KIDS GO WILD FOR REPTILE RANGERS CAMP

"There's a skink," declared Park Authority naturalist Tony Bulmer as he led a group of enthusiastic campers on a brisk, spring nature walk at Lake Fairfax Park. Their destination was Turtle Cove – the perfect setting for Reptile Rangers Camp.

"Why are skinks helpful? They eat what," Bulmer asked cheerfully.

"Bugs," the campers shouted in unison.

Reptile Rangers Camp introduces children to cold-blooded creatures such as snakes, turtles and frogs. Daily adventures include hands-on activities, hikes, nature crafts, games and perhaps best of all, animal encounters.

"It's an amazing camp," raved 7-year-old Gavin Schipani of Herndon during the session last spring. "I love reptiles because they have scales and they're smooth when you touch them."

"My favorite animal is a snake," declared 8-year-old Christopher Daniels of Reston. "I like how some are really big, and they slither because they don't have legs or hands, so that's how they move."

"I saw some turtles and thought they were really slimy, but Mr. Tony said they're not slimy," said 7-year-old Ellie Jung of McLean. "They curl up to protect themselves or to get warmer."

Reptile Rangers Camp helps children overcome fears and dispel common misconceptions about reptiles. Students learn the important role reptiles play in the ecosystem and how to properly interact with animals when they're in the park. Campers also have fun capturing what they've learned in a daily journal of their outdoor adventures.

"Journals are for remembering the words that we learned about snakes and turtles, and it's fun," said 5-year-old Ella Jung of McLean.

At the end of each day, the journals also engage each camper's parents and helps instill a love of nature in the whole family. This year's Reptile Rangers Camp explores new territory at Lake Accotink Park.

The Park Authority offers hundreds of nature camps and programs each spring and summer. To explore the options for children and adults, see the Camps and Nature sections.