

Parents and students accept challenge

Parents across the country were challenged this past summer to get their children off the couch, outdoors, and involved in a new hobby.

According to the number of visitors to www.backyardbirdcare.org, it was a challenge well received. “We were happily amazed at the sheer number of downloads our site experienced in July and August,” Peter Stangel of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation stated.

The plan was simple: introduce children to birdwatching. Families were encouraged to establish bird feeding and water stations, and the students were asked to document the visitors to their feeders in a journal.

“This was a fantastic program for families,” said Stangel. “It was educational, but fun. Family fun,” he said.

The newly designed website features information regarding the 6 Steps Program, a source of easy to follow tips regarding bird feeding habitats and healthy feeding practices. It’s also filled with activities geared toward your child’s entertainment.

“Log on, and download a free coloring book, puzzles, bookmarks, even plans for building a simple bird feeder. It’s something the whole family can enjoy,” added Sue Hays, Executive Director of the Wild Bird Feeding Industry.

And while the response to the summer challenge was higher than anticipated, the organizations involved with the website are asking for more involvement from the Newspapers In Education (NIE) programs operational in most newspaper markets.

“There are many students across the country who do not have internet access at home, and may not have other options to visit the website,” Hays said. “We’d like to reach out to all NIE programs, and ask that they visit the site. Read the simple steps. Download an activity. Then share this program with the students.”

Stangel agreed, noting that this would be an ideal class activity. “If each school sets up a bird feeder and helps the students in the maintenance of the feeder, the identification of birds, and the recording of their journal entries, we will have introduced a new generation to the wonders in our backyards.”

In addition to the family activities and 6 Steps program, the website also contains posters in a variety of sizes, all suitable for classroom and media use. “It’s free. The content of the 6 Steps program and all the activities on the website are free,” Stangel added.

An added bonus? The summer challenge got students off the couch, and outdoors. Perhaps this fall, we’ll see even more students discovering an interest in nature as they learn to recognize the individual bird species in their own neighborhood.

Additional resources:

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - www.nfwf.org

The Wild Bird Feeding Industry - www.wbfi.org

American Bird Conservancy - www.abcbirds.org

American Birding Association - www.americanbirding.org

Bird Conservation Alliance - www.birdconservationalliance.org

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology - www.birds.cornell.edu

Massachusetts Audubon Society - www.massaudubon.org

National Audubon Society - www.audubon.org

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - www.nfwf.org

National Wildlife Federation - www.nwf.org

The Wildlife Society - www.wildlife.org

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - www.fws.gov