



TUG HILL BIRD QUEST:

Backyard Bird Activities

ENGAGE KIDS, ENHANCE YOUR EXPERIENCE

The **Tug Hill Bird Quest** is going virtual this year. That means it's something you can do with your family or as an organized class activity. We've found that one of the ways to engage kids is to ask questions about the birds they see, or might see, to help them develop observation skills and become more engaged.

Questions might include...

- 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 the time of day, the time of year, the temperature?
- Do birds eat on the ground, or a feeder, or in a tree?

To help kids get to know the nuances of birds, and to bring learning to life, consider exploring different activities to connect to their education and interests.

Journaling

Most of the following activities require careful observation and note keeping. Try having kids start a journal with detailed observations of the birds at your feeder site. Even if they don't yet know a bird's name, ask them to describe what they see. Include the date of their observation, the location, the weather, the species' name if they (or you) know it, and an overview of the bird's appearance, behavior, and sounds.

Natural history and behavior

Suggest that kids select one species to observe and study in detail; then, research this bird's natural history and behavior through watching and reading. What time of day does the bird visit your feeder?

Where does it sleep? Where does it live in the 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

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



Robert McNamara

Red-breasted Nuthatch



Eastern Bluebird



Cardinal and Sparrow

Math

Yes, kids can even work on math skills while learning about birds!

Try weighing the birdseed in your feeder before and after each day of the Bird Quest week to compute how much seed was eaten. After several days ask your young birder to calculate the average consumption rate of your feeder birds.

Ask them to predict how often your feeders need to be refilled, and then try it out. Do variables like weather, time of day, or different seeds confound these predictions?

Art

Draw and sketch the birds at your feeder using binoculars to make detailed observations. This is a great way to develop both scientific inquiry and communication skills. Suggest that your young birder include field marks such as the curve of the bird's bill; its eye ring; and its crown, cheek, or ear patch. Compare these sketches to photos and illustrations in field guides.



Hummingbird

Bird songs and calls

Many birds make two kinds of sounds: songs and calls. Songs are used almost exclusively by males to attract females or to defend territories. Calls are used by both male and female birds to express alarm or to maintain contact. Most birds don't sing in the winter, but they often make calls or "chirp" 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 at the Cornell and Audubon. The websites are listed below or you can search them on YouTube. Your library may have DVDs, CDs, or cassette tape recordings you can borrow for home use as well.

Are you interested in doing, or learning, more?

Check out these additional educational resources:

- Audubon: audubon.org
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology: allaboutbirds.org
- North Country Bird Club: facebook.com/North-Country-Bird-Club-98540286097 or Bill Haller at haldex@twcny.rr.com
- Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org

Contact Linda Gibbs at the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust to discuss how you might initiate additional bird or nature-based experiences at home, in your community, or at school. Email: lgibbs@tughilltomorrow.org.

Healthy protected habitats make for healthy birds!

You make conservation happen.

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust is a community-supported nonprofit that works with landowners, municipalities, and our members and partners to protect the wildlands, working forests, and farms of the Tug Hill region and surrounding areas, and to promote appreciation of the region's natural and cultural heritage, for present and future generations.

To receive our complementary eNewsletter, or for more information check out our website: tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org



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