



Times photos by Kimm Anderson, kanderson@stcloudtimes.com

Before playing a predator/prey game with the campers, John Peck Jr. (left) and Wendy Doyle explain what they defined as "the food web," the relationships between predators, animals, plants, disease and other factors in the animal kingdom.

# Predator-prey game helps students grasp 'food web'

### Math, science and computer camp uses games to illustrate lessons of nature

By Lora Pabst

ROCKVILLE — Most of the students at St. Cloud State University's math, science and computer camp have never run through a field while dodging fallen trees and poison ivy, pretending to be different creatures on a food chain.

But they had a chance to learn about the food web and trophic levels, an animal's position in the food chain, while playing a predator-prey game Wednesday at the farm of John and Linda Peck in Rockville.

Robert Johnson, the chair of the ethnic studies undergraduate program at St. Cloud State University, founded the camp in 1987 as part of his research on



The 23 St. Cloud State University math, science and computer campers listen Wednesday as John Peck Jr. explains how to play the predator/prey game.

underrepresentation of minorities in math and science disciplines.

Today, more than 200 third through eighth graders attend the camp during its four-week summer run.

The campers attend math class for an hour and 15 minutes a day and computer class for two hours a day. They also attend art

techniques of other cultures.

"Generally, students of color underachieve in early years," Johnson said.

"The sooner these students are exposed to these fields, the more they will get involved."

The goal of the camp is to expose students to the subjects in a way that is interesting, novel and fun.

dorms at St. Cloud State to expose them to college life so they realize it's a place they could go.

Emanuel Williams, 12, of St. Paul, enjoyed getting out of the city and visiting the country.

"It's another point of view of how people live," he said.

A lot of times, Johnson hears from the parents and teachers of the campers who tell him that their children show increased interest in their classes and computer activities.

Some parents also say their children are more motivated, get better grades and achieve higher scores on standardized tests.

Most of the campers' fees are subsidized by grants from corporations or foundations.

Depending on their financial circumstances, some students attend the camp for free. The maximum cost is \$150.