

Teaching guide for a Nature Walk For Belcarra's Riverside Walk and Nature Trail

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Birdwatching in Belcarra

Overview

If you see one bird, you have seen them all, right?

There are many types of birds in the wild each type of bird has a difference appearance, call, song and behaviour. They are also found in different habitat and ranges. These characteristics help bird watchers identify the birds that they see and here.

When walking on the trail especially at dawn and dusk, you will be able to hear many strange and beautiful noises, most likely these noises are from birds. Birds can be identified by their call; each species has a very distinct call and song. It takes a lot of practice to listen to the calls and be able to identify the birds.

Besides listening to the call of the birds; you can rely on your eyes to see them. To be able to see the birds, you must walk slowly and quietly along the path. Birds react to movement, and if you move too quickly, you will be sure to see a bird fly away from you before you were able to even see it. To be able to see a bird closely, take a seat! Wait for the birds to come to you. It will take awhile, so be patient. Bring some binoculars as well, to see birds in the trees and off in the distance.

****If it is a class activity please respect the rules of safety for your students****

Activity

In the Classroom or At Home

Help develop listening and observational skills

Supplies:

Journal (Small and inexpensive notepad)

Pencil

CD, tape or video of Birds calls

Getting acquainted with the song of birds

Before venturing out on the trail have children listen to bird calls first. There are plenty of resources where you can obtain bird calls:

Tape of bird calls

CD with pictures and sounds of Birds

Video with pictures and sound

It is much easier to hear a bird than to see one!

While listening to bird calls have the children write what they hear. For example a robin:



Once they are done, review and test their listening skills. Do a few sounds each day and repeat a couple as well have the children keep a journal just for bird watching.

Out in the Field

Help develop writing, listening and observation skills

Supplies:

Journal

Pencil

Binoculars, if possible

Once the students have mastered their skills it is time to put them to the test and learn to observe their surroundings.

First have them prepare their journal for the walk. Have them write their name, Date, Time, Weather, Location and whatever information they would like to write down.

Then provide the children with a Pocket Field Guide and a pair of binoculars, if possible. Have them work as a team or individually depending on the number of children and resources.

When a child hears or sees a bird have them record the time, description and/or name of the bird. A child can also record the number of birds seen as well. Be creative and open to whatever may come from this experience.

What do you see? "Solo Sit"

Help develop writing, listening and observational skills.

Individual activity

Separate children along a stretch of the walk where they are far enough apart from each other but close enough to keep an eye on. Have them sit there and observe what they see and write about and/or draw it for 10 minutes. Tell them the general objective of what is expected out of them before going on the walk: *Today we will be looking for...*

Belcarra's Riverside Walk and Nature Trail can be sectioned off into 5 distinctly different areas. Here is a guide to walk you through the trail:

A brief summary of what you can look for before walking on the Nature Trail

1. At the start the riverside walk you will encounter a narrow footpath with a stone wall on one side and a pasture alongside the other. Plants adapted to living on the stone walls, such as ivy, Herb roberts, and several types of small ferns.
2. One area that is reached after the stone wall is composed of a large mound of rocks and stones on one side and on the other, a variety of trees that follow the bank down to the river. The mound of rocks and stones were at the bed of the river and were piled up along the side when the river was dredged in 1960's. The dredging was done to improve drainage. As a result a different habitat was formed. Wildflowers like common spotted orchid, and pyramidal orchid, as well as the carline thistle can be found on these mounds. The large amount of trees provides an ideal nesting place for birds that nest in trees. It also provides protection from predatory animals.
3. The third section of the walk can be recognized because on the river's side there are a lesser amount of trees along the edge, and towards the west there are no mounds of rocks and stones. Instead, pasture fields and hedges can be seen; this provides a different habitat and would allow for different birds to occupy this area. Across to the east there are a few trees right along the river and in the distance you can see rows of hawthorns. If you listen carefully you can hear the sedge warbler; the description of the call is a soft, long scratching call.
4. The fourth section is by the bridge to the west; there, you are able to see the mounds of soil, rocks and stones, from the 1960 dredging. Grasses grow along side the river and beyond the river there are some pasture lands. In the spring and summer you would be able to see swallows diving towards the water and pied wagtails and grey wagtails cleaning themselves in the water or resting on the rail of the bridge.
5. There is another stretch of the trail that leaves the river. In this area, which is closest to Cuillare Road, there are has pasturelands on both sides of the trail. Along

the northeast trail, looking toward the village of Belcarra there you will walk along side the edge of a stone wall, some of the stone have lichens that grows on them. Also there are a few hawthorn trees that are along the side where you can hear the chaffinch singing away.

You can use this as a guide or have the children determine what they see as distinct habitats.

Questions you can ask to help guide your walk:

- What kind of habitat are we in?
 - Describe the landscape
- What type of animal would you likely see here?
- Is there anything that you see moving in the landscape?
 - Can you describe it?
- Where do you think birds may nest?
- What kind of birds would eat here?
 - What would they eat?
- What kinds of birds do you see?

Tell the children to use the questions as a guide and not to answer all of them at one time.

After the first stop have them say what they wrote about or randomly check them individually to see if they are on the right track.

This is a sample that was done May 2004 with three students. The objective was simply to learn what caught the eyes of students 12-13 years of age on the nature trail.

Belcarra Natural Walk -
Outdoor activity

Objectives:

Learn about nature and the surrounding environment

Develop writing, listening and observational skills

Ages: 12 -13 yrs of age

Materials:

- Sketching or Writing pad-one per child
- Pencil-one per child
- Camera
- Binoculars (if possible)

Some words to learn on the walk:

Habitat - the type of environment in which an organism or group normally lives or occurs; riparian habitat

Ecosystem - a system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their physical environment

Landscape - an expanse of scenery that can be seen in a single view

Niche - the status of an organism within its environment and community (affecting its survival as a species)

For their first entry have them write:

Date: _____

Time: _____

Weather: _____

Location: _____

Sheets provided to the students which said

Questions to think about today:

While walking, is there anything that catches your eye?

1. Take picture of it, or sketch it
2. Write a description about what you see
 - Why does it catch your eye?
 - Is there anything you have a question about?

- Write your questions down.

We will have places to stop and **QUEITLY** observe our surroundings
Look and Write about anything that you see and notice.

Questions to think about?

- What kind of habitat are we in?
 - Describe the landscape
- What type of animal would you likely see here?
- Is there anything that you see moving in the landscape?
 - Can you describe it?
- Where do you think birds may nest?
- What kind of birds would eat here?
 - What would they eat?
- What kinds of birds do you see?

Conclusion

Tell them what my project consists of:

Ask:

- Was there anything you found particularly interesting on the walk? Why?
- Are there any questions?
- Is there any information that would like to learn more about?

What the students learned from this activity:

- They learned to appreciate the time observing their surroundings.
- It is not easy to take pictures of birds or to even see them.

What I learned from this activity:

- They were quite interested in looking at birds and about nature itself, for example the insects, river, reeds, swan, and the cows!
- 10 minute intervals were suitable
- I should have emphasised that the students did not have to answer all the questions and said they were just for reflection.
- Five sections may have been too much for children 12 years and younger.
- Guided questions were helpful for student to focus on the objective.