

The lazy, hazy days of summer are the perfect time to immerse your family in nature. The weather's fine, school's out and the great outdoors is the optimal playground.

Formal lessons may be finished for now, but that doesn't mean your child has stopped learning. Summer holidays can be the perfect opportunity to teach children about conservation. There are countless ways to do so, all involving a high degree of fun, which, as every parent knows, eases the learning process.

Below is a comprehensive list of what you can do for and with your kids during the hot season. Be it bugs, plants, archaeology, critters or stunning vistas you seek, Ontario has it all. Teaching your kids to love and conserve their world means it will all still be here for their children to experience.

★ means highly recommended

PETERBOROUGH

Learn about all creatures great and small at the Riverview Park and Zoo (www.puc.org/files/zoo/zoo.html, 705-748-9301, ext. 2304), just north of downtown Peterborough. Meet the keeper at 1 p.m. throughout July and August. The zoo also houses the Kawartha Turtle Trauma Centre (www.kawarthaturtle.org, 705-748-9301, ext. 2303), a unique facility that tends to injured turtles and is involved in fighting their decline.

★ **CAMP KAWARTHA** (www.campkawartha.ca, 705-652-3860 or 1-866-532-4597) operates as an environmental education centre for 10 months of the year and, since 1921, has fostered environmental awareness in young campers during the other two months. The camp is on Clear Lake, 26 kilometres north of Peterborough.

Camp Kawartha offers numerous co-ed camping programs, all of which involve nature-based and outdoor education, including on-site teaching of sustainable living practices. A straw-bale solar-powered greenhouse, wind turbines and solar panels are part of the facilities. Sessions range from one-week day camps for children age 5 to 8, to two-week wilderness canoe trips for campers age 14 to 16. Four-day nature camps for kids age 7 to 14 are run in conjunction with Ontario Nature.

TORONTO

★ **THE TORONTO ZOO** (www.torontozoo.com, 416-392-5900) is a great place to start your wildlife observations. The zoo's Adopt-A-Pond Wetland Conservation Programme (www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond) provides teachers, students and community groups with information, resources and educational opportunities to conserve, restore and even create wetland habi-

tats. You and your children can also take part in the Ontario Turtle Tally by noting turtle sightings and reporting them by entering your observations into the on-line database, the purpose of which is to record information on Ontario turtles, including species at risk. Adopt-A-Pond is also the provincial coordinator of Environment Canada's Frogwatch program, which strives to help save amphibians in Ontario. The program will teach you to identify frogs visually and by their calls. To receive a Frogwatch-Ontario package, e-mail aap@TorontoZoo.ca, call 416-392-5999 or visit the Frogwatch-Ontario website (www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/FrogwatchOntario.asp).

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don (www.toronto.ca/don/index.htm) is a citizens' group sponsored by the City of Toronto that is working to create a clean, green and accessible Don River watershed. You and your kids can participate in a wide variety of related volunteer activities, including the community stewardship program, which divides volunteers into teams that remove invasive non-native plant species, collect litter, maintain bird boxes, build habitat brush bundles and monitor site conditions. The city also has family tree planting days, for which it provides everything you need, including gloves and shovels.

THE TORONTO BAY INITIATIVE (www.torontobay.net, 416-598-2277), a nonprofit organization dedicated to a cleaner,

greener Toronto, organizes boat tours, family fishing days and other events. Restoration work, tree planting and weeding are just a few of the volunteer activities available. The website includes an on-line volunteer form.

THE CITY OF TORONTO (www.toronto.ca/parks/index.htm, 416-338-0338) has a website well worth exploring. It has links to summer camps and camping facilities in the GTA, environmental programs for children, cycling maps and discovery walks, information about the tree advocacy planting program and a guide to Riverdale Farm, found in the heart of the city and open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visitors can talk to the farmer during daily feedings and kids can become junior farmers. Call 416-961-8787 for information or to volunteer with The Friends of Riverdale Farm.

★ **THE TORONTO AND REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (TRCA)** (www.trca.on.ca/learning_education/youth_community, 416-661-6600) runs the Boyd Archaeological Field School for Ontario high school students — pricey at \$895, but fascinating. Now in its 30th year, the program takes place from August 7 to 26 at the Claremont Conservation Field Centre. The course includes an introduction to archaeological theory, archaeological excavation, fieldwork, analysis of artifacts, the study of pre-



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WONDERS

historic Aboriginal cultures, experience in Aboriginal uses of the environment, flintknapping and other lost skills. Students excavate an archaeological site in the east end of the Greater Toronto Area.

The TRCA also runs an exhaustive program of educational activities and learning opportunities for students during the school year, and provides a green list of places to visit in the GTA, along with summer activities relating to the outdoors and the environment.

