



# Habitat Nature Camp Family Handbook Summer 2026



Welcome to Mass Audubon's Habitat Summer Camp! We look forward to meeting your camper and exploring and learning about the natural world together.

# Contents

- Camp Mission ..... 3
- Camp License & Accreditation ..... 3
- Contact Info..... 3
  - Camp Leadership..... 3
- Payment Deadlines, Deposits and Refund Policy..... 4
- Coming to Camp ..... 4
  - What to Pack?..... 4
- Typical Camp Day..... 6
- Drop off and Pick Up Info..... 7
- Camper Feedback ..... 8
- Health and Emergency Policies..... 8
- Accommodations for Campers and One-to-one Aides ..... 9
- Behavior Expectations ..... 10
- Camp Policy Requests ..... 12

## Camp Mission

Habitat Nature Camp has been engaging children in nature study since 1974. We are guided by a philosophy of discovery, providing campers with opportunities to explore, question, and connect in nature. We encourage campers, ages 4–14, to explore their surroundings and discover new interests and talents. We inspire campers to question and challenge their understanding of nature and their own place within it. Our camp community is welcoming and responsive and strives to connect new and returning campers in lasting friendships.

## Camp License & Accreditation

Our camp complies with the regulations of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (105 CMR 430) and is licensed by our local Board of Health. The American Camp Association (ACA) accredits us.

## Contact Info

For registration questions, camp session openings, payment plans and billing questions contact the Habitat Registrars at [habitatcamp@massaudubon.org](mailto:habitatcamp@massaudubon.org). For any other specific camp questions please contact Jane Higgins, Camp Director at 617-977-5503 or [jhiggins@massaudubon.org](mailto:jhiggins@massaudubon.org)

Camp staff are carefully hired for their maturity and caring attitude toward children. They are environmental educators, teachers, and camp instructors—many of whom are former Habitat campers! Each member of the staff provides enthusiasm for outdoor exploration and a passion for education. Small group sizes ensure that campers stay safe and engaged.

All staff undergo background checks, are certified in CPR and first aid, and receive training in health and safety procedures, child development, natural history, and environmental education best practices. Our background check, health care, and discipline policies as well as the grievance procedures are available upon request.

## Camp Leadership

Habitat's Camp Director is Jane Higgins (she/her), who joined Habitat Education Center in 2000. Whether Jane is searching for caterpillars with Pathfinders, singing songs with Explorers, or teaching animal adaptations to Ecologists, a day at camp is a good day!

## Payment Deadlines, Deposits and Refund Policy

To find your balance, and to pay, visit [massaudubon.org/payments](https://massaudubon.org/payments). Full payment for camp and all forms (including health forms and immunization records to CampDoc) are **due on or before May 1** unless a payment plan has been set up with the Camp Director or Operations Manager. A late fee of \$25 per camper will apply if any forms or payments are late or incomplete. No camper is allowed to attend camp unless all forms, waivers, and payments are complete.

### Deposits

- A **non-refundable deposit** is required at the time of registration--\$50 for one-week sessions and \$100 for two-week sessions.
- Deposits **cannot be transferred** to another camper, session, family, or camp location.

### Refunds

- **On or before May 1:** You will receive a refund for any payments made **excluding** the non-refundable deposit per session.
- **After May 1: No refunds** will be issued.

Please note: If Habitat cancels a session, you will receive a full refund, including the deposit.

Refunds are not available for participant dismissal, failure to attend, absences, or sick days.

## Coming to Camp

### What to Pack?

Please label all items with your child's name. Habitat cannot be responsible for loss or damage of personal objects. We do have a lost and found and will keep items until September 15<sup>th</sup>, after which they will be donated to a local charity.

### What to Wear:

- Closed-toe shoes (Sneakers or hiking shoes)
- Socks
- Hat
- Light-colored, lightweight, easily laundered clothing
- Sunscreen and bug repellent

### What to Bring:

- Snack and non-perishable lunch
- Water bottle
- Insect repellent and sunscreen
- Towel (for use in sprinkler/water games—**swimming is prohibited**)
- Extra socks, pants/shorts, shirt, and underwear
- Boots or old shoes (for pond studies)
- Rain gear (if rain is forecasted)
- Any medications needed at camp

**What NOT to bring to camp:**

- Peanuts/Nuts or products that contain them— Habitat is a **PEANUT/NUT RESTRICTED program.**
- Personal belongings, including toys, playing cards, stuffed animals, sports equipment, cell phones, iPods, smart watches, or other electronic equipment.
- Live animals
- Tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or weapons. Possession and use are prohibited.
- Pocketknives, matches, firearms, ammunition or other potentially dangerous items or weapons— **GROUND FOR DISMISSAL**

Such items will be held by the instructors and returned to parents at the end of the day.

