

## Introduction to the Bird Arc



### Indigenous Storywork – Opening Stories

Indigenous peoples learn how to be in the world through stories that are shared across generations. Listen to the stories about water to consider how we are meant to live in good relation with the world.

- ◇ [Story of Blue-Jay and Bear \(Chehalis, Western WA\) as told by Roger Fernandes](#)
- ◇ [Izhapuh \(Coyote\) Makes Himself a Nu'gant'nah \(Goose\) \(Shoshone, Idaho\) - told by Nikki McDaid-Morgan as retold by Donna E. Houtz McArthur](#)

*As you engage in bird activities, refer back to these stories or other stories and songs you know about birds. How can stories and songs help guide bird activities with your families?*

### Indigenous Science - Overview

The purpose of these activities is to build relationships with and learn to appreciate the birds in our own backyards, neighborhoods, local parks, and/or forest preserves. This involves learning where to look for birds, what habitats are appropriate for which birds, and learning to identify birds by getting to know their appearance, location, flight patterns, and calls. The best times for this activity might be closer to dawn and dusk, but it could happen any time of day.

### Arc Gifts and Teachings

(Re)making relationships with birds through observation and storytelling means that we are also connecting with our ancestors by engaging in a practice that they also engaged in. Observing bird relatives helps us to know how to live in particular places and to understand patterns and changes in our ecosystems. When we find bird feathers, we can use them for crafts, making regalia and other spiritual items used in ceremony and prayer. This is one form of resurgence of our traditional lifeways and it is a gift from our bird relatives!

### Our Gift – Our Indigenous Pedagogy

There are many things we can do to fulfill our responsibilities to bird relatives – the first step is to build relationships with them. These activities are intended to help you build relationships with birds through observing, listening, drawing pictures of them, and – if you choose and are able to – engaging in citizen science through apps like eBird.

You will consider our responsibilities to birds by recognizing the gifts they give us and how we can reciprocate by helping to sustain their habitats. We can do this through activities like putting up bird feeders in the winter, planting native plants that the birds like to eat seeds from, and putting decals on windows to help birds keep from running into them. We can also make more sustainable decisions in our everyday lives to support the broader ecosystem that birds are part of.

Prompts in this activity are intended to make you think – they are inquiry-based and should leave you wondering. Engage as a family and with friends and think through different possibilities.

### **Indigenous Observing with Lands and Waters and Activities by Season**

These activities enhance our relationships with bird relatives. Through them, you will take the perspective of birds through imagining what life is like from their eyes and point-of-view. What does the forest look like from an eagle's perspective as it soars high in the sky or is perched in a tree? How do they feel when they catch a fish? How do they feel when they see a forest clear cut? During each activity, imagine birds in different seasons, places, and times. Ask children what might be happening for our bird relatives in 100 years from now or what they might have seen 100 years ago? Observing deeply and talking with family and friends about your understandings *and* your wonderings work to deepen Indigenous knowledges.

### **Relationships with Other Arcs**

Relationships with bird relatives are intricately linked to other ISTEAM arcs. Consider how many of the bird relatives you may encounter are water birds or live near water and all rely on water – water is life. Many birds also eat parts of plants, spread the seeds of plants, use plant materials in their nests, or eat insects off of plants. Finally, many birds are part of our traditional diets and some eat similar foods as we do. As you watch the food videos, listen for bird calls. Do you recognize them from where you live? Are they new to you? As you move through the various ISTEAM activities, we encourage you to think across the arcs, make connections, and see the interconnected ecosystem we are all part of.

### **Visioning our Future**

When we try to live in right relationships with birds through taking actions in our local communities to teach others to notice and have strong relationships with birds, we are working against the systems that have caused humans to forget their relationships and responsibilities to the rest of the natural world. This is decolonization! These activities are meant to be one step toward that by helping you to notice and appreciate birds. As you work through the activities, consider how climate change might be affecting these birds and their ecosystems. What can we do to support them? How can we live more sustainably?

Also consider other human communities. Building solidarities across and within human communities is also central to living in good relations - particularly with Black, Latinx, LGBT+ and other communities who face system oppressions. How can we build solidarities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work towards a world together that will support thriving human and more-than-human communities? In recognizing our complex and intertwined histories, we can work together toward equitable and just futures.

## Bird Storytelling and Storylistening



### Activity Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to build relationships with and learn to appreciate the birds in our own backyards, neighborhoods, local parks, and/or forest preserves as well as those who are important figures in our traditional stories.



