

The Nature Swap at Hamill Family Play Zoo

Currently, the Nature Swap is open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays year-round. It opens at 10:00 AM and closes one half hour before the Play Zoo exhibit closes.

Nestled inside the Hamill Family Play Zoo is the Nature Swap, a special trading post where kids can share stories and artifacts from their time spent in nature.

Here's how it works: Kids ages five and up can bring in objects they find in nature and exchange them for others like fossils, shells, and rocks. Larger items such as deer antlers and llama fur are fair play, too – as long as kids come by them naturally.

When children bring in items, they are awarded points, not only for the item, but for things they tell us about it. They also receive points just for sharing their stories and feelings about exploring nature. Swappers can use the points they earned to take home (for keeps!) items on our shelves, or they can save up their points each time they swap, adding up points in our computer like grown-ups amass money in a bank.

Swapping guidelines are as follows:

- Children must be at least five years old to become a Nature Swapper
- Children may swap up to five items in one visit. One “item” can be a collection of 5 or more like items (such as 5 pinecones, 5 sticks, etc.)
- Siblings or friends cannot “split” points – each swap in and out must be done by an individual.

Things you CANNOT trade:

- Purchased items
- Items found on the grounds of Brookfield Zoo
- Bird materials of any kind: examples include feathers, eggs or nests
- Living plants and animals
- Cave materials
- Freshwater mussel shells
- Coral
- Arrowheads
- Petrified wood
- Materials from the family pet (domestic snake shed, etc.)
- Road kill or similarly “gross” items (no dead animals – insects are OK)

Examples of things you CAN trade:

- Rocks
- Pinecones/seeds
- Sand/dirt
- Antlers/teeth/clean bones
- Fossils
- Wood/bark
- Shells (make sure they're empty)
- Snake sheds from wild snakes
- Nature journal entries, such as photos, drawings or stories
- Casts of animal footprints
- Dead insects, spiders, and exoskeletons from bugs, butterflies and crustaceans (insects must be already dead when you find them – killed bugs will not be accepted)

Important Collecting Information:

Never collect in national and state parks, nature preserves, or other areas where natural materials are protected. Never collect any natural materials that are protected by local state, national or international laws. If you aren't sure, ask!

When collecting, choose your items carefully and leave lots of other natural items for other people to find.