## Typical Camp Day

Each day there will be a nature-related theme, and the hikes, activities and crafts will be tied to that theme. Each day at camp is built around the schedule below. There will always be some flexibility based on weather, camper interests and what we might see while exploring! Program specific schedules will be distributed on the first day of each camp session.

8:50-9:15 am	Drop-off with games and art options
9:30 am	Opening Circle
10:00 am	Group Time, including snack time
12:00 pm	Lunch
12:30 pm	Free time
1:15 pm	Options or second group time
3:00 pm	Closing Circle/Wrap-up
3:15-3:45 pm	Pick-up

### **Attendance Policy**

Children enrolled in two-week sessions are expected to attend both weeks. If your child can only attend one week of the session, it must be the first week and the camp director must be informed in writing in advance. Attendance for the second week only is not permitted. No rebates will be given for incomplete attendance due to dismissal, failure to attend, absence or sick days.

If a camper is going to be absent, please email the camp director or call to let camp staff know. If there are scheduled absences during the camp session, please inform camp staff in writing.

## Drop off and Pick Up Info

When coming to and from Habitat, please drive slowly. Juniper Road is very curvy with no sidewalks, and our neighbors enjoy walking on the road or spending time in their yards. Please refrain from parking on the road when possible. Please be cautious when walking through the parking lot.

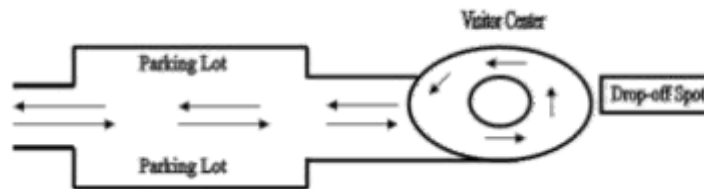
### Drop-off: 8:50 to 9:15 am

#### First Day of Camp

Please park your vehicle in the parking lot and walk your child up to visitor center to check-in.

#### Every other day

Please drive through circle in front of the visitor center and check-in at drop-off spot. **See map below.**



#### Early Arrival—before 8:50 am

Please wait with your child until a staff person arrives. Camp staff cannot be responsible for campers before 8:50 am.

#### Late Arrivals—after 9:30 am

Please park in parking lot and walk your child up to the visitor center to check-in with staff.

### Pick-up:

Please park in the parking lot and walk up to your child’s designated pick-up spot below. Each day, you will be required to show your photo identification and sign your child out with their group leader.

Program	Pick-up Spot	Pick-up Time
Pathfinders/Circle of Life	Nature play area	3:15-3:45 pm
Explorers/Animal Architects	Woodchip Field	3:15-3:45 pm
Ecologists	Nature play area	3:15-3:45 pm
Trekkers	Formal Garden	3:15-3:45 pm
After-camp	Brownie Nature play area	Before 5:15 pm 5:15-5:30 pm

#### Release List

Your child will be released only to those specified on the release list and release people must be aged fourteen or older. Campers aged fourteen or older may sign out if indicated on their health profile in CampDoc. Additional people may be added by sending a note or email to the Camp Director. The pick-up person must show valid photo ID and mark their initials on the checkout sheet. If a person is not on the release list, we will only release your child to them when we receive verbal confirmation from you.

## Camper Feedback

We are excited to learn directly from Mass Audubon campers about their experience. Some campers may have the opportunity to participate in a brief, internal group survey to help us learn about and improve the camp experience. Camp staff will make audio recordings, which we will share with the Director of Evaluation to transcribe and analyze. Quotes and data from these surveys may be published, however campers will not be identified. Only campers with prior authorization (media release) signed by their parents/guardians may participate in the camper survey.

## Health and Emergency Policies

### Sick Campers

Please screen your child daily. Children should stay home if they have the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Continuous cough
- Respiratory virus
- Discharge from or red eyes
- Earache
- Active lice or scabies
- Skin eruptions
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

Children with viral infections may return when their fever returns to normal without fever-reducing medications. Children with bacterial infections may return after 24 hours on antibiotics. Participants infected with lice may return when they have been treated and are nit-free. **In case of any illness where a child is absent, parents must speak to the camp director before returning.**

### Medications

If your child takes medication during the camp day or has emergency medications (inhalers, Epi-pens, etc.), you will be required to upload an allergy/medication action plan to CampDoc.com. No medication may be administered without this form. Medication must be in the original container, bearing the pharmacy label with the camper's name and all necessary prescription information. Please send only enough of the medication for the camp session and write the number of tablets on the container. A record of medication administered is kept in first aid log.

