

# **I Spy Critter Clues Program Outline**

*Designed for Heil Valley Ranch but may be adapted for other properties*

## **I Spy Critter Clues!**

### **Foothills Ecosystem Open Space**

The nature detectives are on the prowl! Help volunteer naturalists search for evidence, including tracks, scat, nests, bones, antlers, and other signs of some of the wildlife that lives here. This program is for children ages 4-9 and their families and will include plenty of hands-on fun for all.

**Note:** This program was developed as a public program, but it may also be adapted for age-specific school programs for elementary-aged students.

**Theme:** Wildlife is everywhere, so be a nature detective and keep your eyes open for clues in your neighborhood and on open space.

### **Concepts:**

- Ponderosa pine ecosystem
- Habitat (food, water, shelter, space)
- Predator/prey relationships
- Herbivore, carnivore and omnivore feeding strategies
- Nature detective approach for the walk (looking for evidence of antlers, bones, tracks, scat, Abert's squirrel signs, paper wasp nest, etc.)
- Trail safety (e.g. lion, bear, rattlesnake, prickly pear cactus, rocks, weather)

### **Wildlife**

- **Mountain Lion** (skull, pelt, track, scat, poster)
- **Mule Deer** (skull, antler, track, scat)
- **Black Bear** (mount, skull, pelt, track, scat)
- **Abert's Squirrel** (mount, Abert's twigs and cones)
- **Bobcat** (mount, skull, pelt, track, scat)
- **Red Fox** (mount, skull, pelt, track, scat)
- **Deer Mouse** (skull, track)
- **Red-tailed Hawk** (skull, poster)
- **Bull Snake** (snakeskin shed)
- **Paper Wasp** (nest)

### **Other Equipment**

- Hand lenses

## **Procedure**

- Arrive early at foothills ecosystem open space and plant bones, antlers, tracks, scat, Abert's signs, snakeskin, etc. in area near the trailhead/picnic shelter
- Meet group and do introduction, including mounts, pelts, and other hands-on props at the trailhead/picnic shelter
  - Introduce ecological concepts
  - Reminder to group to leave everything we find in place (except our wildlife props)
- Lead group(s) on scavenger hunt to find wildlife props
- Identify wildlife props and share a little about each animal
- Collect all wildlife props and return to picnic shelter
- Display wildlife props and encourage hands-on experience and questions
- Reinforce program theme and conclude program

(Edited September 2020, Larry Colbenson, BCPOS Natural History Program Coordinator)