OTTAWA

THE CITY OF OTTAWA (www.ottawa.ca/residents/parks_recreation/index_en.html, 613-580-2782) runs a family-oriented Adopt-a-Park program that focuses on park and roadway conservation. The minimum commitment is road and parkway cleaning twice a year, but volunteers are encouraged to do as much as they wish and can participate in tree plantings, the restoration of park

furniture, and inspection and reporting of park vandalism.

THE CANADIAN MUSEUM OF NATURE (www.nature.ca, 613-566-4700 or 1-800-263-4433) includes on its website a calendar of activities and visitor information, and lists details of fun, hands-on programs for tots to learn about nature. As well, the scientists at the museum and their partners have completed the Rideau River Biodiversity Project. Its website (www.nature.ca/rideau/index-e.html) has detailed descriptions of conservation activities that you can undertake, either on your own or as part of a community group, all in the name of helping the river.

SUDBURY

SCIENCE NORTH (www.sciencenorth.on.ca, 705-523-4629 or 1-800-461-4898) — offering everything from tours deep underground to a walk in the lush tropical butterfly gallery — is a great place to learn about our planet. Kids get to visit and learn about ▶

Photo: John Reaume



porcupines and beavers and can sometimes help staff members with the animals. An extremely deep geological fault runs right through the facility and is fully exposed for visitors to explore.

GUELPH

For activities that teach your child how to tread lightly on the planet, take a look at the **GUELPH ENVIRONMENT NETWORK** (www.bbc.guelph.org/gen;gen@bbc.guelph.org). Listings include the Guelph Boulevard Club, which encourages replacing lawns on boulevards with other plants that use less water, pesticides and fertilizers, and the Palmer Street Ecology Project, an alternative garden and planting demonstration site on a former hydro sub-station lot in Guelph. The website also contains links to information on how to reduce your gardening footprint, a nice summer project to work on in your own yard with your kids.

LONDON

THE LOWER THAMES VALLEY CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (www.lowerthames-conservation.on.ca) manages the Longwoods Road Conservation Area, where year-round conservation education programs are held that focus on educating young people about conservation practices and the importance of watershed resources.

THE THAMES REGION ECOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (www.trea.ca/Welcome_To_TREA.htm, select “Programs” and then “Kids Korner,” 519-645-2845) offers some really fun, activities that promote children’s environmental awareness, like building a composter or cooking with dandelions. Through the website’s “Green Directory” (in the “Publications” menu), you’ll find a list of conservation-oriented programs such as the Grosvenor Lodge environmental day camps (<http://heritagelondonfoundation.org/KidsCamp.htm>), which feature the three Rs — reduce, reuse and recycle. Young environmentalists age 5 to 11 see composting demonstrations, hike on nature trails and learn about water and energy conservation, water quality and gardening through environmental games and activities.

KITCHENER

THE CITY OF KITCHENER (www.city.kitchener.on.ca, 519-741-2382) has a listing of summer camps under the “Community Programs & Services” tab. You’ll find information about various camps, including Camp Eco, where “children will enjoy nature

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crafts, hikes in the park, exciting special events, games and science experiments appropriate for their age. Weather permitting most activities are outdoors.”

WATERLOO

THE GRAND RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (www.grandriver.ca) provides a listing of summer events and activities including “bug studies,” as well as a listing of four nearby nature centres:

- **Apps’ Mill Nature Centre, Brantford** (519-752-0655)
- **Guelph Lake Nature Centre, Guelph** (519-836-7860)
- **Shade’s Mills Nature Centre, Cambridge** (519-623-5573)
- **Laurel Creek Nature Centre, Waterloo** (519-885-1368)

Each centre has its own directory of events and activities to do with the environment. Some centres run day and overnight camps during the summer for children of various ages, focusing on conservation through activities like the Great Garbage Audit (campers collect their refuse all week, weigh it and win big for the smallest amount!), pond or creek studies, animal studies and “eco-challenges” that focus campers’ attention on environmental issues.

ALL ONTARIO

PARKS CANADA (www.pc.gc.ca) lists all the national historic sites and national marine conservation areas in the province. Under “Ontario,” you will find a list of sites, each with a wealth of information on the area, species at risk and the environmentally friendly activities available. For example, for the unique **Point Pelee National Park** [★] in southernmost Ontario, a wide range of guided hiking and cycling tours are listed, along with numerous ways to become involved in conservation efforts in the area.

★ **ONTARIO TOURISM’S GREAT ONTARIO OUTDOOR ADVENTURES WEBSITE** (www.ontariooutdoor.com/en) is great! Click on “Summer” under “Seasonal Getaways” for listings and links to all sorts of outdoors activities, like birding events, cycling tours, and geographic sites to explore (waterfalls, caves or rocks, anyone?) all over the province.

ALGONQUIN PROVINCIAL PARK (www.algonquinpark.on.ca) is a favoured getaway for Ontarians. Click on “Programs” and then “Summer Interpretive Program” for a listing of July and August events, including the August-only Thursday night “wolf howl” tours. Join a park naturalist who will describe the biology and history of wolves in the province. ➔