

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?