### Activity Overview

- ◇ Find traditional and/or personal stories about birds from your or another tribe. This might mean looking for books written by our tribes or by anthropologists, looking online, asking Elders or other relatives, etc.
- ◇ Read or tell the story as a family. When you tell a story, it's important to try to make it come alive for those listening.
- ◇ After reading or listening to the story, talk about the lessons that the story offers about bird-human relationships and life in general.

### Roles, Relations, Responsibilities & Gifts

- ◇ Bird relatives are prominent in our stories and cultures, and we have many things we can learn from being in right relations with birds.
- ◇ We can (re)make relationships with birds by learning about them, (re)membering the bird stories our tribes tell, recognizing their gifts like feathers, and taking on roles in our communities to educate others through telling stories and bringing others' attention to birds, too!

## Learning across generations & with other families

- ◇ This is an activity for the whole family and across generations. How can you connect with family members and friends who live near or far while you tell stories? Online platforms like Skype or Facetime could make storytelling a family event no matter where you are.

## Making connections with stories

- ◇ Starting this lesson with a story about birds from your own or another tribe can help you connect with your original teachings around birds. If you choose a story about a bird relative who lives in the same area you do, you might see them on a walk at some point!
- ◇ See the Bird Arc activity for two recorded stories. Here are other stories you could use:
  - ◇ [WA State Laser](#)
  - ◇ [LC Tribal Legacy](#)
  - ◇ [Native Languages](#) \*Use your best judgment with this site about the authenticity of the stories, but some are very good.
- ◇ Remember we listen with more than our ears. There are lessons embedded in stories about how to live in the world when we listen well, we are listening with our whole selves.
- ◇ Consider personal stories from your family history or from your own life that you could tell about birds or the place you are walking in.
- ◇ Ask children to consider what stories they will tell when they are Elders. It can be traditional stories that they are learning or personal stories that they will tell of this time and place.

## Supporting Learning & Wellbeing

- ◇ While listening to the story, consider perspectives of birds. How would this bird think, feel, or wonder about this or react to this situation? What agency do the birds in the story have? What is their effect on the world?
- ◇ Extension: You can use story while you make relations with birds in other ways. When you see a bird, discuss what you think the story of this bird might be? Ask family members, what will be the traditional story that future generations tell about our time, especially considering bird-human relationships?

## Making Relations with Lands & Waters

- ◇ How does the story relate to our everyday lives and our relationships with birds we see in our daily lives? How do stories strengthen our relations with our bird relatives and with one another?
- ◇ Learning about birds is also about learning about their roles in ecosystems. Who are they interacting with in the story (other animals including humans, plants, soil, water)? How do those interactions matter for the meaning of the story? What do these interactions teach us about the ecosystem where the story takes place?



## Decolonization, Resurgence & Good Relations

(Re)making relationships with birds through observation and storytelling means that we are connecting with our ancestors through engaging in a practice that they also engaged in. When we find bird feathers, we can use them for craft and prayer. This is resurgence of our traditional lifeways.

When we try to live in right relationships with birds through learning how to best protect them and taking actions in our local communities to teach others to notice and have strong relationships with birds, we are working against systems that have caused humans to forget their relationships and responsibilities to the rest of the natural world and each other. Bird watching is decolonization and resurgence!



### Thinking Seasonally and Relationally Using Bird Cards



#### Activity Purpose

Since time immemorial, Native and Indigenous people have learned about the world through our relationships with birds. This activity involves learning about the seasonal cycles and relationships of birds. Attending to the seasonal and relational aspects of bird life is central to understanding the complexity of birds' place in ecosystems.



#### Activity Overview

- ◇ Go outside and find a bird, or several birds, to learn about. You might pre-select a bird for your family to find if you know they live nearby, or learn about whatever bird(s) reveal themselves on your walk.
- ◇ Use the cards as a resource for discussing the seasonal cycles of the bird (front side) and what the bird is in relation to (back side). Your family can read the cards before you go outside, as you walk, or as you make observations.

#### Roles, Relations, Responsibilities & Gifts

- ◇ Consider how paying attention to seasonal changes and the web of relationships around you strengthens your relationship to place.
- ◇ How does this bird's roles and relations change throughout the year? How do our roles and relations change throughout the year? Consider the differences between seasons.
- ◇ How do the birds' relations change, and what new relations is the bird making as lands and waters change?
- ◇ What gifts does this bird offer? And what gifts can we offer in return? Does this change with the seasons or through the bird's life cycle?
- ◇ How do humans adapt with the seasons? Are there similarities in the way that humans and birds respond to seasonal cycles? Are there similarities in the ways we grow and develop?

