Lesson Topic: Exploring Birds

Target Grade Level: Fourth Grade
Though written to target fourth grade learners, you may find that this lesson is applicable to 3rd-5th grade learners with some modifications.

Overview
In this two-part lesson, students will learn how to study birds aligned with the work of scientists. Students will begin by exploring different beak shapes in the classroom. They will then have an opportunity to conduct bird observations in a nearby natural area. At the beginning of the field lesson they will learn to use binoculars. Next, using bird guides and binoculars students will conduct a bird count. They will then review their count data and look for patterns of birds that are most common by habitat. In reviewing this data they will draw conclusions between the type of beak on the identified birds as it relates to the habitat in which they were observed.

Catalina Ecological Principle #1:
What “every student should know” to be an ecologically literate world citizen.
Catalina Ecological Principle #4:
Where things come from (water, energy, food) and where they go (waste, pollution, climate change)
Catalina Ecological Principle #5:
What it means to be a conservation organization on Catalina and an environmental steward worldwide.

Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) Connections:

Performance Expectations
4-LS1-1: Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival growth, behavior, and reproduction.

Science and Engineering Practices
Engaging in Argument from Evidence: Engaging in argument from evidence in 3-5 builds on K-2 experiences and progresses to critiquing the scientific explanations or solutions proposed by peers by citing relevant evidence about the natural and designed world(s).
i. Construct an argument with evidence, data, and/or a model (4-LS1-1).

Disciplinary Core Ideas
LS1.A: Structure and Function
i. Plants and animals have both internal and external structures that serve various functions in growth, survival, behavior, and reproduction (4-LS1-1).
Crosscutting Concepts

Systems and System Models

i. A system can be described in terms of its components and their interactions (4-LS1)

Lesson Objectives

Students will define the term adaptations.
Students will draw conclusions about bird diets based on beak structure.
Students will use binoculars to observe birds.
Students will identify birds through observation of physical traits (i.e. size, shape, color) and behavior (i.e. actions, preferred habitat).
Students will use a field guide to support bird identification.
Students will record observations.
Students will make connections between bird beak shape and type of habitat.

Vocabulary

Adaptation: a change or the process of change by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment
Beak: the horned bill of a bird
Behavior: the way in which something functions or operates
Field mark: a visible mark or characteristic useful in identifying a bird or other animal in the field
Function: the role or action something is designed to fill
Habitat: the place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows
Physical Characteristic: observable body traits or features
Structure: physical features of an animal, plant or object

Materials

Full Lesson:
- Pencils
- Clipboards

Part 1:
- Bird Adaptation Presentation Preparation (Provided)

This information can be shared with students through lecture or interactive techniques. It can also be used to create a multimedia presentation.

- Bird Board (Instructions provided under Educator Preparation)
- Exploring Birds Pre-Test/Post-Test (Provided)
- Photos Resource: Bird Beaks (Provided)
- Photo Resource: Bird Food Source (Provided)

If you have access to scientific specimens, also called biomaterials, these can be used as engaging learning tools. We have included photos for the matching activity. You may want to substitute biomaterials for photos where possible. Lamination of photos is suggested.

Part 2:
- Bird Count Datasheet (Provided)
- Bird Count Rules (Provided)
- Binoculars (Class set)
Educator Preparation

To prepare for this lesson:

- Print and laminate the provided photos. You may also choose to use a combination of photos and specimens. There should be enough sets for students to work in small groups.
- Arrange items into stations through which students will rotate.
- Create a Bird Board:
  - Get poster board from a local office supply store
  - Print photos from the internet that highlight different components of bird identification.
  - Examples include:
    - Look for field marks (e.g. red spot on a gull beak)
    - Note the bird’s behavior (e.g. perching, swimming)
    - Observe bird general appearance (color, size, shape)
    - Note shape of beak
    - Review foot structure
  - Attach photos to the Bird Board with helpful text
- Make photocopies of the provided datasheets:
  - Pre-Test/Post-Test (2 copies per student)
  - Binocular Test Page (These should not be viewed by students prior to the activity)
  - Binocular Use Datasheet
  - Bird Count Datasheet (After adding in your local species)
  - Bird Count Rules
- Identify the type of field guide you’ll use for your field activity. Options include:
  - Tri-fold booklets focused on your region
  - Books such as Sibley’s Bird Guide focused on your region
  - Self-designed one-sheet with 6-9 photos of the birds most commonly seen in your area.
- Locate a class set of binoculars for student use.
- Arrange for a visit to a natural area for bird observations. An estuary habitat will allow students to observe both land and water birds. However, just walking outside your classroom can be a successful location.

