



The Classroom Naturalist

For the Birds!

Observing Birds in Their Natural Habitat

A Bird

A bird came down the walk
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to
the wall
To let a beetle pass.

-Emily Dickinson

Birds are graceful and beautiful animals. They live among us, in cities and suburbs and in forests and backyards. After cats and dogs, they are probably the most recognized animals by children. They are colorful, vocal, and bountiful. Observing birds in their habitats is a great way to introduce students to the scientific methods of observation and inquiry.

In this newsletter, we've provided information on how you can observe birds with your students in the Glover Outdoor Classroom, outside your class window, out near Turner's Pond, or wherever is convenient.



Bird Observation Journals

Observing birds is a fun and educational activity. Your students will enjoy learning about different types of birds and their habits. Most importantly, these activities will hopefully instill a sense of wonder in the children about our natural world and just how great it is to sit and observe nature in action.

When observing birds, it's a good idea for each student to create an observation journal, which they can use to record their findings. You can use notebooks, or have the students create their own using a few pieces of paper stapled together with a hand-decorated cover. After you have prepared the journals, you're ready to start on your bird adventures:

1. Choose an observation site. For instance, you could go into the courtyard, view the birdfeeders from the library or the computer room, or set up a feeder right outside your window. (If you need help obtaining and setting up a birdfeeder of your own, contact us.) Explain that it's necessary to be quiet and still, so the birds won't be scared away.
2. Each time you observe the birds, have the students start a new journal page labeled with the date, time, and weather conditions (include temperature). You can either choose the same time each day or vary the time from the morning to afternoon. If possible, have some students observe in the morning and some in the afternoon.
3. Choose a length of time for the observation (10 or 15 minutes is a good starting point).

4. For the first few days, let the students record their observations without any input from you. Encourage your students to use words and drawings in their journals.
5. After 3 days of observing, have the students read from their journals. What kind of things did they observe? What did they record in their journals? Did they observe behavior, color, size shape of birds, etc?
6. Now, work with your students and discuss the following:
 - **Behavior**--Behavior is what the bird is doing. Is the bird eating, drinking, flying, swimming, flocking, and courting? Have them look specifically for the behavior of the birds they observe.
 - **Physical characteristics**--What are the size, shape, color, bill shape and color, feet and leg shape plumage, etc. of the birds they observe?
 - **Vocalization**--Can your students hear the birds singing? Why do birds sing (to communicate)?
7. Have your students go back and observe, paying attention now to the things you have discussed. You can also get bird identification books from the Glover library and/or use the Internet to identify the birds you have been observing.
8. Set aside some time each day or every other day to discuss observations.



Now that your students are familiar with observing birds, you can do some additional activities:

- **Math Connections**—There are many math-related activities that you can do with bird observation data. Here are two examples:
 - **Make tally charts to record bird behavior**—Students can tally the total number of birds they see exhibiting a behavior in a given time period. Types of behavior they could track include: eating, bathing in bird bath, drinking from a bird bath, taking shelter in a tree, flying alone, flying in a flock, etc.
 - **Create bar graphs.** Using the data they gather, students can make graphs (e.g., the number of birds they observe at the bird feeder over a week's time, etc.)
- **“Up Close and Personal” Observations of One Type of Bird**--A more in depth way to study and observe birds is to choose one of the types you observe and study its behavior over a period of one or two weeks. Read about the bird and find out the following:
 - What trees does it like the best?
 - Which bird feeder does it eat from? What type of food does that feeder contain?
 - How often does it use the birdbath?
 - Does it fly alone or with other birds?
 - What is its song like?
 - Can you tell the difference between the females and males? Do they act differently?

Try to continue your observations throughout the year. This way you can find out if bird behavior, physical characteristics, etc. change with the seasons.

