

Songbirds - February 2009 Classroom Reader

Songbirds

The warmer temperatures of spring are synonymous with the return of many species of migratory birds that headed south to avoid the cold of winter months. Mid-February is typically when the endangered Sandhill Cranes begin to arrive from their southern Georgia and Florida retreats. Despite these birds standing four feet tall and having an almost seven-foot wingspan, they are more commonly heard than seen. These flocks, sometimes numbering more than 200 birds, soar high on the thermals, making them difficult to spot. However, their gentle *garoo-oo-a* calls make them easy to identify.

Also seen over lakes, streams and rivers are Northern Rough-winged Swallows and Barn Swallows. These two related species are quiet easy to tell apart; the Rough-winged has a slightly forked tail, brown and white body, and is found solitary or in small groups. The Barn Swallow, however, is boldly colored with white, blue and gold, has a deeply-forked tail, and is gregarious. Both species are frequently seen skimming over the surface of the river, catching a multitude of flies, gnats, mosquitoes, and dragonflies. On water edges, look for a bright black and orange-yellow bird flitting among the branches. This is probably the male Baltimore Oriole. He, along with Orchard Orioles (their calls sound like *look here, what cheer!*) and both Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, are all feasting on the caterpillars, grubs, berries and fruits that are abundant in the wetlands this time of year.



Scarlet Tanager

Common birds congregating at your feeders are American Goldfinches (also known as Wild Canaries), Red-breasted Grosbeaks, and Tufted Titmice. Below your feeders, look for Mourning Doves, Eastern Towhees and Dark-eyed Juncos feasting on the seeds that the smaller birds threw out of the feeders.



Eastern Towhee



Tufted Titmouse

Keep your binoculars and field guides handy, as you are sure to sight some FOTS (firsts of the season), as well as some of your favorite species as they return to the area.

Teacher Resources

Are you ready to spice up your curriculum? February is the time of year when our migrant birds start reappearing in Georgia and that makes this a great month for bird watching! Check out these websites to find out how your class can get involved!

Great Backyard Bird Count - <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts.

Project FeederWatch - <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders in backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically

count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch.

Teacher Resources all about Birds - <http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/web/birds.html>

This website created at Kennesaw State University has a variety of lesson plans and activities to use with your students! Includes instructions on how to build a bird house, word searches, and online activities.

Reading List

Craighead George, Jean. Luck: The Story of a Sandhill Crane

After a girl saves his life, Luck, a young sandhill crane, begins the long migration north to Siberia with his parents. Soon thousands of cranes join Luck and his family on their challenging journey that is expertly detailed in this wonderful story. (Grades K-3rd)

Davies, Jacqueline. The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon

The story opens with 18-year-old French naturalist John James Audubon roaming the Pennsylvania countryside in search of birds. Audubon loved nature and the outdoors as a child, and was determined to study birds in the wild rather than from books. (Grades 2nd-6th)

Stutchbury, Bridget. Silence of the Songbirds: How We Are Losing the World's Songbirds and What We Can Do to Save Them

Migratory songbirds are disappearing at an alarming rate. By some estimates, we may have lost almost half of the songbirds that filled the skies forty years ago. Following the birds on their migratory journey, Stutchbury teaches us firsthand the major threats to songbirds and shows us that by saving songbirds we are protecting our ecosystem and ultimately ourselves. (Grades 7th-12th)

Field Guides for Younger Children:

Sill, Catherine. About Birds: A Guide for Children (Grades PreK-1st)

Lindsey, David. National Geographic My First Pocket Guide: Garden Birds (Grades 1st-5th)

Latimer, Jonathan and Nolting, Karen. Young Naturalist Guide to Songbirds (Grades 4th- 6th)

Thompson III, Bill. The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America Peterson Field Guide (Grades 4th-6th)

Tory Peterson, Roger. Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America (Grades 6th- 12th)