Procedure: Part 1

Learning to Study Birds

1. Inform students that today they will learn how to study birds like a scientist. They will learn how to identify birds through observation as well how observing a bird’s beak can provide information about its preferred diet.
2. Before beginning the instruction, have students complete the Pre-Test provided. Set these aside to be compared with scores on Post-Tests completed during Part 2.
3. Using the Bird Board, explain different techniques for identifying a bird in the field. These include shape, color, location or even flight behavior.
4. Discuss examples of birds found in your region. Catalina Island examples include:
   a. A sand piper spotted along the water’s edge and pecking into the sand
   b. A woodpecker commonly perched on the side of a tree pecking into wood.
5. Define the term **adaptations**. Using the provided Bird Adaptation Presentation Preparation, explain that all birds have adaptations that help them survive in their habitat.

6. Organize students into small groups and give each group a set of beak photo cards as well as bird food photo cards.

7. Ask students to consider the information they just learned and try to match each bird with a preferred food source.

8. As a class discuss the results and check answers.

9. For an interactive version of this activity, you may choose to create bird ‘beaks’ out of craft materials and have students try to capture ‘prey’ using their beak. There are many lessons online that can serve as a resource.

**Evaluation: Part 1**

Students can be evaluated using the following rubric, which focuses on participation in the matching activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Matching Activity</td>
<td>Student watches</td>
<td>Student attempts</td>
<td>Student actively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>others, but does</td>
<td>to participate in</td>
<td>participates by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not participate</td>
<td>parts of the</td>
<td>correctly matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exercise</td>
<td>bird beaks to prey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure: Part 2**

**Bird Field Study**

1. Before departing for your field trip, ensure that you have one copy of the Bird Count Datasheet for each student group, and enough Binocular Use Datasheets for each of your students. Extra pencils are helpful. You may want to provide clipboards to make writing easier. Alternatively, pieces of cardboard can be used to provide a stable writing surface to students. You’ll also need your student binoculars and several copies of the Binocular Test Page, one for each adult present that can conduct the testing. You will need a staple gun, string, tape or hammer/nail to hang the Binocular Test Page without harming where it is hung. You will also want to bring your Bird Board.

2. Accompany students to the outdoor space of your choice. This may be a nearby natural area or just a space outside the classroom. The focus of the trip is to observe birds so any location with several species for observing will work.

3. Remember that the journey to the activity location is itself a chance to make nature observations. Ask students to keep an eye out for different bird behavior on the ride or walk to the activity destination.

4. Once at the location, pass out the Binocular Use Datasheets, pencils and clipboards and their binoculars. Provide instruction using the Bird Adaptations Presentation Preparation sheet on how binoculars work and how students will be using them. To reinforce their learning, they will complete the Binocular Use Datasheet simultaneously while exploring their binoculars and receiving the instruction.

5. While students are reviewing the datasheet, find a location to affix the Binocular Test Pages. The location should offer a clear line of sight for binocular practice. You will want to have a test page for every adult present that can lead students through the activity for the most efficient use of time. While setting up the Binocular Test Pages, ensure students do not see what is written on the pages.

6. Have students stand at a pre-determined distance from the Binocular Test Pages. Use a cone or stick to prevent students from standing close enough to read the test page without using binoculars. Determine this distance for your binoculars through a test a few days before.
7. Each student will take a turn viewing the test pages with the use of binoculars. Binocular use will allow students to see the words and images on each page. In order to determine if they are successfully using the binoculars, have students first look at the page using the binoculars. Adults should then ask a question about one thing on the page. Students should whisper to an adult their response. Accuracy of student responses can be recorded as evaluation data. To prevent students from repeating an answer from another student, adults should ask different questions.

8. Explain to students that they will now apply their binocular skills to observing birds. Before beginning, review the Bird Board so they are comfortable with observation techniques.

9. Students will now begin the bird count. They will be using the procedure for the Christmas Bird Count even though it’s not Christmas. You can name the activity after your group or school classroom such as the “Room 15 Bird Count 2020” and share results with your school or group.

