

Creek Critters Curriculum



As a Junior Keeper it is important to learn about the critters that live in the streams near waterfalls. When you are knowledgeable about what lives in our streams, you can help others understand why it is so important to take care of these animals' homes! Look around the bank of the stream near the water to spot salamanders, frogs, and other critters that live mostly outside of the water. Look in the water for fish, tadpoles, and macroinvertebrates. Keep track of what you see by taking photos and notes to describe them and where they live.

Macroinvertebrates are what you will want to concentrate on finding first, as most streams are full of them! You will hopefully see plenty of other critters along the way, but let's talk about how to search for macroinvertebrates and what they are.

Macroinvertebrates are creatures you can see without a microscope that do not have a backbone. Crayfish, worms, and snails are some that you may see during your exploration of the stream. However, there are many more that live under the rocks of these streams. A lot of these are insect larvae, which, after living in the water for some time, will develop into adults and either stay in the water (such as beetles) or emerge. Mayflies, for example, live in the water for a year or two. Then they will emerge as adults with wings and only live for about a day on land. Other macroinvertebrates include crustaceans (such as crayfish, which are related to lobsters and crabs), annelids (worms and leeches), and molluscs (snails, mussels, and clams).

To search for macroinvertebrates in the streams, carefully lift up rocks and look at the under side of them to see what lives there. **It is very important to observe the critters and then gently place the rock back down in the same spot you found it, with the same side facing down.** This is how you can observe the macroinvertebrates without disturbing their homes.

You may also see some clear, gooey substances on some of these rocks. These are the eggs of salamanders, snails, and other creek critters. Make sure you do not touch them as they are very delicate. If you are lucky enough to spot some eggs, take a picture of your observation and be extra gentle placing the rock back down into the water where you found it.



Creek Critters Curriculum Questions

1. A _____ is a creek critter with no backbone that typically lives under rocks. They can be insect larvae, annelids, molluscs, or crustaceans.
2. North Carolina is home to ____ species of salamanders, including one of the giant salamanders, which is called a _____.
3. Why is it a bad idea to move or stack rocks from the stream?
4. Name at least 5 critters that live in or around the stream:
5. When searching the streams for critters, describe how to safely search under rocks without disturbing their habitat:
6. As a Junior Keeper, come up with 3 ways you will help the creek critters. These can be things we have mentioned or new ideas you have!