

Willett Garden of Learning

Great Willett Bird Count

Activity: Go on a bird watching walk, learn about bird identification, visit the Wildlife Garden and discuss how gardens can be planned to attract birds.

Goals: To become more aware of the wild creatures living among us, to sharpen powers of observation, to learn about birds

Supplies: bird identification books and poster, clipboard, pencil.

How to proceed:

Familiarize yourself with the background information then take your students on a bird walk around the school and/or park. Stop by the Wildlife Garden and discuss how this garden was planted to attract birds and other wildlife (primarily by planting pollen-producing flowering plants).

For each bird you see, note (optionally write down) the properties of the bird (size, coloring, shape).

Depending upon the abilities of your group, use the *Common Feeder Birds of Western North America* poster, and the various bird identification guides to identify the species you see. Remind students that they will see more birds if they remain quiet.

Write down each bird that you see, either with it's name or it's description.

Background Information

How to Look For Birds

Bird watching or birding is a hobby that can be enjoyed by young and old, in the suburbs and in the country, wherever birds can be found. Some people supplement bird watching with feeding wild birds or planting a bird-friendly habitat to attract birds to their backyards.

In this exercise we will introduce some birds common in Davis parks and backyards. We are focusing mainly on the birds that are large and easily seen. There are many more large birds you can see nearby, especially if you visit local wetland areas. There you will see ducks, geese and wading birds during the fall migrations. Fall through winter is our best time to see birds in this area.

Although this will be difficult to achieve with a whole class, it is best to be rather quiet when looking for many birds, who may be scared off by loud noises. The best time to look for birds is early in the morning as many birds are resting during the heat of the day. But there are several large and common birds that are active all day around the school grounds and park. Among these are scrub jays, yellow-billed magpies, and mockingbirds. These should be easy to spot and are approachable as they are used to people.

Approach a potential bird watching area slowly and quietly. Do you see birds flying near the area? Use your ears as well as your eyes to detect birds. Do you hear birds calling? A woodpecker tapping on a tree? As you enter the area, you may wish to "call" to the birds by making "pshhh--pshhh--pshhh" noises with your mouth, sort of like shushing someone. You may be surprised by the birds that come out of trees to investigate this curious sound. Wait a bit to see if anyone shows up.

Another place to look for birds is. . .straight up! You may see vultures and hawks soaring in the sky. Bird books conveniently give identifications for these birds as they are flying.

Binoculars are necessary for the serious birder, but they do take practice to learn how to focus them and find birds. Another very useful item is a bird identification book. There are several brands available. When a birder is trying to identify a bird, he flips to the pictures of the birds in the book matching shape, markings and habitat to what he sees. Flight patterns and bird calls can also aid identification. Once the bird is identified the field guide describes how the bird behaves or how it sounds, and often includes a range map showing where it is found. Remember that there are often differences between the male and female of a species. The ID guides will illustrate these.

If you are already a bird watcher, you may wish to share some of your tips with the class and let them look through binoculars--it is up to you. If you are not a birdwatcher, relax and take a stroll through the park. You will no doubt see some kind of bird, even if it is a crow! Take the bird book so that you can show the kids where the birds are in the book, how the pictures match up with the actual bird, and the written information about each bird.

A Bird-Friendly Garden

We can manage our home landscapes to provide favorable features for our local birds and beneficial insects. We have established such a wildlife-friendly garden in our Wildlife Garden in Sycamore Park. The following is a list of features that makes a garden friendly to birds:

Shelter. Birds need places to rest, to escape from predators (housecats!) and to build nests. Birds like a garden with a variety of plants of different heights and structures, from tall, mature, trees to low, dense shrubs.

Food for birds. Many birds relish eating berries or seeds provided by landscape plants and this is an easy way to attract them without putting out feeders. We also have bird feeders up in the garden. These are replenished regularly with a mixture of fresh sunflower, safflower and black nyger seeds.

Water. Water will often attract many birds, especially in the dryer months. Butterflies and other insects will also take drinks from shallow puddles.

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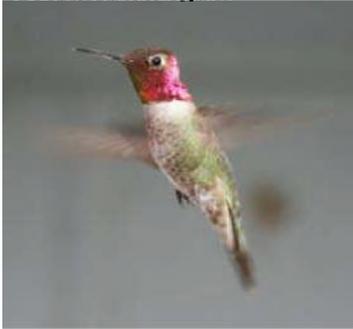
Space. In order to attract the greatest diversity of organisms, they need to have some “elbow room,” especially for birds who can be very territorial. Many birds also appreciate quiet space away from people-activities.

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Indicate how many of each species your class was able to see.

Anna's Hummingbird



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna%27s_hummingbird

American Crow



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_crow

American Goldfinch



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_goldfinch

American Robin



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_robin

Dark-eyed Junco



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark-eyed_junco

House Finch



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_finch

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Mourning Dove

Northern Mockingbird



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mourning>



Rock Pigeon

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_Pigeon



Western Scrub Jay

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Scrub_Jay

White-crowned Sparrow

Yellow-billed Magpie



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White-crowned_sparrow



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow-billed_magpie

Other species: