



Birdwatching

*Unlock a natural discovery that is just outside your door.
This fundamental nature experience is a great building
block for many other explorations and lessons.*

Why Birdwatching?

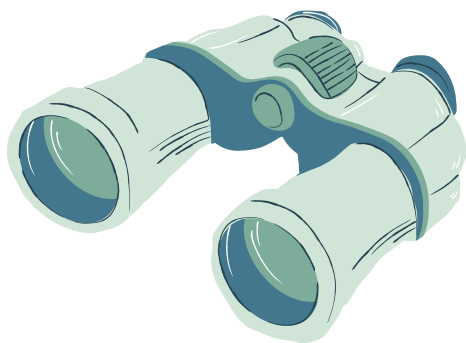
There is no more ubiquitous animal than birds. We can see birds in just about any outdoor setting, regardless of how developed the place is. Birds are also present in all seasons. Birdwatching is a great way to practice observation skills. Birdwatching opens the door for deeper lessons into topics such as adaptation, migration, camouflage and much more.

Getting Started

You don't really need to do anything to start birdwatching with your group, but there are a few things that will make your exploration more fruitful.

Where to Best See Birds

Birds have many different habitats. Birds can be found in dense urban environments (think pigeons) and dense forests. Your best bet is to find an "edge". In ecological terms that's called an **ecotone**. An ecotone is the meeting place between two habitats. A common ecotone in a schoolyard is the edge of a woods next to an open area. Birds use the trees to hide. They come out to the open area to look for food.



About this activity

Grades: **all grades**

Activity Level: **Medium**

Materials: **(optional) field guides, binoculars, paper, Merlin Bird ID app, clipboards, writing utensils, bird feeders.**

A Word on Feeders

You don't need to use feeders to watch birds, but feeding birds will make seeing them much easier.

No need to get fancy. You can start by simply spreading some seed on the ground or use a simple tube feeder with wild bird seed. Over time, you can invest in other feeders and different types of feed such as suet and thistle to attract a wider variety.

If you do plan on feeding birds then be prepared to have a system for refilling the feeders, storing bird seed, and seasonal cleaning of the bird feeders.

What about Binoculars

The classic image of a birdwatcher is someone looking through a pair of binoculars. In our experience, binoculars are actually an impediment for beginning birdwatchers.

Kids love using binoculars, but they get easily confused about which end to look through and kids get so fixed on finding birds in the binoculars that they stop paying attention to the ones they can easily see without binoculars.



Bird ID Made Easy

You're finally ready to head outside. Before you go, review the expectations for birdwatching. Quiet mouths, open ears, and still bodies.

Don't Sweat It

Don't stress about identifying every bird you see. Do your best to notice key features and take a guess as to what you think they are. While there are a great variety of birds, there are probably only 5-10 common ones. Learn those and you'll be able to identify almost every bird you see.

What to Notice

Birdwatching is a practice in observing and noticing. There are a few key things to help you identify your bird.

Colors: The most important clue is color. What color(s) does your bird have?

Unusual features: Aside from colors, does the bird have other features that stand out. Does your bird have a crest like a cardinal? Does the tail stick straight up like a wren?

Calls: What sounds is your bird making? Can you put the call to words to help you sound it out?

Size: How big is it? Is it small like a chickadee, medium like a robin, or big like a hawk.

Behavior: What is the bird doing? Is it on a branch, on the ground, or climbing up a tree trunk? Is it alone or with other birds?

Bird ID Tools

The classic tool is a field guide. We suggest using a simple one with the most common birds as that will cover just about every bird you will see.

You can also use digital guides, such as the popular [All About Birds website](#) or a listing of the most common backyard birds from [American Bird Conservancy](#).

Finally, the [Merlin Bird ID](#) app is an excellent tool to identify birds. It can even help you identify bird calls!

Digging Deeper

- Use the sheets below as guides to make your own **field guide**.
- Learn about **dimorphism**, an animal adaptation often seen in birds, like cardinals, where the males are more brightly colored than the females.
- Speaking of **adaptations**, birds have many noticeable adaptations such as how their beaks are shaped to better eat their food, or how their feet are shaped to better travel in their habitats.
- Study the work of Rachel Carson and other environmentalists. Rachel's quest to protect birds helped rescue birds of prey, like the Peregrine Falcon, from becoming extinct.



Bird Search

Can you find all the birds?
How many of each one can you find?



Robins



Mourning Doves



House Sparrows



Chickadees



Wrens



Cardinals

BASIC BIRD SHAPES



CIRCLE



OVAL



MOUNTAIN



CURVED
"V"



