

# Focus On...

## Science Camp

—By Jordan Jobe

Fifty bleary-eyed middle school students slowly trickled into the auditorium of NOAA's Western Regional Center in Seattle, Wash., one day this summer to attend the third annual, week-long Middle School Science Camp, co-funded by the University of Washington Sea Grant program. The only sounds to be heard were occasional muted shrieks as a few students recognized friends. Most slumped low in their seats, looking around surreptitiously.

I was one of five teachers under contract from the Sea Grant program to guide Science Camp students and encourage critical thinking.

As name tags and notebooks were handed out, one eighth-grade boy admitted, "My dad's traveling this week. He made me sign up."

"Science is hard," said a seventh-grade girl.

"I want to be a marine biologist," an eighth-grade girl giggled. "I can't wait to see their lab."

The campers settled in for the first speaker of the day, Ted Buehner, a meteorologist with NOAA's National Weather Service forecast office in Seattle. While giving the campers a brief overview of the week ahead, he was interrupted by a mysterious phone call. The phone conversation was broadcast to the now more-alert students. It seemed that a "situation" had arisen, requiring the attention of our very own Science Camp.

The woman caller said she had been walking her dog in Explorer Park on Puget Sound when she noticed a huge pile of dead fish. She'd also heard strange barking noises coming from the water.

*continued on page 5*



NOAA

NOAA scientist Michael Strick demonstrates ocean instruments to students at the third annual Science Camp at NOAA's Western Regional Center in Seattle, Wash.



NOAA

A Science Camp student examines simulated sea lion scat made of pudding, shells and octopus beaks to learn about marine mammal feeding habits.

*continued from page 4*

After hearing this staged conversation, the campers were instructed to group up and discuss several hypotheses regarding the problem.

After over a month away from school, presumably spent in various athletic camps or playing video games, my group of students had a difficult time coming up with feasible hypotheses. "There was a tsunami and the wave pushed all the fish ashore, and the barking was from sea lions that were hungry," one camper ventured.

The make-believe fish kill at Explorer Park was the central scientific scenario of the week. The goal for the campers was to participate in various hands-on science activities to acquire a knowledge base to re-evaluate their initial hypotheses.

Throughout the week, groups of 10 students rotated through six two-hour lab stations led by NOAA scientists

At the marine mammal station, campers got to search through simulated sea lion scat for evidence



NOAA

*NOAA scientist Rebecca Reuter helps students make fish prints.*



NOAA

*A camper explains his group's "environmental incident" findings to his family.*

of their diet. At another station, campers learned how microscopic marine organisms are collected using a secchi disk and a plankton tow. Campers also learned how pollutants from various sources affect the Puget Sound watershed.

By the end of the week, most students seemed not only to have a

better grasp of how to solve the fish kill situation, but to have participated in an activity that inspired them.

"I can't wait to go back to school so I can start biology," one eighth-grade girl said. "And I'm even kind of looking forward to learning more about physics." ☺



NOAA

*A student examines a flounder during a "fish print" making session.*



Robyn Ricks/UW Sea Grant

*NOAA Ens. Misty Watson demonstrates a mud grabber for taking bottom samples from the bow of a NOAA research vessel.*