



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

New 4-H Adventures in Nature challenged youth and adults to reap the benefits of spending more time outdoors

It can be hard to pull yourself away from the computer or TV and get outside, but it is well worth it. University of Illinois Extension [4-H Youth Development team](#) in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit created a new program to help encourage youth and families to explore the outdoors. Throughout the spring and summer, 485 youth and adults received [4-H Adventures in Nature](#) monthly challenges that helped motivate them to get outside and learn something new.

The new program stemmed from a need to re-engage youth and families to the wonders of the outdoors while providing them with educational and interactive activities to do together. Research shows benefits of spending time in nature that include:

- Building confidence
- Promoting creativity and imagination
- Elevating cognitive function
- Increasing physical activity
- Reducing stress and fatigue

Each month participants received a new set of challenges/activities. The topics included animals (fauna), plants (flora), water, nature art, and service & stewardship. Some of the activities included watching birds, identifying plants, constructing a rain gauge, gathering and using natural items for paint brushes, and going on a clean-up walk.

Challenges were designed in a manner that youth could complete the activities with or without an adult; allowing them to practice independence. The activities were also adaptable for the entire family to complete together. According to feedback, families found one of the greatest benefits gained through this program to be the time spent together as a family. One family stated "The activities were fun and simple. It was a nice, outdoor, together activity to do during the summer. Also, we homeschool, so these activities fit so nicely into a nature study and just our learning style."

As part of the program, a culminating event was held at [Dickson Mounds State Museum](#) in the form of a family fun day in nature. Those in attendance explored Dickson Mounds, participated in a variety of hands-on activities, hiked, and enjoyed the beautiful grounds. [Colleen Callahan](#), Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, was the keynote speaker for the event. Other presenters included [Dr. Thomas Rothfus](#), Director of [Therkildsen Field Station at Emiquon](#), local [Extension Master Naturalists](#), and [Curt Sinclair](#), Illinois 4-H Specialist, Natural Resources and Shooting Sports.

The five-month program involved 120 families who live in and out of Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties. Participants were encouraged to report back about the challenges they completed.

In addition, the 4-H team has made the information and activities [available online](#) so more people can benefit from the program.



Photo by Joli Pierson | Illinois Extension

Dr. Thomas Rothfus, Director Therkildsen Field Station, demonstrates a microscope and identifying macroinvertebrates in a water sample, during the Family Fun Day of 4-H Adventures in Nature program at Dickson Mounds State Museum. This new program was created to encourage youth and adults to spend more time outdoors.

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