10. Divide students into as many groups as there are adults. If you are in an area with different types of habitats, you’ll want to assign groups to each of these areas. Provide students with the field guides you’ve selected to use for the activity.

11. Review the Bird Count Rules and provide each student with the half-sheet as a reminder. Encourage them to refer to the rules if there are disagreements or questions during the process. Provide one copy of the Bird Count Datasheet to each group and have students identify one person in the group to serve as the recorder.

12. Start the observation by sitting quietly in an area where birds can be observed as they fly or perch nearby. Establish your length of observation based on the time available for the full activity. Using the rules to guide the data collecting, students should begin to identify and record the birds they see on the Bird Count Datasheet. After a pre-set interval of time has passed, students should review their sheet and tally up the number:
   a. Individual birds observed
   b. Number of species observed

13. If time permits, have the groups switch areas to do another count in a different location or habitat and provide a second Bird Count Datasheet.

14. At the conclusion of all observations, lead a full group discussion on the results of the observations. As part of this review, ask students to discuss the type of beaks observed on the birds they counted. Referencing the classroom instruction, ask students if they can identify any patterns related to the habitat in which they observed birds and the frequency of different types of beaks.

15. Upon return to the classroom, have students complete the Post-Test (same as the Pre-Test, provided).

**Evaluation: Part 1**

Students can be evaluated using the following rubric, which focuses on participation in the field activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to Use Binoculars</td>
<td>Student watches others, but does not</td>
<td>Student uses binoculars but is not</td>
<td>Student uses binoculars and correctly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participate.</td>
<td>able to describe what is on the test</td>
<td>describes what is on the test page.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>page.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird Observation</td>
<td>Student watches others, but does not</td>
<td>Student participates with minimal</td>
<td>Student actively participates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participate.</td>
<td>effort or participates actively</td>
<td>following observation rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>but does not follow observation rules.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation Discussion</td>
<td>Student watches others, but does not participate.</td>
<td>Student attempts to participate in parts of the discussion or participates with incorrect information.</td>
<td>Student actively participates by correctly drawing conclusions between bird habitat and beak shape.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extension:**

An extension for this activity is to create an opportunity for students to observe a bird in close proximity. Suggestions include:
- Visiting a wildlife rehabilitation center
- Identifying a parent or community support with a pet bird
- Traveling to an accredited zoo
- Scheduling a visit from an educational organization that uses ambassador animals as part of their instruction

The visit can be an opportunity for students to see diverse feet and beaks as well as ask experts questions about preferred food sources.
Bird Adaptations Presentation Preparation

The following content is provided to guide the instructional portion of the lesson. This information can be developed into a multimedia presentation, delivered with the help of a white board or overhead projector, or discussed verbally during ‘group time’ as per the educator’s discretion. Inclusion of photos or biomaterial objects in this lesson will help with instruction. These can be gathered from books, websites or fellow educators.

Lesson Introduction

- Scientists learn about birds through careful observations
- Through bird observation we can learn about bird adaptations - physical and behavioral - that aid in their survival. Bird beaks are an easily observed structure that highlights how birds are well adapted to eat preferred food sources.
- Sometimes bird observations can be part of structured Bird Counts
- Bird Count data can help scientists understand the health of bird populations in an area.
- Birds are an important part of our ecosystem so it’s important to preserve their populations.

Content Discussion and Application: Adaptations

- Review the lesson vocabulary and define key terms
- Discuss that birds have both internal structures and external structures that are adaptations to aid in their survival. Provide examples of adaptations with students using images to support discussion. The following examples can be used:
  - External Adaptation: An eagle will have a sharp beak for catching and eating prey
  - Internal Adaptation: Some birds have a crop, or special pouch near its esophagus. This pouch allows for storage and early digestion of food. It allows them to eat more than they need to take advantage of available food.
- Discuss how birds with similar feeding habits may have similarly shaped beaks. Discuss common shapes of beaks and the food source and habitat for which they are best adapted. Beaks can even be used for protection.
  - A sharp hooked beak helps catch prey and tear the flesh for eating (eagle, hawk, gull)
  - A short, thick beak is good for eating seeds (finch, sparrow, quail)
  - A long thin beak is good for drinking nectar (hummingbird)
  - A medium sized pointed beak is good for catching insects (mockingbird)
  - A beak with a pouch is good for catching fish (pelican)
- Explain some birds are able to live in multiple types of environments and feed upon many different types of food. We call these birds generalists.

Content Discussion and Application: Binocular Use

- Review the function of binoculars as a helpful tool to see things in the distance.
- Explain that binoculars are an important tool for bird watching.
• Demonstrate that resting your elbows on something solid (table, branch, ground) can help hold binoculars steady.
• Explain that binoculars allow you to observe birds in their natural habitat. They can make it easier to see bird behaviors difficult to see from far away.
• Highlight that binoculars are especially helpful in noticing subtle field marks that are especially important to identifying birds.

Content Discussion and Application: Conducting Bird Counts
• Define and discuss the importance of a Bird Count
  o Bird counts are important for scientists to know how many bird species are living in an area. Christmas Bird Counts have been happening in North America for over 100 years.
  o The Christmas Bird Count started in 1900 as an effort to move away from an annual Bird Hunt to an activity focused on conservation of birds. The Christmas Bird Count takes place in December through early January each year and is organized by the National Audubon Society. For more information, visit the associated web site: https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count
  o Binoculars and field guides are helpful tools in conducting a Bird Count. However, many birds can be identified through careful observation alone.
• Discuss the importance of maintaining healthy bird populations in an area
  o Bird are important members of a healthy ecosystem.
  o Some birds serve as pollinators. In the US, hummingbirds are prolific pollinators, spreading pollen from one bird to another as they feed on nectar with their long beaks.
  o Some birds help with spreading seeds through the environment. When birds eat seeds, some will pass through their bodies without being digested. These undigested seeds can then sprout and grow. As birds will rarely eliminate waste in the exact place they ate, this process leads to seeds being eliminated in a new area from where the feeding happened. This is called seed dispersal.
  o Another benefit of bird waste is that it provides nutrients to the soil that can help plants grow. This is an example of nutrient cycling where the bird moves nutrients such as food it consumes from one place to another through waste elimination in a new place.

Answers to Bird Beak Match:
Red-tailed Hawk – Catalina Ground Squirrel
Brown Pelican – Northern Anchovy
Spotted Sandpiper – Sand Crabs
Mockingbird – Insect
Catalina California Quail – Toyon Berries
Acorn Woodpecker - Acorns

Answers to Binocular Use Datasheet:
1. binoculars
2. eyepieces
3. rest your arms on a solid surface; lie down on the ground
4. focus wheel
5. watch the bird and collect data until it flies away
6. habitat
7. field marks
8. behavior
Answers to Pre/Post Test:

1. D  
2. B  
3. D  
4. C  
5. D  
6. D  
7. False
Photo Resources: Bird Beaks

Red-tailed Hawk

Brown Pelican

Acorn Woodpecker

Spotted Sandpiper

Catalina California Quail

Mockingbird
Photo Resources: Bird Food Source

Northern Anchovy

Catalina Ground Squirrel

Acorns

Sand Crab

Insect

Toyon Berries
Binocular Use Datasheet

Before beginning your bird count, let’s learn about a helpful observation tool.

Review Questions:
1. A set of __________________________ can help you observe birds at a distance from where you are standing.
2. The parts of the binoculars you look through are called the __________________________.
3. If you have trouble seeing through your binoculars because you cannot keep them still, you can __________________________.
4. If you have trouble seeing through your binoculars because they look blurry, you can adjust the __________________________.
5. When observing a bird using binoculars, it’s important to __________________________ before you record your data.
6. Binoculars help us observe birds where they naturally live. This area is their ______________.
7. Binoculars help us see small details of colors and structures on birds. These details are called __________________________.
8. Binoculars help us closely observe bird __________________________ or actions. This information can help with identifying birds.
**Name:** Adult Bald Eagle

**Food:** Fish and Small Animals

**Size:** Wingspan can be over 6 feet
Bird Count Rules

During your Bird Count activity, you’ll want to follow these rules so your data is as accurate as possible. The most important thing to remember is to watch your bird for as long as possible, getting as much information before the bird flies away.

1. Use your best observation skills. Focus on:
   a. Behavior
   b. Field Marks
   c. Shape
2. If a bird is spotted, point out the bird to everyone in your group. Everyone must agree on the species before it can be recorded on the sheet.
3. Work together to spot birds quickly before they fly away.
4. Use binoculars to notice details about the bird.
5. Refer to field guides to help with identification.
Exploring Birds Pre and Post Test

Circle the correct answer for each question. Select only one answer.

