

# Activity: Spencer Sparrow



## Summary of activity

Starting with a letter from a sparrow pupils are asked to consider birds which use their school grounds. Simple bird surveys and clue hunts are used to create a list of birds which use the grounds. Pupils then consider how they might be able to help their local bird life and create a variety of feeders, assessing the effectiveness of each.

## Learning objectives

- To identify birds which use the school grounds
- 2. To create effective bird feeders.

## Preparation

- Photocopy observation sheets.
- Print the letter from Spencer Sparrow and put in envelope addressed to the class.
- Gather materials for making bird feeders Do any stages of making the feeders that pupils will be unable to do (drill holes, halve coconuts etc.).
- Buy foods to fill feeders.
- Request that pupils come in to school well prepared to spend time in the outdoors.
- Choose a location in the school from which pupils can sit to observe the school grounds.

- You may wish to create a classroom hide by shading sections of the windows out with sugar paper. Working in small groups pupils are given an observation sheet and asked to record the birds that they see during a ten minute period. Pupils use bird posters and books to identify the birds they see. Each member of the class should have a go at doing this. A group could be allocated to each break time, so that data is collected over a week.

## Resources

- Letter from Spencer Sparrow.
- Bird observation sheet.
- Bird identification posters/books.
- Bird feeding observation sheet.
- Binoculars

## Health and safety consideration

- Refer to your risk assessment for your school grounds.
- Complete a risk assessment if you leave the school grounds. Consider pupil specific risks.
- Consider activity specific risks such as use of scissors to make bird feeders, handling dirty bird feeding equipment to refill with food, eating food meant for birds and piercing fruit/coconut shell to thread onto string.

## Introduction

Read the class the letter from Spencer Sparrow (see below).

## Main Activity

1. Discuss with pupils:
  - How should we help Spencer?
  - Do we just want to feed Spencer?
  - Do all birds eat the same things?
  - Which birds live in our school grounds?
2. Create a summary table of results from the bird observations on the board for pupils to refer to. Pupils can create a list of birds which occur in their school grounds.
3. Ask pupils how they can help the birds that live in their school grounds.
4. Using the guidance below support pupils in creating a range of different bird feeders (fat balls, half coconuts, fruit on string, ground feeding, bird tables, fat in cracks of a post).

## Plenary

Pupils then need to decide where to locate bird feeders and should explore school grounds to find suitable areas. When bird feeders have been placed in school grounds, pupils should repeat 10 minute observations, this time adding upon which feeder they saw a particular bird. You may wish to use the Bird Feeding Observation Sheet below.

### Follow-up ideas

Create bird feeders, tables, baths and boxes. Establish plants that are good for birds and insects.

Pupils could use simple spreadsheets to record their data.

Create report style fact-files about sparrows.

You may wish to investigate which feeding methods are favoured by each of the birds on your list. This can be linked to adaptation. You could also investigate how feeding patterns change between season.

Write a letter back to Spencer Sparrow about how they have chosen to help him.

Use the 'Garden Birds' fold out key from the Field Studies Council to identify birds ([www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)).

Continue bird monitoring all year round. Pupils can then analyse data collected and consider reasons why observations vary from month to month.

Consider providing and making bird boxes.

Map the presence of birds in their school grounds.



<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Time started</b>	
<b>Time ended</b>	

	<b>Number of birds seen</b>
<b>Blackbird</b>	
<b>Black-headed gull</b>	
<b>Blue tit</b>	
<b>Chaffinch</b>	
<b>Collared dove</b>	
<b>Dunnock</b>	
<b>Great tit</b>	
<b>House sparrow</b>	
<b>Magpie</b>	
<b>Pied wagtail</b>	
<b>Robin</b>	
<b>Rook</b>	
<b>Starling</b>	
<b>Swallow</b>	
<b>Swift</b>	
<b>Wood pigeon</b>	

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Time started</b>	
<b>Time ended</b>	

	<b>Sunflower seeds</b>	<b>Peanuts</b>	<b>Bird table</b>	<b>Ground feeding</b>
<b>Blackbird</b>				
<b>Black-headed gull</b>				
<b>Blue tit</b>				
<b>Chaffinch</b>				
<b>Collared dove</b>				
<b>Dunnock</b>				
<b>Great tit</b>				
<b>House sparrow</b>				
<b>Magpie</b>				
<b>Pied wagtail</b>				
<b>Robin</b>				
<b>Rook</b>				
<b>Starling</b>				
<b>Swallow</b>				
<b>Swift</b>				
<b>Wood pigeon</b>				

Dear Class,

My name is Spencer Sparrow. **Do you know me?**

I am a small brown bird. Sometimes I build my nest in the roof of your school. I often visit your school grounds. **Have you seen me?**

If you have not seen me you might have seen one of my family, or even one of my friends. There are lots of us around. Have you seen a Sparrow near your own house? Sparrows just like me live throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and much of Europe. We get everywhere! In 1980 there were 10 million more sparrows in the UK than there are today. Here in the East of England, the problem has been really severe. The number of sparrows in this region has decreased by 90% since 1970, and every day there are less and less of us about. **Why do you think that is?**

We really like school grounds and gardens. They are good places to build nests and find food. Our problem is that it is becoming harder and harder to find suitable places to build nests and there is less and less food around for us to eat. **Can you help us?**

Without food and places to raise our families we will have to move away from your school grounds to somewhere else. We might even have to move right out of the county, perhaps to Cambridgeshire or Lincolnshire.

Thank you for reading this letter. I hope you can help us.

Yours faithfully,

*Spencer Sparrow*