

Backyard Activities

You and your classroom can investigate an array of bird questions while participating in the Tug Hill Bird Quest. Which Birds flock or feed alone? Which ones act like bullies? Which birds grab seeds and fly away with them, and which ones gulp them right down? Are visits to your feeder influenced by time of day, time of year, or temperature?

Natural history and behavior

Select one species to observe and study in detail; research this bird's natural history and behavior both by watching and by reading. What time of the day does the species visit your feeder? Where does it sleep? Where does it live during summer? What kind of nest does it build? Observe its behavior at your feeder. Does the bird flutter or drop its wings, pass food back and forth, make raucous sounds, or chase other birds?

Weather

Does weather influence how many birds come to your feeder, or how much food they eat? Look separately at the variable of wind, rain, temperature, and barometric pressure. Investigate why one factor might make a difference to the birds and another one might not.

Math

Weigh the birdseed in your feeder before and after each day of the Bird Quest week and compute how much seed was eaten. After several timed counts, calculate the average consumption rate of your feeder birds. Predict and then test how often your feeders need to be refilled. What variables-weather, time of day, different seeds-confound these predictions?

Art

Sketch the birds at your feeder, using binoculars to make detailed observations. Include field marks such as the curve of the bird's bill, its eye ring, and its crown, cheek, or ear patch. Compare your sketches to photos and illustrations in field guides.

Bird songs and calls

Many birds make two kinds of sounds: songs and calls. Songs are used almost exclusively by males to attract females and to defend territories. Calls are used by both sexes to express alarm and to maintain contact. Most birds don't sing at feeders in winter, but they often make calls or "chip" notes. Listen carefully to these and try to learn the sounds of each species. You can also listen to recordings of actual bird songs and calls; check your local library for cassettes or CDs. Many websites also feature songs and calls of certain feeder birds.

Journaling

The suggested activities all require careful observation and note keeping. Try starting a journal with detailed observations of the birds at your feeder site. Even if you don't yet know a bird's name, describe what you see. Include the date of your observation, the location, the weather, the species' name if you know it, and an overview of the bird's appearance, behavior, and sounds.

Additional Educational Resources:

<http://ccejefferson.org/> Cornell Cooperative Extension Jefferson County
www.birds.cornell.edu Cornell Lab of Ornithology
<http://ny.audubon.org/> Audubon New York