

# Binoculars & Bird Watching

## Suggested Number of Volunteers: 2

## Materials in Activity Tub:

- Binoculars (10 pairs)
- Common Nebraska Bird Images (12)
- Common Birds of Nebraska Images & Identification sheet
- Bird Markings ID Sheet
- Birds of Nebraska books (10)

## Materials Provided by the Group:

- None

## Objectives

Students will:

1. Learn how to use binoculars.
2. Learn how to identify birds.
3. Learn about wildlife viewing, especially bird watching.

## Background:

Birds! They are everywhere. No matter where you live, there are birds. If you live in an urban environment, like a city or town, you may see birds like Common Grackles, Cardinals, American Robins, or Blue Jays. If you live on a farm or in the country, you might see birds like the Eastern or Western Meadowlark, the Dickcissel, Eastern Kingbird, or the Horned Lark. And, if you happen to be in a wetland area you will often see Red-Winged Blackbirds, Great Blue Herons, or any number of waterfowl species such as Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, or Northern Pintail.

The great thing about birds is that not only can you find them in any habitat, you can also find them any time of year. Yes, some species migrate out of Nebraska for the winter, but many bird species stay here! In fact, some species even migrate to Nebraska for the winter! Dark-eyed Juncos spend their summer months in Canada, but travel south to Nebraska each winter. Cardinals, Blue Jays, and Red-tailed Hawks are all year-round residents of Nebraska.

Not only are birds everywhere, they are easy to see. By using simple identification tools, you can usually tell what kind of bird you are seeing (or at least what family of birds).

This activity introduces participants to the sport of wildlife viewing and bird watching.

## Procedure:

### *Before the Activity*

Place “Common Nebraska Bird Images” in trees or on structures around the station. These will be used by participants to learn how to use and focus their binoculars. They will also be used to help learn bird identification tips.

### *The Activity*

1. Welcome participants to the station. Ask if they have ever used binoculars or been bird watching. If they have, ask if they have any questions about binoculars or bird identification. If they don't have any questions, and they would like to go bird watching, give them a pair of binoculars and a bird ID book and allow them

continued on next page

# Binoculars & Bird Watching, continued

to head out. Ask them to return in about 20 minutes to allow others to use the binoculars. Also, remind them that the binoculars' strap needs to remain around their neck at all times. It is advised that you give one pair of binoculars to groups of two or three participants. One participant can use the binoculars while the other(s) help identify birds using the bird ID book.

2. If participants have not been bird watching or have not used binoculars, give them a quick instruction session on how to use binoculars. Include in the session:

- The strap of the binoculars needs to remain around their neck at all times.
- When they get the binoculars, adjust the distance between the two eye pieces until they see one large circle when looking through both eye pieces. If they see two circles (one for each eye) the distance between the two eye pieces is probably too far... bring the eye pieces together. If they see no circle (it is black when they look through the binoculars), the eye pieces are probably too close together... move the eye pieces farther apart.
- The center dial between the two eye pieces is for focusing. Once they have found a bird and have located it with their binoculars, use the center focusing dial to bring the bird into focus.
- When looking for birds, look without the binoculars first. Your field of vision is much larger without the binoculars. So, the best way to find a bird is to locate it without the binoculars, stare at the bird (DO NOT MOVE YOUR HEAD) and bring the binoculars to their eyes... the bird should be in the field of vision of the binoculars.
- Do not walk with the binoculars to your eyes... you will trip or run into someone, or something.
- Look and LISTEN for birds... listening is a great way to locate the general location of birds especially when they are hidden by leaves.
- Have fun and remember to be patient!

3. Once participants feel comfortable with the

binoculars, ask if they know how to identify birds. If they don't, explain a few simple rules of bird identification:

- Color is the easiest way to identify a bird... always make note of the bird's color(s).
- Look for unusual markings... does the bird have a bright colored tail feather? Or, does the bird have a bright band of feathers on its wing? These markings will help you identify the bird.
- Look at the size of the bird... if you are seeing a bird that is brown and white, it could be a sparrow or an eagle... the size will help you determine what you are actually seeing.
- Remember where you are... if you are in a wetland, you are probably not going to see a Meadowlark (a prairie bird), but if you are in the middle of a prairie, you are probably not going to see a Mallard (a water bird).

4. Once participants have an understanding of how to use binoculars and ID books, send them on their way.

Remind participants:

- To return in about 20 minutes to allow others to use the binoculars.
- That the binoculars' strap needs to remain around their neck at all times.

NOTE: It is advised that you give one pair of binoculars to groups of two or three participants. One participant can use the binoculars while the other(s) help identify birds using the bird ID book.