

Trash N' Turtles: A DEADLY Combination

Program Theme Statement

Litter is harmful to local wildlife. Humans are the cause, and they are also the cure!

Sometimes by accident, and sometimes intentionally, humans create a lot of litter in our state parks. Besides making our parks look dirty, some of the litter can be really harmful to wildlife. Plastic bags, fishing line and cigarette butts are among the worst of the worst. We all can make a HUGE difference by reducing the amount of litter in the park.

"Tangled Turtles" Wildlife Entanglement Activity:

Materials needed: rubber bands

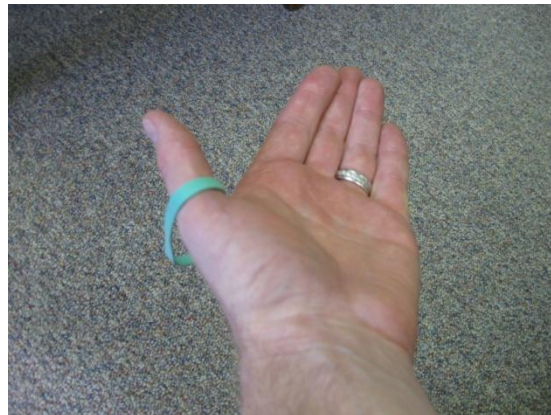
Ages: all ages

Time: about five minutes

Step 1: Start with one hand out palm facing UP



Step 2: Hang a rubber band from your thumb and let it dangle DOWN



Step 3: Pull the rubber band BEHIND your palm and wrap it around your pinky finger



Step 4: Now WITHOUT using your other hand or any other body part, try to take the rubber band off!

(Allow them 30 seconds to try. Some can remove it, but most have difficulty)

“Imagine being a fish or a turtle and being tangled up in fishing line or a plastic bag. Turtles can’t reach far enough for an extra limb to help. Fish have fins and have trouble shaking loose. Imagine being stuck there. You can’t move, you can’t eat, and you can’t hide from predators.”

Plastic Bags, fishing line, six pack rings and discarded rope entangle hundreds of animals like turtles, fish, water snakes, birds, beavers, muskrats, raccoons, salamanders, etc.



“Trouble is LINED up” – guessing activity

Hold up or pass around a jar of fishing line. Explain that participants will be able to guess how long it took park staff to pick up this much fishing line, in minutes, hours, days or weeks. Whoever is closest will win a prize, state park pencil, magnet, etc.

For this jar the answer is 3.5 hours!

And the bad news is, we can pick up that much EVERY day in our State Parks!!!

Questions:

Does fishing line float? Some of it does, but most of it drifts around until it gets tangled up in something that is usually underwater. If an air breathing turtle, snake or mammal gets tangled up, they literally drown!

What happens during heavy rains or floods? Fishing line, plastic bags and other trash get washed downstream where it can create hazards. If it eventually winds up in the ocean, it can entangle endangered sea turtles, seals, whales and much more.



“Keep your BUTTS out of the park” – guessing activity

Cigarettes butts are one of the WORST pieces of litter humans can leave on the earth. Cigarette butts, balloons and other small pieces of plastic can be mistaken for food by wildlife. Our state reptile, the Box Turtle, likes to eat mushrooms, and sometimes they can't tell the difference between THEIR food and OUR trash. They may have never even seen a cigarette butt before!

When rains wash cigarette butts and pieces of plastic into streams, rivers and lakes, aquatic turtles, fish and birds can mistake them for food. Cigarette butts look like small fish in the water, balloons and plastic bags look like jelly fish or eggs. Sometimes wildlife eats plastic and immediately chokes. If they are able to swallow it, the cigarette butts or pieces of plastic accumulate in their stomach and don't allow them to digest any food. They STARVE to death with a stomach full of TRASH!

Hold up or pass around a jar of cigarette butts. Explain that participants will be able to guess how many butts are in the jar. Whoever is closest will win a prize, state park pencil, magnet, etc.

For this jar the answer 633! (I know because I had a seasonal employee count them, hah!)

And the bad news is, we can pick up that much EVERY day in our State Parks!!!

Questions:

Do cigarette butts float?

What happens during heavy rains or floods?



Conclusion

Clearly all this litter is harmful to wildlife. There are a lot of sad stories, and sad pictures.

But, this is where WE can make a difference!!! WE can clean up the parks and help out our wildlife. Every cigarette butt we pick up may save a bird. Every plastic bag we pick up may save a sea turtle.

We can also help by spreading the word. Tell others how important it is to NOT litter. Ask smokers to use ashtrays. When shopping, use canvas tote bags instead of plastic bags. In the park, not only do we pick up the trash to keep the park clean, we also encourage recycling of fishing line and other materials.

Together we can stop the deadly combination of....Trash N' Turtles.

Additional Tips

Use in addition to volunteer trash clean ups.

Have a contest during trash clean ups with awards and prizes.

Use during turtle programs to advertise trash clean ups and promote awareness.

Promote the Junior Ranger program and trash pickups as a stewardship project.



Contents of one sea turtle stomach