

Natural Illinois: Birds



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study! Illinois is home to a wide variety of birds that are as close as your backyard, local park, or schoolyard. Birds are often colorful and musical, and highly appealing to children!



Collect resources about birds.

- Ask a librarian to help you find nonfiction books, nature magazines, videos, and online resources about birds to share with the children.
- Display posters of birds in the classroom. Place laminated photographs of birds in the science center.



Find out about birds together.

- Ask the children, “What are some things you know about birds?” “How can we tell that something is a bird, and not a dog or a fish?” Make a topic web or a list of their ideas and questions about birds.
- Take small groups of children outdoors. Ask them to quietly watch and listen for birds all around them. Check for bird tracks in the dust or snow. Help children identify the birds they see using a field guide, a poster about birds, or other colorful pictures.
- Find songs from various birds online and play them for the children. Encourage them to describe similarities and differences. Ask them to replicate bird calls with their voices.
- Invite a local expert to answer children’s questions about birds. A nature center or master naturalist group may be able to help. Have the children practice their questions before the visit. Record the answers to questions on chart paper and display them in the classroom.



Take a close look at birds.

- Be aware that people need special permits to possess wild bird feathers, nests, and eggs. Children may be able to see and touch these items at a nature center or museum.
- Find out if a local park or forest preserve cares for wild birds that have been hurt. Children may be able to sketch and photograph birds there.
- If your program’s director and custodian approve, put bird feeders where the children can see them. Provide good-quality birdseed and suet, not breadcrumbs. Help children keep a record of birds that visit the feeders. Take pictures of birds that visit the feeders and display them in the classroom.



Encourage children to represent what they learn about birds.

- Provide clay, wire, paper, and other art supplies so children can make models of birds, feathers, nests, eggs, and bird tracks.
- Invite children to draw or sketch feathers, nests, or eggs. Encourage them to notice interesting colors and draw items to scale (e.g., an egg looks very small when in a nest).
- Offer chimes, bells, or a keyboard so children can try to duplicate bird songs.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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