kids in a fun and friendly way. A children's trail is an ideal way to do this, with a nature treasure/ safari hunt. The Skiff Mountain's Children's Trail was created to get the younger generation interested in the outside world, and educated on not only species, but of steps toward conservation. A series of cartoon characters based on species found on the property as well as direct and indirect evidence of these animals is used around the trail.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

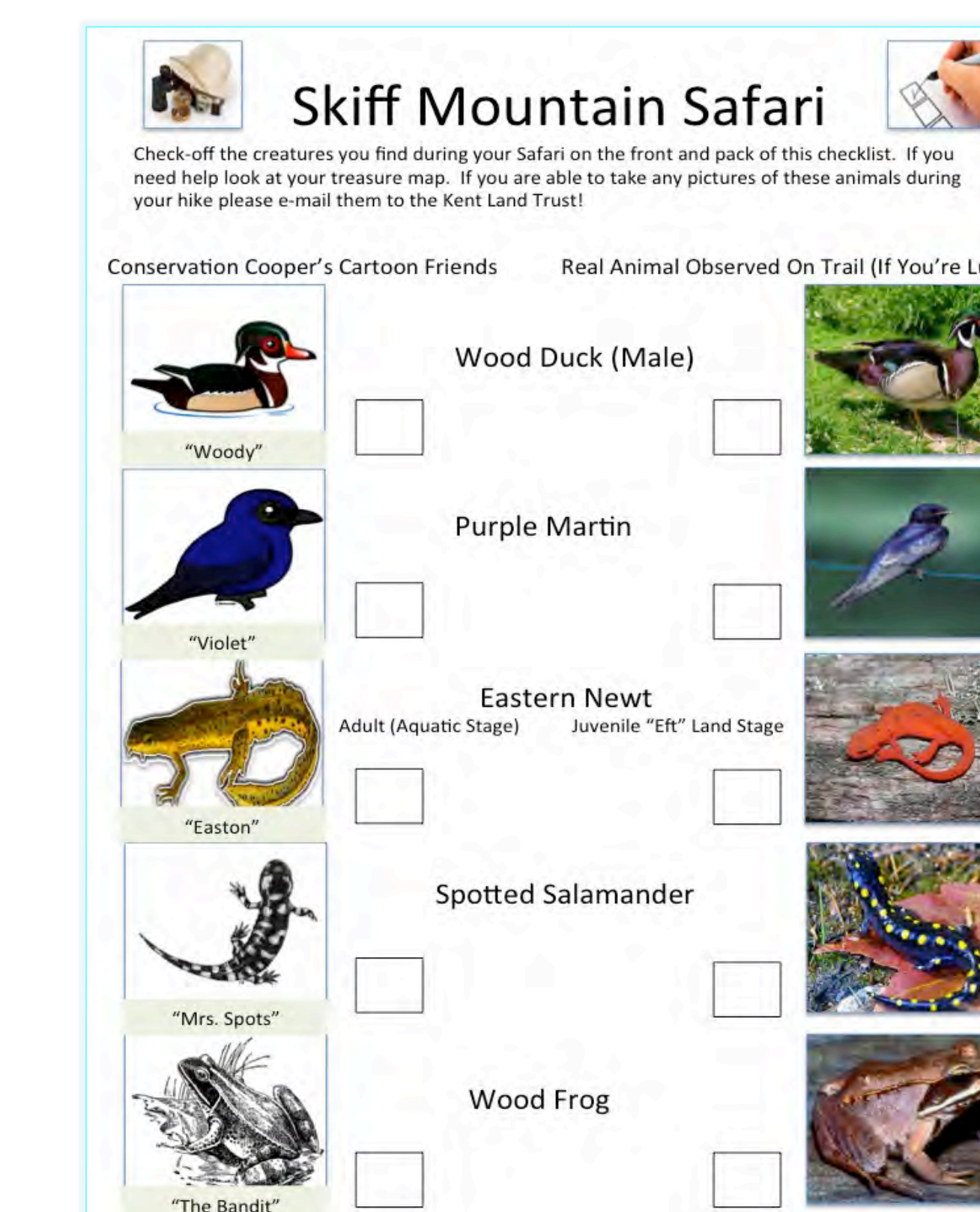
This project was conducted on Kent Land Trust's Skiff Mountain Preserve, near Marvelwood School, in Kent, Connecticut. The 250± acre property harbors both central hardwood and transitional second growth forests as well as early successional and wetland areas which allows tremendous biodiversity on the property. Armed with a notebook and pen, Garmin GPS unit, a camera, and a hiking stick, we started to create the foundation of a children's trail. To do this, we had to read several handouts on trail signage guidelines, trail building and maintenance. We also had to read the property's Habitat Management Plan. Prior to our start on the trail, we had to review the habitat management for the site, and review inventories of the wildlife found on the property by the Marvelwood School. We had to create trail maps using ArcGIS, ArcGIS Online and Google Earth. We called in professional support from an alumni of Marvelwood, Laurie Pelech, who specializes in the use of GIS. Laurie came to campus to assist us with map making, and gave tutorials with respect to our map design.