"Cardinal eating safflower seeds" by ksblack99 is licensed under CC-0 (public domain). <https://flic.kr/p/LXN7zR>

## Learning Across Generations & with Other Families

- ◇ Take time to hear the ideas from everyone in your family. What do you learn from each other? What are the different perspectives the youngest children bring? And the oldest?
- ◇ Check in with community members and physically distant relatives. What changes have they been noticing?

## Supporting Learning & Wellbeing

- ◇ Use the bird cards as a tool rather than the focus of the learning. It's better to get outside, focus your attention on the bird, and observe them with all of your senses than read about them. The cards can be a guide as you explore outdoors and make relations with birds.
- ◇ Pay attention to patterns. Do you see these birds at certain times? Near certain areas like water or specific trees? Why is this?

## Making Connections with Stories

- ◇ Are there seasonally specific stories that your tribe has about birds? Is there a special memory that you or your family have of seeing a bird during a certain season, like seeing a hummingbird in the summer or a bright red cardinal in the winter? Talk to your elders and see what stories they have about birds and seasons.
- ◇ How can we think of the seasons as different stages in a story? Craft a narrative that explains or describes seasonal changes within this place and with particular birds. Get creative!

## Making Relations with Lands & Waters

- ◇ Remember wherever you are, you are in an ecosystem and on Native land. If you are in a new place, learn which tribal nation communities are nearby or have homelands in that place.
- ◇ Take the perspective of birds. How do birds think and feel about different seasons? How might that explain the way they behave across time and over different geographical areas?



## Decolonization, Resurgence & Good Relations

Bird knowledge has always been central to Indigenous ways of living, and our land-based practices shift with the seasons. Resurgence involves going back to these seasonally specific practices. For example, many of us are engaging in our tribe's dance that mimic birds, making regalia using feathers or talons, and doing ceremony with bird feathers. Consider how you can be a part of these resurgent efforts. It could be as simple as paying attention to seasonal changes and beginning to notice the patterns of which birds come through your neighborhood throughout the year. Are there factors that make it more difficult to engage in seasonal traditions? What might these challenges be and what are ways for us to overcome them?

### Walking Land: Making Bird Relatives



#### Activity Purpose

Since time immemorial, Native and Indigenous people have learned about the world through our relationships. One way to make relationships is by paying close attention. This activity involves building relationships with bird relatives by going on a walk and making observations.



#### Activity Overview

- ◇ Go on a walk (it can be in your neighborhood, at a park, your yard, or even a city block). As you walk, talk about the place you're in. What do you notice?
- ◇ Stop to observe the bird life that you notice. What draws your attention first (e.g., a bird call, sounds of leaves in trees or on the ground rustling, movement)? Consider what details you notice about the bird and what colors you see. Do you know things about this bird and how they relate to humans? Where did you notice the bird? Is it flying, perched, or walking? Is it in a tree or a bush? What size is it?
- ◇ You can use the bird relative activity sheet to draw connections and track what you learn.

#### Roles, Relations, Responsibilities & Gifts

- ◇ What role does this bird play in this place? What is our role in this place? How are these roles related? How do we know?
- ◇ Consider your responsibilities to this place. How can humans help or harm bird relatives? What decisions can we make each day to be good relatives to birds?
- ◇ Consider the web of relationships that this bird relative is part of. How are we, our ancestors, and future generations connected to that web?
- ◇ What gifts does this bird offer? And what gifts can we offer in return?

## Learning Across Generations & with Other Families

- ◇ Take time to hear the ideas from everyone in your family. What do you learn from each other? What are the different perspectives the youngest children bring? And the oldest?
- ◇ Talk as a family about the different ceremonies, regalia, and dances that connect us with our bird relatives. There are many dance movements that are direct imitations of birds, as well. Can you try these dances if it's appropriate?
- ◇ Check in with community members and physically distant relatives. Share what you've learned and ask what they know, or what they've been learning about.

## Supporting Learning & Wellbeing

- ◇ Start the walk by talking about big ideas. Ask family members to share what they know about birds or what memories they have with birds. Consider how being with birds makes us feel and how birds feel when we visit them. Once the walk is finished, discuss what you learned and revisit the big ideas. Bookending the walk in this way can make the big ideas come through more clearly.
- ◇ Pay attention to patterns. We learn from land by paying close attention to the patterns that exist. Do you see particular birds more often in certain areas? Near certain trees or plants? Soaring high in the sky or walking on the ground? Near water? Why is this?

