



Birding Lane

ALABAMA WILDLIFE FEDERATION ACTIVITY

Grade Levels

6-8

Overview

Students test their skills at observing and identifying birds in wild bird habitats as they take a stroll along “Birding Lane.”

Subject Areas

Science, Language Arts, Environmental Education

Duration

Prep: 40 minutes

Activity: 50 minutes

Learning Objectives

Students will identify native birds in the habitat lab and identify the differences between bird species.

Alabama Course of Study

Objective Correlations for Science

Sixth: 7

Seventh: 1, 4, 5, 6, & 7

Eight: 1

Habitat Lab Connection

Explore your habitat lab as students look for birds.

Materials

- Pictures of birds (laminated)
- List of common names of birds in pictures (for teacher's reference)
- Tape (for attaching bird pictures)
- Construction paper or poster board (for Birding Lane sign)
- Markers (for Birding Lane sign)
- Pencils
- Paper
- Binoculars (*optional*)
- Field guides (*listed on page 2*)

Adapted from “The Birding Beat,” a Flying WILD activity created by the Council for Environmental Education.

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Background Info

Take a hike along “Birding Lane” in your habitat lab and try to identify as many birds as you can! Learning to identify birds is a challenge that promises to delight and reward the novice and expert birder alike. Things that bird watchers check for include the silhouette (size and shape of a bird), habitat (where you see it), plumage (color and color patterns of feathers), sounds, behaviors, and other field marks that stand out. These can be important clues to help you identify what you are observing. Grab a field guide and take a stroll along Birding Lane!

Preparation

1. Gather pictures of at least 10 different birds common to your geographic area. Search through magazines and old calendars; contact your local Audubon chapter or state wildlife agency to ask for pictures; and browse the Internet. Cut out the pictures and laminate them, if possible. You might want to consider displaying these birds along your walk: American Robin, American Goldfinch, Eastern Wild Turkey, Northern Cardinal, Mallard, Blue Jay, Great Horned Owl, Yellow Warbler, Carolina Chickadee, and Downy Woodpecker. A bird field guide can offer those specific to your area.
2. Decide where to conduct this activity (preferably near your “Wild Bird Habitat” in the habitat lab where bird feeders, bird baths, and nesting boxes are already located). Establish an area or path as a trail called “Birding Lane,” where participants can stroll along in their search for birds.
3. Place the bird pictures that you gathered along this trail in areas where the particular species might be found in the outdoors. For example, a robin picture could appear on the ground, where robins are commonly found foraging for worms and other insects. A bluebird picture can be placed on a fencepost, an eastern wild turkey in a field, a warbler perched in a tree, and a woodpecker on the side of a tree trunk.
4. Make a street sign entitled “Birding Lane” and plan how and where it will be mounted.
5. On the day of “birding,” set up your bird identification area with the Birding Lane sign and the bird pictures. Have several bird field guides, plus paper and pencils. Provide binoculars, if possible.

Procedure

1. Ask students to take a walk along Birding Lane to find and identify birds including the bird photos placed along the trail. They should take a pencil and paper to keep track of the birds that they spot. Suggest that, when making notes or sketches, they can get clues from these bird identification characteristics (see “Helpful Hints for Bird Watching” on page 2).
2. When the students return, they can use field guides to identify the birds they found along their walk. Be certain that you have a list of correct common names for the birds that were pictured, being as specific as possible.



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Literature Connections

- ⇒ *Bird* (DK Eyewitness) by David Burnie (ISBN: 10-0756606578)
- ⇒ *About Birds* by Cathryn Sill (ISBN: 10-1561451479)
- ⇒ *Audubon Backyard Birdwatcher* by Robert Burton (ISBN: 10-1571451862)

Bird Field Guides

- ⇒ *National Audubon Society Field Guide to Southeast United States* (ISBN-10: 0679446834)
- ⇒ *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America* by David Allen Sibley (ISBN: 067945120X)
- ⇒ *Birds of Alabama Field Guide* by Stan Tekiela (ISBN: 1591931517) with *Birds of Alabama Audio CD* (ISBN-10: 1591931509)

Bird Magazines

- ⇒ *Birds & Blooms*
- ⇒ *Audubon Magazine*
- ⇒ *Wild Birds*
- ⇒ *Birder's Digest*

