



Interpreting Bird Behavior

Activity Description:

Observe bird behavior and hypothesize how their behaviors help them survive.

Materials:

- This activity sheet
 - Pencil
 - Optional: binoculars
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Bird behavior seems plain ol' strange, doesn't it?

Did you ever notice how different bird species move, eat, and communicate in their own unique ways? American robins move along the ground in a step-stopping pattern. And double crested cormorants sit beside lakes with their wings spread out. What's up with that? These behaviors help these birds be successful in their environment. The robin goes step, step, step, stop to move about and listen to worms. The cormorant is drying out its waterlogged wings after diving into the lake for fish.

Scientists study bird behaviors to learn about how birds survive. Some observable behaviors include migration patterns, food storage strategies, nesting patterns, and courtship displays.

Spend some time watching our feathered friends, and you'll see for yourself how every bird species has its own fantastically interesting behaviors.

Directions:

1. **Find a place to quietly watch birds.**

Most birds must be on alert for predators to protect themselves or their young. They'll often get spooked and fly away from people. Stand or sit still and make minimal noise, so that you can observe the greatest number of birds.

2. **Record your observations** in the table (page 3).
 - a. Don't worry about knowing the name of the birds. You may look them up later on [iNaturalist](#) or [eBird](#); or send us a picture, and we'll help you out!
 - b. These are some common bird behaviors:

Flying: the act of staying aloft in the air

Flocking: birds grouping together for protection

Feeding/Drinking: eating/drinking from the ground or stored food

Foraging: the act of looking through ground debris for food

Preening/Bathing: the act of cleaning oneself or another

Singing: communication that is species specific

Giving an alarm call: an abrupt communication to warn others

Walking/Hopping: movement along the ground

Territorial: the act of protecting a tree branch or area on the ground

Get creative and descriptive with what you call your observed bird behaviors. Ex: A raven's flight can be called a flap-flap-swish.

3. **Hypothesize:** why do these birds behave this way? Write your hypotheses on your table.
4. **Answer:**
 - a. When you were bird watching, what time of day was it? What was the weather like? How can the time and weather affect bird behavior?
 - b. Describe the behavior you found most interesting. How do you think that behavior helps the bird survive?
5. **Share your observations with Seeds of Stewardship.** Send us photos of your experience and completed worksheet:
 - Post your photos to Instagram and tag [@aztsos](#)
 - Or email your photos to
 - julie@aztrail.org for Northern AZ
 - treven@aztrail.org for Southern AZ

Bird on!

Bird Behavior Observations		
Bird name or description or drawing	Behavior	Hypothesis: Why does the bird behave this way?
<i>Example: American robin</i>	<i>Step-step-stop (foraging)</i>	<i>To move on the ground and listen for worms.</i>