

North Woods Girl Nature Connection Guide

The book *North Woods Girl* demonstrates the impact that an adult can have on a child's future interests and well-being. Many studies have shown that spending time in nature is good for one's mental and physical health. School teachers, nature center and park naturalists, and other environmental educators incorporate nature study activities into their inter-disciplinary curricula. But you can study nature at home, without being a professional! Below are some activities to study the natural world around you, without being an expert. These activities are a great way to spend time with the child or grandchild in your life and start a lifetime appreciation for our world.



1. What is the North Woods?

The North Woods is a nickname for the northern coniferous forest that stretches from northern Minnesota eastward to northern New England, Montana, the Pacific Northwest, and throughout Canada. The majority of trees are conifers (evergreens) that can handle the cool, moist, shady forest and temperatures that range from 100° F to -60° F. The soil is thin, often acidic, and has low nutrients. Henry David Thoreau described it as "sprucey and moosey." Minnesota naturalist and author Mark "Sparky" Stensaas said "The North is a subtle place... superficially lifeless and sterile," but there are many organisms that can live in the harsh conditions.

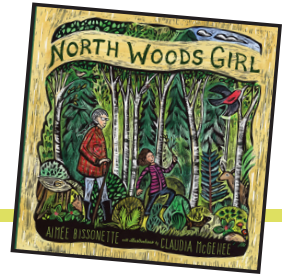
Some common species are:

- Trees:** Conifers: white pine, white spruce, white cedar, and balsam fir. Tamaracks. Deciduous: paper birch, quaking aspen
- Birds:** black-capped chickadee, American robin, raven, American three-toed woodpecker, gray jay, boreal chickadee, ruffed grouse, hermit thrush, purple finch, common loon
- Mammals:** red squirrel, snowshoe hare, black bear, timber wolf, moose, porcupine, white-tailed deer
- Plants:** fireweed, tansy, large-leaved aster, bunchberry, wild sarsaparilla, thimbleberry, red baneberry, wild lupine, harebell, orange hawkweed, bracken fern, reindeer moss
- Rocks:** basalt, granite, rhyolite, agates

On the next page, you'll find photos you can check off as you hunt for nature's treasures. You can take your own photos and create a Scavenger Hunt for your family and friends.



North Woods Girl



North Woods Scavenger Hunt



Tree: Conifer: Balsam Fir
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Tree: Deciduous: Paper Birch
(photo © Brian Scantlebury)



Bird: Downy Woodpecker
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Mammal: Beaver
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Mammal: American Black Bear
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Plant: Tansy
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Plant: Bunchberry
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Birds: Common Loon
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Rock: Agate
(photo © Aimée Bissonnette)

Other Animals, Birds, Plants, Trees, and Rocks You Found:



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2. Insect Pollinators

Observe and photograph all the insects that come to your flowers over the summer.

Try planting nectar-bearing native plants such as blazing star, Joe-Pye weed, Canada goldenrod, Culver's root, bergamot, and purple coneflower.

Use www.Bugguide.net to help identify your insects.

3. Birds

Look outside your house or apartment. How many kinds of birds do you routinely see? These are common birds in Minnesota yards: house sparrow, American robin, black-capped chickadee, northern cardinal, blue jay, American goldfinch, downy woodpecker.

- a) Keep monthly journals of your observations. Which ones spend time on the ground? What foods do each type eat? Does this change over the winter? Can you recognize their songs? Visit The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "All About Birds" www.allaboutbirds.org to learn more about your birds and listen to their songs and calls. Or check out Cornell's Celebrate Urban Birds <http://celebrateurbanbirds.org> to get a kit and share your observations, photos, and artwork.



Canadian Tiger Swallowtail

(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



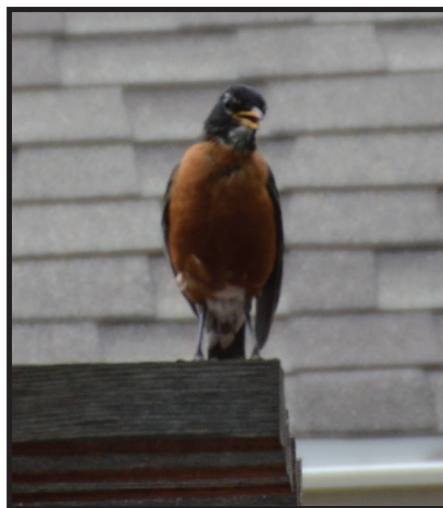
Syrphid Fly, mimics bees

(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



American Goldfinch

(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Robin

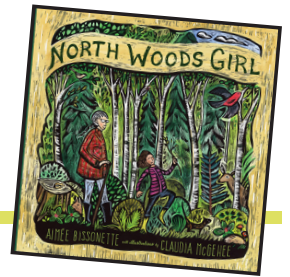
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)

Listen for owls at night.

Barred Owls sound like "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all." Great Horned Owls make this pattern, "Hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, hooooo." The less common Screech Owl sounds like a crazy person laughing or a horse whinnying.



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Gray Squirrel (photos © Lee Ann Landstrom)



4. Gray Squirrels (or red or fox squirrels)

- Observe the squirrels around you. How do they behave when they are on the ground? In a tree? At your bird feeder? Watch when they come together; is there a chase? Is there a boss squirrel? What movements do they make with their tail? (slow flicking, fast flicking, hold it over their back, lay it flat). What do these movements seem to mean?
- Try an experiment: Put out an array of foods in side-by-side piles (sunflower seeds, millet, whole wheat bread, unsalted peanuts, berries, crackers). Which food is their favorite, i.e., eaten first? This may vary between species and even between seasons.

5. Animal Tracks

In winter snow (or in mud), animals leave tracks as they go about their activities. Can you identify some tracks? Red fox, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit, house sparrow, raccoon, wild turkey. Where do the tracks go? What was the animal doing?



Fox Tracks
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Rabbit Tracks
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)



Squirrel Tracks
(photo © Lee Ann Landstrom)