Glen Martinez	**Observing Animal Activity**
Dorsey High School	
Los Angeles, CA	
2002	**Grades 6-12**
Sri Lanka's Temple Monkeys	

Objectives:
Students will learn scientific observation skills by observing the activities of squirrels (or other non-threatening wild animals) on their school grounds.

Materials Needed:

Map of school grounds for each pair of students
Notepads for each student

Background Information:

The techniques and procedures in this lesson plan are modeled on those used during my participation in the Sri Lanka's Temple Monkeys expedition. During the expedition, volunteers worked in teams of three. Two volunteers each had a focal monkey to observe, while the third volunteer was the Navigator and mapped the location of the monkey group, which was almost always on the move.

For this lesson plan, much flexibility in student groups is in order on the part of the teacher. Depending on the nature of the animals observed, whether they move as a group or not, a student Navigator may or may not be needed. Students will work in pairs to observe one animal, and the teacher can easily add more students or have students work individually, depending on the number of available observational animals and class size.

Procedures:

1) MAP PREPARATION
In their assigned pairs, students divide their school map into quadrants. On the left margin, students label quadrants alphabetically, and on the bottom margin, quadrants are labeled numerically. (Depending on the quality of the school map and the desire of the teacher, the students can be given a mini-lesson in map creation and doing such tasks as breaking down the quadrants into precise hectors or other units of measurement.)

2) FIELD NOTEBOOK PREPARATION

n his or her field notebooks each student creates an activity key and a sample notes to refer to later in the field.

Activity Key:

F= foraging. Any activity involving food, such as feeding, looking for food, and chewing food.
M= moving. Any locomotor activity not directly involved in foraging.
D= drinking. Consuming water from any source.
R = resting. Sitting or lying down for extended periods with the eyes open.
S= sleeping. Resting with the eyes closed.
P= playing. Squirrels "having fun".
B= breeding. Engaging in sexual activity with another squirrel
A= aggression. Any activity in which the animal is fighting or defending territory.
C= chasing. Chasing other squirrels for either play, sexual activity, or defense of territory. When possible combine C with B, P, or A. For example, writing "C-B" means chasing to breed.

Sample Activity Notes:

Time Observed	Activity	Comments
12:58	F1	Acorns
12:59	F1	Acorns
13:00	M2	Climbing Tree
13:01	M3	Climbing at top of tree
13:02	Lost	Lost sight

3) FOCAL ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION

Students are taken to an area of the school grounds where squirrels are most likely to be found. Student pairs choose one "focal animal" to observe as a team. On a page of their field notebook, each student takes notes on the animal so it can be easily identified during observation. Comparing it to other squirrels, students write down distinguishing characteristics of their focal animal. The bushy-ness of its tail, coloration, scars, size, and other characteristics should be identified.

4) FIELD OBSERVATION
Students observe the focal animals' behaviors, taking notes in their field notebooks. Students must account for every minute of observation time. If students lose track of the animals, "Lost" is to be written in the log books. Students continually communicate with each other to agree upon the category of the animal's activity.

5) SUMMARY

Back in the classroom, pairs calculate how much time their focal animal has spent on each activity. For food consumption, they also list the types of food eaten. They are to create a chart to present the information. If desired, the teacher can have the students calculate percentages of time spent of each activity.

Along with the chart, the students are to write a brief summary paragraph which explains their findings.

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated on the completeness of their field notebook, the data summary, and on the summary paragraph.