

Summary:

Participants observe different bird behaviors.

Grade Level:

3-6

Time:

1 hour

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- ◆ Identify different bird behaviors.
- ◆ Observe several bird behaviors in the wild.
- ◆ Describe how different bird behaviors help the birds to survive.

Materials Needed:

- ◆ Copies of the Bird Behavior Checklist
- ◆ Copies of the Bird Behavior Hike worksheet (optional)
- ◆ Regional bird field guides
- ◆ Pens or pencils
- ◆ Clipboards
- ◆ Clear contact paper and grease pencils (optional)



Background:

Bird behavior is generally dictated by different needs, including protection from predators and the elements, feather and wing maintenance, mating habits, and obtaining food and water.

If you are a good observer, you can witness many bird behaviors. Most birds must be wary of predators to protect themselves or their young. For this reason those who stand still and make minimal noise will likely observe the greatest number of birds and their behaviors.

Bird behavior can be quite complex and different for each species, but some guidelines are highlighted below.

Birds protect themselves from predators in a number of ways. Some may actually use their beaks and talons, but a large portion of birds try to avoid predators by **hiding** from them. **Camouflage** and different types of cover (grasses, bushes, etc.) help them. In the absence of cover or other protection, many birds will stand very still, and predators like hawks, which fly high and watch for movement, may miss them.

Many species find safety in numbers in a **flock**. A flock can consist of one species, as with Canada geese, or several; birds like grackle

will tolerate many other species in their group. In a flock, many eyes and ears keep the group aware of any dangers present, as well as where to find food. Sometimes a flock will even band together to scare away predators.

Birds also sound **alarm calls** to warn the flock. Most calls are short and simple, and are usually the same from species to species.

Bird songs, on the other hand, are often very complex, and are so distinct a number of species can be identified from their songs. Normally, only adult males sing, and then only during mating season.

Courting time or not, almost all birds try to keep themselves clean. Many do this by **bathing** in water, while others roll around in dirt for a dust bath.

When they bathe, birds often get rid of feather parasites. By **preening** their feathers with their beaks and feet, they remove more parasites, arrange feathers, remove dirt, and help to waterproof their plumage.

All this maintenance work can help protect birds from the elements, and, if they **fly**, it can help them fly more efficiently. Some birds, like vultures, can catch air currents with their wings outspread and travel by soaring. Others fly by flapping their wings.





Bird Behavior Hike

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Finally, birds eat a wide assortment of different foods. Diet can vary greatly between species and their habitats. Vultures and some others feed on **carrion**, the meat from dead animals. Hummingbirds eat off of nectar, insects, and small spiders. Other birds may eat different types of fruit, seeds, insects, fish, small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, or combinations of several of those choices. Participants might spot birds actually **feeding** or **foraging**, that is, looking for food.

What to Do:

1. Before starting this activity, investigate a local area where participants could go on a bird behavior hike. Ask for help from naturalists at local nature centers or local representatives from the state natural resources department.

2. Make copies of the Bird Behavior Checklist below, or make copies of your own checklist. Use the Bird Behavior Hike worksheet as a guide to accompany the checklist. If participants can differentiate between bird activities, have them design their own behavior guides. Be aware of the local bird population; if the checklist below is inadequate, or if there are other bird characteristics the participants might observe, make the appropriate changes.

3. Ask, *Have you ever watched birds? What kinds of things have you seen them do?* Tell participants that today they will have a chance to go out and observe different birds and their behaviors. Explain that they will first go over the basics of some different behaviors, and then they will be able to head out on a short walk in a local park or bird sanctuary.

4. Talk about and help define terms on the checklist. Discuss how the different behaviors help birds to survive. Ask the group to think about how they can find different birds, and where and when they might be more likely to see certain behaviors.

5. Pass out copies of the checklist and clipboards. Participants may work alone or in small groups. If possible, have volunteers oversee small groups. Consider laminating the checklists, or cover them with clear contact paper to make them stronger and reusable. Participants can then use grease pencils and wipe the marks off after every outing.

6. Take the group on a bird hike. Make sure they bring their clipboards and something to write with. If participants observe one or more of the behaviors on their checklist, have them mark the box next to the appropriate behavior, and then describe the bird and where they observed it. If you have time, some

participants may want to look at a field guide and identify the type of bird.

7. Wrap up the hike by having the participants talk about what they found during the hike and what they learned about different birds.

For Younger Participants (Grades K-2):

For large groups, it is strongly recommended to split into groups of 8-10, head in different directions, and have volunteers oversee small groups. Younger participants may do especially well with the Bird Behavior Hike worksheet. Consider playing bingo with the worksheet — participants would mark on the sheet when they see a particular bird behavior. Whoever connects three behaviors horizontally, vertically, or diagonally wins.

For Older Participants (Grades 7 and Up):

1. Discuss various bird behaviors with the group, then ask participants to each pick a particular bird that might live in the area.

2. Have them research and find at least three identifying characteristics (e.g., color, song, shape, size, type of nest, time of year they may visit) using resource materials.



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3. Have the group create a bird checklist, including the bird name, at least three characteristics, and several boxes they can check off, including when and where the bird was spotted.

4. Have the group go bird watching (once or many times!), and have them check off the birds they see each time they go.

Questions:

- What are some examples of bird behaviors?
- How do these behaviors help birds survive?
- How do different bird species differ in the behaviors they show?



Adaptations:

Refer to general adaptations on pages 11-16.

Hearing Disabilities:

- Use pictures/examples to illustrate each of the different behaviors.
- Have participants who are deaf identify singing and warning calls by the movements the birds make during these behaviors (i.e., outstretched neck, open beak, etc.).
- Have a set meeting place in case individuals get separated.
- Position yourself and the sign language interpreter so the participants can see you for

further directions or warnings while on the trail.

Learning/Cognitive Disabilities:

- Use pictures and examples to illustrate each of the different behaviors. If desired, have the participants act out each behavior to help reinforce learning.
- Use a variety of bird calls and bird sound tapes to enhance the experience.
- Have field guides with large color pictures available.
- Have a set meeting place in case individuals get separated.

- Have participants who have difficulty writing complete the alternate worksheet or dictate information to a partner.

Motor Disabilities:

Overall:

- Select a largely accessible site for the activity.

For participants with limited muscle strength, coordination, or dexterity of the hands:

- Have participants who have difficulty writing complete the alternate worksheet or dictate information to a partner.

Visual Disabilities:

Overall:

- Use a variety of bird calls and bird sound tapes to enhance the experience.
- Clearly mark the area with a guide string on one side.
- Encourage partners to be interactive with the participant, vividly describing the behavior that each bird is engaging in to enhance the participants' experience. Have partners assist with field guide work and identifying birds as needed.
- Have resources available in alternative formats (Braille, large print, and audio cassette).

For participants with low vision:

- Provide large print version of the Bird Behavior Checklist. Have clipboards and thick black markers available for use.
- Provide binoculars.

For participants who are blind:

- Have a Braille version of the Bird Behavior Checklist available.
- Have small tape recorders available for participants to record their information or dictate input to their partner.
- Consider completing a bird call hike instead. Listen to a bird call tape and practice identifying different calls. Have participants practice making several bird calls. Go on a bird call hike and keep track of as many different birds your group can identify.

