



Ornithology Bird Count Activity

Recommendations: For students Gr. 3-6. Adult supervision recommended.

Purpose: Use knowledge of the animal kingdom to broaden an understanding of birds – their characteristics, calls, quirks, and quandaries. Then find as many birds as you can!!

Materials:

- Small notebook and pen/pencil
- Binoculars if available (*not required*)

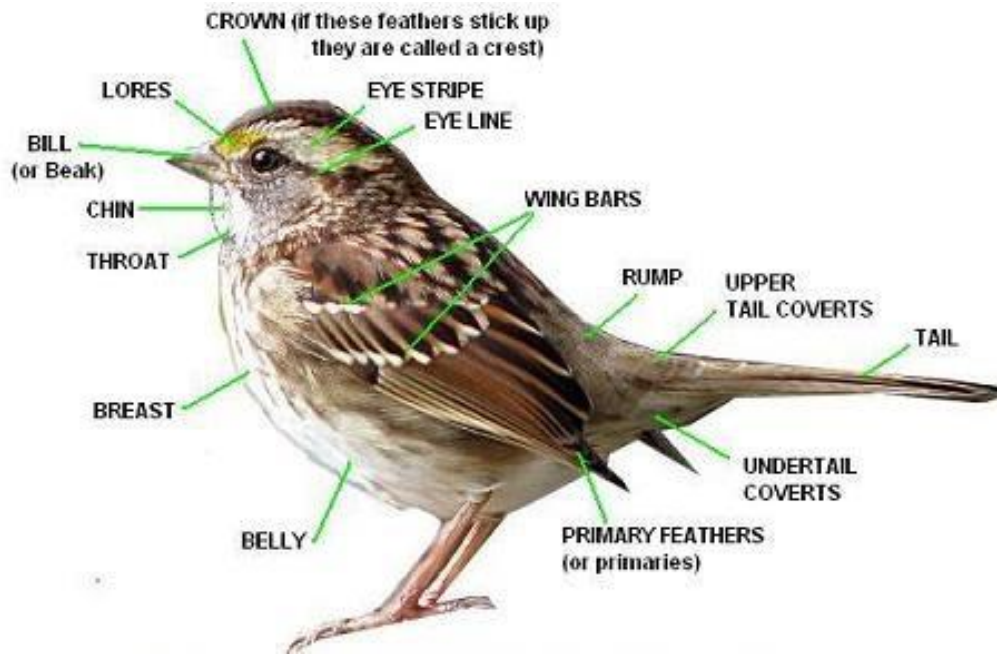
How it Works:

Context: There are approximately 10,000 different species of birds in the world; varied in shape, size, colouring, wingspan, diet, flight ability, living patterns and so much more! Despite there being 100s of species in our own neighborhood, we only recognize a famous few (looking at you Robin, Blue Jay, Canada Goose!) It is time to open our eyes –and ears! –to the feathered friends around us.

