

# Are We Disturbing Birds?



## Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify some human activities that can improve, disrupt, or destroy habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- Learn that natural forces, such as drought or severe cold spells, can also affect wildlife.
- Identify some of these influences in their community.
- Suggest ideas to improve disturbed habitat or prevent problems for birds.



## Method

Students identify changes that have taken place in their community in the recent past. They suggest how the changes may have affected local birds and how conditions could be improved for them through specific habitat projects or changes in land use policies. Older students could develop a map-based plan of recommended action.



## Materials

- Writing supplies
- Research material

## Background

Every living thing needs a decent home to survive. Imagine what would happen if your home were demolished and you had nowhere to go! It's the same for birds and all wildlife. Every time their homes are disrupted or destroyed, wildlife species are forced to move elsewhere or get squeezed out of existence.

Canada is home to about 500 species of birds. Many of their populations are declining. Nearly 100 percent of all wildlife species decline is caused by human activity. The main cause is habitat loss. It's a complicated problem: most of our bird species depend on many habitats for survival— summer nesting homes; winter homes; and rest and refueling stopovers in between those two residences.

When we use pesticides, we kill plants and insects that birds eat or the water they drink. When we fill in ditches, build dams, or drain swamps, we make life difficult for birds and other creatures. Some municipalities are proactive in protecting wildlife habitat through land use restrictions, but even so, accidents can happen. How often have we heard in the news about a large area that was changed before anyone realized that an environmental impact assessment should have been done first?

For additional resources visit:

[CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education](http://CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education)

The statistics are grim, but the outcome need not be. We believe the best way to reverse these trends begins with action in backyards. Like you, birds need a spot to call home to survive. They need four basics to make a happy habitat: food, water, shelter, and space—arranged just right for them. Birds flitting about your yard is a sign that survival basics are nearby. If birds fly over your neighbourhood without stopping, something important may be missing. Think about it from the bird's view. If you were a bird, would you visit your yard or neighbourhood

## Activity

1. Review the habitat elements that all living creatures, including birds, need to survive (food, water, shelter and space).
2. Have students brainstorm a list of human and natural activities that can interfere with healthy habitats and cause problems for birds.
  - Human activities include housing developments; new roads; use of pesticides on parks, playing fields or farm crops; and dams or dredging.
  - Natural happenings include severe winters, droughts, or floods.
3. Have students research what human activities have occurred in your community in the past six months or year. They may ask municipal officials for a list of development projects that took place within the research time frame.
  - Students do not need to research every project; they can zero in on just one or two.
4. Encourage students to find out what was there before the project began (such as a park, farm, field, wildflowers, trees, or a pond).
  - What birds lived there then?
5. If possible, have students visit one or more developments. Have them look for:
  - Ways the development may have disrupted conditions for bird habitats.
  - Ways that it may have helped to improve conditions.
6. Once students have gathered enough data on the development(s) they are studying, ask them to create a list of recommendations that could improve conditions for birds at the site. For example:
  - Could garbage and litter be cleaned up?
  - Could trees, vines, and shrubs be planted for birds?

## Extensions

- Have students research what bylaws exist in your area to help reduce habitat disturbance. Are they strict enough or could they be improved?

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