



Observe like an Ornithologist

Lincoln City Nature Challenge

The University of Nebraska State Museum's division of Zoology has over 11,000 bird specimens, primarily from Nebraska, Mexico, and Central America. Ornithologists study birds and make many observations about their physical features, behaviors, and interactions with other birds. Try being an ornithologist in your own backyard and make observations about the local birds that come to your neighborhood. If you download the iNaturalist app, you can upload photos of your backyard birds and participate in the Lincoln City Nature Challenge!

What you need:

- Large-eyed needle
- String, twine, or yarn made of natural fibers. It is good to use a material that will break down easily and is thick/visible enough to avoid entangling birds.
- Small foods safe for birds (see examples below)
- Paper for an observation sheet
- Writing utensil

Examples of bird-safe foods:

- Cranberries
- Blueberries
- Grapes, with large ones cut in half
- Whole-oat, sugar-free cereal (such as Cheerios)
- Plain popcorn (unsalted, unbuttered)
- Raw, unsalted pumpkin seeds
- Unsalted peanuts in the shell

Note:

- Make adjustments for the types of birds in your area and the foods that they eat. Ensure that you are providing birds with foods that are nutritious and are not rotten or moldy. This will help keep the birds in your neighborhood safe and well-fed in the future.

Procedure:

1. Thread the needle with the string. Make sure that the string will be strong enough to support the foods you have chosen for your garland and that the string fits through the eye of your needle.
2. Help children create a garland or garlands by carefully pushing the needle through the bird-safe foods. Let them have fun adding food options to make a pattern or add the various foods randomly.

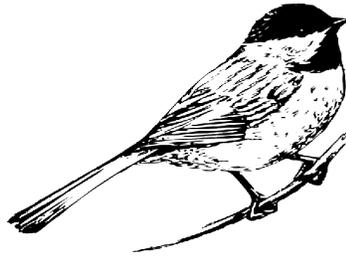


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Ask open-ended questions, such as “Why do you think birds might like to eat these foods?” or “Why are you putting the food in that order?”

3. Once your garland is complete, tie it up outside. Try to place it where you can safely observe birds from a distance, and also look for spots where you can keep it long across trees or branches because this makes it more difficult for squirrels to access it.
4. Watch from a distance with your observation sheet. When you see a new bird visit the garland, write down observations such as their color, size, which foods on the garland they seem to like eating, and if they interact with other birds. If you have a camera or phone, you can even take photos of the birds you see to help remember details.
5. To take this activity further, utilize any books at home about local birds, kid-safe websites, and other resources to try to identify the birds who visited your garland!



Learn More:

- Do some research to learn about the types of birds that are local due to the current season! For example, many Nebraska residents can view hummingbirds and orioles starting in late April and early May. Find out what foods the seasonal birds enjoy, and you can tailor your selection of bird food and types of bird feeders.
- Nectar or sugar and water hummingbird feeders attract a lot of Ruby-throated hummingbirds. Some eastern Nebraska residents, especially those along the Missouri River or near heavily forested areas, can expect hummingbirds all summer long, as they stay to nest nearby. Other families can see the hummingbirds come through in the spring due to migration patterns.
- Orioles, specifically Baltimore and Orchard orioles, begin to come through in late April and peak in mid-May. The orioles enjoy grape jelly, and you can cut an orange in half and put the jelly inside. The birds will eventually habituate to the feeder, and then you can switch to just using grape jelly in your feeder. A good feeder complex can use a quart of jelly a day until migration passes! Local birds will continue until the mulberry crop ripens, and the orioles switch from feeders to mulberries.
- Research your own native bird populations and migration patterns to see what types of foods and feeders will attract you local bird species!

