

# LEARNING ABOUT BIRDS

Lesson developed by: Pat Rossi and Sue Worstall, Summit County Master Gardener Volunteers

## OVERVIEW

This activity has 2 goals:

1. To learn about what a bird needs in its habitat (where it lives) and what kind of habitat it lives in, e.g., forest, grasslands, urban area, or the shore
2. To learn how to identify birds nearby

## QUIZ TIME!

First, to get your feet wet, take the quiz, **What Makes a Bird...a Bird?** from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/k12/september>

If doing individually or as a group, check for the correct answer as you go.

**Questions:** What did you learn about birds from this quiz?

- Were you surprised that most birds don't eat worms? (Insects and seeds are much more popular foods)
- Can you think of some birds that don't fly? (Penguin, ostrich, cassowary, rhea, emu, kiwi)
- What species of male and female birds look different – that are also Ohio's state bird? (Cardinal)

## BIRD IDENTIFICATION

There are more than 800 species of birds in the U.S. and Canada! Bird watchers can identify many species from just a quick look.

They're using the four keys to visual identification:

1. Size and shape
2. Color pattern
3. Behavior
4. Habitat

As an example, think about a black-capped chickadee:

1. **Size & Shape:** Tiny bird with large head, plump body, narrow tail, and short bill
2. **Color Pattern:** Shiny black cap and throat against white cheeks. Buffy sides; wings and back soft gray



3. **Behavior:** Busy, acrobatic, and often in feeding flocks of several species
4. **Habitat:** Forests, woodlots, backyards, and shrubby areas; in the West, associated with deciduous trees

## Questions:

- Think of your favorite bird. How would you describe a its:
  1. Size and shape?
  2. Color pattern?
  3. Behavior?
  4. Habitat?
- What are some birds you consider the prettiest?
- Why do you think that, in some bird species, the male is showier and the female is more subdued in appearance? (Generally, the male is showier to attract the female. The female needs to be more camouflaged when nesting.)
- What birds do you remember seeing when you were young? Do you think they still live in that area?



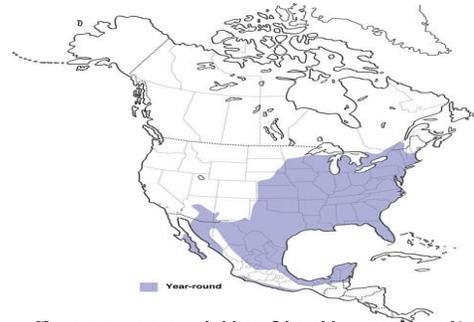
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## THE NORTHERN CARDINAL THE OHIO STATE BIRD

- The male Northern Cardinal is perhaps responsible for getting more people to open up a field guide than any other bird. They're a perfect combination of familiarity, conspicuousness, and style: a shade of red you can't take your eyes off. Even the brown females sport a sharp crest and warm red accents. Cardinals don't migrate and they don't molt into a dull plumage, so they're still breathtaking in winter's snowy backyards. In summer, their sweet whistles are one of the first sounds of the morning.
- Only a few female North American songbirds sing, but the female Northern Cardinal does, and often while sitting on the nest. This may give the male information about when to bring food to the nest. A mated pair shares song phrases, but the female may sing a longer and slightly more complex song than the male.
- The male cardinal fiercely defends its breeding territory from other males. When a male sees its reflection in glass surfaces, it frequently will spend hours fighting the imaginary intruder.
- A perennial favorite among people, the Northern Cardinal is the state bird of seven states.
- Nearly any bird feeder you put out ought to attract Northern Cardinals (as long as you live within their range), but they particularly seem attracted to sunflower seeds. Leave undergrowth in your backyard or around the edges, and you may have cardinals nesting on your property.



Range map of the Northern Cardinal

### RESOURCES

- Photo & map source: [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu) Another Cornell site. These sites contain much information about species, habitat, live bird cam, song, etc. Also eBird, bird ID for 6,000-plus species
- [www.Audubon.org](http://www.Audubon.org) The National Audubon Society
- <https://camp-joy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Common-Birds-of-Ohio-Guide> Ohio Department of Resources CD field guide

### Contact information:

If you have any questions about this activity, please email [mgsummitcounty@gmail.com](mailto:mgsummitcounty@gmail.com).

We hope you benefitted from this activity. Please let us know if you utilized this with a quick email to the above address. Please send your name, facility name, number of participants involved in this activity, and your feedback for improvement so we can measure our impact and improve this product. Thank you!