

Feeder Watch

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Grades: 2-6

Subject: science

Skills: observation, data collection, identification

Duration: one class period & late fall and winter seasons

Vocabulary: species, food energy, migration

Objectives:

Students will be able to: 1) identify various winter birds
2) explain the function of different shapes of beaks

Method:

Students perform an experiment to determine the food preference of different bird species at two feeding stations and monitor winter bird visitation frequency.

Background:

In Algonquin Provincial Park there are 272 recorded species of birds. A large number of these are migratory, leaving the Park each fall and returning again in the spring. A main reason that these birds leave Algonquin each fall is due to a lack of food. There are birds that do over-winter in Algonquin and subsist on seeds, fruit, small mammals, and stored food. It is hard though, for birds that do stay in Algonquin, and other places, during the winter to find a steady supply of high energy food. At the Algonquin Visitor Centre there are three active feeders and two suet traps for birds to utilize from late fall through to early spring. While these feeding stations provide a steady supply of high energy food for winter birds, it also allows Naturalist staff to monitor the frequency and variation of bird species throughout the season. This information is then used to supply data for feeder watch programs, seasonal departure and arrival times of late and early migrants, and for seasonal status records.




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The Science Behind Algonquin's Animals



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Materials:

| ✓ | Items Required | Quantity |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| | elevated large bird feeder or feeding platform | one |
| | bird feed | enough for study period |
| | suet | enough for study period |
| | data entry sheets | set for each day |
| | bird identification book | one |
| | binoculars (optional) | one |
| | graph paper | one per student |

Procedure:

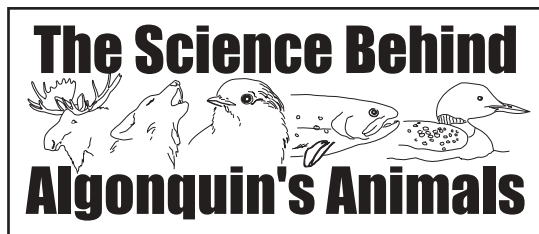
- 1) Place the feeder or platform where it will be easily visible from a window in the classroom. Fill feeder with seed. Hang the suet from a nearby tree or use wire mesh with 1x1 spacing and attach directly to the trunk of a tree. **Note:** Do not put seed out until late fall and do not put suet out until temperatures are cold enough to freeze the suet or it will become rancid. It may take several days or weeks for birds to arrive at the feeding stations and become regular visitors.
- 2) Establish a time when students are to watch the feeder and record birds that visit, e.g. three time periods such as morning, mid-day and late afternoon. Select one student or pair of students to watch the feeding stations. This can be done for a single time period or for one day. A class exercise can be to make up a schedule on bristol board and post it in the classroom and have students select what days or time periods they wish to observe.
- 3) Set a time limit for feeder observations, e.g. 10 minutes. During that time have the observer(s) record the number of birds and individual species that visit the feeding stations on the data sheet.
- 4) Create a large data sheet on bristol board or chart paper and record the data for each time period for each week and month.



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Variations:

Divide the platform feeder into sections (or use multiple feeders) and place a different type of feed in each section (no mixed seed) and have the students observe and record which birds visit the different seed types more frequently and graph the results.

Extensions:

- 1) Have students keep track of daily weather conditions and compare that to the frequency and number of species visiting the feeding stations and graph the results
- 2) Keep records of the first and last date each species is observed.
- 3) Have students learn the different species of winter birds likely to be seen. This can be done through slides or flashcards in a quiz game format.
- 4) Have students observe the different beak types of different birds and research the function of each.
- 5) Discover which species are native to Canada and which are introduced.
- 6) Discover which species can also be found in Algonquin Park

Evaluation:

Ask students to:

- 1) Graph the number of birds for each month.
- 2) Graph the number of birds for each week.
- 3) Identify the birds that have visited the feeding stations.
- 4) List which birds only visited the suet and which only visited the feeder.
- 5) Explain why birds have different kinds of beaks.
- 6) List three foods birds eat in winter.



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