

The Birding Beat

Participants test their skills at identifying birds as they take a stroll along Birding Lane.

Need to Know

Take a hike along Birding Lane and try to identify as many birds as you can! Learning to identify birds is a challenge that promises to delight and reward the novice and expert birder alike. Things that bird watchers check for include the silhouette (size and shape of a bird, habitat (where you see it), plumage (color and color patterns of feathers), sounds, behaviors, and other field marks that stand out. These can be important clues to help you identify what you are observing. Grab a field guide and take a stroll along Birding Lane!

Getting Ready

1. Gather pictures of at least 10 different birds common to your geographic area. Search through magazines and old calendars; contact your local Audubon chapter or state wildlife agency to ask for pictures; and browse the Internet. Cut out the pictures and laminate them, if possible. You might want to consider displaying these birds along your walk: American Robin, Lesser Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Mallard, Ring-billed Gull, Song Sparrow, Blue Jay, Great Horned Owl, Yellow Warbler, Carolina Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, and House Wren. A bird field guide can offer those specific to your area.
2. Decide where to conduct this activity on the day of the festival. Establish an area, path, or wall space as a trail called Birding Lane, where participants can stroll along in their search for birds.
3. Place the bird pictures that you gathered along this trail in areas where the particular species might be found in the outdoors. For example, a robin picture should appear on the ground, where robins are commonly found on the ground foraging for worms and other insects. A bluebird picture can be placed on a fencepost, a Wild Turkey in a field, and a warbler perched in a tree.
4. Make a street sign entitled Birding Lane and plan how and where it will be mounted.
5. On the day of the festival, set up your bird identification area with the Birding Lane sign and the bird pictures. Have several bird field guides, plus paper and pencils. Provide binoculars, if possible.

NEED TO GET

- Pictures of birds, laminated if possible
- List of common names of birds in pictures (for station leader's reference)
- Tape (for attaching bird pictures)
- Construction paper or poster board (for Birding Lane sign)
- Markers for Birding Lane sign
- Field guides
- Pencils
- Paper

Optional:

- Binoculars

TIME

Preparation: 40 minutes
Activity: 50 minutes

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ZOOM IN, ZOOM OUT!



If you hold this activity indoors and have selected a hallway to serve as Birding Lane, create props such as trees, a stream, fenceposts, and thickets, to enhance the activity.

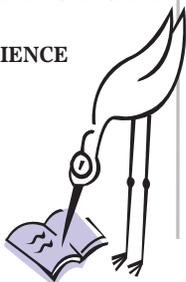
You may want to invite bird-watching experts from your local Audubon chapter or birding organization to assist with this activity. These birding experts can help participants identify the birds and answer other questions about bird watching.

Bird watchers check for silhouette, plumage (including color), sounds, behaviors, habitat, and field marks that stand out.

IN STEP WITH SCIENCE STANDARDS

STANDARD C: LIFE SCIENCE

- Populations and ecosystems



Taking Flight!

Festival participants take a walk along Birding Lane to find and identify birds common to their geographic area.

1. Ask participants to take a walk along Birding Lane. They should take a pencil and paper to keep track of the birds that they spot. Suggest that, when making notes or sketches, they can get clues from this list of questions about bird identification characteristics:

- **silhouette** (size and shape)

How big is the bird in relation to a robin? (Be careful because this is hard to judge from a photograph.)

What shape is the beak?

How big is the beak relative to the rest of the body?

How long is the tail compared to the body?

How long are the legs compared to the body?

Is the end of the tail square, pointed, round, or forked?

- **plumage** (color and pattern of the bird's feathers)

What color are the feathers?

How would you describe the color pattern?

- **Other field marks** (visible characteristics)

Is there an eye ring (tissue or feathers surrounding the eye) and what color is it?

What color are the legs?

Can you find other markings?

- **habitat**

Where do you see the bird (land, shore, water, etc)?

2. When participants return to the station festival booth, they can use field guides to identify the birds they spotted.
3. Participants complete the activity by identifying the birds they found along their walk. Be certain that the station leader has a list of correct names for the birds that were pictured, being as specific as possible when naming local birds.

Questions for Your Guests

1. Once you have identified the birds seen on Birding Lane, consult a field guide to determine which of these birds are year-round residents and which are migratory.
2. If you have identified migratory birds on your list, what time of year are you most likely to see the bird? Why?

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What Did You Learn?

1. What types of information did you record to help you identify the birds you spotted?
2. In addition to the clues you recorded, what are some examples of other clues that can help you identify birds?
3. Was this information helpful to you in finding the bird in the field guide?

Wanted: Your Feedback

1. What changes would you make to this activity?
2. Did participants need to consult a field guide to identify the birds they spotted?
3. Was the field guide sufficiently helpful, or did participants require further assistance in identifying the birds?

Question for Reflection

Consider the places in your neighborhood and town where you are most likely to spot birds. What are some of the birds you might find on your own street or around your school?

