

Wingy About Birds



Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Develop bird-observation skills.
- Recognize basic bird behaviours and characteristics.
- Learn to identify some backyard birds.



Method

Students practice observational skills by looking for basic features of bird species.



Materials

- List of bird traits (include diagrams of beaks, feet, wings and tails)
- Images of local birds
- Bird field guides
- Clipboards with student observation sheets
- Pens or pencils
- Bird song recordings (optional)
- Binoculars (optional)

Background

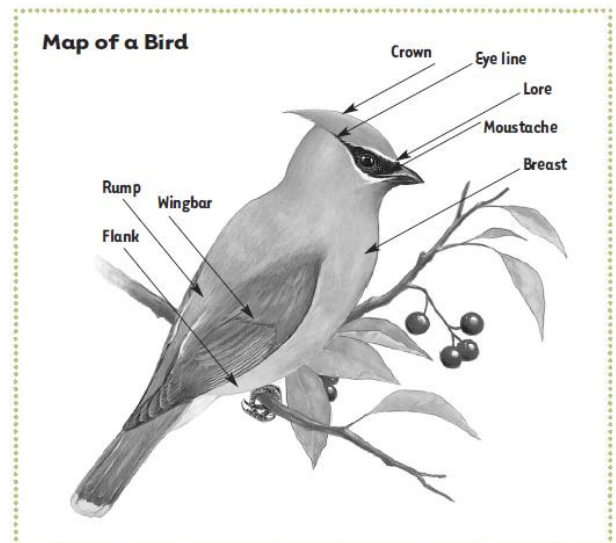
Learning to identify different traits of birds helps to further our understanding of them and enriches our appreciation of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things.

Students will be taught the importance of keen observation in identifying species through traits such as size, flight pattern, the shape of beaks and tails, markings, and behaviour.

You can simplify or expand this exercise depending on the age of your students.

In Advance

Identify an area where you can bring the students for a birdwatching exercise. This may be on your school grounds, in a nearby field, by a stand of trees, or at a birdfeeder.

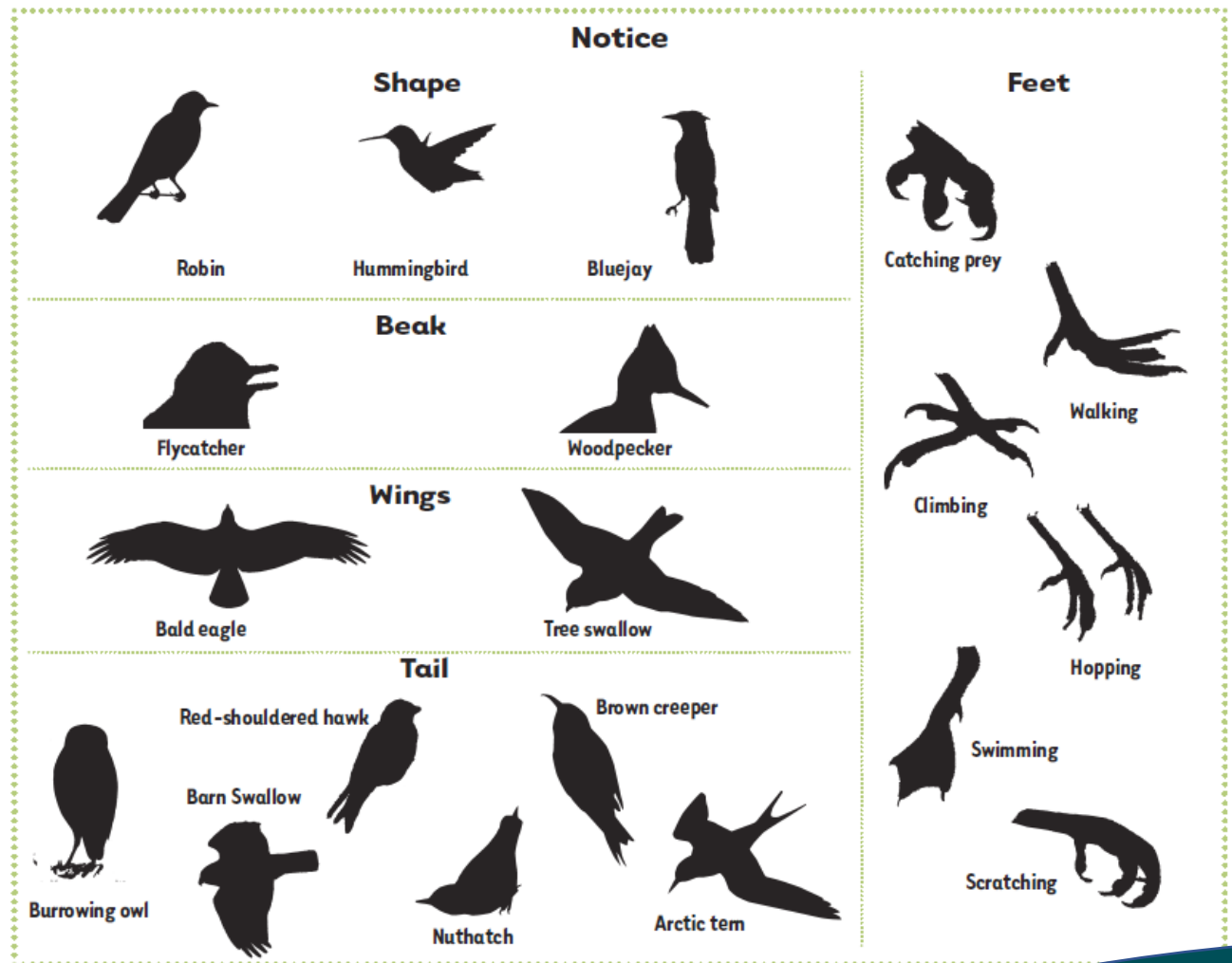


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Activity

- Begin by discussing "clues" that can help to identify a species of bird. These clues include:
 - Size** - Is the bird small, medium, large, or enormous? Compare it to familiar birds, such as a robin. Is it larger or smaller?
 - Shape** - Is it plump or slender? This can help to narrow the list of possible species.
 - Proportions** - Is the tail of the bird short or half the length of its body? Is its head large or small in proportion to its body?
 - Colour** - What colour is the bird? Does it have any distinct patterning?



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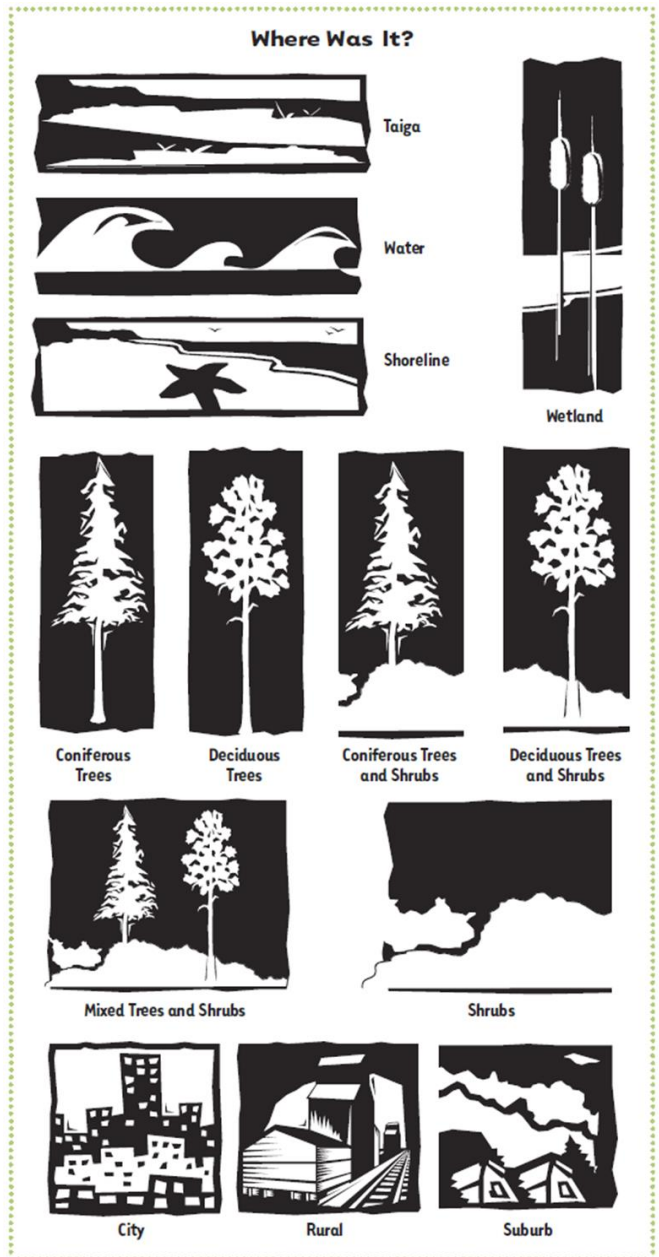
2. Once you've described the size, shape and colour, you can focus on more specific details:

