Conservation Corner

*Conservation Corner is a weekly article produced by the Forest County Land &Water Conservation Department. For more information contact Steve Kircher, County Conservationist-Land Information/GIS Director at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at* *lcc@co.forest.wi.us**.*

**Using Tech to Learn in Nature**

Just because you can’t tell a Tufted Titmouse from a Coast Pignut Hickory doesn’t mean your kid has to know you’re not a walking Natural History Museum. With the following nature apps for smartphones and tablets, you can wander outdoors, day or night, and answer practically any question they have, from “What is that bright star on the horizon?” to “Is this bug that I’m putting in my mouth poisonous?” The window of time during which your kid thinks you know everything is vanishingly thin, so leverage technology to make it last as long as possible. Because, someday soon, they’ll be all grown up and able to Google things for themselves. These plant, animal and star identifying apps let you identify pieces of the world around you through your phone’s camera feature or by asking you questions. They turn screen time into an opportunity to get out into nature and learn, giving your kid the gift of having a world of information at their fingertips. Some are free and some involve a fee.

**Bird Apps**

**Merlin Bird ID**- Merlin asks you 4 simple questions about any bird you happen upon and delivers a small selection of potential species. Assuming you can see and/or hear it, you can quickly identify whatever it was that just pooped on you. Merlin cross-references your answers with a massive database of bird sightings that’s maintained by thousands of hardcore bird geeks, and only suggest species known to have been seen recently near your location. However, while suggested species will include samples of their song, the nature app can’t identify a bird based on its song, which some less-free apps can (free – iOS, Android).

**Stars and Planets Apps**

**Skyview** - Point your phone’s camera at the night sky and SkyView will determine your location via GPS and identify all the planets, constellations, stars and satellites that are currently visible. A robust search function that helps you find things like the International Space Station, the Hubble telescope, or the Big Dipper. It also has daily updates that point out when new things have become visible. SkyView is one of the top-rated nature apps of all time in the App Store. ($1.99 – iOS, Android).

Other astronomy apps include NASA, StarWalk, Star Chart, SkySafari, Solar Walk, Sky Map, Go Skywatch, Stellarium, and Pocket Universe.

**Bugs and Butterflies**

**Audubon Butterflies, Insects and Spiders** *-* Basically just an app version of the Audubon Society’s world-class field guides, these apps include in-depth information on literally every single butterfly or bug you could possibly encounter in North America. Spectacular photo galleries for every single species and robust search that lets you enter things like size, shape, and color to help identify things when you don’t know the name. (Insects and Spiders: $4.99 iOS,

**Picture Insect**– Just take a photo of the insect you wish to identify and Picture Insect will use artificial intelligence to try and match it with one of the over 1,000 species they have cataloged. Users can share photos with each other for second opinions on what type of insect is pictured. However, there are in-app purchases available, so keep this one away from curious little fingers (free – iOS, Android).

**Animal Track Apps**

**iTrack Wildlife Pro**- Another app version of an old school field guide, iTrack Wildlife lets you search a database of 69 North American mammals based on some basic information about their foot, paw, or claw prints. The app will not only help you identify animals based on their prints, but also on their skulls. However, tiered pricing means you can access a handful of species with the free “Lite” version and a handful more with the “Basic” version. The whole package is pretty spendy for an app ($14.99 iOS, Android).

**Trees Apps**

**Leafsnap**– Leafsnap uses software similar to facial recognition to scan a photo of leaf that you take with your phone and compare it with a database with hundreds of different tree species. The resulting match includes everything you could ever want to know about that tree. Leafsnap will help you see (and name) the trees from the forest. It currently works best in the Northeastern U.S. and Canada, as well as the U.K. Also, it’s iOS only, although the Audubon Society has a less robust tree app for Android (Free iOS).

More citizen science project opportunities:

* <http://wiatri.net/> - Wisconsin Aquatic & Terrestrial Resources Inventory – various projects – bees, bats, amphibians, etc.
* <https://monarchjointventure.org/mlmp> - monarch larva monitoring project
* [https://www.usanpn.org/natures\_noteb ook](https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook) - National Phenology Network
* [www.bumblebeewatch.org](http://www.bumblebeewatch.org/)
* [www.citizenscience.gov/](http://www.citizenscience.gov/)
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