



Building Birdhouses and Feeders

ACTIVITY

Background:

In order for a place to offer a habitat for any living thing, it must offer four basic elements: food, water, cover, and areas to reproduce and raise young. A bird feeder and/or birdhouse can help take care of some of the basic needs for local birds.

Ideally, a planned habitat will have as many food-producing plants available as possible, so that the area will meet food needs throughout the year. Birds are particularly fond of berries and other types of seeds. A bird feeder is an excellent way to provide seeds in the absence of suitable plants, especially for the wintertime.

Animals also need a safe place to raise their young. Birds, for example, need a safe place for their nests. Birdhouses can be placed on posts, trees, and buildings to help meet this need. Some birds can be more particular about their houses than others, and so the house you build and the amount of care taken may affect what type of visitors arrive. The nesting shelf instructions included here can attract nesting birds such as phoebes, American robins, and barn swallows.



Part A: Building Bird feeders

What to Do:

1. Ask participants, *What do birds need in their habitat to survive? What kinds of things can WE do to help them?* Follow the instructions below, or simply use bird feeder kits donated from a local hardware store or bird watcher's club. Follow written directions that come with kits.

Important: *Make sure an adult does any of the work that requires the use of a saw or a drill. Also make sure that all wood materials are well-sanded and free of splinters.*

2. Break participants into groups to work on the activity. If possible, have volunteers oversee small groups. Encourage participants to help each other. Assist them in cutting holes in the containers for the birdseed and the dowel. Attach strong wire to the top of the feeder for hanging from a corner of a building or the branch of a tree (see diagram). Fill with birdseed, and hang.

3. Feeders can be hung from a tree branch, left on the ground or placed on a stump or wall. Encourage participants to select a site where they

Summary:

Participants learn how to build simple birdhouses and bird feeders.

Grade Level:

3-12

Time

1 to 2 hours to make; several days for observations

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- ◆ Understand the importance of food and other basic needs for all wildlife.
- ◆ Create a feeder and/or home for birds.
- ◆ Observe the use of their feeders by birds and other animals.

Materials Needed:

PART A: BUILDING BIRD FEEDERS

- ◆ Strong string or wire
- ◆ Empty milk cartons or 2-liter plastic soda bottles
- ◆ 1/4" diameter dowel or small stick long enough to go through the carton and have room for a bird to sit on either side
- ◆ Birdseed

PART B: BUILDING BIRDHOUSES

- ◆ 40-inch length of 1x12-inch pine or fir shelf board
- ◆ 20 1 1/4" galvanized wood screws or suitable nails
- ◆ Screwdriver
- ◆ Sandpaper
- ◆ Drill
- ◆ Hammer
- ◆ Safety goggles





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have already observed birds. Have small bags of birdseed ready to give the participants when they take their feeders home. Remind participants that some areas are safer than others; a feeder on the ground makes birds vulnerable to cats, and a feeder in the open (away from the safety of brush) may make birds vulnerable to predatory birds, like hawks.

4. Have participants hang their bird feeders and return to observe them for several days in a row. *Do they observe any birds feeding there?* If there are any problems (i.e., squirrels scaring away the birds, eating all the food, etc.), have the group brainstorm ways to address these problems and go out and take action. If you wish, have participants record their observations of the bird feeding stations. *Do they notice any changes depending on the time or weather conditions of the day?* If possible, have participants use field guides to identify the birds using their feeders.

Part B: Building Birdhouses

What to Do:

1. Discuss the basic habitat needs of birds. *How can we help to provide these?* One way is to provide birdhouses. Follow the instructions below, or simply use birdhouse kits donated from a local hardware store or bird watcher's club. Follow written directions that come with kits. Consider making nesting materials (cut grass, twigs, pet hair) available in the vicinity of the birdhouse.

Important: *Make sure an adult does any of the work that requires the use of a saw or a drill. Also make sure that all wood materials are well-sanded and free of splinters.*

2. An instructor or other adult should do the following preparatory work: Cut the 40-inch board into sections as per the diagram. If participants are using screws, pre-drill holes to avoid splitting the wood.

For nails, consider marking the area where the nails need to go with a small "x." Drill drainage holes in the floor (Piece 4) of the nesting shelf. Break participants into groups to work on the houses. If possible, have volunteers oversee small groups. Encourage participants to help each other.



3. Pass out the diagram to each group. Help participants through the assembly process. Have participants put the pieces together following the numbers on the diagram (e.g., attaching board #1 to board #2, and so forth). They should use all the screws or nails.

4. The nesting shelf can be mounted to a building (a participant's house, for instance), or trees. It should be placed 6 -10 feet off the ground on a north-facing wall or tree trunk. Adults should be responsible for mounting the shelves.

For Younger Participants (Grades K-2):

These participants may help with putting things in the right place, but should not use hammers or other tools.

Questions:

- What do birds need to survive?
- Why might some of these needs be unavailable?
- How can humans help birds?





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Adaptations:

Refer to general adaptations on pages 11-16.

Hearing Disabilities:

- Demonstrate each step as you give directions. Have a completed project to show participants.
- Position yourself and the sign language interpreter so the participants can see you for further directions or seeking assistance.

Learning/Cognitive Disabilities:

- Demonstrate each step as you give directions. Simplify directions as needed. Have a completed project to show participants.
- Provide pre-cut pieces as needed.
- Space pairs/small groups out for safety purposes.
- Have partners coach throughout the activity as needed.
- Make sure each participant has completed each step before moving on.

Motor Disabilities:

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

- Use adaptive scissors to make required cuts as needed (feeder).
- Provide pre-cut pieces as needed.
- Have partners assist with assembly as needed.

Visual Disabilities:

Overall:

- Demonstrate each step as you give directions. Have a completed proj-

ect for participants to see/feel.

- Have a copy of the directions in both large print and Braille.
- Space pairs/small groups out for safety purposes.
- Provide pre-cut pieces as needed.
- Encourage partners to provide good orientation directions and coach throughout the activity.
- Have project pieces separated out by function (i.e., side pieces, top, bottom); place in piles or bags. Place an index card labeled in large print and Braille on top of each of the piles or bags.
- Make sure each participant has completed each step before moving on.

For participants with low vision:

- If the work surface does not provide enough color contrast, place a piece of black paper under the project.

For participants who are blind:

- If possible, have partners put together a birdhouse or feeder at the same time and describe each step to the participant. Have the participant feel the project at each step.