1. A bird’s beak shape relates to_______________________________.
   A. where it lives.                                      C. what food it eats.
   B. defenses it might need for protection.              D. all of the above.

2. Changes over time for an organism or species to become better suited to its environment are called _________________________.
   A. migration.                                        C. behavior.
   B. adaptations.                                      D. habitat.

3. The place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows is called its_______________________________.
   A. migration.                                        C. behavior.
   B. adaptations.                                      D. habitat.

4. The way an animal acts is called its_______________________________.
   A. migration.                                        C. behavior.
   B. adaptations.                                      D. habitat.

5. Christmas Bird Counts have occurred for_____________________.
   A. about 40 years.                                    C. about 80 years.
   B. about 60 years.                                    D. over 100 years.

6. Something that birds DO NOT do to benefit an ecosystem is_______________________________.
   A. pollination.                                       C. nutrient cycling.
   B. seed dispersal.                                    D. improve air quality.

7. True or False: When trying to identify a bird, it is important to quickly look at the bird and then look at your field guide.
   True _______ False _______
**Bird Count Datasheet**

To use this sheet, make a tally mark each time you correctly identify a species. At the end of the activity, add up the field tallies to get a total number for each species. Next, add up the total number of birds overall. Lastly, count how many different species you observed. Record these at the bottom of the sheet.

Group Name:___________________  Date:___________  Number in Group:____
Location:_______________________  Weather:________  Temperature:________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bird Species</th>
<th>Field Tally</th>
<th>Total # Observed</th>
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Total Number of Different Species:_______  Total Number of Birds:_______
Try it on Catalina!

While both parts of this lesson can take place anywhere, it was designed for use in the interior of Catalina Island. If you have the chance to conduct your field trip on Catalina, here are a few tips that can be used to tailor the lesson to apply to the Island’s unique bird life.

On Catalina, the students can go to Little Harbor to conduct a study of birds in three distinct habitats. The coastal/maritime habitats, aquatic estuary, and coastal sage scrub found in the Little Harbor area provide a plethora of bird species, with different dietary needs, for student observation.

Lesson Location:
Part 1: Classroom
Part 2: Little Harbor, Catalina

Species Focus:
For this lesson, the focus was on birds that live on Catalina Island and more specifically that are common to the Little Harbor area. You can learn more about Catalina birds from the Catalina Island Conservancy website which provides a list of birds most commonly found on the Island. Included in this lesson is a Bird Count Datasheet highlighting Catalina species.

Conclusion:
Conducting the field trip portion of this lesson on Catalina presents an opportunity to discuss the Catalina Island Conservancy’s conservation work, along with the unique ecology of the Island. Discussion topics can include how life travels to island habitat through the 3Ws (wind, wing and wave) and bird species that are endemic to the Island. There are a number of locations around the Island that are well-suited for bird watching activities. Comparing the diversity you see in the Interior with the species found in Avalon can be thoughtful conclusion to the activity.

For information about the Catalina Island Conservancy, please visit our website:
www.catalinaconservancy.org.
Bird Count Datasheet: Try it on Catalina

To use this sheet, make a tally mark each time you correctly identify a species. At the end of the activity, add up the field tallies to get a total number for each species. Next, add up the total number of birds overall. Lastly, count how many different species you observed. Record these at the bottom of the sheet.

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Location: ______________________  Weather: _______  Temperature: _______

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acorn Woodpecker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allen’s Hummingbird</td>
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<td>American Kestrel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bald Eagle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bewick’s Wren</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Phoebe</td>
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<td>Catalina California Quail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chipping Sparrow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Raven</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common Yellowthroat</td>
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<td>European Starling</td>
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<td>Hermit Thrush</td>
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<td>House Sparrow</td>
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<td>Killdeer</td>
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<td>Mallard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mourning Dove</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Flicker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Mockingbird</td>
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<td>Osprey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacific-slope Flycatcher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red-tailed Hawk</td>
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<td>Ruddy Duck</td>
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<td>Spotted Sandpiper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spotted Towhee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Gull</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White-crowned Sparrow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson’s Snipe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Number of Different Species: _______  Total Number of Birds: _______