

16. Introduction to birds

Discussion topics and information

Birds are present in most different environments and can provide an interesting and valuable insight into the health of ecosystems. They fulfil many important roles in the ecology of natural areas, from hunters and scavengers of carrion to pollinators of rare plants. Best of all, they are mostly present during the day, providing a magnificent opportunity for learners to observe their habits close up.

The common name (non-scientific name) of a bird is occasionally named after a prominent bodily feature or marking. In some cases this might help to tell us a bit about the bird we are looking at. Examples include Black-chinned honeyeaters, White-naped honeyeaters, Yellow-tailed black cockatoos and Sulphur-crested cockatoos. Bird names which reflect a bodily feature, are often the most easily remembered. Even if the bird's name does not tell us anything about its physical appearance, being able to visualise and describe the appearance of a bird is one of the most important techniques of identification. Knowing the different parts of a bird can help us to make accurate descriptions when we are looking at them in the field. For example saying that the bird has a blue crest, white brow and red breast will make it a lot easier to look up in a book than if we say it had a blue mohawk, white eyebrow wrinkle and red front bit.

Lesson ideas

- Making a list of the number of birds that students can name and describe will provide an indication of the class's bird knowledge and provide a number to measure against at a later date.
- Ask students to tell you the names of the birds they know and make a list. This will act as a good indication of the class' knowledge prior to learning about birds from which you will be able to gauge improvement.
- Ask students to describe what the birds on the list look like without any visual aids.
- Show some images of common birds such as Magpies, Willy wagtails, Galahs and Cockatoos (picture sheet included with this activity) and ask learners if they know the names of the birds.
- Explain that birds are sometimes named after their bodily features and show pictures of two similar indigenous birds (picture of White-naped honeyeater and Black-chinned honeyeater included with this activity) and ask students to spot the differences.
- Show students an overhead or picture of the *Parts of a Bird's Body* sheet included with this activity. Discuss the human equivalent body parts and ask students to point to them on their own bodies.
- Issue *Invent-a-bird* worksheet included with this activity.
- Introduce students to the *Bird Chart*: The bird chart at the back of this folder provides an introductory list of species regularly seen in your local area. It is by no means exhaustive and fast learners should be encouraged to extend their knowledge beyond this introduction as more birds are discovered. The chart denotes threatened species protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1973* as well as species considered to be in local decline but not yet threatened.

Recommended resources

Pizzey and Knight 2001. *The Graham Pizzey and Frank Knight Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Harper Collins Publishers Australia.

Prescott, Ann 2002. *Common Bush Birds of the Mt Lofty Ranges*, SA Dept for Environment and Heritage.

Rowland, Peter 1998. *Green Guide: Birds of Australia*, New Holland Publishers Australia.

Recommended resources, cont

Simpson and Day 1999. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, Sixth Edition*, Penguin Books Australia.

Slater, Peter 2001. *The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds, Revised Edition*, New Holland Publishers Australia.

Winters, Bob 1999. *Australian Guide to Birds*, Gould League of Victoria.