SMILE



RAINBOW



WAVY



STRAIGHT
LINE

Drawing a Simple Bird

Add circle for head



STEP ONE

Add oval for body



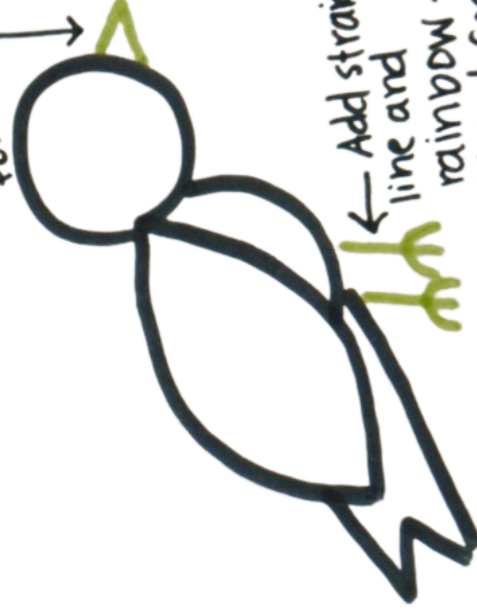
STEP TWO

Add oval with pointed tips for wing



STEP FOUR

Add triangle for beak



STEP FIVE

Add straight line and rainbow for legs and feet



STEP SIX

Add mountain for tail



STEP THREE

Add circle for eye



Drawing a Bird in Flight

Add circle for head



STEP ONE

Add oval for body



STEP TWO

used a curved line to
finish wings



STEP FOUR

Add Mountain for tail



STEP THREE

Add other details as
needed



STEP SIX

Name of bird:

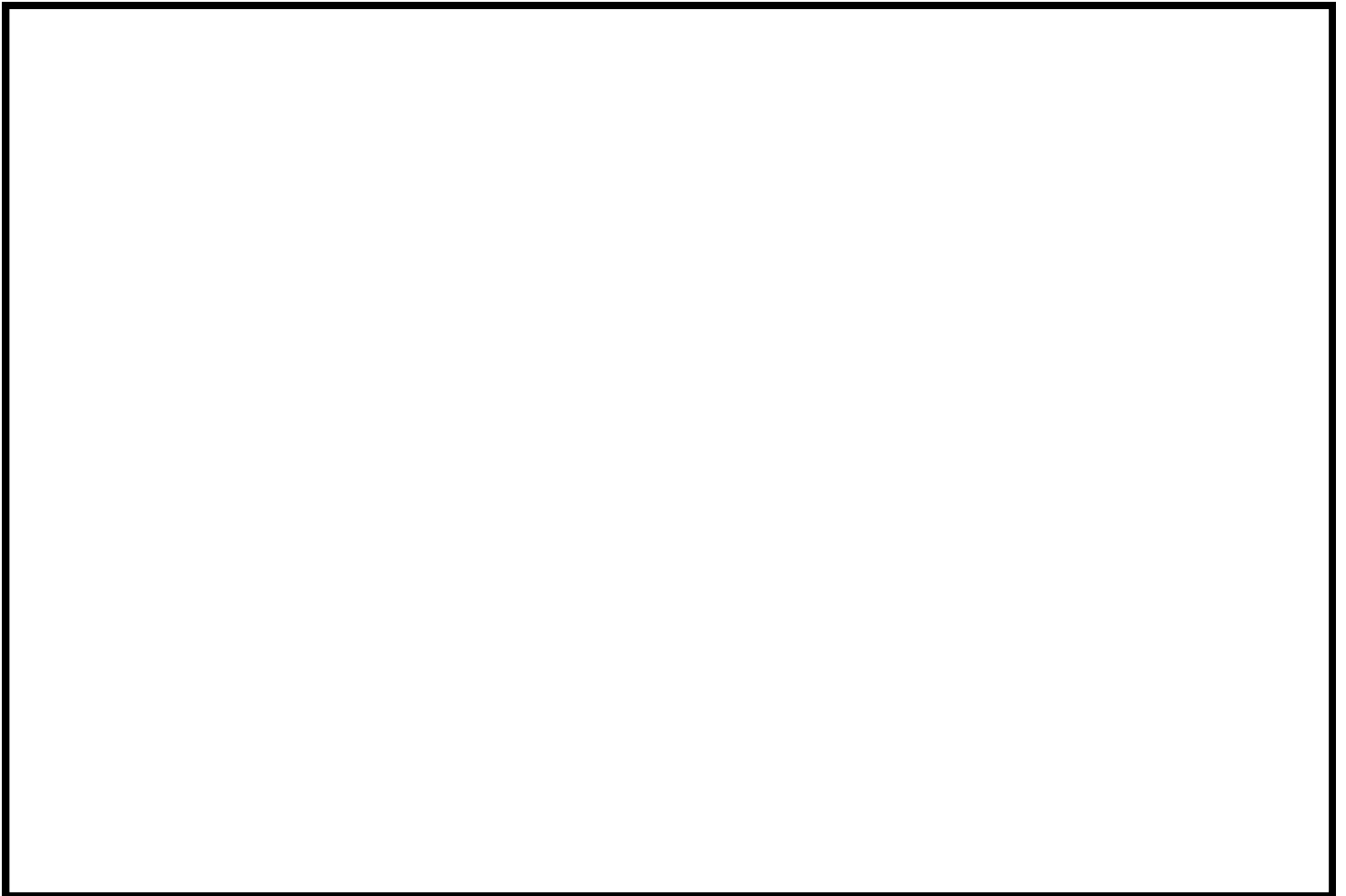
can be your best guess

**What Color or
Colors was it?**

**Did it have
any unusual
features?**

**Where did
you see it?**

Drawing of bird:

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a drawing of the bird. It occupies the bottom half of the page.