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Avian Antics – Bird Exercises

This is a great way to get your audience or class up and moving around like the birds. I use a three-ring binder that holds all the photos and I flip to each one as we learn the exercises/dances. I always throw out some bird facts about each bird as we practice the exercise. Remember to go back and forth calling out birds after you teach a new exercise. As you call out a bird the participants should perform the exercise. This is similar to a Simon Says game and I call birds faster and faster as we progress. Before we learn a new dance we return to the first bird – the standing penguin.



1. I always start by showing a picture of a King penguin. I ask everyone to stand quietly with their arms “wings” at their sides. This is a great way to get everyone’s attention and you will come back to “penguin standing” before moving on to the next exercise.



2. The next step is to show a picture of penguins swimming under the water. I have the participants use stiff “wings” bent down toward the ground. Everyone bends over slightly and pretends to “swim” through the water quickly catching fish. (Many penguins can swim up to 25 miles per hour under the water while others have been clocked at almost 100 mph)



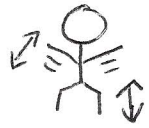
3. The next bird on my list is the Turkey Vulture (TV). Give a few facts about vultures and show a picture of a soaring TV. Have the participants hold their arms up in the shape of the letter “V” (dihedral). Soar back and forth like a TV riding the thermals. Explain what thermals are. Vultures can soar for indefinite periods without flapping by catching a ride on warm air currents; the turkey vulture has been known to soar for over six hours at a time without flapping. They look for a column of rising warm air, or thermal, and ride it as it rises higher in the atmosphere. When it reaches maximum height, they dive across the sky at up to 60 miles per hour until they find another.



4. Now show a picture of a Bald Eagle soaring. They soar with their wings parallel to the ground. Have the participants hold their wings out from their sides parallel to the ground. Give some Bald Eagle facts and pretend to soar as you look for prey. The eagle can probably identify a rabbit moving almost a mile away. That means that an eagle flying at an altitude of 1000 feet over open country could spot prey over an area of almost 3 square miles from a fixed position. While migrating, eagles ride columns of rising air called thermals and can average speeds of 30 mph.



5. The next bird on my list is the Osprey. I show a picture of an Osprey in flight and ask participants to position their arms in the shape of the letter “M”. The Osprey is a fish-eating specialist, with live fish accounting for about 99% of its diet. Barbed pads on the soles of its feet help it grip slippery fish. When an Osprey takes a large fish to its nest, it carries the fish headfirst to make it as aerodynamic as possible. Osprey can be found on all continents of the world except for Antarctica. Have participants pretend to “dive” for fish by doing deep knee bends.



6. The next bird is a woodpecker. I show a picture of a woodpecker and explain that as a woodpecker flies it often appears as if they are riding an invisible roller coaster. They flap their wings very quickly while flying. Have participants replicate this rising and falling style of flight by “flapping” their arms very quickly and bending their knees while moving up and down.



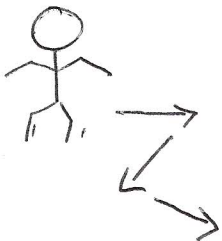
7. Hummingbirds can beat their wings up to 53 times each second. They can also fly backwards and hover. Have your participants flap their wings as fast as possible while moving backwards and forwards.



8. With all this flapping, folks might be getting tired so I now show a picture of a flamingo standing on one leg. Many participants might think this is an easy behavior to copy but remind them that birds stand on their toes, not their feet. Have participants try to balance on one leg, standing on their toes.



9. Everyone is familiar with pigeons. I show a picture of a pigeon and give some facts about pigeons. Pigeons can hear sounds at much lower frequencies than humans can, such as wind blowing across buildings and mountains, distant thunderstorms and even far-away volcanoes. Sensitive hearing may explain why pigeons sometimes fly away for no apparent reason. Pigeons have a unique drinking behavior. Most birds take a sip of water and throw back their heads to let the water trickle down their throats. But pigeons suck up water, using their beaks like straws. Pigeons can fly up to 40 or 50 miles per hour and may fly as far as 600 miles a day. Pigeons have been used as messengers since the 5th century BC. Pigeons were also war heroes during World War I and II. Have participants make a cooing sound while moving their neck in and out. Explain that male pigeons do the “pigeon” dance while courting a potential mate. Have participants turn around in a circle (both ways) while making this sound and bobbing their neck. Strutting your stuff is very important in the world of pigeons.



10. Now it is your turn to add more birds to the list. Perhaps a Reddish Egret canopy dance. Have your participants hold out their arms like an umbrella and run quickly from one spot to another. In the wild a Reddish Egret raises its wings high to cast a shadow on the water, which reduces the sun's glare and helps to drive the bird's prey. The bird prances forward or in circles and darts its pointed bill into the water to grab its food. This "dance" looks awkward, but it is a very effective hunting method.

Remember to keep calling out the birds that you have taught and enjoy all the smiles of the participants as they move quickly to keep up with all the bird exercises. Perhaps show some video clips of these bird behaviors either before or after the exercise session. Enjoy!