## Making Connections with Stories

- ◇ Are there stories that your tribe has about certain birds? Is there a special memory that you or family have with a certain bird? Ask your Elders what stories, memories, or teachings they have with different birds.
- ◇ Get creative and make your own story about this place or about a certain bird.
- ◇ Ask children to consider what stories they will tell of this time and place when they are Elders.

## Making Relations with Lands & Waters

- ◇ Consider what this place was like a long time ago. Also, consider what it might be like one hundred years from now! What decisions can we make right now that will make that future bright for bird relatives?
- ◇ You might revisit the same birds multiple times. See the Nurturing Relations With Bird Relatives activity for more information on revisiting a bird relative.
- ◇ Hone your attention on one bird or a group of birds. What do you notice about how they interact with other birds, animals, plants etc.? What can we learn from watching birds in this way?
- ◇ How do the birds move through the sky on a windy day? A rainy day?

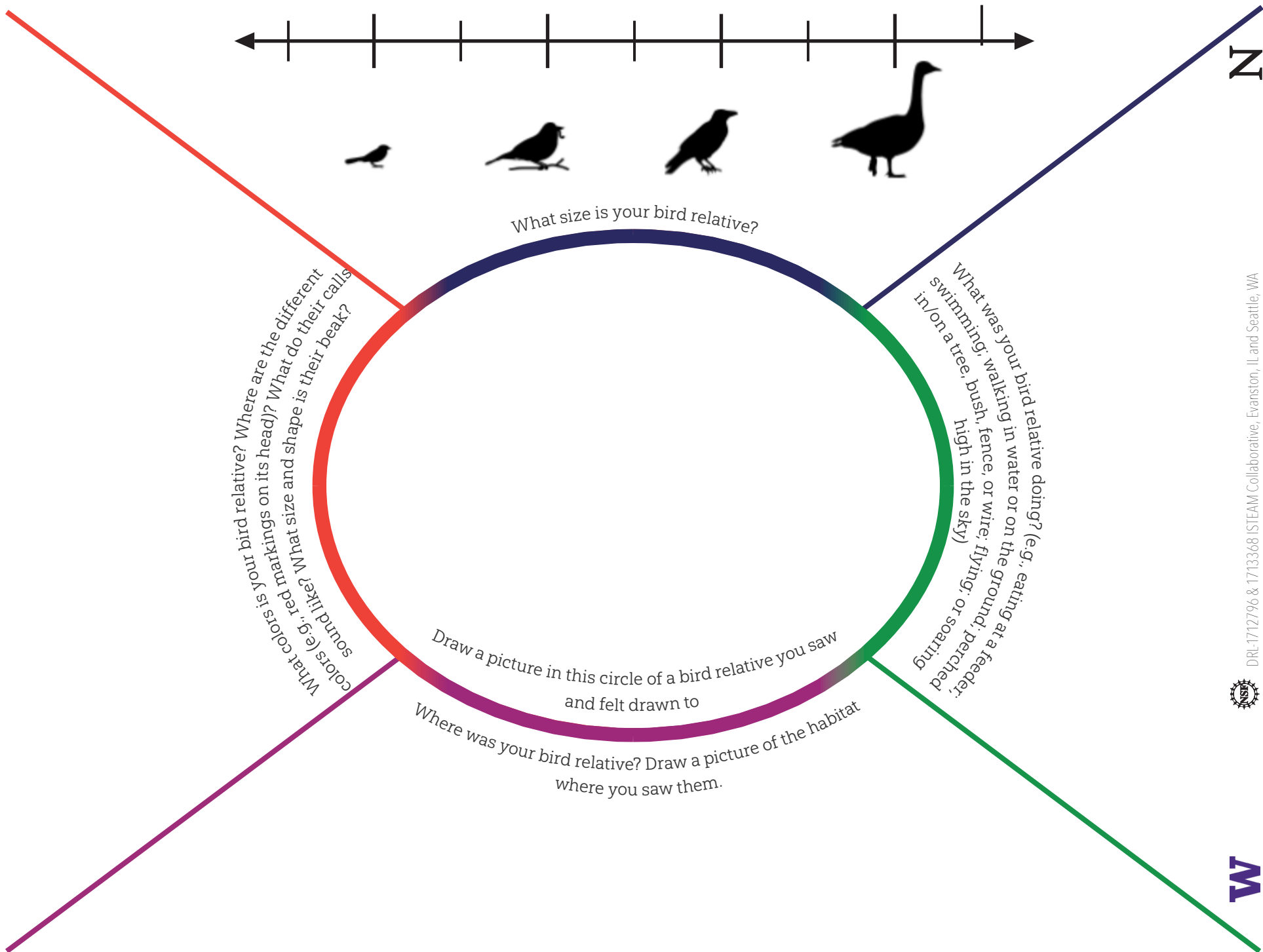


## Decolonization, Resurgence & Good Relations

Indigenous peoples have always learned through walking land with family and community. You engage in resurgence by continuing these traditions and everyday practices! Getting to know bird relatives leads us to a better future.

Some humans have made decisions that have made it harder to be in good relations with birds. What decisions can we make to nurture healthy relationships with birds?





## Walking Land: Nurturing Relations with Bird Relatives



### Activity Purpose

Since time immemorial, Native and Indigenous people have learned about the world through relationships. This activity involves revisiting a bird relative and strengthening your relationship with birds.



### Activity Overview

- ◇ Go on a walk to visit a bird that you have visited before. Think about what time of day they might be most active as you plan the walk. You might know where a family is nesting (careful not to disturb them!). You might visit a bird you learned about from the Making Bird Relatives activity or any other bird who you know. It can be your second time visiting or the hundredth time. The more time you spend with a bird relative the better!
- ◇ Visit with the bird relative; you may put tobacco down for the bird, sing a song, or share a story. Try to mimic their song. Is anything different since the last time you saw this bird? Do you notice anything that you didn't notice before? In different seasons, some birds change their color, or if there are predators around you might see their behaviors and songs change.
- ◇ You can add to the bird relative template as you learn more and more about the bird relative over time.

### Roles, Relations, Responsibilities & Gifts

- ◇ Think of your visit with this bird the same way you would visit an old friend. Visiting supports healthy relationships with bird and human relatives alike. You can talk with the bird about what you notice, or listen and consider what the bird is noticing. Thank the bird for their presence. Do you know how to say thank you in your Native language?