- **Wonder Journals**--Have the students create a wonder journal from their observations. For example: If there are fewer birds when it rains, then you could wonder if the birds don't like the rain? Do birds get angry with one another? Do they play games?
- **Bird Word Wall**--Set aside space on a wall and make a word wall. Divide the wall so that you have a section for verbs that show a bird's movement, adjectives that describe how a bird looks, etc. Add to the wall as the students' observations grow.
- **Creative Writing Connections**--Using their observations, have the students write a fictional piece about birds and a non-fiction piece. They can also write poems.
- **Tree Trunk Explorations**--Go out into the courtyard or around Turner's Pond and examine tree trunks for holes and other markings made by birds.
- **Courtyard Trees and Shrubs**--Study the various trees and shrubs in the Glover Courtyard. They were placed there specifically because they provide food and shelter for different types of birds. What types of birds are attracted to the plants in the courtyard? The Glover Courtyard Plant Info Sheet and Bird Info Sheet binders (on the Teacher Resource cart) will be terrific references for this activity, as well as the Courtyard Design plan.

Need More Information or Ideas?

Check out these books from the Glover Library:

Curriculum Guides (Outdoor Classroom Teacher Resource Cart)

Inquiry at the Window by Phyllis and David Whiting

Ten Minute Field Trips by Helen Ross Russell

Access Nature by the National Wildlife Federation

Keeping a Nature Journal by Clare Walker Leslie

Bird Identification Guides

Audubon First Field Guide: Birds by the National Audubon Society

Stoke's Field Guide to Birds by Donald and Lillian Stokes

Birds of Boston by Chris Fisher & Andy Bezener

Peterson Field Guides: Feeder Birds of Eastern North America by Roger Tory Peterson

Audubon's Birds by John James Audubon

Great Literature Tie-ins

Backyard Bird Watching for Kids by George Harrison

The Backyard Bird Feeders Bible by Sally Roth

Common Birds and Their Songs (book/CD) by Lang Elliott & Marie Read

Counting is for the Birds by Frank Mazzola Jr.

Bird Egg Feather Nest by Maryjo Koch

Birds, Nests & Eggs by Mel Boring

Robins in Your Backyard by Nancy Carol Willis

Nature All Year Long by Clare Walker Leslie

Blue Bird Rescue by Joan Rattner Heilman

Wild Bird Photography by Tim Fitzharris



Plant of the Month: **Red Osier Dogwood** (*Cornus sericea*)

The red osier dogwood is a deciduous shrub that grows up to 10 feet tall. (Deciduous means that it drops its leaves in the fall and grows new leaves from buds in the spring.) The bark and dull green leaves turn red in the fall (before the leaves fall off). Clusters of small white flowers appear in May and are followed by white or bluish fruits that ripen from July to October. The plants spread rapidly by underground stems to form a large clump.



Dogwood berries are eaten by 98 types of birds, including flickers, downy woodpeckers, robins, cardinals, cedar waxwings, and song sparrows. Many birds (such as goldfinches, robins, and cardinals) and small mammals also use it as shelter and for nests (the upright twigs are a favorite nesting site for goldfinches). White-tailed deer like to munch on the twigs and buds.

Native Americans used red osier dogwood branches for making baskets, snowshoes, cradleboard frames, arrows, and drying frames for skins. The stems were used to make a medicinal tea, and the bark was twisted into rope. Wood shavings were boiled with iron rust to make a black dye.

There are three red osier dogwoods in the Glover Outdoor Classroom. This time of year, you can spot them by looking for their dark red branches that stick straight up.

Feedback Needed! Please help us provide activities and information that will benefit you and the Glover students the most. Let us know what you'd like to see in this newsletter: the types of topics that would be helpful, additional features, etc. Comments are welcome! Call or email us: Margaret Eberhardt (696-3632, eberhardt_bos@msn.com) and Janet MacNeil (698-7013, janetmacneil@comcast.net); or drop us a note in the Glover Outdoor Classroom mailbox in the office. Thanks!

Visit us on the web at <http://gloveroutdoorclassroom.home.comcast.net>

Coming Next Month: Ideas for Making Our World a Better Place
Inspired by Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2004