- Is the **beak** it stumpy, short, slender, hooked, flat, or chisel-like?
- What do its feet look like in shape and **colour**?
- Are its **wings** rounded or pointed while in flight?
- How does it **fly**? Does it swoop, fly straight, glide, flap (quickly or slowly), or do a combination of those patterns?
- What is the bird **doing**? Is it hopping, walking, or climbing a tree trunk? Is it catching insects in the air, picking them off foliage, or digging for them in the earth?
- Does it have noticeable **quirks**, such as tail-wagging or wingflicking?
- What **habitat** was the bird using? Was it in a field, on a lawn, in coniferous or deciduous trees, in a marsh or pond, or in the suburbs, city or country?
- Describe any **noises** the bird makes, such as songs, chirps, or squawks.

3. Have students design a bird identification chart or checklist using the sample student observation sheet enclosed.

4. Students should now practice observing and identifying some common backyard birds.

- Hold up an image of a local bird and say that you spotted it in your backyard.
- Provide clues to help students identify the bird. Have students write down details like the bird's general shape, the shape of its beak and its colour patterns.
- If possible, play the bird's song for the students.



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- Ask the students if the bird has any other unique characteristics that could be clues.
 - Encourage the students to ask questions of you, such as "What was the bird eating?"
5. After describing and writing down several of the bird's traits, help students find it in a field guide.
 6. Repeat this activity with several different local bird species.

Field Observation

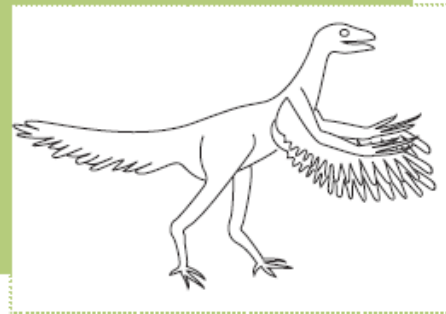
7. Now you are ready for an excursion into the field to observe and identify birds. This activity can be done on your school grounds, in a nearby field, by a stand of trees, or at a birdfeeder. Binoculars can be handy but are not necessary.
8. Birdwatching with a group of students can be a challenge! Stress the importance of silence and moving slowly so birds won't be scared off. Sit as a group to watch and listen.
9. When a bird is spotted have students quietly discuss all the features they notice while you jot them down. Then have them check a field guide to look for the birds.

Extensions

- Look for other signs of birds, such as nests, feathers, sapsucker or woodpecker holes in trees, and footprints.
- Use a citizen science app, such as [iNaturalist](#) or [eBird](#) to track your observations and help with identification.
- Discuss how certain characteristics are perfectly adapted to what birds eat or where they live. For example, sparrows have stumpy beaks for cracking seeds and eating insects, while a robin's slender beak is perfect for digging slugs and worms and insects and berries. A hawk's strong, hooked claws are designed for catching and holding prey, while a woodpecker's feet are just the thing for climbing tree trunks.

Evolution of Birds

Many scientists agree that birds descended from dinosaurs. One famous fossil is that of a bird that lived about 150 million years ago. This thickly-feathered, crow-sized creature with three claws on each wing tip and a long, bony tail was discovered embedded in a limestone quarry in Germany in 1861. Scientists named it *Archaeopteryx*, meaning ancient wing.



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Tell us what you see.

| Date | Species Name | Description | How Observed (saw, heard, tracks, nest, etc.) | How Many Did You See? | Type of Habitat (on the lawn, in a conifer tree, in a deciduous tree, in a marsh, etc.) |
|-------------------|--------------|---|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. April 10, 2004 | Robin | <i>Slender beak; feeding on worms; hopping legs</i> | <i>Saw</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>on the lawn</i> |
| 2. | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | |
| 4. | | | | | |
| 5. | | | | | |
| 6. | | | | | |
| 7. | | | | | |
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| 9. | | | | | |

Name: _____

School: _____

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