- ◇ As you pay attention to birds over time, you get to know them better. You might feel a new sense of care, responsibility, or gratitude.
- ◇ What is this bird's role in the surrounding ecosystem? Does that role change over time?
  - ◇ Think about birds' migratory patterns. What effects do they have on the ecosystems they travel through if they migrate? What effects do birds who stay for the winter have on the ecosystem?
  - ◇ How might the bird change or have different roles as it grows older?
- ◇ Does the bird have certain gifts to offer that they might not have had or were unnoticed last time? What gifts can we offer in return?

## Learning Across Generations & with Other Families

- ◇ Take time to hear the ideas from everyone in your family. What do you learn from each other? What are the different perspectives of the youngest and oldest children?
- ◇ Check in with community members and physically distant relatives. Tell them about your bird relative and ask if they have bird relatives to tell you about.

## Supporting Learning & Wellbeing

- ◇ It can be helpful to start the walk by talking about big ideas. Talk about what your last visit was like and discuss what you expect during this visit. Once the walk is finished discuss what you learned and revisit the big ideas.
- ◇ Pay attention to patterns. We learn from land by paying close attention to the patterns that exist. You might notice more of these patterns as you visit the same plant over time. Where do you meet birds most often? What time of day?
- ◇ As you revisit a bird over time, you notice different details. Zoom in and pay attention to smaller details, such as colors and shape of wings, beaks, and tail feathers. Zoom out and pay attention to the bird's habitat.

## Making Connections with Stories

- ◇ Make connections to tribal, family and personal stories. Ask your Elders if they have a special relationship with a particular bird.
- ◇ Tell the story of your relationship with this bird. Think of your role as a storyteller and what teachings and knowledge you can pass on to others.

## Making Relations with Lands & Waters

- ◇ Consider what this place was like a long time ago and what it might be like one hundred years from now!
- ◇ Consider ways that you can strengthen relations with your bird relative. What can you do each day to help bird populations thrive?
- ◇ Take the perspective of your bird relative. What are the experiences of this bird over time? What does the world look like through their eyes? Is the bird happy that you noticed them?

## Decolonization, Resurgence & Good Relations

We have always learned through walking land with family and community. Getting to know bird relatives continues these traditions and leads us towards a better future. Some humans have made decisions that have made it harder to be in good relations with birds. What decisions can we make to nurture healthy relationships with birds?

