



## OBSERVE WILDLIFE CHALLENGE | *Whooo's there?*

### FOR THIS ADVENTURE, OBSERVE WILDLIFE

This challenge is designed to safely introduce your child to the fascinating world of animals—both big and small—that live all around us. They will learn the skills of quiet searching and patient observation, which are the foundations of both science and mindfulness.

### WHY OBSERVE WILDLIFE?

Wildlife observation is key to early development and fun!

- **Observation Skills:** Looking closely for clues like nests, holes, or feathers helps children think and notice small details in the world around them.
- **Calmness and Focus:** Being quiet and still while searching for animals teaches patience and helps children focus, which is wonderful for emotional well-being.
- **Empathy:** Learning where animals live and how they survive helps children develop a stronger connection to nature and a desire to protect it.

**Wildlife Center Access Note:** *If you cannot reach a natural wild area, try visiting a botanical garden, aviary, or nature center. Many nature centers and gardens in Utah participate in Museums for All, providing free or discounted admission for people receiving food assistance (SNAP benefits).*

### ● CRITICAL SAFETY WARNINGS ●

**Observing wildlife requires respect and distance. Please follow these safety rules at all times:**

- **Keep Your Distance:** Never approach, feed, or touch wild animals, no matter how small or friendly they appear. This is for both your safety and the animal's well-being.
- **Stay on the Trail:** Staying on marked paths protects the plants and keeps you safe from stepping on small creatures' homes.
- **Leave No Trace:** Only take pictures, only leave footprints. Leave everything exactly as you found it.

### THE ANIMALS CLUE HUNT

#### What To Do

Go outside and look for things animals leave behind! Can you find a feather, a chewed-up nut or seed, a hole in the ground, or a piece of shed snake skin? You might even spot a quick-running lizard on a desert trail! **(Trusted adults: Do not let children touch or pick up animal scat.)**

**Choose one:** Draw a picture of the clue you found and the animal you think it came from *OR* Move like the animal! How would it walk or hop?

#### Learning Goal

Develops scientific thinking by encouraging children to use clues (inference). It helps children think closely about what an animal does and what it eats.





### THE CRITTER HOME SEARCH

#### What To Do

Look up into the trees for nests (like squirrel dreys or bird nests) or holes. Look down under rocks (have a trusted adult turn over the rock carefully) or under logs for bug homes.

After you find a home, tell a grown-up all the ways it keeps the animal safe.

**For Older Preschoolers:** They may want to draw a picture of the animal's home in their Nature Journal!

#### Learning Goal

Helps children learn new words about animal homes (such as nests, burrows, and webs) and understand how they protect animals.

This activity improves focus and observation skills by searching in different directions (up and down) and talking about what you find.

**Why We Are Careful:** The animal's home keeps it safe, warm, and hidden, just like your house keeps you safe and cozy. We leave the home alone so the animal can feel safe when it comes back.

### THE QUIET GAME (LISTEN FOR WILDLIFE)

#### What To Do

Practice using quiet feet to sneak to your comfortable sitting spot. Sit very, very still for one minute. Close your eyes and listen only for animal sounds (chirps, buzzing, wind, crunching leaves).

After one minute, point to where the sound came from. Tell a grown-up what kind of sound it was (e.g., "A bird made a cheep-cheep sound!" or a squirrel made a kuk-kuk-kuk sound!)

#### Learning Goal

Encourages calmness and focus through quiet stillness. Helps children connect to nature through hearing and patience.

### THE GENTLE INSECT CATCH

#### What To Do

With a trusted adult watching, gently try to catch a safe insect like a pill bug (aka "roly-poly bug), grasshopper, ladybug, or caterpillar using a small clear cup, a jar, or your hands.

Observe the insect closely for a couple of minutes. What color is it? How does it move? Then, carefully lift the cup and let it go back to its home!

#### Learning Goal

Teaches respect and empathy for small creatures. It improves fine motor skills (using a gentle touch) and concentration.

### LITERACY CONNECTION

**Trusted Adults:** Learn more about wildlife by looking for a picture book at your library!

**You can start with these titles and get more recommendations from your librarian:**

- [A Nest is Noisy](#) by Diana Hutts
- [Over and Under the Snow](#) by Kate Messner





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Utah's wildlife can be observed from designated sites like preservation areas or from your neighborhood. From bird watching to fishing, there are many ways to engage with animals here in Utah.

**Leave No Trace Principle 6 - Respect Wildlife-** Follow this principle by giving wildlife space, never feeding wildlife, and avoiding wildlife during sensitive times like mating, nesting, or raising young.

**Use the Thumb Trick** - Use this trick to make sure you are observing wildlife from a respectful and safe distance. 1) Stick out one arm at full length. 2) Raise your thumb and cover one eye. 3) Aim your thumb at the wildlife you see. If you can cover the entire animal, you are an appropriate distance away. If not, back up slowly until you can cover them.

