

Environmental Education in New Orleans City Park: The Value in an Outdoor Classroom

Amanda Snyder and Aimée K. Thomas, Ph.D.
Loyola University New Orleans



New Orleans City Park

- ★ Located between two neighborhoods, Lake Pontchartrain, and Bayou St. John.
- ★ 1300-acre public park including attractions such as an amusement park, botanical garden, restaurants, lagoons, and most importantly to this research, a 60-acre forest called Couturie Forest.
- ★ In 2005, Hurricane Katrina damaged the park, but it has replanted trees and maintains its title as the location with the world's largest collection of mature live oak trees, with some trees as old as 600 years!
- ★ This makes it an ideal place for an outdoor classroom for students of all ages to experience science in the natural world.



Figure 1. Image of City Park in 1912. Unknown photographer. *New Orleans City Park*, neworleanscitypark.com.

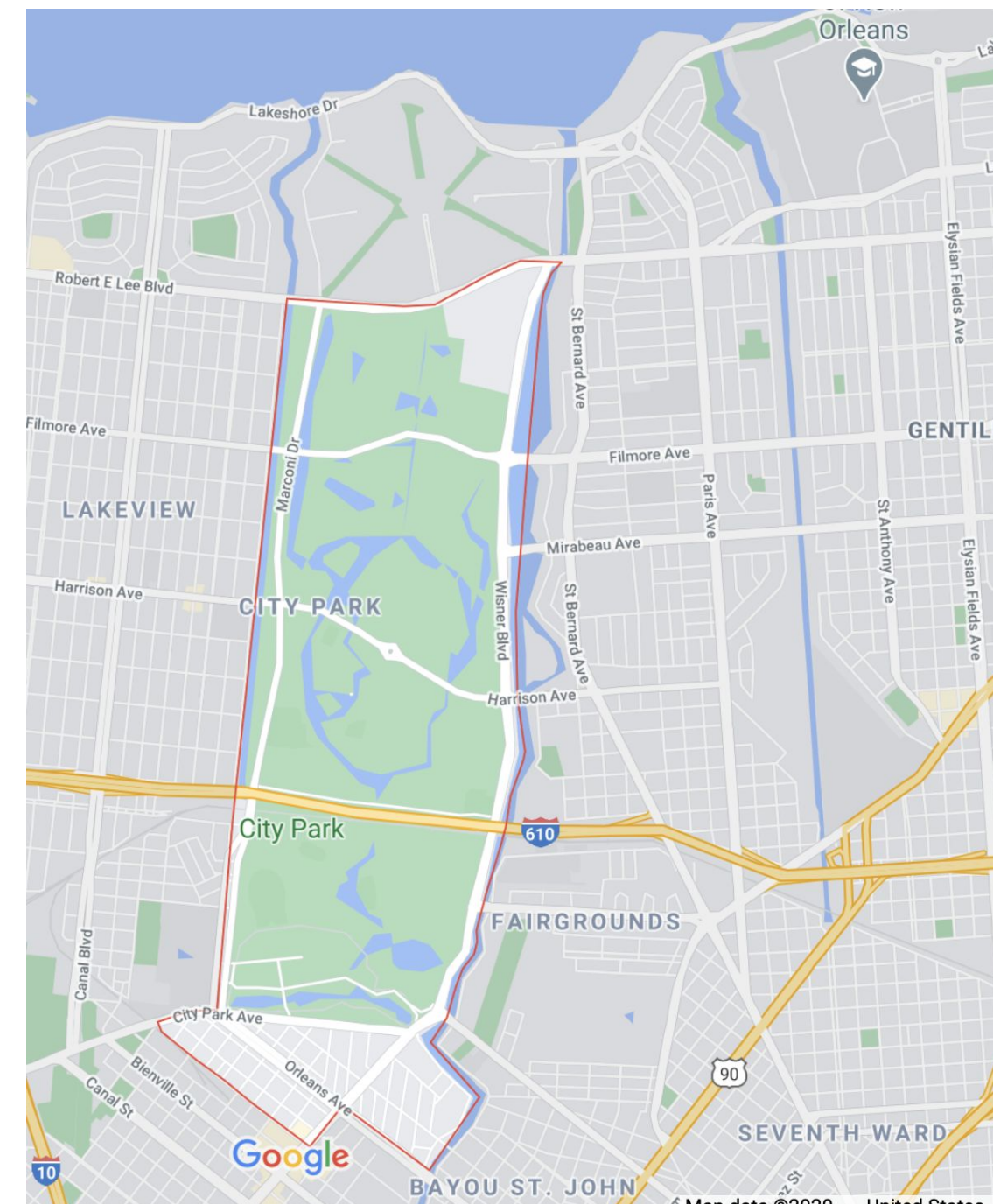


Figure 2. Aerial map of City Park, showing surrounding neighborhoods and relation to bodies of water.

Environmental Education in an Outdoor Classroom

- ★ Environmental education and intrapersonal factors were main determinants of greener behavior in participants in one study (Varela-Candamio et al. 2017), which goes along with research determining that more education on the environment has a positive correlation with environmental attitudes (Ibáñez et al. 2020).
- ★ Education held in an outdoor classroom reduces behavioral problems resulting in a need for teacher redirection, increases child attention and focus, as well as increases child happiness and well-being (Largo-Wight et al. 2018).
- ★ One study narrowed down three necessary elements for teaching about the environment to be context, connections, and communication (Basile and White 2000).
- ★ The ERIC Learning Model has shown success in students who used this experiential learning model in an environmental course improved in engagement and involvement of the material and a more positive attitude towards learning (Matriano 2020).

