Citizen Science at Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center

By Karl Brummert

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, we at the Sanctuary have been talking about citizen science this and citizen science that, without really fully implementing it in our education programs. Now, we are moving forward and actually *doing* it.

The Education staff at the Sanctuary has been incorporating citizen science and research into various public, school, and camp programs. During the past two winters, we participated in the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch. Staff, as well as visitors, identify and record the number of bird species that visit our feeders each Saturday and Sunday. This year, we offered a formal public program, *Spread Your Wings*, that introduced participants to the basics of bird watching and how to start a Project FeederWatch program in their backyard to contribute their own data to the Laboratory's website.

During our popular seasonal camps, counselors devote a lesson to citizen science. Some involve children in counting and recording birds at the feeders or elsewhere on the grounds, while other counselors develop their own unique studies using anything from insects to squirrels. During summer 2002, the two older camp groups even had the opportunity to observe the Sanctuary's research interns in action as they banded birds at Hoffman Center. We plan to continue involving more camp and school groups in our avian and habitat enhancement research programs.

This year, the Sanctuary has been working with two schools to begin onsite citizen science projects. Locally, we are partnering with a science teacher at the James Vernon School in the Oyster Bay/East Norwich school district to set up a bird feeding station outside the fifth grade science classroom. The after-school science club has been writing letters to local nurseries for plant donations. Sanctuary staff has been assisting students with creating homemade bird feeders and preparing the site. It is wonderful to see how enthusiastic the students are about the project; even their parents are getting involved by donating books and other materials. Our ultimate goal is to incorporate the lessons into the classroom curriculum during the next school year, while the after-school science club continues to maintain the feeders.

In the Roosevelt school district, we are working with the after-school programs coordinator at the Roosevelt Children's Academy—a charter school—to set up birdfeeders outside several classrooms. The program began with an introduction using our live birds to teach the students about basic bird biology. Eventually, we will work with a select group of teachers, providing them with support and assist them with identifying birds and maintaining the feeders. As the program continues, the teachers will ultimately be empowered to lead most of the lessons themselves.

Why are we focusing on citizen science programs? Our goal is to provide more direct experiences and interaction with nature. We also want to move more toward programs that have multiple sessions and extend over a period of time, rather than a single classroom visit. Students get more from a program if they are involved more intimately with it. We also hope that involving students in real science will not only improve their science skills—and ultimately test scores—but also increase their awareness of nature in their own neighborhood and encourage them to be environmental stewards.

Prospect Park Green Team

By Glenn Phillips

HERE AT THE PROSPECT Park Audubon Center, we've been taking notice of the local youth that have become regulars here. As the first urban Audubon center, it is important for us to connect with the children who would otherwise have no exposure to nature.

Dante, age 11, is one of the children that inspired the forming of our weekly Green Team. He seemed to have extra time on his hands and he was naturally attracted to the Audubon center. He would show up every week, by himself, riding his bike to spend hours here. It wasn't long before Dante was a part of our Green Team.

The first week of the Green Team, we outfitted the kids with Discover Packs, filled with binoculars, bug boxes, bird books, pencils and paper, which are available free to school groups that want to explore nature in Prospect Park. As soon as we left, we spotted some coots, wading in the water. Dante was so impressed with these birds that he declared them his favorites. We continued on our walk and spotted cardinals, wood thrushes, mallards, mute swans and robins. We collected some leaves to bring back to the Audubon Center for identification and ended the day by reading up on local wildlife. Dante and other members of the Green Team, which has grown to over 15 participants, come back almost every week for new adventures.

Most participants in the Green Team are from the Flatbush area of Brooklyn and, if it weren't for Prospect Park, they would have no place to interact with the natural environment. The Green Team is a way to connect children like these to environments, sciences and careers that truly need their input. The Green Team, a free program, meets every Wednesday at 3:30.

This fall, the Center will also offer more intensive, pre-registered after-school programs. Meeting weekly for six weeks each season, these programs will help kids become environmental experts, develop science fair projects and have fun outdoor experiences in Prospect Park. For schedules and more information, call the Center at 718-287-3400.

PROSPECT PARK AUDUBON CENTER

Green Team member examines a specimen collected at Prospect Park.

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