**Utah's Division of Wildlife Resources** - This Division regularly holds classes and events, many of which are free. Visit the website or sign up for their newsletter for more information.

**Visit a Nature Preserve** - Many nature preserves have walking/ hiking trails to help visitors see the wildlife in the area.

**Fishing** - Utah is home to many rivers, lakes, and streams teeming with wildlife. These bodies of water host various fish species, including rainbow and cutthroat trout, bass, and even catfish. Before fishing, make sure to obtain the proper fishing license!

**Birding** - Head to a local green space in your neighborhood and see what birds you can spot. If you're curious about the species you encounter, try using iNaturalist or other wildlife identification apps.

**Explore Local Wildlife Attractions** - Utah's Hogle Zoo is a great place to see wildlife up close and learn about different species. Other educational destinations, like the Ogden Nature Center, American West Heritage Center,

and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, also offer valuable opportunities to learn about wildlife. Tip: Many zoos, nature centers, animal sanctuaries, and preserves accept SNAP EBT benefits for discounted or free admission.

**Build a Bird Feeder** - Only put out a bird feeder during times of the year when birds need extra help finding food, such as in winter or during migration. Research the birds that live near you and learn what they like to eat. For example, the black-throated sparrow in San Juan County enjoys seeds, insects, and berries!

**Visit the Living Planet Aquarium** - Utah is fortunate to have the Living Planet Aquarium along the Wasatch Front, visit the aquarium to learn about the diverse animals that inhabit our planet's deep oceans. Tip: The Living Planet Aquarium accepts SNAP EBT benefits, offering a discounted admission rate of \$2.

**Create an Animal Habitat** - Choose one of your favorite wild animals and learn about the food, shelter, and resources it needs to survive. After researching, try creating a small habitat that models what the animal needs in the wild—such as a butterfly garden, a bird feeder, a water source, or a bat house.

**Animal Signs Scavenger Hunt** - While hiking, biking, or exploring your favorite trails, see if you can find signs of wildlife. Look for things like antlers, fur, scat, or footprints. As you find these signs, try to guess which animals might have left them behind!

**Use Binoculars** - Libraries usually have binoculars, which you can check out! If you don't have access to binoculars, make your own by tying two cardboard tubes together, covering them with paper, and decorating! They won't magnify what you're looking at, but will help you focus on smaller areas to see wildlife!





**Sit and Spot** - Find a quiet spot in your neighborhood, schoolyard, park, cemetery, or on a trail. Try drawing or writing in a notebook about what you see, hear, smell, and feel. Older youth can spend a few hours each week returning to the same spot, recording the animals they see in their yard or local park.

**Make a Bug Hotel** - Collect a few bugs (roly poly bugs, also known as pillbugs, work great!) and place them in a large container filled with moist dirt, twigs, leaves, and food. See if you can track where they burrow and what they're eating!

**Tie a Fly** - In fly fishing, anglers identify which flies are hatching in an area and then create artificial flies to attract fish. Try making your own fly using materials you find outdoors. If you're unsure where to start, check out online video tutorials for guidance.

**Make a Reptile Rockpile** - This is a great activity if you live in a hot, sandy area. Pile a bunch of rocks in a sunny spot outdoors, leaving gaps for reptiles to enter and exit. See if you can spot any reptiles coming in and out of your rockpile!

**Wildlife Photography** - See if you can sit still and capture a photo of an animal in its natural habitat. You don't need a special camera—phones can take great photos!

**Junior Ranger Programs** - Many of Utah's national and state parks offer Junior Ranger programs, which include activities like tracking animal prints, bird watching, and learning about habitats. With five national parks and 46 state parks, there's likely one near you!

**Nighttime Wildlife Viewing** - Many animals - such as bats, great horned owls, desert tortoises, and beavers - come out at night when it's dark and quiet. With the sun setting earlier in the fall, it's the perfect time to spot these nocturnal creatures!

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**Insect observation** - Look for insects in gardens, parks, or your home. Use a magnifying glass or take a photo with a phone to enlarge it and see details. Become a Citizen Scientist - Throughout history, everyday people—like you—with a good eye for observation and a love for nature have made important discoveries about the world around us. Check out the National History Museum of Utah's website to learn more about cool citizen science projects you can take part in!

### **TAKE IT UP A NOTCH!**

**Citizen Science** - There are a variety of Citizen Science opportunities you can participate in. Each one gives you the chance to help scientists gather information about animals in your area.

**Endangered Animals** - Utah has 17 endangered animals, including the California Condor and the Colorado Pikeminnow. Find an endangered animal that interests you and learn more about it. Get involved in local preservation and protection efforts. Bring your friends along!

