



Common Birds of Georgia

Objective(s): Students will demonstrate proficiency in (1) identifying several birds common to their region, (2) categorizing birds by family and shared characteristics, and (3) recording observations.

Overview

Students will learn to identify common birds found in their community.

Georgia Standard(s) of Excellence (GSE)

SKL1; SKL2; S1L1; S2E3; S3L1; S5L1; S7L1; SEC1; SEC2; SEC3; SEC5; SEV4; SZ5.

Essential Terms

Characteristic
Checklist
Classification
Habitat
Family
Field guide
Field mark

Materials

- LAB: Common Birds of Georgia Student Guide
- LAB: Common Birds of Georgia poster
- Field guides
- Bird checklists
- Drawing supplies

Additional Resources

- LAB: Birding & Binoculars
- LAB: Cheep Sheet for Bird Songs and Calls
- LAB: Using a Bird Checklist
- LAB: K-2 Observation Sheet
- AllAboutBirds.org
- Merlin Bird ID (app)

Background

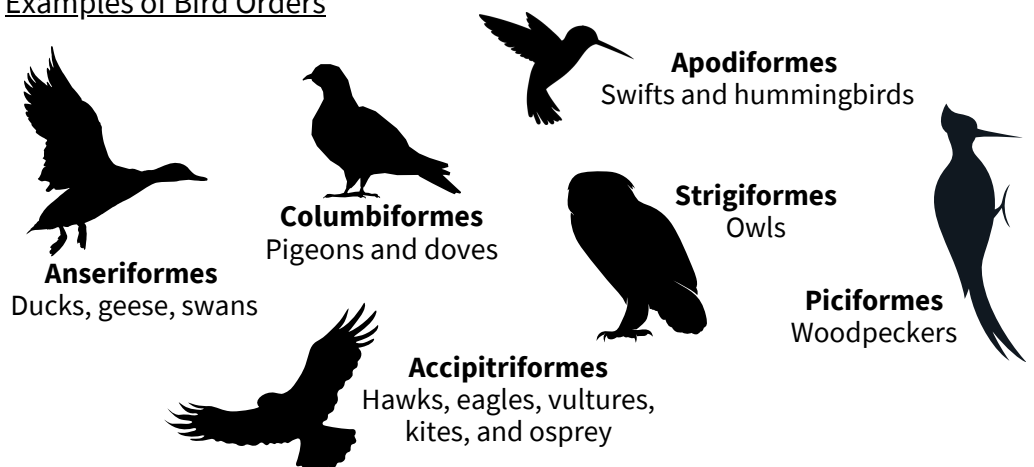
Roughly 10,000 species of birds live on Earth, and more than 300 can be seen in Georgia during the year. Fascinating and familiar, birds provide endless opportunities to engage students in meaningful, real-world learning in any subject. Watching birds not only sparks wonder and curiosity, it also cultivates awareness, hones observation and recall, and requires attention to detail. These skills will equip students for lifelong learning in the classroom and beyond. To make learning about birds manageable, common southeastern birds are the focus of these activities.

Field guides are useful tools for learning about the many birds that visit your region. They are usually organized by taxonomic order and family. Navigating a field guide is a skill that is transferable to many reference sources your students will encounter. In addition to content knowledge, basic information literacy can be taught using a field guide's index, table of contents, diagrams, and maps.

Birds of a Feather

Birds can be **classified**, or grouped, by **order**. Within orders, birds are further classified by **family**. Familiarizing yourself with bird families and their general silhouettes will help you guide students in identification. The largest order of birds is the Passerines, which includes nearly half of all bird species in diverse families that share physical traits, behaviors, and habitat preferences. Birds in this order, more commonly known as "songbirds," are distinguished from other orders of birds by their complex vocalizations and the arrangement of their toes, which facilitates perching.

