



Cornell University

**Cornell Cooperative Extension
Monroe County**

2449 Saint Paul Blvd
Rochester, NY 14617
p. 585.753.2550 f. 585.753.2560
e. monroe@cornell.edu
monroe.cce.cornell.edu

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For more information, contact:

Susan Coyle
585.753.2555
smc226@cornell.edu

Monroe County 4-H Inspires Young Citizen Scientists

Monroe County fifth & sixth graders try their hand at citizen science

The Monroe County 4-H team had an exciting experience guiding local fifth and sixth graders through an introduction to citizen science during Monroe County Soil & Water District Conservation Field Days on September 17th-19th.

This year's Conservation Field Days hosted over 1,000 children from schools across Monroe County, with students learning about the environment through various hands-on-activities conducted by local organizations in picturesque Ellison Park. This year the Monroe County 4-H team participated in each of the three days of the event, leading children through a quick, twenty-minute introduction to citizen science by collecting data on the biodiversity of "mini-ecosystems" in the park.

4-H Youth Development Educator Lori Koenick kicked off each session with a brief introduction to Cornell Cooperative Extension and the 4-H Program, as well as the definitions of ecosystem, biodiversity, and citizen science. "You don't need to wear a white lab-coat to be a scientist," Koenick explained to the students. "Anyone can do science!"

With a clipboard, pencil, and magnifying glass in hand, the students split into groups and set off to locate one of several mini-ecosystems set up from which to collect data. As the children gathered around their mini-ecosystems marked off by hula-hoops, they began to look for evidence of plants, fungi, insects, invertebrates, and other animals. Students recorded their findings. One group from Webster School District ran around excitedly to other groups, showing off a caterpillar they found amongst the grass in their ecosystem. Another group from East Irondequoit School District decided to look beyond what they could observe on the surface, checking just under the soil in their ecosystem, discovering worms and grubs.

As the classes gathered back together at the end of the activity, 4-H Educator Jessica Reid showed students how to record their data on a single chart for the whole class. Students participated in a discussion comparing their data to those of other groups, and thinking about what factors may have affected their findings. Early-morning classes tended to find a lot of snails, slugs, and mushrooms amongst the morning dew, while later morning classes

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often made note of more flying insects, such as dragonflies and bees, flying in and out of their ecosystems.

The Monroe County 4-H Program is offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension to the youth of Monroe County. 4-H is a worldwide youth development program open to all youth aged 5 to 19, who want to have fun, learn new skills, and explore the world. In return, youth who participate in 4-H find a supportive environment and opportunities for hands-on or “experiential” learning about things that interest them.

Learn more at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-development>.



4-H Educator Jessica Reid directs students to enter their findings on their class chart. Photo by Susan Coyle.

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