

Bird Banquets



Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Sharpen their bird identification skills.
- Learn which bird species stay around in the winter.
- Discover some food preferences of different species of birds.
- Determine what types of food are part of a specific bird's preferred habitat.



Method

Students erect a platform birdfeeder and observe which foods are preferred by which birds.



Materials

- A flat, table-type of birdfeeder on a sturdy pole
- A baffle to discourage squirrels and raccoons
- Large bag of good-quality mixed wild birdseed
- Suet, dried or fresh fruit, and nuts
- Strainers or sieves
- A field guide on birds
- Writing paper for journal

Background

Winter makes it hard for birds to find food. We can help by setting up birdfeeders. It's fun to feed birds year-round and a great way to learn more about them.

Various bird species have different types of beaks adapted to eating certain foods. Grosbeaks and chickadees prefer larger sunflower seeds. Bohemian waxwings and robins devour wild berries and fruit. Juncos and redpolls like small seeds, such as millet and milo, often found in wild birdseed mixtures. Hard beef suet (available from butcher shops) is ideal for woodpeckers and nuthatches.

In Advance

- Purchase a bag of high-quality, mixed wild birdseed. The ingredients ought to include sunflower, millet, and cracked corn. Note that baked goods, such as breadcrumbs, are unhealthy for birds and may also attract unwanted visitors, such as raccoons, rats, and pigeons.

For additional resources visit:

CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education

Activity

1. Have students place a platform feeder near their classroom window (but not too close or birds may collide with the windows) or at another location on your school grounds.
 - Depending on the location of your school and the number of other food sources in your neighbourhood, it may take a few weeks before birds visit regularly.
2. Establish a viewing centre where students can watch the birds without scaring them off. One method is to place a cardboard or paper shield over the window and cut eye holes for observation.
3. Students should:
 - Divide the feeder into four sections
 - Sort the different seeds and grains into three piles (using strainers or sieves) and place one pile in each section.
 - Put dried or fresh fruit and nuts in the fourth section.
 - If you are using suet (in winter), hang it under the feeder or from a nearby tree.
4. Have students watch and identify birds that visit your feeder to observe which species eat which foods. Have students keep a journal of field notes on birds that visit the feeder. Include details such as the name of the species, date, time of day, and weather conditions.
 - Why do you think some birds choose different foods?
 - Are there similarities between species that prefer the same foods?



Extensions

- From data in their journals, note whether more birds visit the feeder after a storm or during cold spells. Records can be kept on arrival (spring) and departure (fall) dates for each species.
- Develop graphs and charts of your findings.
- Discover which birds at your feeder are native to Canada, and which are introduced species, such as the house sparrow and the European starling.

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