

*Adventure out*

## *Finding joy in nature*

Connecting with nature in a fun and exciting way is something that Olivia and Ava Curtis know all about. They recently headed out to Piney Lakes to explore all its wonderful creatures, sights and smells and got to 'know their patch' as part of the **Wildlife Ninja School** and **Nature Navigators** programs.

story and photos  
by Natalie Curtis







I always encourage my kids to spend time outside. I find that a connection to nature helps to ground and balance them. Learning about the local plants and animals helps them to understand the world they live in and the importance of a healthy environment.

Olivia is eight and Ava is four, and I was hoping to get them involved in activities that gave them meaningful interactions with nature and engaged them to see and value joy in nature. We stumbled across the *Know Your Patch* program while looking for something to do over the school holidays.

Early this year we headed off to Piney Lakes Reserve, so the girls could participate in some exciting new nature programs run as part of the *Know Your Patch* program. Ava and I participated in Wildlife Ninja School in the morning.

## WILDLIFE NINJA SCHOOL

As all the kids gathered on the mat ready to listen to the presenter, I sat back eagerly awaiting what would unfold.

I watched the kids hone their senses as they learned to become wildlife ninjas.

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**Main** Wildlife Ninja School.

**Inset left** Nature Navigators.

**Inset right** Engaging senses in nature.

**Above left to right** Observing nature up close; tackling the ninja obstacle course; nature treasure hunt.

### ***A message from Know Your Patch program coordinator, Joselyn Juraszek***

*We do our jobs because we care about nature, about the place of humans in this world, about other species and about natural features that shape us. Why do we care? We do this work because at some point in our lives we fell in love with the natural world, and it is human nature to want to protect what we love.*

*Children who come on our programs have loads of fun and that's the most important thing. That would be the biggest benefit from the child's point of view. We see children really coming alive, they are so happy and carefree when playing in nature. They are creative, they think deeply, and they work together to solve problems. What we really hope they take away from our program is a memory of how happy they felt being in nature and to want to have that feeling again and again.*

*You don't have to let your kids roll in mud to have them truly love and appreciate nature, but if you want your kids to love nature it takes more than reading a science book or looking at a seed.*

*Getting kids outside to explore, take risks, ask questions and enjoy the wonder will encourage a lifelong connection with and care for the natural world.*



Ava was engaged straight away practising her ninja skills, I have never seen her sit so still! Quiet and relaxed, the kids listened to the sounds around them—the wind blowing, a fly buzzing and even a bird calling. They also practised their ninja moves as they tried walking without making a sound.

After all the practising it was time to tackle a ninja obstacle course. Ava was so excited as she watched the other kids balance on logs, stepping around plants and walking quietly through crunching leaves. She waited, wondering if she had what it takes to become a wildlife ninja.

“The hardest part of the ninja course was being super sneaky and balancing through the obstacle course,” Ava said.

I was so proud of her; she got her badge and became a certified wildlife ninja. She was now off to use her skills on a nature treasure hunt.

“I like finding nature stuff and I found a pretty feather in the bush.”

She loves collecting things in nature and when I found out that she wasn't going to be able to keep them I was concerned. But after finding some amazing treasures and sharing them





with 'show and tell' they used them to create a silly happy nature face for others to enjoy.

"We used all our nature things to make a giant face and we returned what we found back to nature."

It was such an important lesson to learn that we can enjoy nature's treasures, but they belong in nature and not in our pockets.

## NATURE NAVIGATORS

In the afternoon Olivia participated in the Nature Navigators activity. The best part about this activity was that we said goodbye to the kids and they had to work with their peers without their parents' help. They had to navigate around Piney Lakes Reserve in teams using a map and coordinates. Map reading was a challenge but they soon got the hang of it.

"I enjoyed being with my group and navigating through the nature trail with the map. It felt like we were on a wildlife adventure," Olivia said.

Completing challenges, exploring the local bush, finding out more about local animals and taking selfies was all part of this fun adventure.

"Our mission was to navigate through the nature trail looking for the special markers and discovering which animals live in those habitats."

"At times it was tricky to work out which animals belonged in the habitat, but we read the booklet and figured it out.

Once we were sure of what animal it was, we placed a cut-out in the bush and took a selfie!"

The highlight for me was watching the joy on the kids' faces when they played a water-based game with buckets and cups to put out a fire.

"When we got back, we played a firefighting game with water, it was SO MUCH FUN!"

I enjoyed watching the kids immerse themselves in the bush and having fun outside. Also, I loved how they worked together to navigate their way through the nature trail and make their discoveries. They both had such a great time. Programs like these are a great way to get your kids to try something new and step out of their comfort zone. I would recommend everyone to give them a go.

**Above** Navigating nature.  
**Top right** Taking a selfie.  
**Centre** Water-based games.  
**Below** Pure joy in nature.



## Do it yourself

**Where is it?** *Know Your Patch* activities educate and inspire the community to conserve and protect their local patch.

Fun nature-based activities set in a local context are used to encourage a connection to and care for the nature and heritage of our local environments.

Activities are designed around a head, heart and hand connection to bring about action by people of all ages to preserve and protect their patch.

**Contact** For more information on programs we offer, email [knowyourpatch@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:knowyourpatch@dbca.wa.gov.au) or visit [exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au/group-events/know-your-patch](http://exploreparcs.dbca.wa.gov.au/group-events/know-your-patch).

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