

# Bird Migration Game



This lesson plan was produced by the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning in 2016 as part of the Nature Discover Project.

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**Activity Name: Bird Migration Game**

**Ages:** 6-12 (also works for older students as well)

**Activity Level:** medium to high - high physical activity component

**Length of time:** 30-60min

**Number of Participants:** best with a group of 10

**Concept:** Living in Canada, many of our spring and summer birds are migratory; they do not overwinter here. This activity brings home the concept of how far and how arduous this annual migration is for birds. It is a role play activity of sorts where the participants are specific bird species that must leave their breeding ground get to their wintering ground and return again. The activity sets a course which has many of the challenges that birds actually face while migrating. It is an experiential way for participants to understand migration, its natural and man-made hazards and the risks for birds to survive.

**Materials Required:** This is like a huge board game with stations that could be set up throughout a loop trail system. 24 stations are recommended. Each station has a description of an event or hazard and a related instruction (ie. go back three stations, do 10 jumping jacks, etc.). Tracking sheet. Map of North and South America. Coloured string for the "research station" where they get banded.

**Introduction:** Start with an overview of migrating birds in the local area including a map showing the distances some of these birds travel. This could also include a discussion on feather types and design. As well as explaining that the stops that the birds make along the way are physical limits to how far they can fly without stopping food.

**Methods:** Explain how many stations there are and where they are located. Participants choose a migratory species and fly solo or in a small flock. The participant or group receives a die that they use at each station. They throw their die at the start of their migration and the number they get is where they start their migration. Then they "fly" off. When they return (either they died on route or completed their migration) they record on a group tracking sheet what they were and if they survived or not. Then they can try again!

Debrief after everyone has had a chance to make it through the game at least once or twice, then ask the participants to share their experiences, relate these to a real life example or species. Maybe when they next see a migratory bird they look at them differently! ("You've come along way!"). You could discuss the importance of having places where the birds can rest and feed on their way (marshes, wetland, etc.)

**Tips for Teachers:**

- If you have a mixed age group, try to pair younger and older participants together (in a flock) as there is a lot of reading in this activity. Alternatively, younger participants could be paired with a leader to play this game.
- This is a pretty active game (most participants run between stations)!
- Save enough time to allow all participants to get through the game twice. They seem to just get the idea the first time around, so having them go twice or even three times really helps to cement the concept.

**Background facts and information:**

- Turkey Vultures, Purple Martin, Rufous Hummingbird, Swainson's Thrush, Olive-Sided Fly Catcher are all bird species we have used for this as they breed in our area.

**Literature Cited:**

- To help with the selection of bird species we use Sibley's Field Guide for Western North America or the Peterson Guide to the Birds of Western North America.

**Note: this game is based on the game from the [International Migratory Bird Day](#) organization. It has been redesigned for our purposes.**