CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

SUMMER IDEAS FOR YOUR FAMILY

2025

Care for Our Home

We have only this planet, this Earth, which we share with countless other members of our own species, Homo sapiens, though we also carry forward genetic inheritance from other hominids long gone from our forests and mountains - Homo neanderthal and Homo denisova. It took all of human history up to 1800 to reach a population of 1 billion. In 1970 there were 4 billion and now there are over 8 billion.

We share our earth with billions of other life forms – everything from mold, fungi, viruses, to reptiles, birds, and insects to animals, with which we share lots of DNA. We need to get away from our computers and smart phones in order to meet our relatives, competitors and friends waiting outside our front door.

We hope that you will find something in these pages that interests you, that you will want to get out and experience further and that in turn will encourage you to care for our common home so that all life can thrive together.

Don’t Swat that Fly…

Your nose or ears may be the perfect resting place after a flight that may be more kilometers long than you will fly in your whole life! How can that be? Well, it is a matter of migration. You know that many birds travel long distances in the spring and the fall to get to better feeding grounds or breeding grounds. You may know that caribou also travel across Arctic lands to get to better feeding areas for the summer season. But it probably comes as a surprise that many species of flies also travel some thousands of kilometers, a journey often not completed by a single individual fly, but by several generations of a fly’s “family.”

We don’t tend to notice flies migrating – they are just not as noticeable as large insects like locusts. In their journeys, they perform many useful tasks, pollinating plants, helping to clean up the world by attacking dead carrion, eating pests like aphids, but also carrying diseases like malaria.

Scientists have found evidence of migration by some 590 fly species, mostly hover flies, but also including mosquitoes, midges and houseflies. How do they figure out that a fly has come from some faraway place? They check for pollen grains on the bodies, particularly the heads, of flies. Estimating from this tiny evidence, it is suggested that two species of hoverflies carry up to 8 billion grains of pollen over the English Channel from southern England to the rest of Europe in the spring and up to 19 billion grains back in the fall.

They have found evidence of flies travelling across deserts, oceans, in every continent of the world except Antarctica. How fast can you run? Some hoverflies have been recorded travelling at 40 kilometers an hour, sometimes with the help of following winds – that is almost as fast as some birds. How do you find your way across town? Some flies have been found that use the sun as a guide to direction – truly amazing when you think of how small they are and lacking a brain the size of yours.

Besides helping the spread and health of plants by cross-pollination, flies can help get rid of some very smelly stuff. It is reckoned that fifty houseflies can lay enough eggs on pig poop that, when the eggs hatch as larvae (like small caterpillars), they

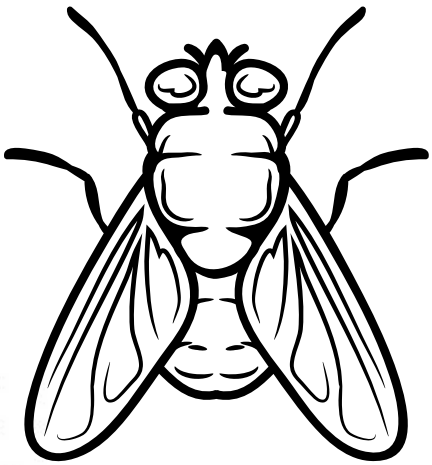
will change half a metric ton of poop into compost to improve the soil for growing plants, like wheat for making bread.

How much food do you eat in a year? If two hoverflies arrive in the spring in England at the end of their migration, the larvae from their eggs are estimated to eat as many as 10 trillion aphids in the year following, aphids which attack our plants. 10 trillion has twelve zeros – 10,000,000,000,000 aphids – that is a lot of eating for which we can thank flies!

In this world, there is usually a downside to everything. The downside to the amazing travels of flies across continents and oceans is that perhaps a sixth of migratory flies are thought to carry diseases to humans. For example, mosquitoes carry a virus for dengue fever or malaria, which can kill thousands of people each year, despite advances in treatment.

We hear a lot on television and other media about how life is becoming very difficult for our fellow creatures because we humans are spreading in large cities, changing the landscape, destroying wetlands, changing agricultural practices like intensive use of pesticides, and so one. Insects that migrate are also affected by these environmental changes. For example, in one area of Germany scientists have recorded a 97% decline in migratory hoverflies in one area – that is a lot of useful help for humans almost eliminated.

