

## ABSTRACT

For several years I have worked in and around the Goodwin Conservation Center located in my home town of Hampton Connecticut. The Goodwin is a state park which is run and operated by the D.E.E.P. and The Friends of the Goodwin volunteer staff on the land donated by forester James L. Goodwin.

My inspiration for the project came to me in the spring of 2012 when I was working to help clean up after an early morning program at the Goodwin. As I finished up the cleaning my eyes fell on a case to the back of the conference room. I was shocked to find taxidermy mice or as a conservationist would call them “Skin Studies”.

As a novice taxidermist myself I started to collect moles, mice and shrew to taxidermy. I soon was hard at work trying to assemble a meaningful program focused on “pests”. These would be the animals that we despised because of there habits however I was determined to show the public what they really are, an animal with the will to survive.

## RODENTS AND SMALL MAMMALS

When I made the decision to put the programs into action I knew there was only one man who could help me do this and that was Juan Sanchez. Juan is the seasonal naturalist at the Goodwin and is now a good friend. When Juan and I sat down to create my first lesson we had a lot to work with. I had already chosen which animals I thought would be the most familiar to the children. We finally narrowed our selection down to moles, shrews and a few kinds of mice.

Juan and I created a game to help them learn about one of these small mammals which was the common mole. We created a maze of rope where the “moles” would feel their way around rocks and stumps in order to find their gummy worm. This would teach the kids about moles and that these animals do what they need to in order to survive. The tunnels in our yards are not a hazard but help from a small subterranean mammal eating the grubs that destroy our crops and lawns.

We started to talk to the kids about the importance of rodents and small mammals in our ecosystems. For example the meadow voles importance to an elaborate food web which places them in an important role as a staple food source for birds of prey. As a group we also went out to a field of milk weed to look at some examples of rodent nests more specifically vole nests. The vole is the largest mouse in New England and loves to use milk weed fluff as bedding which I took advantage of to show the group how nests were more sophisticated than a pile of brush.

Of course after a long day of adventuring through the woods we all went back to the conference room to have some hot chocolate and brownies with a short review of what we learned along while having a look at some of my taxidermy mice.



## BEEES AND WASPS

After seeing how my first program worked out I wanted to make a follow up course that was just as exciting for the kids. However we were faced with a new problem, it was now winter and bees are all hibernating. Juan had shown me a hive that was found in a pine tree several years ago and after examining it I came to the conclusion that the wax honey bee hive was just the thing we needed to keep the kids interactive.

Knowing what we had to do I started work on researching habits and behaviors for several bee species. I was not surprised to learn that the bees are the only insect to pollinate apple trees making them an indispensable resource to our local markets.

Many of the children who came that day were afraid of bees. When I asked why they said “because they sting us”. I continued to then ask if any of them had ever been stung by bees; out of the group only one boy raised his hand. To then clear up the misconception of bees wanting to sting people I told the children that bees are actually quite tolerant of human activity around the hive and only sting if attacked. After the kids got a better understanding of bees I moved on to wasps. Black and blue spider hunters are the top spider hunting wasp in our area which the name suggests. When the group found out about spider hunters they got excited and asked to go look for spiders so we went out in front of the building for a little while so the kids could look for their prey. When they came to me with the spiders I told them about how the wasp larvae ate the spiders which grossed some of them out. However being grossed out didn't stop them from enjoying some fresh local honey with me back in the conference room.



### Rodents and Small Mammals



We all see them in our mouse traps but what is behind the so called pests in our yards and houses. Join *Environmental Ambassador* Michael Grady and *Naturalist* Juan Sanchez to take a deeper look into moles, mice and more. Together we will look into the life cycle, habitat, diet and what makes these pest so unique and adaptable. Please join us August 25 and get a new found respect for some of the most despised animals by home owners and learn why not to hate mice to pieces



### Bees and Wasps



Well time to enjoy some fresh honey on my toast but where did the honey start at, join *Environmental Ambassador* Michael Grady and *Naturalist* Juan Sanchez and we will find out. Together we will take a look at how these important bees, wasps and hornets live. Especially how wild bees make honey and colonize hives to survive the winter. Please join us October 13 and we will get ready to be touched by the bug covered in fuzz.



## CONCLUSIONS

I was able to connect these children with nature and help them understand that these animals are not a pest but a pal who is here to help us not hurt us. I was also able to clear up misconceptions which are like road blocks that prevent an educator from reaching their audience. So by clearing this misconception I am doing more than teaching a lesson I am also opening up opportunities for a greater acceptance of these animals.

□The children learned that Rodents and Small Mammals are not to be hated but enjoyed as an important part of an ecosystem full of hungry predators and wary grubs.

□They also learned that the bee is not a pest by any means but just the opposite benefiting apple farmers and people with arachnophobia.

## REFERENCES

All of my information came from Juan and several books on my subjects which were:

Wild Mammals of New England. Godin, Alfred J. John Hopkins University 1977  
The Wild Mammals of Missouri. Schwartz, Charles W. University of Missouri 2001  
New England Wildlife. DeGraf, Richard M. University of New England 2001  
Peterson Field Guides Insects. Borror, Donald J. Houghton Mifflin Company 1970  
Insects of Eastern Forests. US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 1985

I would like to thank Juan Sanchez Jr. for all the time he spent helping me and for being a great mentor and a friend. I also want to thank Sam Nunn for showing me that I wasn't the only kid who was so passionate about the environment.