



WINTER SURVIVAL FOR BIRDS

UW-MADISON EXTENSION



Should we stay or should we go? Find out what it is like for birds to migrate as a group.

4-H PROJECT AREAS:

Birds

LIFE SKILLS:

Critical Thinking, Cooperation

TIME:

20 – 30 minutes

Ask

Who has seen flocks of geese flying?

Where do you think the geese go when they fly in the fall?

What is the word we use to describe birds moving far away when the seasons change?

Do all birds migrate? Why and why not?



Did you know?

Migrating birds often follow wind currents, which are like rivers in the air flowing in the direction the birds are flying. Currents help the birds save energy by speeding up their journey and giving them time to soar instead of flapping their wings. Scientists call these routes "flyways."

Investigate

Ask, Why do birds fly in groups? One reason is to save energy; the birds in the back of the group have less wind resistance, so it is easier to fly. The birds take turns being in front. Another reason birds flock together is protection.

Tell the youth, "Let's pretend most of you are Indigo Buntings, a small blue bird that is common in North America. The only time of the year these birds flock together in large groups is when they migrate. Let's find out why!"

Create

In the room, make a long, narrow path for youth to run down. It should be wide enough for 4-5 youth to run at the same time. Explain that this is the flyway. **Ask, What kind of animal would hunt birds?** Common answers are bigger birds, coyotes, jaguars and cougars. The #1 predator of birds: House cats!

Ask all youth to go to one end of the flyway. Invite a volunteer to be the predator in the middle of the flyway – this person wants to eat as many birds as possible! The predator’s job is to tag birds as they go through the flyway. Invite the rest of the youth to run the length of the flyway, one at a time. It is not unusual to have zero survivors!



Tell the youth they are now going to migrate and we're going to keep track of how many birds survive when we work together. Ask the group to get into partners, and repeat the activity. Then, ask the youth to get into groups of 4-5 and repeat the activity. Finally, ask the youth to be one large group, and repeat the activity. It is okay to change who plays the predator each time, if desired.

Resources:

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Share/Reflect

Ask the "birds," What was the safest way for you to migrate? Why?

Ask the "predator," When was it easiest for you to catch your prey? What size group made it the hardest to catch somebody?

More to explore...

Not all birds migrate in winter. Explore more about birds by learning about birds that stay where it is cold during winter. What do they do to survive? How do they stay warm? Try this demonstration, which works best outdoors in the wind: Have everyone stand by themselves apart from each other for 1 minute. Then have them huddle up in large groups of 4-10 people for 1 minute. Ask, How much of a difference was there between being alone vs. in a group? Chickadees are usually very independent and territorial, but in the winter they work together to stay warm. Ask, Have you ever thought you could do something by yourself but then asked for help?

Relationship to 4-H...

In 4-H, we work together to accomplish our goals. Some of our goals are individual, and some goals are made as a group. Our group could be small (a few youth working on a similar project), medium-sized (a club working on a service activity), or large (4-H youth nation-wide doing a science experiment all on the same day). Although there are thousands of youth involved in 4-H, it all starts with one – you!