Science Center X: Animals

Steps

1. **Wild vs. tame.**
Discuss the difference of wild animals and domesticated ones. Behaviors and reactions to humans can be completely different. Things we do can harm wild animals without us intending to, like feeding animals to the point where they don't fend for themselves anymore.

2. **Rescue.**
How do you rescue an animal? Should you? Ask a professional to do a demonstration or record a video that explains what to do, what not to do and when to call for help.

3. **Set up a blind.**
Set up an area where you can watch wild animals without caging them. You can also look online for video feeds that show animals without being intrusive.

4. **Track it!**
Learn to identify animal tracks. From rubbing plates to plaster molds you make yourself, use these to show how to identify animals and birds.

5. **Describe it!**
Animals come in all shapes and sizes. Use description to help identify animals. You can make a matching card game to put pictures of animals with their names. Perhaps samples of different fur to touch would make describing easier. A local taxidermist might have a few animals for you to borrow and display. Find someone who studies insects and see if they have a collection they'd be willing to share — they might come with it so you'll have an expert as well.

You might be able to borrow items from park learning centers to help your visitors get a better look at animals. For example, Indiana Dunes has samples of birds in clear tubes so you can look at them closely.

6. **Life cycles.**
Every animal, bird, reptile and insect has a life cycle. Presenting pictures of these shows the cycle. Allowing students to touch the caterpillars is better than just looking at a drawing. If you're worried about damaging wildlife, craft your version of it that can be manipulated. You don't have to make it human-sized. Make them really large and tell your visitors that they are half their normal size (or any other comparison you wish).

7. **Communicate.**
Do you communicate with your pets? How do animals communicate without a language? Nonverbal clues are hard for humans because they are so used to verbal communication.

Honey bees do a wiggle dance. My cat sits in front of her water bowl and meows. (She wants fresh water, not that stale stuff.) Explore this more in depth and create an exhibit.

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Animals are part of our world. From pets to zoos, we love to watch them, feed them and play with them.

NOTE: Only general ideas are given for this theme. Be sure to explore ideas online or at your local library.

8. **Shelters.**
Animal shelters are a great way to expose kids to animals and their needs. You don't need to go to a shelter. You can ask them to bring in an animal or two. In addition, they can provide information on donations they are looking for, how to adopt, etc. This is a win-win for your Science Center and helping animals in need.

9. **Zoos.**
Like shelters, they can bring in animals or you can go to them. Be sure to have something more for your visitors to do than look at the animals. Talk to your local zoo and see if they have programs available that you can add to your Science Center or develop something beneficial for both of you.

10. **Pets.**
Volunteers can bring in their pets or you might have small tanks with fish, hermit crabs, birds, snakes, turtles, etc. They can discuss the care and needs of the pets. Visitors might be allowed to help brush, feed or play with the pets.

11. **Endangered species.**
What does it take for a species to be considered endangered? How many animals are on the endangered species list? What makes them become endangered? Discuss the impact losing different species can have on our world.

12. **Create a critter.**
Do you know the parts of an animal, bird, reptile or insect? Collect items that can be used to create these. Items should be reusable so the critters can be taken apart or adjusted by your visitors. You might even make this into a challenge.

13. **Animal charades.**
Create cards with the names of common animals. One person pulls the card and acts out the animal. The person who guesses first gets to act out the next one. What other games might you play that helps visitors remember information about animals?

14. **Like the animals.**
Explore the world like an animal does. Pretend to be the animal. Look at the world from their normal height / location. Try to simulate animals by things like looking at the world in black and white like dogs or use a microscope to see what you'd see if you were really tiny. Research ways to see and experience the world like the animals.

15. **Science Center X: Nature.**
The Nature badge that goes with this set has some activities that work with animals as well. Check it out!

16. **Explore more!**
There are so many ways to introduce and learn about animals that it can't be contained here. Continue exploring online to find out even more great ideas to make your Science Center a success.

Supplements

SUPP_Cards_Animal.pdf
Two-sided cards with 32 silhouette animals and names on back
SUPP_Create Critter.pdf
Create a Critter printable
SUPP_Insect Collection.pdf
Basics in creating an insect collection
SUPP_MBD_Track Ident.pdf
Minibook: Beginners Track Identifiers

SUPP_SCR_Animals in the Air.pdf
Scramble: Animals in the Air
SUPP_SCR_Animals in the Water.pdf
Scramble: Animals in the Water
SUPP_SCR_Animals on the Land.pdf
Scramble: Animals on the Land
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Word Find: Endangered Species from World Wildlife
SUPP_WF_Extinct NA.pdf
Word Find: Extinct North American Animals Since 1500
SUPP_WF_Insects.pdf
Word Find: Insects and Spiders
SUPP_WF_Pets.pdf
Word Find: Pets
SUPP_WF_Reptiles.pdf
Word Find: Cold Blooded Animals
SUPP_WF_Zoology.pdf
Word Find: Zoology

SUPP_Exhibit Planner.pdf
Exhibit Planner — Pre-planning and testing questions
SUPP_Scientific Inquiry.pdf
Scientific Inquiry — Printables for use with any exhibit theme

Sites to Explore

www.exploratorium.edu/explore
www.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/free-lesson-plans
kids.usa.gov/teachers/lesson-plans/science/index.shtml
www.teach-nology.com/teachers/lesson_plans/science
www.sciencefairadventure.com
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