Creeping and Crawling while Promoting 4-H

The Situation
In Payette County, Idaho, a large number of youth are not involved in 4-H youth development programs. In 2005, there were 5,094 school aged youth within the county; of these, only 3.9% were members of the 4-H program. To increase this percentage, alternative school enrichment programs offered through Extension have proven to be a positive recruiting tool for 4-H.

The Idaho Standard Achievement Testing (ISAT) requirements for schools restricts the time teachers have for extracurricular activities. In order to bring 4-H programs into Payette County school classrooms, a program needed to be developed that enhanced existing science curriculum. Developing a unique 4-H program within these guidelines increases the opportunity for Extension to enter schools.

Our Response
During the summer of 2006, walking sticks, Madagascar hissing cockroaches, and Australian spiny leaf bug insects were purchased and raised in the Payette County Extension office. Upon hearing of the availability to view live insects, a 1st grade teacher requested a hands-on presentation be given in her classroom. The teacher invited Extension Educator Tony McCammon and Marilyn O’Leary, Junior Master Gardener volunteer leader, into her classroom to present the hands-on activity. After seeing the positive response and success of the instruction, additional teachers requested the presentation for their classrooms. Tony McCammon identified this request as an opportunity to take 4-H into the classroom.

In order to meet ISAT requirements, insects would be used as a platform for science education. The presentation was created by studying a combination of activities found on the internet and the curriculum of the Junior Master Gardener Program. The result created a 90-minute science presentation for grades K-5. In 2008, an advanced course was incorporated for presenting to grades 6-9. Payette County 4-H has identified children in grades K-9 are most likely to join a 4-H club.

The presentation consists of separating the class into 4 groups which rotate through different lessons. The lessons consist of:
- Introduction to the Payette County 4-H programs and what it has to offer
- Reading of an insect book
- “Dress a Bug” – general insect anatomy
- “Create a Home” – insect homes

Figure 1 "Dress a Bug" lesson teaches about insect anatomy by dressing the kids up like insects.
• “Bug Off” – insect pests
• “Crawling Friends” – insect pets and other beneficial insects
• Summary and encouragement of youth to become involved in 4-H

During the fall of 2007, a letter was developed explaining the 4-H program and the insect science presentation. The information was circulated in three schools to K-9 teachers. Teachers called and scheduled this school enrichment program for their classes.

Program Outcomes
During a two year period (2006-2008), the program was presented to 243 elementary and 63 middle school students. Teachers saw the educational value of the presentation and are still requesting the program. Some comments from participants are:

• “Thank you for bringing Sticky. I liked when he walked on my head. Leafy had a cool head. I will bring my blackberry leaves for them.”
  2nd grade student

• “Their feet are strong. I learned a lot from you. My favorite part was the hissing bugs.”
  1st grade student

• “Thank you for sharing your knowledge with the kids. They loved the bugs. It is a great science lesson. See you next year.”
  1st grade teacher

Several teachers now use segments of other 4-H material in their class lessons since being introduced to the 4-H presentation. Three teachers have purchased Junior Master Gardener Manuals or Literature in the Garden books.

Many new members have joined 4-H due to promotional activities in the county, such as the school enrichment program. In addition, as a direct result of the insect science presentation, afterschool programs have been started at the Payette Primary Elementary School and McCain Middle School. The Payette Primary Elementary afterschool program has started a Junior Master Gardener 4-H club which meets every Monday. Tony McCammon and two Advanced Master Gardeners facilitate the sixty students now enrolled in this 4-H club.

For More Information
Tony A. McCammon, Extension Educator
University of Idaho Extension—Payette County
16 South 9th Street
Payette, ID 83661
208-642-6022
Fax: 208-642-6034
Email: tonym@uidaho.edu

Figure 2 “Crawling Friends” highlights the beneficial insects in the area and pet insects.