

Eco-scavenger Hunt brings families together



By Nate Smelle

Families gathered at silent Lake provincial Park on the morning of Thursday, Aug. 6 to take part in an Eco-scavenger Hunt posted by members of the Bancroft Field Naturalists Club and the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council. To the delight of the organizers the annual event saw its best attendance ever this year with more than 60 participants.

Betty Coutu has been volunteering with the Eco-scavenger Hunt since it began four years ago. As a member of both the naturalists club and the stewardship Council she appreciates how important it is for children and youth to experience nature with their friends and family. Likewise Coutu believes these types of experiences are equally as enriching and enjoyable for adults.

"I am so happy with today's turnout," said Coutu.

"It really shows us that people are interested in nature. To me that's what it's all about; protecting nature and teaching the next generation to have respect for it. When they have a chance to touch, see, smell and hear nature they learn to appreciate it more."

Dividing the larger group into three smaller search parties, Coutu gave out lists of items and observations one could encounter and check off while exploring the forests and the shoreline surrounding Silent Lake. With help from the Ministry of Natural Resources Youth Stewardship Rangers, each team of explorers ventured out into the wilderness to see what they could discover.

Fiona Murray has been working with the Youth Stewardship Rangers this summer based out of the Kawartha Highlands. A student at Lakefield College she decided to get involved with the program to learn more about outdoor education.

"I study outdoor education in some of the classes I take at school," said Murray.

"You learn a lot about nature when you work and spend time outside."

Encouraged to keep an eye, ear and nose out for things like: a bird flying overhead, the sound of tree leaves rustling or the scent of pine needles, everyone came back with their own story of discovery to tell.

Elizabeth McKale and her six-year-old son Alex stumbled upon the activity went out for a morning hike on the beach. Visiting the park from Peterborough on a weekend camping trip with friends McKale said that eco-scavenger hunt was a perfect way to spend the last day of vacation together before going back to their home in the city.

"We've had an excellent day," said McKale.

"My son saw his first woodpecker today. We also saw a spotted frog and a turtle. Both of them were right in front of us and it was Alex who pointed them out to me. He is usually quite introverted, but today he really came out of his shell."

"It was a painted turtle and a leopard frog," Alex explained.

Elated by how much fun her son was having while learning about nature; and surprised by how much she enjoyed the activity herself, McKale said the two of them would be continuing the activity at their favourite park in the city.

"Our yard is full of wildflowers which the butterflies and birds love, so there is lots of wildlife we can watch when we get home too," she said.

"We will definitely be paying closer attention to what's around us next time we go for a walk with the dog, or for a bike ride."

