

# Come Learn with Us

By Kenneth Nalley, Park Naturalist/Volunteer Coordinator

Spring is here, and, usually, that means school field trips arriving at the Refuge all season. Given the circumstances of the past year, however, that has not been the case this spring. While we haven't had our usual influx of school groups to keep us busy, we are offering many different environmental education opportunities during the week.

Since we have begun offering programs Monday through Friday, we have been able to reach more homeschool students looking to supplement their lessons with hands-on activities in nature. Every day of the week, we have a guided hike scheduled in the morning, followed by a naturalist-led environmental program. These programs last roughly an hour and are great opportunities to experience wildlife and the natural world up close. Some of our programs, during a hike or from the water on one of our canoe/kayak tours, are more general and focus on specific wildlife and their roles in the ecosystem. Other programs are more in-depth and explore different natural history topics. Some of these might include arts and crafts, scientific inquiry, nature scavenger hunts, live animal presentations, and more.

Another way we have been assisting teachers during this time is by offering opportunities for teachers to receive continuing education credit. One workshop that we have facilitated for formal and informal educators is Project WILD. This workshop is offered through Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and is a great tool to use in your classroom to add to your lesson plan. The environmental education activities are helpful for teachers, informal educators, and parents who homeschool their kids.

This past year has been an adjustment for all students and teachers in many ways—and not having field trip experiences is just one more challenge to add to their plates. That's why as informal educators, we are happy to still be able to offer these learning opportunities even during the current circumstances. We hope that we will soon be able to return to welcoming school groups multiple days a week and guiding children through nature.



Students catch macroinvertebrates for an aquatics program at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. FWNC&R Staff Photo.