

It's a green thing.

The week of July 7th through July 11th was a very busy one for about 33 kids that participated in the 4-H Summer Camp. Ranging in ages from 8 – 14, these youths had lots of fun while learning about nature, crafts, outdoor skills, dairies, history, plants and team work.

April Butler, 4-H Agent came up with the idea for the camp and said that “It was a lot of work to put it together, but it is important to have wholesome activities for our youth.” The staff from Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District assisted April with planning the event and by providing supervision, teachers and moral support. It's good to see the different county departments working so well together on projects and we plan to do more in the days to come.

The week started out with a trip to Highlands Hammock State Park where the kids had an opportunity to go on a tram ride followed by a ranger guided tour through the cypress swamp. It was a wonderful opportunity for the kids to see the beauty of nature and learn about it at the same time.

Tuesday was the time for them to show off their talents. A fun filled day held at the Agri Civic Center included building bird boxes for screech owls, painting their own flower pots, making stepping stones for their gardens and putting together a scrap book page with a picture of the group. It was amazing to see the kids work and learn new skills and hone up on the skills they already had. Each child got to take their crafts home and show them off to their parents.

Mid week brought on a competitive edge for the kids. Bishop Park was full of youths who would be competing in a “Survivor Challenge.” The challenge included dip netting, swimming, casting and canoeing. Each group of kids was given a lesson in each category and then the competition began. Four teams competed for the prestige of being first place. Each group did very well and tried their hardest. Not only was it a lot of fun, but it taught the kids about the importance of working together toward a common goal. They also know a lot more about these outdoor skills and there was plenty of laughter and fun.

Thursday included a trip to Butler Dairy, where the children bottle fed calves and had hands on leaning of the dairy operation. In addition, they planted caladium bulbs in the flower pots they painted and used compost that was supplied by the Butlers. Rounded off with a fun filled trip to Cypress Gardens on Friday, the camp was a hit.

As with any successful event, it wouldn't have been possible without the help of so many people. Thanks to our Earth Team volunteers, who made all the kits for the bird boxes and instructed the kids how to put them together. Thanks to the Highlands County Lakes Association for cooking the burgers and hot dogs each day for our lunches. Many thanks go out to all of the camp sponsors: Butler Oaks Farm, Highlands County 4-H Foundation, Highlands County Extension, Highlands County Master Gardeners, Highlands County Parks & Recreation, Highlands Earth Team, Highlands Hammock State Park, Highlands Soil & Water Conservation District, Riverwoods Field Laboratory, Rose Show Supplies, Sapp Caladiums, Inc., W & W Lumber Company and South Florida Water Management District.

Much appreciation is extended to all the folks who gave up their time and came out to supervise, teach and encourage the kids through out the week. You are the reason that the event was so successful.

It is our hope that the kids walked away from this camp with a better understanding of nature, more confidence in themselves and others, new friends and fond memories that will last a life time.