

Backyard Birds

A mini lesson for grades 4 - 7

Time required:

2+ class periods

Materials:

- Bird identification photo guide (accessed through the [Bird Studies Canada website](#))
- Bird tally sheets
- Access to a computer or other electronic mobile devices
- Outdoor area for bird watching
- Optional: binoculars

Curriculum Connections:

Grade 4: Understanding Life Systems - Habitats and Communities

- 2.3 use scientific inquiry/research skills to investigate ways in which plants and animals in a community depend on features of their habitat to meet important needs
- 3.7 describe structural adaptations that allow plants and animals to survive in specific habitats

Grade 6: Understanding Life Systems- Biodiversity

- 2.1 follow established safety procedures for outdoor activities and field work
- 2.2 investigate the organisms found in a specific habitat and classify them according to a classification system
- 3.1 identify and describe the distinguishing characteristics of different groups of plants and animals, and use these characteristics to further classify various kinds of plants and animals

Grade 7: Understanding Life Systems- Interactions in the Environment

- 2.5 use a variety of forms to communicate with different audiences and for a variety of purposes
- 3.2 identify biotic and abiotic elements in an ecosystem, and describe the interactions between them

Background:

Birds are a logical starting point when introducing children to Ontario's biodiversity as they are active, vocal, often brightly coloured, and display a range of interesting behaviours. According to the Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC), 496 different species of birds have been recorded in Ontario. This number can seem overwhelming, especially for new birders learning identification. It is important to remember that different birds occupy different geographical ranges and habitat types and that these habitats change seasonally for many migratory birds. So as you learn, start small! Focus your skills on what is in your area during a particular season and expand your knowledge from there.

Activity 1: Your Backyard Birds

With your class, learn what is in your area with a photo ID bird guide:

1. Visit the [Bird Studies Canada website](#) and mark your area on the map. Click "View and Print" for a photo list of birds you may find at your location.
2. Assign each student or pair a bird from your list and have them prepare a short (2-3 slide) presentation about that bird (include key identification features, habitat, diet, and behaviour). Have the students deliver the presentation to the class to teach the other students how to identify their bird.

Activity 2: Bird Walk

Put the students' identification skills to the test with a bird walk around your school! You may wish to print colour copies of the photo guide to bring with you. Fill out the Bird Count Tally Form during your walk (one per class or small group). Where permitted, older grades may split into smaller groups and spread out to record sightings at different locations on their own data sheets.

Data Assessment: As a class, tally the total number of birds recorded on the walk and create a graph of number per species. For older grades, record behaviours (ie. birds eating at a feeder, flying, swimming, in trees/bushes, on a fence, on the ground) and create a series of graphs including: number of birds/species per location and number of birds/species per behaviour type.

Extension: Conduct another bird survey in the spring, monthly or weekly and compare the data as migratory birds begin to return to Ontario. Create a class calendar to record dates when new species are identified.

Activity 3: Become Citizen Scientists

Since birds are highly mobile and range across province, it can be difficult for ornithologists to study behaviour and track migration and monitor populations. Citizen science is a great tool that helps bird experts to know where birds are and when. The data provided by bird watchers contributes to important research projects.

Your class can contribute to bird science by submitting your bird walk observations! Learn about the many Citizen Science programs that are offered on the Bird Studies Canada website. You can get started right away with the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) which runs February 15-18th, 2019.

Can't get enough birds?

Check out BEAN's

["Ontario's Backyard Birds"](#)

lesson plan for 5 more activities!