Examples of Bird Orders



Examples of Bird Families in the Order Passeriformes (Passerines)

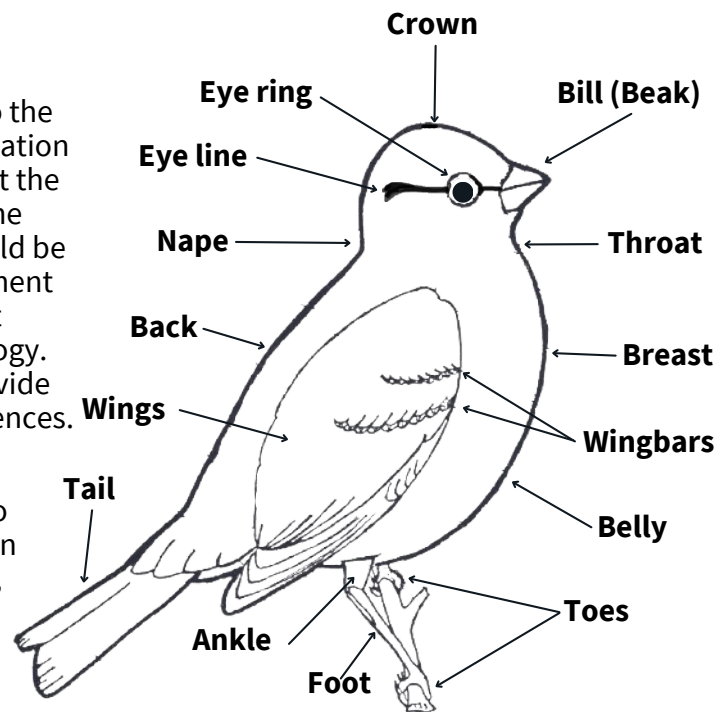


Bird Bodies

Prepare students for observing and describing birds by completing the *LAB: Bird Bodies* activity. The diagram to the right represents the general shape of a bird, though variation exists across species. Encourage students to think about the body parts of humans and other animals to help label the diagram. Ask students why learning bird body parts could be helpful. In the field, instruct students to note the placement of colors, markings, patterns, and other field marks that stand out on the bird's body, using the proper terminology. Noting the length and shape of the legs and bill can provide clues to the bird's family and its diet and habitat preferences.

Preparing for Flight

Studying hundreds of species can be a daunting task. To make this process easier, students will focus on common birds found in their region. Through hands-on activities, students will practice bird identification and sharpen observation and communication skills. In addition, students will learn to organize species taxonomically.



Activity 1: What's Out There?

Students will practice the skills necessary to observe birds.

The best way to identify birds is to go looking for them! Review *LAB: Birding and Binoculars* for tips on facilitating groups outdoors. Learning a few facts about common species in your area is helpful. Below are a few ideas to prepare for a bird walk.

Practice sound mapping: Listening to and pointing out sounds helps students take an inventory of the space around them. Students can practice this before observing birds.

1. Bring the group outside and explain that looking for birds also means listening for birds. Being able to locate where a sound is coming from can help increase students' chances of seeing a bird.
2. Instruct the group to remain quiet for about one minute. Ask students to listen carefully for bird sounds and point to where they're coming from. Do this a few times until students are confident in identifying the locations of the sounds. Students can also practice this skill on paper by using words, symbols, and pictures to create a sound map of what they hear, marking themselves as an "x" on the center of the page.

Learn common sound devices: Teach common mnemonics like the Northern Cardinal's "what-cheer, what-cheer," and the Carolina Wren's "teakettle, teakettle, teakettle," all of which can be heard on almost any bird walk in the Southeast. Refer to *LAB: Cheep Sheet for Bird Songs and Calls* for examples of songs and calls of common birds.

Get Outside and Observe: The *LAB: Observation Journal* can be used on bird walks to encourage groups to record and make field notes about their observations. This exercise can be used repeatedly to document the diversity of birds in the students' area. The *LAB: K-2 Observation Sheet* is more appropriate for younger audiences.

Activity 2: Putting it Together

Students will create a field guide of common birds in Georgia.

Individually or as a class, students will create a field guide by gathering information on common birds in their community. If possible, distribute field guides for students to flip through in order to draw inspiration for their field guide pages. If books are not available, visit an online resource such as allaboutbirds.org (Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

1. Using the birds from the *LAB: Common Birds of Georgia Poster*, students will pick a focal bird (or birds). Depending on time and students' abilities, they can create field pages for one or multiple species.
2. Using basic drawing supplies (paper, markers, etc.), students should include information such as size, behaviors, physical features, and songs/calls as well as illustrate the bird's habitat. Where applicable, encourage students to represent at least three different orders of birds in their pages.
3. Once completed, students can create a cover, index, or other additions. Bind the pages together to create individual booklets or a class field guide.