So don't swat that fly. It could be the most helpful creature you meet today. It certainly is one of the most helpful creatures you will meet.



Thanks to Anthropocene Magazine Weekly Science Dispatch of April 10/25 for the above information.

Create a Butterfly Puddle

All creatures, insects, birds, animals, including you, need water to survive. There is a general rule of thumb for human survival:

You can survive -

3 minutes without air, 3 days without water, 3 weeks without food

Of course, this depends on what you are doing, what shape you are in, and the temperature around you. But, in a world of growing summer temperatures, we need to be more aware of the water needs of God's other creatures.

It is really helpful to have some water available in your yard for insects and birds. To encourage butterflies to visit your yard and to help them with some nutrients try the following project:

You will need a flat, fairly shallow container with a rim, like a plastic pot saucer which is waterproof so it doesn't run dry by leaking out water, some sand and some soil or manure or salt.

1. Fill the container with sand.

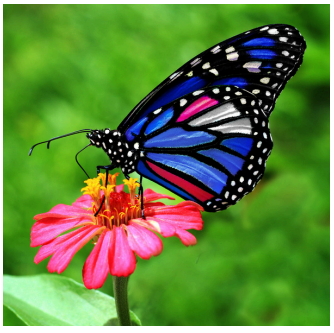
2. Because butterflies are also looking for nutrients, mix into the sand a little soil, or manure or a little salt.

3. Smooth out the sand mixture and press down a dip in the centre for your water.

4. Put water in the dip and put the dish somewhere near flowers in your yard. Replace the water as it dries out.

You can add also help butterflies by putting several flat dark stones near your puddle – this gives butterflies a place to sit, dry their wings if needed, and warm up for flying. It's the butterfly equivalent of a beach towel and a chaise longue by the pool!

Thanks to KidsGardening.org for the above idea.



Be a Fossil Hunter

What is a fossil? It is like a clue left at the scene of a crime! It could be the stone remains of the body of some sea creature that lived 500 million years ago when a sea covered where you live today; it could be an imprint of a plant that grew in the warm shallow water, or some trace of activity left in old mud turned to stone

Depending on the rocks where you live, you can find one of the following:

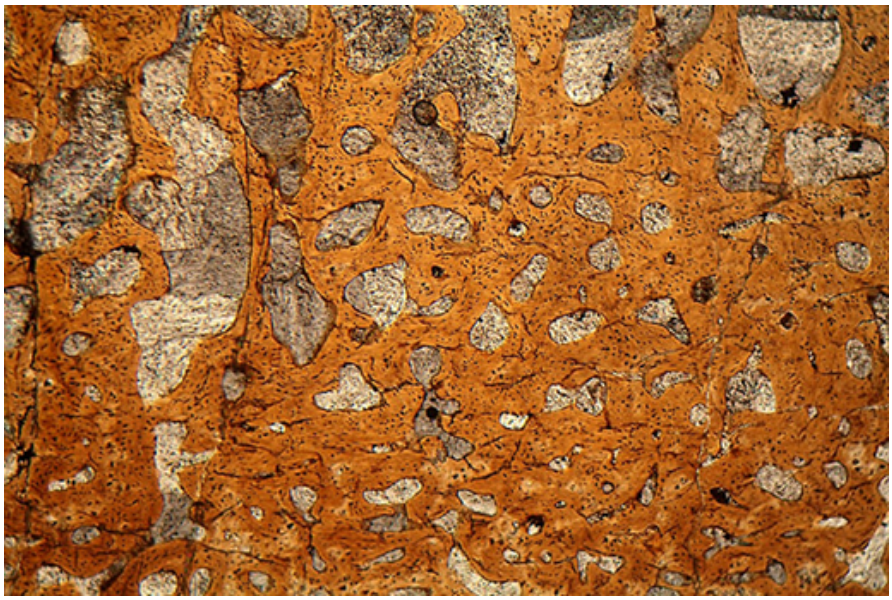
Body fossils – actual remains of bodies – bones, teeth, shells, leaves and petrified wood

Casts and molds fossils – the actual bodies have disappeared by the hole created by that creature's body is filled with other minerals leaving an impression in the stone.

