

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

## Jr. Master Naturalist 4-H club offers fun, education, and adventure

For the past twelve years, adults in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties have been engaged in local natural resource education and volunteer efforts in the [University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist \(EMN\) program](#). Now youth can have the same opportunity thanks to the new [Fulton 4-H Junior Master Naturalist Club](#) that launched in January 2023.

Extension Master Naturalist Jenny Beal and [Canton Park District](#) Superintendent of Recreation Amanda Atchley collaborated with Illinois Extension to form the club.

"Mrs. Beal was one of my teachers growing up in Canton," explained Amanda. "I remember going through the outdoor education program called Outward Ingersoll, when I was in Mrs. Beal's class, which inspired me to go into my career in outdoor recreation. Now, I'm happy to be working with her on the Jr. Master Naturalist club."

As a retired teacher, Jenny understands how active, hands-on learning, outdoors is a perfect way for youth to gain a better understanding and appreciation of nature. Both Jenny and Amanda want to share their experiences knowing that kids thrive when they spend time outdoors. When these two ladies combined forces with Illinois Extension staff, something special was born.

In addition to local Fulton 4-H and Master Naturalist coordinators, State Master Naturalist and Climate Change Specialist [Duane Friend](#) and Natural Resources and Shooting Sports 4-H Specialist [Curt Sinclair](#) assisted with the launch of this new club as part of the state-wide pilot program. The six monthly meetings focused on natural resources and environment included: Wildlife in Illinois; Fossils and Geology; Climate Change & Weather; Insects, Wildflowers, and Trees; Pond Explorers and Aquatics; and Camping Adventures.

Club leaders engaged five guest speakers and one other Master Naturalist to share their knowledge with 16 youth. Fun adventures included identifying Illinois mammals by their pelt, skull, tracks, and scat; making core samples using candy bars; measuring wind speed & relative humidity; collecting and viewing aquatic life; a fire building activity, and making an edible fire, to name a few.

"I had so much fun in the Junior Master Naturalist 4-H club and can't wait for it to start again!" explained first year 4-H member Aaliyah.

In her program report to the state, Jenny reported, "as leaders, we feel the Jr. Master Naturalist program was a great success. The kids were very enthusiastic and over the six sessions. We built relationships and friendships while learning about nature and developing good stewardship. We all had a great time exploring science in nature."

The Junior Master Naturalist 4-H club will start again in January 2024. A short video showcasing Jenny and this club may be found on our Extension unit's YouTube channel, [go.illinois.edu/MNProjectSpotlights](https://go.illinois.edu/MNProjectSpotlights).



*Junior Master Naturalist 4-H Club co-leader, Amanda Atchley, shows club members an animal bone found during a nature hike at the club's meeting that focused on fossils and geology. Identifying mammals native to Illinois was for the Junior Naturalists during their exploration of Big Creek Park in Canton.*

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