### Sun/Pest Protection

Please apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater) and insect repellent before arrival and ensure campers dress appropriately for the weather. With written permission, we will help with reapplication but ask that campers bring their own supply. We recommend non-aerosol sprays.

In addition to mosquitoes, ticks are common at Habitat. We teach campers how to identify ticks and do tick checks. We recommend that you check your child each evening as well.

### Meningococcal Disease and Camp Attendees

Campers are *not* considered to have increased risk of Meningococcal Disease, but the Department of Health requires us to provide you with the information in the link below. You do not need to print or return a signed waiver to us. [Meningitis info from mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/meningitis-info)

### Required Immunizations

All campers and staff are required to provide immunization records via CampDoc.com in accordance with [MA Department of Health recommendations](#). If your family's religious beliefs do not permit physical exams and/or immunizations, please contact the camp director, who can provide you with an emergency treatment policy and immunization/physical exam waiver.

### Mandated Reporters

Massachusetts law requires professionals who work with children to notify the Department of Children and Families (DCF) if they suspect that a child is being abused, neglected, or both.

### **Parent Notification**

If your child begins to feel sick, or sustains an injury that requires medical attention, we will give them a place to rest, supervised by staff members. You will be contacted and asked to pick up your child. In case of emergency, we will notify you immediately as to your child's situation. If we cannot reach you, we will use the emergency contact information listed on your child's health forms.

### **Bathrooms**

Campers will have opportunities to use the bathroom throughout the camp day. While we know some of our younger campers may be new to going to the bathroom on their own-- please reinforce potty training before the start of camp. Our staff do not provide one on one assistance during toileting and campers are expected to be able to fully use the toilet and clean up after themselves. If an accident occurs, cleaning up and changing clothes is handled by the Camp Director and another trained member of camp leadership in a matter-of-fact way that does not shame, humiliate, or embarrass the child. Soiled clothes will be bagged and returned to the family at pick-up. If you have any concerns about bathrooming, please contact the [Camp Director](#).

## **Accommodations for Campers and One-to-one Aides**

### **Accommodations for Campers**

As an outdoor, nature-based program, it is important that families of children who have disabilities understand Mass Audubon's expectations, programs, and terrain prior to enrolling. Due to the outdoor and exploratory nature of our camp programs, campers move on uneven terrain throughout the day. The terrain varies from hard-packed, gently sloped paths to steeper, uneven trails that may have exposed rocks, tree roots, and other obstacles. Weather could affect our trail conditions. We encourage all families to visit the camp's sanctuary prior to enrolling to understand its unique terrain.

If your child requires accommodation, please contact the camp director as soon as possible; a delay in request could disrupt your child's Mass Audubon camp experience.

### **One-to-one Aides**

Mass Audubon camps do not provide one-to-one support; however, we do welcome one-to-one aides to support campers when the family provides them. Aides must follow Mass Audubon's Child Protection Standards, including obtaining a CORI/SORI and background check.

If your child requires an aide in school, please contact the camp director as soon as possible to discuss how we can best support your child. Family members are not permitted to be aides.

## **Behavior Expectations**

Our staff establishes expectations and offers guidance throughout each day. Our sanctuaries are open to the public and camp groups may spend time in areas that have visitors, vehicles, varied terrain, water, and wild animals. For everyone to have a safe and positive experience, campers are expected to follow Mass Audubon's Camper Code of Conduct with minimal support from staff.

### **Mass Audubon's Camper Code of Conduct**

Respect Yourself. Examples include:

- Take care of yourself and your body and ask for help.
- Apply sunscreen and bug spray.
- If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, talk with an adult.

Respect Nature. Examples include:

- Carry in/carry out–take trash and recycling with you or put in an appropriate bin.
- Leave animals, plants, and other parts of nature where you find them.
- Observe wild animals from a distance.

Respect Others. Examples include:

- Listen and follow instructions given by camp staff.
- Always stay with your group.
- Use caring and kind language.
- Respect other people’s physical space and objects; keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
- Listen to all ideas and be inclusive – allow others to join/play with you.
- Treat others the way they want to be treated and celebrate each other’s individuality.
- Use pronouns and names people introduce themselves with.