Carbon fossils – thin dark imprints of things like leaves on rocks

Trace fossils – clues that tell you what happened at the spot – footprints, burrows, nests, coprolites (poop), and gastroliths (stones swallowed by animals to help digestion, like what modern birds have in their crops)

Molecular fossils - you won't see this because it is a kind of trace in the rocks left by the chemical makeup of an organism that lets scientists know what was there and how things lived



Here is a photograph of some different kinds of fossils:

A is a coral piece found at Rock Glen

B is a pebble from the beach at Pinery Provincial Park – the arrow points to a small creature still embedded in the rock

C is a piece of petrified wood (don't remember now where I found it – always make a note of where and when you found your fossil treasures)

D is a carbon print of a leaf from northern B.C.

E is a pebble from Pinery showing various sea creatures

F is a cross section of plant (maybe coral) showing the various clustered cells from Lake Huron

G includes two body casts of brachiopods and a body cast (the dark shiny one) where all that remains is a mineral cast of the brachiopod with very faint body lines that are hard to see in a photograph, from a bend in the Ausable River.

If you look at #C, you might notice that it looks wet. Often it is hard to see fossils when they are dry. So, you might want to paint your fossils with shellac on the side you want to display so that they will always look wet and reveal your special finds.

We are very lucky to live in an area where there are many fossils just waiting for you to notice them. They may be in rocks in the area where you live, your school grounds, or even in the stones used to build your church.

So, if you want to find a Paleozoic fossil, look for large grey rocks which may well contain the remains of ancient sea life. If you are lucky enough to visit Lake Huron this summer you can find fossils in beach pebbles lying there in the water on the sand. But remember the Rules of Fossil Hunting:

1. Look for fossils ONLY where you have permission to hunt. So, at the Rock Glen Conservation Area, you can look for fossils; at Hungry Hollow quarries, there are "No trespassing" signs and only members of certain mineral clubs are allowed to collect fossils on organized trips. On land that is privately owned, you will need the landowner's permission.

2. NEVER dig for fossils – that is the job of scientists because digging around by untrained folks may destroy valuable scientific evidence.

3. Take only ONE fossil if permission is posted to take a fossil home – that way others can also enjoy the fossil detective experience.

Where are places where you can see fossils close to London?

Just down Oxford Street heading west out of town towards Komoka you can stop at Kilworth United Church. This is the second oldest church still used in London. It is built of local granite field stone and "Wishing Well Rock" which is a porous limestone in which you find fossils.

Check out the four corners of the building in particular to see fossils in the stone. On the front wall of the church, you can find the imprint of ancient beech tree leaves, fossil sticks and frogs! Of course, NO prying fossils out of the walls!!! Just record what you find with your camera or smartphone.

One of the best places out of town but still an easy drive away is the Rock Glen Conservation area near Arkona, slightly northwest of London.

There you can have a picnic under the trees and then go down on a series of stairs and trail past a beautiful waterfall to the Ausable River. The river makes a 90-degree bend and the sand where it bends is a great place to find brachiopods and coral fossils. Remember, if you want to take home a specimen, take only one. Then you have to climb back up the stairs to the museum at the top in the park area where you can see examples of fossils gathered in the area with descriptions and identification. If you ever find a fossil you can't identify, with your parents' permission, you can contact the Earth Sciences Museum at the University of Waterloo either by email at earthmuseum@waterloo.ca or on X @EarthSciMuseum or on Instagram @uwearthmuseum with a photograph of your fossil and a note of where you find it. The curator at the museum or one of his staff will try to help you.

Another good place to see lots of small fossils is in beach pebbles along the shore of Lake Huron. When you are tired of playing in the water at Pinery Provincial Park and it's not time yet for a trip to get a super-sized icecream at the park's shopping centre, try just wading along in the shallow water at the beach, and you will see dozens of tiny sea creatures that were alive 450 million years ago.

Further away from London there are multiple sites along Lake Huron and Georgian Bay like at Craigleith and Southampton where you can find more different kinds of sea-living fossils. Check out these places on the Internet to see what is available, what the rules are about looking for fossils, if you are planning to spend some summer-time up in that area.
Happy fossil hunting!

Really Interesting Places to Visit

One of the best things to do in the summer is NOTHING! Just unscheduled time outside in the sunshine with the wind, the sound of birds, the smells of things growing. No classes, competitions, timetables or assignments.
BUT...

There are some really interesting places to visit with your family. Here are a few starting with the closest:

The Museum of Ontario Archaeology just off Wonderland Road, north.