Using Garmin GPS map 60CSx units we mapped out several potential trails, making sure it was within the boundaries of the Land Trust properties. We used ArcGIS Online to make the maps. Once we were assured the GPS trails were within the property boundary, we temporarily marked the trail with orange flagging tape. Next we identified waypoints for "Wildlife Treasure Stations", these locations were used to erect interpretive signage and cartoon critters geared to enhance the understanding of wildlife found on the property for young children between the ages 5-10 years old. We utilized students from our community service program, UCONN NRCA staff, and adults from the Kent Land Trust to help clear and mark the trails.

The children's trail was marked using standard guidelines common to hiking trails around the country. This consisted of rectangular blazes painted six inches in height and two inches in width painted on trees larger than three inches in diameter. Blazes on trees were also set five feet high on a tree to be easily visible at the average eye level. To help children learn to follow trails properly, double blazes were used when needed to indicate caution and/or a major turn. We also used distance markers to indicate how far the hiker has gone on the trail, placed each quarter mile. Where trails intersect, wood signs are placed utilizing traditional signage protocol. A kiosk was built to put at the trail head to give specific information about the trail, trail etiquette, and safety information. A "kid friendly" Safari checklist was created so that children could search for wildlife cartoon characters in order to learn to recognize real organisms they might see on the trail.











RESULTS

We have high hopes for the children's trail. While the trail will not be formally finished until May, the end result will be a trail that teaches. It will give families a chance to introduce their children to the environment in a fun and friendly way, and plant the idea of conservation. Skiff Mountain will be utilized for recreational purposes especially now that a formal trail system exists. The usage of this area will give the general public a new appreciation and knowledge of global and local biodiversity. Hopefully the people will be supportive of the need to manage habitat for the benefit of different species. The trail will become a legacy, and will educate people for many years to come.



Skiff Mountain Safari

Check off the creatures you find during your safari on the front and back of this checklist. If you need help look at your treasure map. If you are able to take any pictures of these animals during your hike please e-mail them to the Kent Land Trust!

Conservation Cooper's Cartoon Friends	Real Animal Observed On Trail (If You're Lucky)
 "Woody" <input type="checkbox"/>	 Wood Duck (Male) <input type="checkbox"/>
 "Violet" <input type="checkbox"/>	 Purple Martin <input type="checkbox"/>
 "Easton" <input type="checkbox"/>	 Eastern Newt Adult (Aquatic Stage) Juvenile "ET" Land Stage <input type="checkbox"/>
 "Mrs. Spots" <input type="checkbox"/>	 Spotted Salamander <input type="checkbox"/>
 "The Bandit" <input type="checkbox"/>	 Wood Frog <input type="checkbox"/>



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, providing a trail system based on actual scientific research on the property for the general public, especially the children functions to:

- ❖ Address a need within the local community to introduce children to nature in a fun and exciting way.
- ❖ Increase species recognition, knowledge and habitat awareness for different organisms which that can be passed down from generation to generation to ensure a safer future for the planet.

With focus and tremendous effort, this project came together and was definitely worth the work. More importantly it is helping to plant the seeds of conservation in individuals so that they will want to protect and manage nature for the future, perhaps when it is needed most.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES

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