

Being outside in fresh air and sunlight is good for all of us. It's calming and helps us live in the moment. If we're quiet, we are sure to see birds and hear birdsong. This set of eight common garden birds will help children notice these things. Designed to be taken outdoors, the stones can be easily and safely cleaned afterwards.

Key vocabulary

- UK names: blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch, goldfinch, pigeon, robin, sparrow, and starling
- Bird/birds
- Beak, feather, wing, claw, tail
- Fly, flies, flying
- Nest
- Red, green, brown, orange, yellow, black, white, blue
- Smooth/rough
- Curve/point
- Sharp/blunt
- Soft/hard
- Tall/taller/tallest



Activity ideas

Using the bird stones

- Talk about the birds to help develop descriptive vocabulary and observational skills:
 - Can you find any with yellow on them?
 - Which is the biggest/smallest?
 - Do you know the name of this one?
 - Which one is your favourite?
 - Why did you choose it?
- For more details, download the information sheets found [here](#).
- The birds can be used as characters for imaginary play. Lots of opportunities for developing storytelling skills.



- Make bird nests from natural materials. What would make a really good nest? How will we keep the bird's eggs safe? Display the nests and talk about what they look like. This activity will also help with fine motor control.
- Go on a bird hunt, comparing the stones with the birds you see. Using binoculars requires both spatial awareness and good motor skills, so practise using them.
- Take rubbings of the bird stones using wax crayons.
- Use magnifiers to examine the markings of the birds. What do you see? What colour is the ...?

- One child describes a hidden bird to another child, who has to guess which bird it is from the description. A downloadable poster can be found [here](#) to help with the game.
- Make imprints of the birds in play dough. This works in the reverse too by pressing the dough onto the stone. A good activity for learning about levels of pressure.
- Rotate a number of the dough imprints so that the children need to orientate the bird stone to place it correctly in its imprint. Good for spatial awareness and fine motor skills.



Feed the birds

- Invite a local birdwatcher or a member of a local wildlife organisation to come to answer questions on how best to care for local birds. Discuss with the children what questions they would like to ask.
- Set up a bird feeding area so that the children can observe visitors to it.



- Provide materials that children can use to build a bird hide to observe visiting birds from. Provide planks, tarpaulin, clamps, mesh, camouflage sheets.
- Involve the children in making some seed cakes for the feeding zone.
- Push a stick horizontally through a cored apple. Loop some string round the part of the stick showing in the centre of the apple. Press seeds into the outside of the apple. Hang it in a tree for birds to enjoy.
- Thread cubes of cheese, apple and some raisins on to a piece of wire before joining the two ends to make a circle. Tie a loop of string round it and hang it from a tree.

- As well as needing food, birds need water to drink, so add a bird bath to your feeding area. The birds will also bathe in it, which the children will love watching.
- In addition, create an area of bird-friendly plants. Try teasel, honeysuckle and sunflowers. Involve the children in planting and caring for the plants.
- Encourage the children to sit and listen to the songs of the birds that visit your outdoor space.



Learning more

- Use the nests above to make a number line, placing play clay eggs in each one to explore number sequences.
- Conduct a bird survey, using a tally chart to record how many of each bird are seen during a given period. If in the UK, try taking part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch.
- Use tweezers to pick up seeds or nuts to drop into pots like a bird feeding its babies. Ideal for practising fine motor control.
- Drip some marbling inks into a shallow tray of water. Blend the inks gently to create a pattern. Lay a sheet of paper on the surface of the water. Carefully lift it off and lay it down to dry. Once dry, cut an egg shape from the marbled sheet.





Games you can play

- Discuss how birds fly, that we can't fly and how we invented aeroplanes to enable us to do so. Use this to introduce making paper aeroplanes. There are many websites that show how to make a wide range of these. Whose plane went the furthest? Is there a way we can measure how far it went? Why do you think it flew so far?
- Kim's Game: Show the children a selection of the birds before placing a cloth over them. Remove one of the birds in secret, take off the cloth, and ask the children to identify and describe which bird is no longer there. Swap roles so that a child leads the game.

Extending the learning

- There are so many fascinating birds beyond those of our back gardens: raptors, flightless ones, birds of paradise, hummingbirds. Provide as many means as possible for the children to learn more about them: fiction and non-fiction books, video, photographs.
- Collect bird feathers and explore for sensory feedback:
 - How does it feel?
 - Do they all feel the same?
 - How are they different?
 - What are the colours and patterns like?
 - Do they make a sound as they are moved through the air?



Children's books featuring birds

My First Book of Garden Birds by Mike Unwin and Sarah Whittley

An Egg is Quiet by Dianne Hutts Aston and Sylvia Long

A Nest is Noisy by Dianne Hutts Aston and Sylvia Long

Beautiful Birds published by Campbell Books

Songs of the Birds by Isabel Otter and Clover Robin

The Little Book Of Garden Bird Songs by Caz Buckingham and Andrea Pinnington

Birds of a Feather by Laura Fairgrieve and Kate Read