

Bird Identification Game

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Society

www.braudubon.org
www.KidsWhoBird.org



About the Game

- This Bird Identification activity is appropriate for a festival-type setting where you can set up tables.
- Kids can come through and finish a “game” in 5-7 minutes, depending on age.
- 2 or more tables can be set up concurrently, but a coach is required for each table.
- Game observers are often learning as much as the participants.
- No reading is required, so participants can be as young as 3 (although they may have to be lifted to see the pictures on the table).

Materials

- 2 sets of photos
 - First set: Close up laminated photos of local birds each numbered
 - 2nd set: Set of laminated cards with photos of 3 similar birds labeled with names
- Markers with numbers that correspond to first set of photos
- Game prizes

For inside setup:

1 or 2 tables, clear packing tape, poster tack or some way to affix photos to a wall

For outside setup:

- (in tent): 1 or 2 tables, rope, clothespins, clear packing tape.
- If you have space: 3 ft tall wooden stakes

Stapler

- 2 or more pair of binoculars
- 1 or more spotting scopes



Game Setup

There are 2 variations of this game – one designed for indoors or small spaces and one for larger spaces or outdoors

Small space: hang numbered photos from set 1 on the wall at eye level. If using a tent, suspend rope from tent poles and attach photos using clothespins

Outdoors/larger space: staple numbered photos from set 1 to stakes and set in the ground about 50 ft from table

Affix the second set of photos to the table using packing tape. This helps keep them from being rearranged, sliding, or blowing around.

Set numbered markers on the table (I used found rocks with numbers taped on them)



To Play the Game

Explain to the participant that this is a bird identification game. They will match each bird at the top with a bird on the table and mark it using the numbered marker. The cards on the table, however, each contain 3 birds that all look very similar, so the participant must look very closely at the characteristics of each bird to make sure they're matching them up correctly.

The amount of coaching that is given will depend on the age and ability of the child participating. Allow the child time to look closely at the pictures and make a choice. If the wrong choice is made, point out unique characteristics of the "right" match without just giving away the answer. Often parents will coach (sometimes incorrectly!).



Using Scopes and Bins

If you have space to set up the photos from set 1 at some distance from set 2, you can have kids practice using binoculars or a scope to do the bird identification. The principle is the same – they are just using the optics to “ID” the bird at a distance and then mark the bird on the card on the table.

Coaching on basic use of the binoculars or scope is recommended! Often kids are not successful using the optics because they’re not taught how and people assume all you have to do is look through them without making adjustments.



Benefits and Outcomes

What are kids learning from this activity?

- There are cool birds right in their area that they may have never seen or noticed
- Many birds look similar but are in fact different species
- Must pay attention to detail
- For many, it's a first introduction to binoculars and scopes. They're not as easy as they look, but can make a huge difference!



Prizes

Since you'll be coaching participants to a successful conclusion, everyone who plays will be a winner! Offer a prize that's bird related, and hopefully something that won't be immediately discarded.

Last year's prize pack included a tri-fold brochure produced by Cornell's FeederWatch program that illustrates common backyard feeder birds, a fact sheet on a "cool" Louisiana bird, and Audubon pamphlet on bird-feeding and a handful of black-oil sunflower seed.

The envelope included our local Audubon chapter contact information as well as information about our KidsWhoBird club.



Lessons Learned

- If you set up the game outside, prepare for wind. We tried with and without a plastic tablecloth and the clear packing tape just does not stick well to the tables. Bring extra tape!
- The game will be popular and kids will want to do it multiple times – allow some variation in prizes for repeat performers.
- Get permission from the photographer to use their photos for the game. Very often folks are fine with educational use of their work.
- The photos will attract people of all ages with bird questions – have someone who is bird-knowledgeable in the booth who is not supervising the game to answer questions (and listen to bird stories – folks love to tell their stories!)
- Feature birds that are found in your area, but maybe not the most common ones. The object, after all, is to get kids intrigued about bird life. Find some cool birds!
- Use markers that will not blow away! At first I just had laminated numbers but they would blow off after being placed on the pictures, so I taped them to rocks we found in the area.
- The photos should not “match” exactly . Since the purpose is to have kids use critical observation and deductive skills to figure out the ID, you want to use pictures of birds in different poses so that they have to work a bit to figure out the match. You’ll be there to coach if they seem to get stuck, and it’s fine to give clues!
- Feel free to contact me with any questions or if you have any suggestions for improvement!
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