

Say it With a Song



Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn that each species usually has two or more distinct songs.
- Learn what birdsongs mean to other birds.
- Learn to identify some local birds by their songs.



Method

Students will become familiar with some common birdsongs and their meanings.



Materials

- Recordings of local birdsongs
- Images of birds

Background

Birds use song, call notes and behavior to communicate with each other.

In spring, the main purpose of a bird's song is to stake out territory and to attract a mate. A male bird starts by marking out the invisible borders of his territory—then defends those borders from other birds of the same species with his song. To them, the song clearly means "No trespassing!" The male chooses a singing spot where he can be heard clearly, such as a treetop or a post

Once he's mapped out his territory, the male does his best to attract a mate. He uses his bright feathers, a special dance, or a song, or sometimes all three, to woo the female. The male's song probably conveys details about his size, health, and social status to tempt a female—but there is much we don't know about birdsongs.

A great way to identify birds is by learning their songs. Each species usually has two or more songs. With practice, the variations and general patterns can be recognized by a sharp-eared ornithologist. Sometimes people remember songs by creating words or mnemonics to fit the sound. For instance, a white-throated sparrow seems to be saying "I love Canada, Canada, Canada." Students can make up their own words to birdsongs.



For additional resources visit:

CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education

In Advance

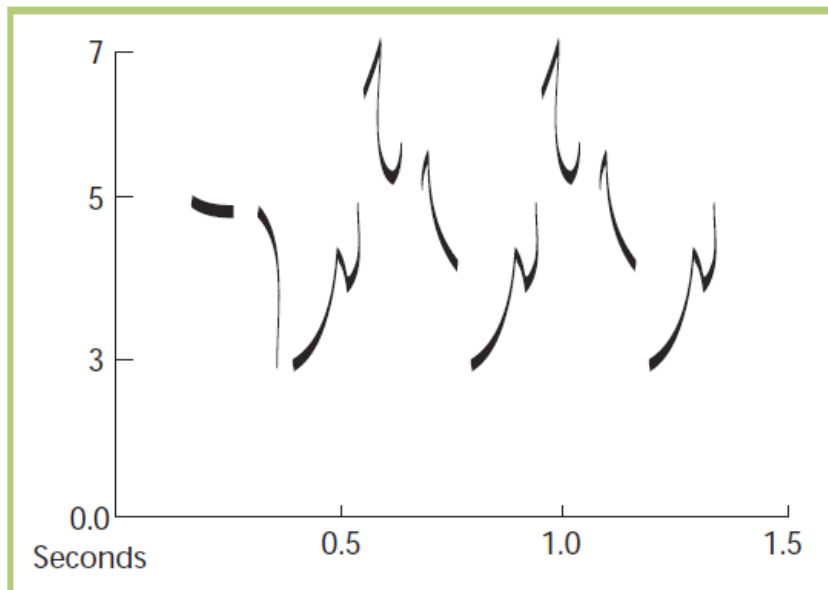
- Collect some good quality recordings of local birdsongs. Choose eight to ten songs of birds in your area. Find them online or reach out to a local naturalists' club for help.
- Prepare images of the birds whose birdsongs you chose to show the class.

Activity

1. Explain that birds use song, call notes and behaviour to communicate with one another.
2. Introduce of the birds local to your area by playing their birdsong for the class, one at a time.
3. Name the species and show its photograph to the class as each song plays.
4. After each song is played, have the students discuss the qualities of the song.
 - Is it musical? Harsh? Bubbly?
 - What words could they match with the song to help them remember it?
5. Once the students are familiar with each song, play all of them again, one at a time, without using the bird images. Have students identify each song – calling out the answers.

Extensions

- Take students out for a field excursion to practice their listening skills on birdsongs.



Scientists use a **audiospectrogram** (also called a **sonogram**) to depict the song of a bird. It displays the tempo, pitch and volume of a song.

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