Check out its website at https://archaeologymuseum.ca for details on what you can explore there and summer camp information (really neat stuff including simulated digs and artifact exploration.) In July and August, you can explore life in the Great Lakes region, the natural habitat and the human occupation. The museum site is next to the Lawson archaeological site dating from the 1500s.
It is open Monday through Saturday 10-4.

Fanshawe Conservation Area in the northeast end of London.

You can camp, fish, hike, bike, and canoe there. Check out its website at https://thamesriver.on.ca for information on fees and special nature programs for kids. There is a pioneer village situated in the area, a living history experience, with separate entry fees to explore with daily demonstrations of pioneer skills like weaving and growing food. Check out https://fanshawepioneervillage.ca for details of summer programmes and a map.

Ska-Nah-Doht Village just outside London on Longwoods Road

This is a reconstruction of a Haudenosaunee village of 1000 years ago. There is a great downloadable guide to what you can see and do with details of Indigenous life on the website https://lowerthames-conservation.on.ca/conservation-lands/ska-nah-doht-longwoods.
In the summertime, it is open from 9-sunset and entry costs only a parking pass of $5 to the Conservation area.

Kustermans Adventure Farm a little further away near Mount Brydges

All kinds of fun from a corn maze to a zipline to up-close encounters with farm animals and a chance to pick strawberries, blueberries, raspberries for your family dinner.

Check out their website at https://kustermans.ca for details on events, entry costs and prices of fruit to be picked in season.

Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory just north of Highway 401 on Highway 31.

Quite a bit longer a drive but, if you like butterflies from different places in the world like Costa Rica and the Philippines, would like to see them hatch and learn about butterfly farmers creating a sustainable industry, then this is the place for you.

Your family needs to book tickets online at https://cambridgebutterfly.com and they are good for a specific time only because this is so popular an attraction. So, planning ahead of time is essential.

There is much more to experience and enjoy outdoors in our area – just input as subjects on your computer or smartphone what you are interested in for summer activities and you will see a huge choice for you and your family. Have a super summer!

Who Eats What?

Did you ever stop to think about all the different kinds of food you eat? Humans are called omnivores, that is, they eat just about everything – plants, other animals, birds, even, in some places, insects and worms.

However, most other creatures like one kind of food in particular. Can you match the animal below with its favorite food, perhaps its only food?

Draw a line between the animal and its chosen food.

Beaver	krill
Blue Whale	eggs
Butterfly	leaves, seeds
Coyote	blood
Deer	aspen bark and leaves
Flea	fruit, fish
Giant panda	bamboo
Goose	hay, oats
Horse	eucalyptus leaves
Koala	rabbits, mice, frogs
Penguin	fish
Racoon	nectar
Spider	grass, seeds

If you were on the list, write down here what your THREE favorite foods would be:

_____

_____

_____

Thinking about all the foods you like...

When we think about what we like to eat, many of our favorite foods are summer foods grown in the summer or eaten mostly in the summer. Take a moment to think about how our foods appeal to us because of how they smell, how they look, how they taste, how they sound when we eat them how they feel in our hands and in our mouths. How many are the ways in which foods please us.

Here is a prayer you might want to say this summer. Look at how it thanks God for things about food that appeals to our senses. You can change the foods mentioned if you like other foods that taste good, look good, or smell good.

Dear God our father who gives us food,
Thank you for the snap of celery,
the crunch of carrots and the squeak of beans.
Thank you for the zing of mustard,
the sting of salt and the tang of pickles.
Thank you for the red of tomatoes,
yellow peppers, green peas.
The world is full of your flavours, textures and colours,
and we thank you for them as we eat together.
With watering mouths, and thankful hearts.
Amen.

Thanks to Faith Action for Nature for much of the above.

Eat like a Caveman!

Well, perhaps not exactly –

During the Paleolithic period of human history, people lived on game hunted and various roots, berries and seeds gathered. They also suffered from hunger at certain times of the year, partly because they lacked many ways of keeping perishable foods like meat for long periods of time.
In many places in what was a fairly short time, people hunted to extinction what are called “megafauna,” that is, large animals like the mammoth, mastodon, auroch and sabre-toothed tiger. So, no more chomping on a mastodon bone accompanied with a handful of berries for dessert.
Fire also changed what was eaten. With fire, people could make meat easier to eat and digest, and smoking or drying meat also extended how long meat could be kept. Probably you would also prefer the taste of cooked food over raw.

Did you know that our near relatives, the chimpanzees, also prefer to have cooked food?