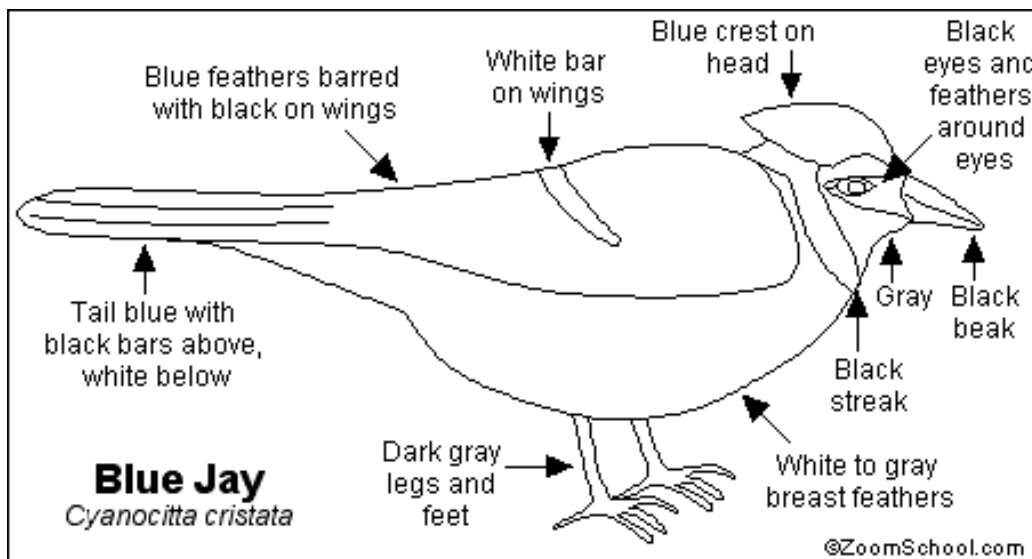
Step 1: write a list of a few birds that you know well and can identify the moment you see them. For inspiration you can sit in your yard or go on a short walk and write down the birds you see. My list looked like this.

1. Blue Jay
2. Cardinal
3. Robin
4. Nuthatch
5. Black Capped Chickadee

Step 2: Now it is time to learn how to distinguish between different birds. Look at the diagram below that labels the different parts of a bird. The colour and shape of these parts can be crucial for identifying different birds. Pick a bird or two from your list above and either write out a description or colour a picture of that bird using the identifying characteristics as seen in the labeled picture.



If you want one that you can print and colour, try this labeled outline of a Blue Jay:



Step 3: Go out and find new birds!

- “Sit Spot”: choose one place to sit quietly and watch from for a length of time (*at least 10 minutes*)
- Leisurely walk: keeping your eyes wide for sightings of birds from different habitats
- Do a combination of both!

The goal here is to see birds that you *do not* recognize and record their identifying features. Don’t worry about identifying the bird just yet! This part is about training your brain to pay attention to all the little details called Field Markings. Making *Field Notes* of what the bird was doing can also help.... for example, some birds only eat on the ground so you might see birds like robins and dark-eyed juncos are pecking for worms or at the base of a feeder. Songs, chirps and calls can also be a way to identify birds so record a description of the sound if you hear one.

My list now looks like this:

1. Slender dark brown/black body with dark metallic blue head and yellow eyes. Feeding on the ground. Song sounded like rusty bed springs.
2. Small bird with cone beak, dusty red crown, throat, and breast but grey/brown eye-stripe and cheeks, white-ish belly with dark stripes.
3. Song –chi-oo, chi-oo, chi-oo (*up to 10 times in a row then stops, then calls again*)
4. Seen in the water so thinking it's a type of duck –white on the sides with black line along the back (*like reverse skunk*), big white patch on the back of its otherwise dark head

Step 4: It is time to identify! Using the Field Markings that you recorded, look online or in a field guide to narrow down the specific species of bird you saw

- App you can download and take with you <https://www.audubon.org/app>
- Online Field Guide: https://www.audubon.org/bird-guide?field_bird_family_tid=All&field_bird_region_tid=49
- Downloadable Peterson Field Guide: https://www.academia.edu/39589445/Peterson_Field_Guide_To_Birds_Of_North_America_Peterson_Field_Guide_Series_by_Roger_Tory_Peterson

Turns out the birds I saw were:

1. Common Grackle
2. House Finch
3. Not sure? If I hear the song again, I'll try following it until I see the bird and write out its Field Markings
4. Bufflehead

Step 5: Get back out there!

- Can you spot birds that you didn't know before but have now identified?
- Find more birds that you don't know, record their *markings* and figure out who they are
- Complete the Eli Knapp bird challenge by finding and learning the identity of 100 different birds. (This means you will have seen 1% of the world's population!)

Conclusion:

There is so much more to learn about birds. If your student enjoys this, look out for “Ornithology: Bonus Content” coming soon to the Gould Lake Website.