

THIS WEEK ON THE LLANO ESTACADO

October 26-30, 2009



PREDATION;

No matter where a person goes, into a backyard, in the alley, at a city park, on a schoolyard, or out on a ranch far from town, sooner or later, the astute observer will find the remains of animals eaten by other animals. Many people will be “grossed out.”

To better understand the dynamics of the populations of any one species of

animal, scientists record evidences of predation, and begin to ask questions such as the following:

What does one species of an animal eat? When does it eat that particular prey species? Why does it eat it at that time? How many of that prey species are found in one location? When does the prey animal reproduce? What does the prey animal eat? What happens if the predator is removed? What happens if the prey species is removed? How many species feed on the prey animal?

What is the prey animal in this photo? Is it a rabbit? A pocket gopher? A packrat? What animal might have eaten it?

Teacher and student challenge;

Survey the schoolyard, and record any evidence of predation. Look for scattered feathers (that mean a hawk ate a bird), for owl pellets under a tree (where an owl vomited the hair and bones of a mouse), or partial remains of an animal as above, which indicates the handiwork of a housecat, dog, or fox. Look for other evidence (footprints, for example) to determine the predator and report your findings to bwilliams@sibleynaturecenter.org