



BIRDS, BIRDS, EVERYWHERE!

YOUTH AND FAMILY ACTIVITIES

April 17, 2020

Open your eyes and ears to the birds in your area! Birds are active at all times of year and there is always something to see or hear when you pause to observe. Learn some bird identification basics with an easy-to-use app, put your new skills into practice on a bird walk, and make a sound map.

WHO'S THAT BIRD?

Curious about the birds you are seeing? Use the Merlin Bird ID app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to learn more about the bird species near where you live.

What you need: Device with app capabilities, bird photos (included below)

Time: 20 minutes

1. Download the free Merlin Bird ID app from <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/> or your app store.
2. Open the app and install the Bird Pack for your geographic region. Depending on memory available on your device, you may choose to install a pack for your entire continent, or just your region. The app will suggest packs based on your phone's location.
3. Begin by selecting "Start Bird ID" from the home screen of the app. Merlin will walk you through a bird identification using a series of five questions about your bird sighting, asking you about the:
 - Location of the bird
 - Date of your sighting
 - Bird size (using a comparison to some more common bird species)
 - Up to three main colors of the bird
 - Bird location (such as on the ground, at a feeder, on water)
4. You may also wish to watch a short video, such as [this introduction to using the Merlin Bird ID app](#).
5. With these questions in mind, practice using the app to identify a few birds. It can be helpful to try this before going out, so you are comfortable and familiar with how to use the app. You may practice using:
 - Photos of birds you have taken previously
 - Photos of birds in books or magazines
 - Bird photos included on page 2 (answer key and photo credits on page 4). If using these photos, note that these are all birds you can see in Western Washington, at any time of year.
6. Using your chosen bird images, practice going through the identification steps with the app to identify your bird. It may take a few attempts, and you can always go back and change your responses (such as trying one fewer color or changing the size of your bird).
7. You may wish to explore other functions of the Merlin Bird ID app:
 - Try a Photo ID: Select "Photo ID" on the home screen to have the app attempt to identify a bird in a photo on your device or that you take. It can be helpful to take the photo first, in case the bird flies away.

- Learn more about birds: Select “Explore Birds” on the home screen and use the filters to select an area and date of interest, such as your where you are today. The app will generate a list of likely birds and you can learn more about different species, including how to identify them and listen to recorded samples of their songs and calls.

Bird 1



Bird 2



Bird 3



Bird 4



BIRDWATCHING

Birds are everywhere! Whether you are on a walk, or watching from a window, use the skills that you learned from the Merlin Bird ID app to identify birds in your neighborhood.

What you need: Device with app capabilities, Merlin Bird ID app; *Optional- Binoculars, Nature Journal/Paper, Pencil*

Time: This activity can take as much or as little time as you would like.

1. Find a comfortable spot to sit looking out your window or go for a walk outside. Keep your eyes peeled for local birds!
2. When you spot a bird, take note of their color, size and location. *This is where binoculars might be useful.*

3. Use the Merlin Bird ID app, from the “Who’s that bird?” activity, to identify the species that you observed.
4. Make a list in your nature journal, or on a piece of paper, of the birds that you identified. Include the date, time and weather in your notes.
5. Take some time to learn about each species that you observed.

Consider this!

Species may be more active in your area during different seasons and even different times of day. Choose various times throughout the day to make observations. Some suggested times are 8:00 - 8:15 am, 12:00 -12:15 pm, and 6:00 - 6:15 pm. Repeat these observation points and see if you notice any patterns in species observed!

SOUND MAPPING

Birds vocalize for a variety of purposes, including territory defense, contact calls, and attracting/impressing potential mates. Take the time to listen closely and see if you can observe native bird vocalizations and other sounds of nature.

What you need: Paper and pencil; *Optional – Nature Journal in lieu of paper*

Time: 15 – 20 minutes

1. Find a place to sit comfortably where you can hear outdoor sounds. This could be on a deck, at an open window, or in a park.
2. Place an “X” on your paper, or in your nature journal, to represent your location.
3. Close your eyes and spend 30 seconds listening to all of the sounds around you.
4. As you listen, try and identify each sound. Perhaps a car drove past crunching rocks and gravel on the road beneath its wheels, your neighbors are talking loudly to one another, or maybe someone else is mowing their lawn.
5. As you listen, try and begin to filter out the human-made noises. What natural noises do you hear? Perhaps the wind is blowing through the trees, or a bee is buzzing past. What about birds? Can you hear any?
6. Take some time to map the natural sounds that you hear. You can do this by writing a word to describe the sound, drawing a symbol, or even a picture to represent the sound. As you work you may consider the following things:
 - What or who made the sound?
 - How might you represent the distance and direction of the sound from your location?
 - How could you show the volume and tone?
 - Is the sound moving or stationary? Can you draw the path of the sound or indicate its movement, or lack thereof, in another way?
 - **Pay special attention to bird vocalizations.**
 - How many different bird sounds did you hear?
 - How are they different? How are they the same?
 - Can you use your Merlin Bird ID app to identify any of them?
7. Remember that your sound map should tell a story. Design your sound map in a way that makes sense to you!
8. As you complete your sound map, take a moment to appreciate all the natural noises that so often go unnoticed.

WHO'S THAT BIRD? KEY

American Robin



Golden-crowned kinglet



White-crowned sparrow



Great Blue Heron

