



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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Discovery Day field trip returns to Mason County

On September 20, 2024, 4-H Discovery Day brought 169 third-grade students and their teachers to [Rockwell Mound Park](#) in Havana for an immersive experience in conservation and environmental education. This unique field trip allowed young learners to engage in hands-on activities and gain exposure to Illinois' natural resources. The day featured rotating stations with expert guest speakers who shared their knowledge about wildlife conservation, ecology, and environmental stewardship. Prior to 2020, Discovery Day had been a long-standing tradition for Mason County Schools, but was discontinued with school closures. This year, however, University of Illinois Extension's Mason County 4-H staff worked hard to revitalize the program and bring this amazing field trip back to the community.

[Research](#) has shown that exposure to nature offers significant health benefits, including decreased risk of cardiovascular disease and mental illness, as well as improved cognitive function, physical activity, sleep, and mental health. Moreover, [a study from Clemson University](#) confirms a link between nature and overall positive youth development. Programs like 4-H Discovery Day can provide opportunities for young people to reap these benefits. "Our hope is that Discovery Day can help these kids fall in love with the outdoors. And if they love the outdoors, they'll try hard to take care of our planet. And they'll spend more time in nature and be healthier and happier because of that," says Emily Schoenfelder, 4-H youth development educator.

In addition to the benefits of nature-based activities, 4-H Discovery Day provided a positive learning experience for the students involved. When participating teachers were asked about their and their students' experiences, 100% of respondents indicated:

- The topics covered were of interest to their class.
- Their students learned new things.
- The field trip helped them meet educational outcomes or standards that they are working towards.

Teachers also reported that the field trip engaged their students on subjects not typically covered in third grade. One teacher commented, "It teaches them about the state in which they live, and we don't teach that sort of stuff in third grade. It was just amazing!!" Another teacher noted, "The topics covered are so appropriate for our area!"

The success of 4-H Discovery Day highlights the importance of nature-based educational programming in fostering health and contributing to academic goals of young people. By providing experiences that align with educational standards and expand students' understanding of their environment, 4-H Discovery Day continues to be a powerful tool for inspiring future generations.



Mason County 3rd graders explore boats and equipment at 4-H Discovery Day while presenters from the [Illinois Natural History Survey's Illinois River Biological Station](#) teach about local aquatic life. Students also learned from [IL Conservation Police](#), [the IL Petroleum Resource Board](#), [IL EPA](#), [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#), [Mason County Soil and Water Conservation District](#), and more as they rotated through a variety of hands-on stations and activities.

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