Other Related Conservation Education Activities

Project Learning Tree

- ⇒ *Charting Diversity*

Project WILD

- ⇒ *Which Niche*

Flying WILD

- ⇒ *Bird Behavior Scavenger Hunt*
- ⇒ *Home is Where the Forest Is*
- ⇒ *Who Was That Masked Bird?*

Discovering Alabama Videos

- ⇒ *Red-cockaded Woodpecker*
- ⇒ *Wildlife History*

Helpful Hints for Bird Watching

There are five basic clues you can look and listen for that will help you to solve the bird identification puzzle:

- 1) **Silhouette** (size and shape) — Is the bird large or small, short-legged or long-legged, crested or not crested, plump or slim and sleek, short-tailed or long-tailed? Is the end of the tail square, pointed, round, or forked? What shape is the beak?
- 2) **Plumage** (color and pattern of the bird's feathers) — What color are the feathers? How would you describe the color pattern? Is there an eye ring (tissue or feathers surrounding the eye) and what color is it? What color are the legs? What other "field marks" or visible characteristics does it have, such as breast spots, wing bars (thin lines along the wings), etc.?
- 3) **Behavior** (how it flies, forages, or generally comports itself) — Does it flap its wings constantly when it flies or does it soar? What position are the wings in when it flies, in or out? Does it climb up the side of a tree? Do they spend a lot of time on the ground? Does it hold its tail up for balance?
- 4) **Habitat** (where it lives) — Where do you see the bird (land, shore, woods, water, etc.)? What kind of food do you see it eating?
- 5) **Voice** (bird song) — What does its call sound like? Is it short or long? How often does it repeat the call?

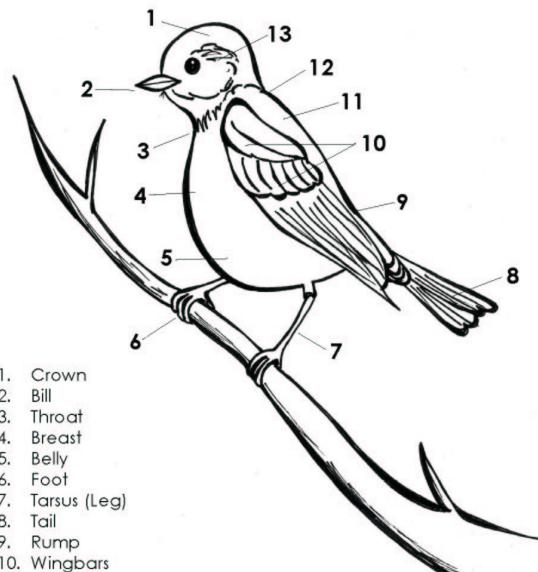
This may seem like a formidable amount of information to gather, but in truth you often need only one or two of these clues to identify a bird. Sometimes, the key to identification is simply knowing which clue to look for first when you see an unusual bird. Remember, the bird is most likely a species that commonly occurs in your area, so focus on those birds first. As your birding abilities increase, you will be able to pinpoint the important clues with greater ease and certainty.

Information derived from <http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com/birdid.htm>

The Parts of a Bird

This diagram shows some of the basic body parts used to identify birds.

Describe a bird in terms of these attributes and you can almost always find him in your field guide.



- 1. Crown
- 2. Bill
- 3. Throat
- 4. Breast
- 5. Belly
- 6. Foot
- 7. Tarsus (Leg)
- 8. Tail
- 9. Rump
- 10. Wingbars
- 11. Back (Mantle)
- 12. Nape
- 13. Eyebrow

By Linda Dow

Part of "Bird Watching with Elementary Students" on www.learnnc.org.



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Assessment

- ▶ What types of information did you record to help you identify the birds?
- ▶ In addition to the clues you recorded, what are some examples of other clues that can help you identify birds?
- ▶ Was this information helpful to you in finding the bird in the field guide?
- ▶ Which of the birds you identified are year-round residents and which are migratory?
- ▶ If you identified migratory birds, what time of year are you most likely to see the bird? Why?

Extensions

Have students keep a journal of birds that are in their yards at home. Students write about the bird features and sketch the bird in their journal. Students then use field guides to identify their local birds.

Notes

The Habitat Learning Lab Program is a partnership between:



Alabama Cooperative
Extension System



Alabama Wildlife Federation

www.alabamawildlife.org/habitat-learning-lab/



A joint project of the Alabama Wildlife Federation and Foresters



Alabama Department of
Conservation & Natural Resources