

## FRIENDS OF ROCK BRIDGE MEMORIAL STATE PARK

### Sixth Annual Urban Populations Outreach Program (UPOP) At Rock Bridge Memorial State Park Summer 2011

The Missouri Parks Association's Urban Populations Outreach Program (UPOP) in Columbia has again given children (and their teen and adult leaders) who are under-served by our state parks opportunities to explore the resources of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park. Our goals were for children to (1) have positive experiences in our state park, (2) learn about the variety of natural and recreational resources available at our state parks, and (3) develop the map reading skills in order to direct their families to the state park and its resources – and (4) most important, encourage families to visit our state parks. The staff and volunteers really enjoyed watching the children discover nature's special secrets



*“Oooo it was dark, and cold in there.”  
“There was only one bat, but I didn’t wake it up. Bats can get sick if we wake them up. The frogs weren’t asleep and we saw five.” “This water is from rain. “It goes down, down to get in here.” “This isn’t scary, it’s fun”*

Reports from Fun City K-3 class upon leaving Conner’s Cave in Rock Bridge Memorial State Park.

This year, a total of 257 (192 children, 33 teens and 32 adults) participated in UPOP field trips to explore Rock Bridge Memorial State Park: (1) to explore Conner’s cave and learn about cave life, (2) explore and monitor streams in the park, and (3) learn to find the park and its resources using maps. The UPOP program was funded by Missouri Parks Association with support from Downtown Optimist Club and the Conservation Federation of Missouri (to support family activities) and sponsored by the Friends of Rock Bridge Memorial State Park (FoRB) with staff support from Rock Bridge Memorial State Park staff. Meredith Donaldson served as coordinator and the Boone’s Lick Chapter of Missouri Master Naturalists provided additional volunteer support.

Participating youth agencies included Fun City, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Columbia, Boy's and Girl's Town, Columbia Housing Authority Moving Ahead Summer Youth Program, the City of Columbia Youth in Action Program – all agencies serving low income and at risk children in Columbia, Missouri.

**Program:** Early in the spring and summer, Meredith provided training and program materials to assist agency staff in preparing children for their experiences at the state parks. Field activities were conducted June through August. Half day field trips included guided tours through Conner's Cave, water and aquatic life monitoring of streams, hikes in search of wildlife, map reading, and nature journaling.

The funds from the Missouri Conservation Federation were to support family activities in the state parks. It was difficult to build enthusiasm for this in the heat of the summer. Programs are currently being planned for this fall with the Columbia Housing Authority and other agencies. A report of these will be provided following these programs.

### Highlights of 2011:



#### **Frequent experiences in a place can form an attachment.**

Each year the number of children who have been on previous UPOP trips increases. This year, older children were observed running to a particular place or feature exclaiming, "I remember this." There was a joy in finding the familiar, but also discovery of changes that had occurred since the last visit. One group last year hid some rocks and other treasures deep under a rock ledge. Upon return this year, they found one rock was still there, but other items were not. The group came up with several explanations for the missing items, and then put the little rock back in its hiding place.

#### **Exploring outdoors can contribute to learning basic skills and science.**

Fun City, a nonprofit located in the Columbia Housing Authority, had a very strong educational focus this year and were participating in an assessment of improvement in basic skills with assistance from Columbia Public Schools. Early in the summer, the director said they might not have time to visit the state park this year. Meredith provided training to the teachers in how math, reading and writing could be incorporated into outdoor explorations and provided them with classroom materials and posters. As a result, Fun City visited the park three times. Every trip emphasized scientific inquiry, measurement, reading nature guides to learn more, and writing in nature journals. Each trip they continued to build on their learning about the water cycle, karst topography and the interdependence of animals in aquatic habits.

### **UPOP experiences enhance classroom learning.**

Meredith was part of the EPA funded Columbia Outdoor Classroom Program that involved demonstrating for teachers how the outdoor classroom could be used to teach different subjects. There were numerous times when children would greet her enthusiastically and would then share what they learned in UPOP the previous summer. On one day at West Boulevard Elementary School, Meredith was waiting to lead a lesson in the outdoor classroom. She saw one boy being disciplined by the teacher at the school door who then joined the group with a sullen, defiant face... until he saw Meredith, whom he had met on a UPOP trip the past summer. There was a transformation and he soon became the leader of his group. He was overheard later asking his classmates, "What do you think might be burrowing in the ground there? Use your clues...what does it want down there underground?...and look at the hole, what size animal is it." This is the impact UPOP can have on a child. Is he already on his way to becoming a future park naturalist?



Examining the parts of a flower. Investigations included recording color, number of petals and locating stamen and

### **UPOP fosters leadership.**

The Moving Ahead afternoon program at the Columbia Housing Authority has a wide age range of children. This year, Meredith suggested that the older children be trained to lead the younger ones in activities at the park. The older group went out in July and it took a little time for Meredith to convince them that they would really be the naturalist on the return trip. They learned their lessons well. When they returned in August, three boys led tours of Conner's Cave, three girls taught bat natural history in another area and a third group of leaders led a bat echolocation game. The adult helpers started to assist, but soon stood back. Meredith had to coach the cave group a little when they presented to their group and a few members



of the public who were also at the cave entrance. The enthusiasm of these young interpreters was such a joy to see, but Meredith could not let stand the admonition that if you wake up any bats they would die of white nose syndrome. Other cave facts were more accurate. But, you could see that these youngsters were already stewards of our natural resources.

Boys and Girls Club monitoring the Devil's Icebox Branch

<b>Table 1. UPOP Columbia 2011 Participation</b>						
Children	Teens	Adults				
0	5	4	6/11/2011	RBMSP	Youth in Action	Invasive plant removal
		5	7/6/2011	at Fun City	Training staff	Incorporating field activities into basic skill instruction
39	4	4	7/13/2011	RBMSP	Fun City	Conner's Cave
37	4	3	7/20/2011	RBMSP	Fun City	Stream Monitoring
36	3	3	7/27/2011	RBMSP	Fun City	Water Cycle Activities
6	8	4	7/27/2011	Moving Ahead	Moving Ahead	Conner's Cave trip/training of older group to lead cave tours
37		5	7/18/2011	RBMSP	Boys and Girls Club	Conner's Cave Tour
0	0	0	8/8/2011	RBMSP	Boys and Girls Club	Cancelled
32	9	3	8/10/2011	RBMSP	Moving Ahead	Field activities lead by Moving Ahead older group
5	0	1	7/26/2010	RBMSP	Boys Town	Field (Insect collection) and Stream (aquatic critter collection)
<b>192</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>Total: 257</b>			



Moving Ahead getting ready to hit the trail.