

Bird Survey

Credit: Kilkenny Education Centre, National Parks and Wildlife Service

A bird survey is a fantastic way to become aware of the many species of birds around us. Birds love singing at dusk and at dawn, mainly to mark their territory and let everyone know that they are still here. To us, the songs of birds sound like songs of joy and together they merge into one amazing concert.

Birds also visit our gardens, we see them in parks, on the streets even and in many other places outside. Different birds prefer different habitats, sing at different times in the morning, in the evening and during the day and also have different habits, e.g. in terms of feeding, nesting, raising their young, travelling thousands of miles to winter in warmer regions.



*Robin, blackbird and goldfinch. Taken from the Wicklow Mountains National Park's Garden Bird Guide.
 Credit: National Parks and Wildlife Services.*

There are many guides describing more or less common species of birds: their colours, their habits, their habitats, their songs. The Wicklow Mountains National Park provides a great overview of garden birds – you don't have to go far to see them! The Glenveagh National Park also have an excellent brochure on bird identification. These resources will help you with your bird survey. They are available on www.livingearth.ie

A 'dictionary' of bird songs is available from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z>

A bird survey is an activity you can do on your own, with your family or with a class at school. When working in groups you can split up the times you observe birds, so one person can take the morning slot, someone else can watch what happens in the evening.

You might not all be in the same location, so you can compare notes and see are some birds more common in places close to woodlands, beaches or open fields.

What to do

1. Begin by putting out some food for the birds, such as peanuts and sunflower seeds. Make sure you put the food near a tree or shrubs and some place where you can view it safely and quietly.
Of course you can also observe the comings and goings at your bird feeder or bird bath. See how to make a bird feeder and bird bath from materials that you have at home on www.livingearth.ie
2. Observe for a certain time, e.g. 20 minutes, at different times of the day (morning, lunchtime, evening) and repeat your observation at the same time the following day or days.
3. Using the template below count the number of birds that come into your garden, even if they do not feed on the food you put out for them.
To help you identify the common garden birds have a look at the guides provided by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and available on www.livingearth.ie
4. Now this is where your maths comes in: present your results in a bar chart. A bar chart is a chart that uses rectangle blocks to represent numbers.
5. Put the names of the bird species on the horizontal axis (robin, crow, blackbird etc.).
6. On the vertical axis mark the frequency, so if you saw 5 blackbirds then you will colour in 5 blocks high.

From your observation can you tell:

- What was the highest number of each bird species that you saw at any one time?
- Was the total number of birds higher at a certain time of the day (morning, lunchtime, evening)?
- Where there any birds that only came at a certain time of the day?
- What was the most common bird in the morning/at lunchtime/in the evening?
- What kind of behaviour did you notice in different birds?
- After observing birds for several days, what birds can you identify by their songs?

If you worked with a group of bird watchers:

- What birds were more common in places close to beaches, woodlands, open fields or in town?
- Did different people observe the same bird species at the same time of the day?
- Where the more or less birds in one place compare to another at the same time of the day?

Template: Bird Survey

Date, time and duration of observation

Describe the location:

- Where did you carry out the survey? Your garden, a park...
- What were the surroundings like? In town, near or in woodlands...
- Was there anything to attract birds? A bird feeder, a bird bath...

Label the horizontal axis of the bar chart with the bird species you saw (see example)

Above the species colour as many squares as you saw birds of this species