The next great change in food preparation and storage came with the invention of pottery. Think about how your eating would change if you could mix your piece of meat with some roots in some water and slowly cook the whole lot in a pot over a low fire. Ta dah, stew was born! And, bonus, you could make a little meat or small fish feed more people than if everybody needed their own large chunk of raw flesh.

Talking of water, until the last hundred or so years, much water was not the healthy drink it is today – with various parasites in it, it could make you very sick. So, in earlier times, people used beer or wine as the liquid for their cooking – both beer and wine were early human inventions/discoveries, resulting probably from airborne yeast working on stored grains and fruit.
How do we know what folks ate thousands of years ago? Archaeologists digging in caves, small buried villages, dredging up pots and bones from lakes and rivers, have been able to do analysis of molecular remains in pots to tell if people used beer or milk, stored grain, ate olives or rotten fish sauce, and so on. They have been able to identify animals eaten by bones with knife marks on them. They can do analysis of ancient human bones and bodies to see what people ate and where they lived as children.

When a mummified body of a man, now called Otzi, who lived about 5000 years ago was discovered in a melting glacier, scientists were able to say, from studying his remains, that his last meal had been red deer meat with some einkorn wheat with traces of a toxic bracken, which he might have eaten to get rid of some parasites in his body. It is amazing what science can tell us now.

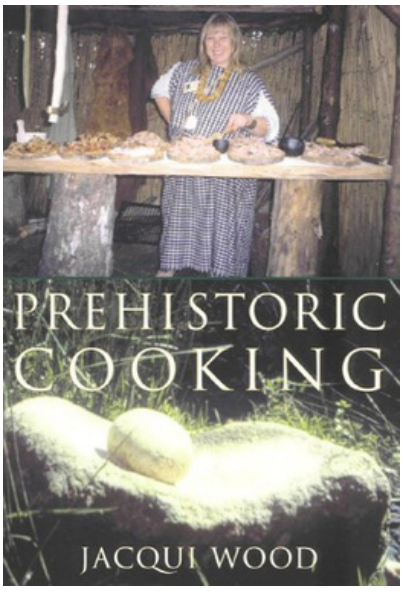
Eating like a caveman this summer? Maybe not so much.

The closest you will probably come to is having a barbecue this summer. If you go fishing and actually catch one big enough to eat, you can copy a Neolithic cook by having an adult degut the fish but leave the head on. Wrap the fish in a bunch of long grass, tied as a bundle at each end with more grass. Slather the bundle with wet mud. Cook over a fire or on your barbecue for about 40 minutes till the fish is cooked. When you crack off the dried baked mud and open the grass up, if your fish had a thin skin, the skin will come off automatically. Otherwise, it will still stick to the fish's flesh, holding the fish together.

If you don't like the idea of killing a rabbit for your stew, or some bigger animal, try this vegetable stew which can feed 15 people. The ingredients are given with modern measurements which obviously Stone Age people would not have had, but which make your cooking easier:

Ingredients:
125 grams chopped hazelnuts 1 kilo. peas
100 grams butter 1 sprig of mint
1 bunch of sorrel 750 grams bulgar wheat
1 bunch chives and wild marjoram 2 teaspoons salt
1 kilo chopped and cleaned leeks

Fry the nuts in the butter for five minutes in a large pan.
Add the leeks and herbs, except for the mint, and cook till soft.
Add peas, mint and salt. Cover with water and simmer for 30 minutes. Add the wheat and cook till all the liquid is absorbed.
Serve at once.



Recipes taken from "Prehistoric Cooking"
by Jacqui Wood, published by Tempus.

Join an Outdoor Game for You, Your Family and Thousands of other People in the World Looking for over 3 million Secrets hidden round the World

The game is called geocaching. You can do it in your own home town, in a provincial park where you might be camping, when visiting your grandparents or perhaps at summer camp.

It's basically a world-wide game of hide and seek, for which you probably will need adult help. And, if you like, you can make it a competition against friends or strangers to find the various hidden objects around the world. These objects can be small or big. All contain a logbook in which you can write down when you found the hidden container. It might have something you can take, to be replaced with something you leave for the next discoverer, or perhaps a trackable, which is an object which gets moved around and which you can follow on your phone or computer.

So how does it work? Go to the website https://www.geocaching.com where you or your parents can download free the geocaching app onto your smartphone. It will give you a map of your area with an idea of where there are geocaches. It is based on the same idea that the GPS system in your car helps your family to drive to where you want to go. Like a car, you follow the coordinates of a cache; when you find it (it will not be buried) you sign the logbook to prove you have found it, and then you log your find online and start accumulating a score of finds.

