

MSU Summer Camp Fun for All Ages



By Karen Brasher

Summer is filled with activities that often take children one direction and their parents another, but a Mississippi State University program brings families together for outdoor adventures that can

include handling snakes and throwing tomahawks.

Designed to foster and enhance an appreciation for Mississippi's wildlife and fisheries resources through hands-on experiences, the 5-day Intergenerational Wildlife and Fisheries Camps are filled to capacity in June and again in July.

"The uniqueness of our camps compared to others on campus is that both parents or grandparents and their children attend and learn side-by-side," said John Guyton, camp director and associate extension professor in MSU's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. "During the July camp, one family had three generations ranging from 10 to 69 in attendance."

The campers rise every morning around 6 a.m., eat breakfast and then begin the day. Conservation activities include telemetry, trapping, carnivores, wild turkeys, river ecology, hunter education, boater safety training, forest insects and plants, and reptile and bird biology and identification.

"These are not typical classroom-style presentations by any means. Active learning takes place as campers hold reptiles, feel bears' teeth, watch a mountain lion, shoot rifles, throw tomahawks, and fish, many for the first time," Guyton said.

The sporting activities include fishing, hiking, seining, canoeing, archery, tanning, skeet shooting, rifle shooting, bow fishing, tomahawk throwing, fly tying and using GPS receivers.

"My favorite part of camp would have to be when we shot the shotguns," said 10-year-old Callie Turner, a resident of Eupora.

Callie attended the camp with her grandfather Glen Booth. Her uncle David Booth and cousin Abbie Booth also attended.

"Attending the summer camp made me fill like a youngster again," Glen Booth said. "I learned a lot about balancing the fisheries in farm ponds, which is important since my son is in the process of stocking his pond."

Booth, a graduate of the University of Mississippi, said it also brought back memories of college life and proved that Bulldogs and Rebels can get along.

While fun and memories are important to any summer camp, the larger objective is to educate campers about conservation topics and to lay the groundwork for an appreciation for the land that will last into adulthood.

"To determine how effective the teaching methods are, we administered a short test at the start of camp and at the end of camp," said Leslie Burger, wildlife and fisheries extension associate. "In both the June and July camps, scores improved an average of 19 percent."

Many of the campers are outdoor-oriented and already participate in hunting, fishing, camping and boating, Burger added.

"However, so many of Mississippi's children are growing up without any outdoor experience at all, and the challenge to reach these kids with conservation may be greater," Burger said.

By involving students in conservation lessons and outdoor activities, we hope to instill the need to protect, conserve, sustain and use our natural resources, Burger added.

Hosted by the College of Forest Resources, the camp includes cooperators from the Mississippi State University departments of forestry, landscape architecture, and wildlife and fisheries. The College of Veterinary Medicine and MSU Extension Service are also involved. Assistance from outside the university is provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S.D.A. Wildlife Services; U.S.G.S. Biological Resources; Mississippi Chapter of the Nature Conservancy; Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks; Starkville School District; and the Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge.