



## Activity: Bird Sounds

**Objective:** By listening to tape recordings of bird sounds, students will distinguish the bird calls or songs of ten species of Iowa birds.

**Materials:** Tape recorder, record player or CD player, *A Field Guide to Bird Songs of Eastern and Central North America* cassette or CD of bird calls and songs, and word association sheets

**Background:** One of the most characteristic features of birds is the sound that they produce. Most birds produce these sounds by passing air across membranes in their air tract, much the way humans produce sounds. However, some birds produce sounds by tapping their bill against a hollow tree (woodpeckers), by vibrating their wings against their body (ruffed grouse), or by having air pass across specially-shaped feathers (snipe). Birds use these sounds to identify and defend a territory, to attract and hold a mate, and to communicate with their young.



Birders commonly use the sounds of birds as a way to locate birds and to identify the species. Good birders routinely locate 70-80 percent of the birds they find by hearing them first. This exercise also forces students to use their hearing, a sense that they often don't use when they are outdoors.

**Procedure:** Have the students listen to the tapes and highlight the Iowa birds on the activity sheet. On a birdwatching hike, have the students try to identify birds by sound alone. The students can also listen to the bird tapes and try word associations for the calls.





## Activity: Word Association Sheet

### *Bird species*

American robin

### *Bird call sounds like:*

clear caroling short phrases, rising and falling, often prolonged notes, tyeep and tut-tut-tut or cheery-up-cheerily cheery-up-cheerily

American crow

a harsh caw-caw

Northern Cardinal

cheer-o-cheer-o-what-what or pretty-pretty-pretty

Blue jay

a harsh jeeah or jay

White-breasted nuthatch

a nasal ank-ank-ank-ank

Gray catbird

a cat-like meow

Common yellowthroat

a bright, rapid whichity-whichity-whichity-witch

Northern flicker

a loud wick-wick-wick-wick-wick and a squeaky flick-a-flicka-a-flicka

Mourning dove

a mournful whoo-who whoo-who

Barred owl

a barking call that sounds like Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?

Red-tailed hawk

a high-pitched squeal slurring downward Keeer-r-r

Rufous-sided towhee

drink your TEA!

### *Birds that say their name:*

Black-capped chickadee

chickadee-dee-dee or a clear whistled fee bee

Killdeer

kill-deer kill-deer

Whip-poor-will

heard at night whip-poor-will whip-poor-will

**Follow-Up:** Try a bird song quiz or bird song tag team for review.