Work in City Park

Below is our developed curriculum using nature found in City Park.

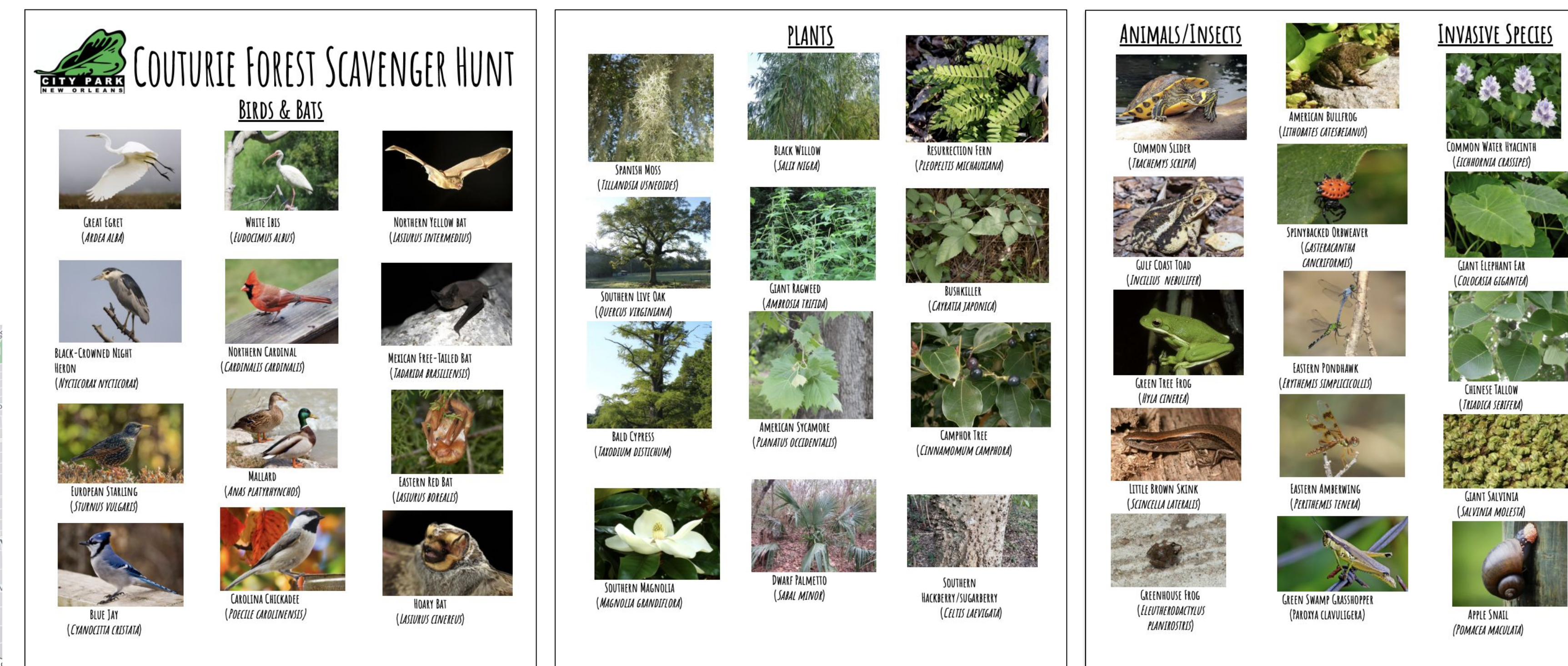


Figure 3. Handout for scavenger hunt of Couturie Forest created by Amanda Snyder and Amanda Tang Nian.



Figure 4. Tree roots along Couturie trail filled with the invasive apple snail.



Figure 5. Example of invasive species, elephant ear, along Couturie trail.



Figure 6. Dead tree on trail showing its significance in the forest ecosystems.



Figure 7. Example of eutrophication in City Park lagoon.



Figure 8. A group of preschoolers observing invasive species in a lagoon.

What now?

- ★ For City Park, these tours will continue to be offered to surrounding schools and as possible to the public.
- ★ As a teaching model, it would be useful and completely possible to implement this style in parks across the country.
- ★ Information would vary, but the formats of scavenger hunts, engaging activities, and informational tours can occur in any park.

Literature Cited

- ★ Basile, Carole, and Cameron White. "Respecting Living Things: Environmental Literacy for Young Children." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 28.1 (2000): 57-61.
- ★ Esteban Ibáñez, Macarena, et al. "University as Change Manager of Attitudes towards Environment (The Importance of Environmental Education)." *Sustainability* 12.11 (2020): 4568.
- ★ Largo-Wight, Erin, et al. "Nature contact at school: The impact of an outdoor classroom on children's well-being." *International journal of environmental health research* 28.6 (2018): 653-666.
- ★ Matriano, Eric Aguilana. "Ensuring Student-Centered, Constructivist and Project-Based Experiential Learning Applying the Exploration, Research, Interaction and Creation (ERIC) Learning Model." *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching* 7.1 (2020): 214-227.
- ★ Varela-Candamio, Laura, Isabel Novo-Corti, and Maria Teresa García-Álvarez. "The importance of environmental education in the determinants of green behavior: A meta-analysis approach." *Journal of Cleaner Production* 170 (2018): 1565-1578.

Acknowledgements

- ★ I would like to thank the City Park employees I worked with in this process, Lindsay Kirsch and Meg Adams. I would also like to thank Dr. Aimée Thomas, my advisor at Loyola University, who oversaw this project.