**Proactive Behavior Guidance Strategies**

Before coming to camp, family members provide information about camper’s needs to camp staff and/or the Camp Director. Camp staff may contact a family to discuss best strategies to meet camper’s needs during their session. Any previously known behavior issues that may affect a camper’s participation should be shared with the camp before the session begins. Failure to disclose information may result in grounds for termination.

Camp staff are trained to proactively manage behaviors within each group. Some strategies staff use include:

- Reinforce positive behavior through praise
- Provide ample warning to campers prior to transitions
- Clearly state behavior expectations through group agreements and visual tools
- Provide daily schedules through group check ins and visual tools

When campers struggle with the behavior expectations set for them in the Camper Code of Conduct, camp staff will follow one or more of the steps below, depending on the situation. Camp staff may try a step multiple times.

	Leader Response	Consequences for Camper
1st step	Reminders of the rule. *	Reminders of the rule, discussion of why behavior was inappropriate, and possible options.
2nd step	Reminders of the rule, plus short break. Take notes on a behavior incident report. Camp Director or designee may have a brief check-in with family in person or via a call.	Take a break for up to 15 minutes. Reminders of the rule, discussion of why behavior was inappropriate, and possible options.
3rd step	Discussion with the camper about rules of camp. Update Camp Director or Assistant Director on the steps taken so far. Supervise camper during longer break. Add to incident report. Camp Director or designee updates family.	Camper will take a longer break which may include an entire activity. Reminders of the rule, discussion of why behavior was inappropriate, and possible options.

4th step	Camper will be taken to Camp Director or Assistant Director for a discussion. Camp Director or Assistant Director will speak with the family about behavior contract.	The camper will be asked to reflect on the discussions about behavior and begin a behavior contract.
5th step	Camp Director and other Leadership staff (Director of Camps, Education Manager, Regional Director) will discuss possible dismissal of participant from the camp and speak with family.	The family will be called. Behavior contract is reviewed. Possible dismissal.

\*If a camper intentionally hurts another person themselves, or runs away from the group or staff member, they will immediately be brought to the Camp Director, Assistant Camp Director and/or Behavior Specialist.

After steps 1 through 4, if there is no mutually agreeable resolution of the behavior issues, the Camp Director may issue a written notice of termination. Refunds will not be provided for behavior-based dismissals.

### Prohibitions when Managing Behavior

In accordance with the Massachusetts Minimum Standards for Recreational Camps for Children:

- (1) Corporal punishment, including spanking, is prohibited.
- (2) No camper shall be subjected to cruel or severe punishment, humiliation, or verbal abuse.
- (3) No camper shall be denied food, water, or shelter; and
- (4) No child shall be punished for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet.

### Termination from Camp

Mass Audubon camps recognize the various needs of campers at different ages and stages of development, and that campers must be treated individually. The family will be notified of issues leading to a child's termination from a Mass Audubon camp.

Mass Audubon reserves the right to dismiss any camper whose actions or behaviors jeopardize the overall health and goals of the camp, including campers requiring routine, on-going one-on-one attention and direction related to behavioral issues. Mass Audubon also reserves the right to dismiss any enrolled participant whose actions interfere with the successful operation of the camp. Repeated failure to comply with camp rules and/or procedures will result in dismissal. No refunds will be given for behavior-based termination of participation.

### Immediate Suspension

Any camper whose behavior seriously threatens the emotional or physical safety of themselves, or others may be suspended, for an initial period of up to 2 days. During the period of suspension, the Camp Director, camp staff, and the family will further evaluate to determine whether it is appropriate for the camper to return to the camp. Examples of behavior that may warrant immediate suspension:

- Physically attacking or threatening another child, themselves, or an adult.
- Documented harassment of another child, including the use of discriminatory language based on race, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.
- Due to a child's dangerous behavior, an emergency physical restraint is used on the child to protect themselves or others from imminent serious physical harm.
- Leaving the camp site without permission of the staff (including leaving the sanctuary grounds or leaving the immediate vicinity of an outdoor activity without permission of camp staff).

The camp reserves the right to allow provisional reentry into the camp or to proceed with the termination of the camper's enrollment. No refunds will be given for behavior-based termination.

*All families and campers review and sign off on Mass Audubon's Behavior Expectations and Camper Code of Conduct before attending camp. Visit our website to view Mass Audubon's [camp goals and inclusion practices](#).*

## Camp Policy Requests

Our policies on background checks, health care, behavior discipline and grievance procedures are available upon request.

---

Thank you for being part of the Habitat Nature Camp community. We look forward to an exciting summer of discovery and adventure with your family!