Try it out this summer and see if searching for caches doesn't add lots of fun to being outdoors.

Need A Fresh Idea for Something to Do This Summer?

Can't think of anything interesting to do? Going camping again this year with your family - same old place, same brothers and sisters, same people you met last year?

If you want something different to do, check out one of the following books. Yes, we said BOOKS – places to find all kinds of fun things to do outside, to help you see more of what is going on around you from underground up to the sky, to make you smarter - knowing how to use a knife without bleeding, or how to eat bugs without throwing up, or how to escape being eaten by a bear (Yes, we include a book in this list that can tell you all this essential info!) This list is also for parents who may be looking for activities for the end of the summer when everyone seems to have done everything they wanted to do, and are now getting bored and whiney!

Starting with books for younger kids, here are some suggestions of ideas. They can be borrowed from your public or school library, or bought from Chapters or Amazon. One of the books on the list you will have to buy, not borrow, because you can turn the book into a home for bees – not something recommended for doing with a library book! So, kids, share this list with your parents, grandparents, anyone who might want to buy you a birthday present, so they can have ideas on how to make the family's summer holidays a special time.

1. *Nature for Toddlers Activity Books: 50 learning activities to explore the natural world* by Jenette Restive for ages 1-3.

2. *Kids' Outdoor Adventure Book: 448 great things to do in nature before you grow up* by Stacy Tornio and Ken Keffer for ages 2-9.

3. *Backpack Explorer: on the nature trail for ages 3-6,* this is a take-along field guide.

4. *Nature Adventure Book* by Katie Taylor for ages 5-7 with a variety of crafts and games, divided into sections on adventure skills, being a nature detective, wild art, and games.

5. *Camping Activity Book for Kids: 36 fun projects for your next outdoor adventure* by Amelia Mayer for ages 5-9, working on wilderness skills.

6. *The Animal Adventurer's Guide: how to prowl for an owl, make snake slime, and catch a frog bare-handed: 50 activities to get wild with animals* by Susie Spikel for ages 5-9 emphasizing how to track, find, and identify animals.

7. *Exploring Nature: activity book for kids – 50 creative projects to spark curiosity in the outdoors* by Kim Andrews for ages 5-9, building skills like observation, wildlife safety, drawing and writing.

1. *Forest School Activities: outdoor skills and play for children* by Naomi Walmsley and Don Westall for ages 5-10, divided into four sections on bush craft, wild food, nature awareness and games.

2. *Hiking Activity Book for Kids: 35 fun projects for your next outdoor adventure* by Amelia Mayer for ages 6-9

3. *The Nature Connection: an outdoor workbook for kids, families and classrooms* by Clare Leslie for ages 6-10, offers activities using different senses like sketching wildlife, collecting leaves, and bird watching.

4. *Turn This Book into a Beehive! And 19 other Experiments and Activities that Explain the Amazing World of Bees* by Lynn Brunells for ages 8-12, developing more understanding of bees and their importance.

5. *The Young Adventurer's Guide to (Almost) Anything! 45 action-packed outdoor activities* by Ben Hewitt for ages 8-12. This is the book where all is revealed about avoiding being a bear snack, eating bugs, and pooping in the woods without falling down, and other essential survival info.

6. *The Outdoor Scientist: the wonder of observing the natural world* by Temple Grandin for ages 8-12, introducing kids the variety of science through fun activities like stone skipping, investigating migratory routes, and building sandcastles.

7. *The Kid's Guide to Exploring Nature for ages 8-12,* looking at plant and animal ecosystems in different environments, identification, keeping a journal and doing field experiments.

8. *A Girl's Guide to the Wild: be an adventure-seeking outdoor explorer* by Ruby McConnell for ages 9-12, stories of outdoorswomen and activities building skills like basic first aid, map-reading, interpreting weather signs, and campfire cooking.

Parents:

The above list is from the website www.getthekidsoutside.com. If you check them out on Amazon.ca you will find that they have all been given good reviews by other users.

The original inspiration for t his series of seasonal family activities in God's world is the Faith Action for Nature series, created for the Church of Scotland and various partners, including the RSPB Scotland.

This document was created by the Environment Committee of Springbank Catholic Family of Parishes, 2025.