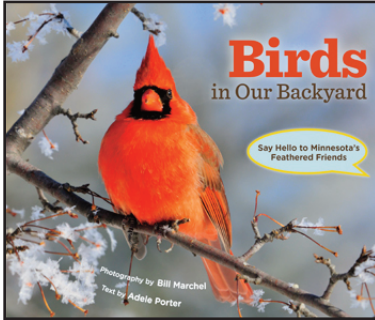


Story Time Guide for Birds in Our Backyard



Photographs by Bill Marchel • Text by Adele Porter
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“All across this great wild land,
Birds put on a show that’s grand . . .”

Birds in Our Backyard takes readers on an adventure through the lives of birds that call Minnesota home. The rhyming text encourages readers to take a closer look at birds, the seasons, and the wild spaces that make up Minnesota’s big backyard. The informational balloons provide interesting facts about each photo. The book can be used with students of many ages, from kindergartners learning the basics of seasons to older students studying Minnesota’s native wildlife.

Sharing the Book at Story Time

Read the title aloud and show the front cover. Do you have a backyard? Does our state of Minnesota have a backyard? We call the shared (public) spaces of parks, forests, waterways, and wildlife refuges Minnesota’s big backyard. Many kinds of wildlife live in this shared space. This book is about the birds that live in Minnesota’s big backyard during just one or two, three, or all four seasons of the year.

What season was it when the photo on the cover of the book was taken? Show the back cover of the book and review the four seasons. (Blue Jay – frosty winter, Rose-breasted Grosbeak – spring tree flowers, Mallard Duck in summer breeding plumage on open water, Bald Eagle on fall migration flight.) The life of a bird follows a seasonal pattern, a plan for what it needs to do in each season. As you listen to the words and look at the photos, think about what birds are doing (their behavior) during each of the four seasons. Review the four basic needs of birds: food, water, shelter, and a place to nest and raise young. Look for the ways that people can provide for the needs of birds during each season.

The book text was written for an age range. A glossary of higher-level vocabulary words is included at the end of this teacher guide to review with students as necessary. After you read aloud the rhyming text, review the seasons and behaviors found within each. On your second reading, focus on the brief informational sidebars to add answers to the previous questions.

The last page of the book text encourages the reader to explore Minnesota’s big backyard of local, state, and national forests, parks, and wildlife refuges. If you have a large state map, locate as many of the public spaces as possible. Ask children to share some of their experiences camping, hiking, or visiting a favorite outdoor area.

Other Activities!

Busy Bird Charades

Every action by a bird, or no action at all, is a behavior. Call out a bird behavior from *Birds in Our Backyard* and have the children imitate the movement. Action behaviors from the book include:

- Settle into a nest and stay there in rain, wind, snow, hot sun (the storytime leader can make the sounds of the weather)
- Nestle inside an egg
- Chip out of an egg
- Call out chac, chac
- Learning to fly (includes taking off, steering and landing)

Other Activities!

Busy Bird Charades continued

- Flapping, gliding, soaring flight
- Stamp on the ground while going in a circle
- Pull off a berry while standing on a limb
- Stand on a log, puff out chest, and flap wings from back to front without the wings touching together
- Group flock movement (Snow Buntings rising from an arctic gust like sparkling dust)
- Loons swimming (sit on chair with arms bent at elbow and held tight to sides while moving only legs)

Once they've had practice imitating behaviors, divide the children into two teams. Secretly give one team a behavior to act out as a group. Can the rest of the group guess the mystery behavior?

Bird Scavenger Hunt: The Basics

Birds have four basic needs: food, water, shelter, and a place to nest and raise their young. Hunt for signs of each of these on a walk around the block.

FOOD: Look for insects in the cracks of tree bark and tucked in the cracks and holes of building bricks; lift up flower planters, rocks, and leaves to find insects, seeds, acorns, maple helicopter seeds, and mushrooms. Stop to look closely at flowers and where and how a bird gets the nectar. Large birds like owls and hawks eat mice, squirrels, snakes, lizards, frogs, and toads. You just may find a toad or two!

WATER: Rain, dew, puddles, and public fountains.

NESTING: Puddles are places for water and also for the mud that birds like robins need for building their nests. Nesting materials include mud, animal hair and fur, gravel, pebbles and rocks, sticks, twigs, leaves and grass, and even spider web silk. Birds nest on tops of buildings, on the sides of buildings, in cliffs and caves, trees, shrubs, and on the ground. Some, like the Killdeer, will even nest in a gravel parking lot!

SHELTER: Birds take shelter in tree hollows, under the eaves of buildings, bridges, and rock ledges, and under leaves and plants.

Make a Bird Basics journal on your return with photographs that you took along the way or pictures that the children draw.

Word Puzzle

Birds in Our Backyard is written in the form of couplets. Putting together a couplet is like putting together a word puzzle. A couplet is a simple two-line poem that rhymes. Each line in a couplet has the same number of syllables. This can be explained to young children as "counts." The lines have a rhythm to them that makes reading and hearing them fun.

Read the following lines from the book and have the children clap the rhythm along with you.

Bring them insects, bring them bugs,
Frogs and toads and slimy slugs...

Challenge the children to compose a nature couplet with you as a group (Robins are gray, orange, and black. In the spring they come on back.) Get a move on it and jive to the rhythm of the rhyme by flapping your wings to the count of the poem instead of clapping.

You and your young readers can discover more about birds in these books

Birds, Nests, and Eggs, by Mel Boring, Cooper Square Publishing, 1998. A take-along guide that will help children identify 15 birds. There is also information on how and where birds build their homes and their young.

Cardinals, Robins and Other Birds, A Junior Golden Guide by George Fichter, Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1993. An early guide to 18 common birds with basic information on bird structure and function incorporated throughout the book.

Wild About Minnesota Birds, by Adele Porter, Adventure Publications, Inc, 2007. Adele is a Minnesota author WHO grew up in St. Paul and found meadowlarks along the north edge of the Minnesota State Fair next to the University of Minnesota agricultural fields! She is also wrote the text for this book.

Vocabulary Power!

These words from Birds in Our Backyard may be unfamiliar to some of your listeners. Review them either before or after reading the text.

Birds of Prey – Birds that hunt while in flight for animals, including other birds. They have keen eyesight and strong talons for finding and capturing their prey. Eagles, hawks and falcons are birds of prey.

Bogs – Wet, spongy ground with soil composed of decaying matter

Camouflaged – Hidden

Courtship – The behavior of a bird when trying to gain a partner; when males and females pair up.

Crystal Flakes – Snowflakes are six-sided crystals

Gales – Winds

Materialize – To appear as if from magic

Nestled – Snuggle into

Prance – To lift the legs in the movement of a dance

Rippled – The wrinkles on top of the water made by the wind or movement of the water

Scrumptious – Delicious, yummy

Species – The kind of bird. All living things are organized into large groups such as a plant or animal and then into smaller groups. A species of bird is a specific kind of bird: a Black-capped Chickadee is a different species than a Boreal Chickadee.

Vole – A small mammal similar to a mouse but with a very short tail

Wondrous – Wonderful, remarkable, amazing

About the book's creators

Adele Porter is the author of several bird books, including *Wild About Northeastern Birds* and *Wild About Minnesota Birds*. Check out adeleporter.com for more information on the birds in *Birds in Our Backyard*.

Bill Marchel has earned numerous awards for his wildlife photography, which has appeared in *Audubon*, *Ducks Unlimited*, and many other publications. Visit billmarchel.com to see more of his breathtaking images.