

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?

