

# 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. Studying birds with preschoolers can help meet Illinois Early Learning Benchmarks 3.C.EC, 5.A.EC, 11.A.ECa, 12.A.ECa, 12.B.EC, 12.C.EC, and 13.B.ECa.

## Collect resources about birds.

- Ask a librarian to help you find nonfiction books, nature magazines, CDs or videos, and Web sites about birds to share with the children.
- Order *Illinois Common Birds*, a free poster from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Web site. Or borrow an IDNR "Illinois Birds Trunk," which contains bird song CDs, models of eggs, and other resources. For details, see <http://dnr.state.il.us/education/CLASSRM/teach.htm>.

## 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, the *Illinois Common Birds* poster, or other colorful pictures.
- Play parts of a bird song CD every day so children can hear a variety of bird sounds.
- 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.

## 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.
- Buy feathers in a craft store for children to look at with magnifiers. Invite them to sketch the feathers in detail.
- 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.

## 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.
- Offer chimes, bells, or a keyboard so children can try to duplicate bird songs.

## For related Web resources, see "Natural Illinois: Birds" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

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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