

# Therapeutic Recreation Protocol: Backyard Birds

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## General Purpose

- To improve concentration skills.
- To improve memory skills.
- To increase capacity for happiness through avoidance of habituation by providing variety, novelty, and challenges
- To increase leisure resources and opportunities through providing information and resources necessary for involvement in leisure in the client's context

## Program Description

Participants will learn about birds they are most likely to see at feeders or on a walk near their residence, how to attract the birds by making a correct feeder to attract finches and chickadees year-round.

## Materials Needed

- Big white board or large paper flip tablet
- Dry-erase markers for whiteboard or markers for flip tablet
- Bookmarked videos with bird songs, bird pictures, and photos of nesting materials on the internet.
- Bird nest, feathers, nesting materials such as string, hair, dried grass, etc.
- iPad or computer with HDTV, HD cable and HD TV
- Song lyrics to *Rockin' Robin* and/or *When the Red, Red Robin Goes Bob Bob Bobbin' Along*
- Cheap birdseed with milo and millet as first two ingredients in small ziplock bags that can be passed around and examined.
- Cheap women's nylon knee high stockings or legs cut off pantyhose—must be 'snaggable' (nylon not microfiber)
- Niger seed (also called nyger or mislabeled as thistle seed)
- Empty clear tennis ball container(s) or deep cup(s)—stocking will be stretched over mouth to aid in filling with seed.
- Small jar lids optional (no more than 2/12" in diameter, must fit in tennis ball container or deep cup.
- Ribbon for decoration
- Small "dixie" cups for scooping seed
- A shallow plastic tray or box with sides to catch seed
- Backyard Birds Mini Guides
- 8x11 printed pictures of the birds featured in the Backyard Birds Mini Guide or pictures can be on an iPad or computer and displayed on the television.
- Bird songs/calls of each of the birds in the Backyard Birds Mini Guide.
- A field guide to western birds
- Binoculars

## Populations

This activity is appropriate and modifiable for most populations.

## Contraindicated Criteria

Participants with physical or cognitive issues may need assistance.

## Cautions / Special Notes

Most birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which makes it "illegal for anyone to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal

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regulations.” Feathers and nests from invasive species such as house sparrows, Eurasian collared doves, and starlings are appropriate and legal for this activity. Additionally, feathers collected from game species (pheasant, chukar, ducks, etc.) taken legally under hunting permits are also acceptable. A complete list of protected birds can be found on the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s web site <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/regulationspolicies/mbta/MBTANDX.HTML>.

Nests and feathers have the potential to carry mites and germs. Put bird nests in an airtight container with several mothballs for at least 24 hours. The nest can then be wrapped in clear cellophane or enclosed in a clear box or large jar that will allow for inspection. Feathers should be put in an airtight container with mothballs for at least 24 hours and then soaked in a 1:1 solution of hydrogen peroxide and isopropyl alcohol. If you decide to allow participants to handle nests or unsanitized feathers, conduct this activity outside and do not bring the items indoors. And, of course, follow up with rigorous hand washing and cleaning of any materials that have come into contact with the items.

## Setting Up the Environment

Participants will sit at tables where they can see each other, the facilitator, and the television screen. Participants will need the tables to inspect objects and help create a finch feeder. As participants arrive, play bird sounds.

## Intervention Activity

### *Introductory Questions*

What do you hear right now? (Bird song is playing.) Do you like hearing birds?

Do you have bird feeders set up here?

Did you have bird feeders at your homes in the past?

Can anyone make a sound that a bird makes? A call or a song or a noise?

What kinds of birds do you see or have you seen? (List.)

Optional physical component: When someone mentions ‘robin,’ say that waking up to seeing and hearing a robin is really a lovely experience. Play a video of a robin with the audio of its call. Suggest that the group should wake up right now.

Cue up the song *Rockin’ Robin*, display lyrics on the TV. Movement makes the brain learn better so incorporate movements to the song including ‘chicken wing’ arms, hand ‘beaks,’ foot points and flexes, claps. Alternatively, the slower song *When the Red Red Robin Comes Bob Bob Bobbin’ Along* can be used.

### *Introduce Objects*

Note that there is so much interesting information about birds that we can hardly come close to covering it all, but we can learn about birds that you are most likely to see and how to attract them and identify them.

What two things are important to have if you are a bird watcher? Show binoculars and pass them around as well as a field guide.

This is a birdhouse with a nest. What do you see in this nest? What is it made out of? What kind of bird might nest in a birdhouse like this? A small bird or a large bird? The bird that nested here is on the list we made earlier. Each fall you should clean out your birdhouse and make it ready for next year’s residents. This is a birdhouse that was taken down in the fall, so no birds were disturbed. This is a nest of a house sparrow.

What do birds use as nesting materials? (List.) What can you see in the bird nest that we have? Show nesting materials in person or online. Show photos of nests made from litter like gum wrappers and string and cigarette

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butts. Show photos of a nesting materials cache that can be offered to birds starting in late February. Nesting materials may attract birds to nest close by. Offering nesting materials in February may encourage birds to nest close by.

Show feathers. How do they appear/feel? Are they soft or stiff? Why do birds need different kinds of feathers? Has anyone hunted or plucked a bird of its feathers? Discuss the origin of the feathers. Discuss laws protecting birds especially migratory birds. What do you think of these laws?

Most birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which makes it “illegal for anyone to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal regulations.” Feathers and nests from invasive species such as house sparrows, Eurasian collared doves, and starlings are appropriate and legal for this activity. Additionally, feathers collected from game species (pheasant, chukar, ducks, etc.) taken legally under hunting permits are also acceptable.

### *Introduce the Backyard Birds Mini Guide*

There are so many birds that it is hard to choose just a few to learn to identify. This mini guide shows some of the birds that we have already listed. The birds here are the ones that you will most likely see at or around your feeders or on a walk. Which birds do you recognize? Do you know how these birds sound? For instance, a chickadee has two recognizable sounds. One is “fee-bee-bee-bee.” Let’s try it together.

Let’s listen to a bird song and then see if we will learn which bird it belongs to. You can read the written description of a bird’s song or call from the field guide and see if the actual recording matches the description. Ask participants to hum or whistle or sing the bird sounds they hear. Participants can refer to the Backyard Birds Mini Guide for the names of birds.

### *Attracting Birds to Hanging Birdfeeders*

People wonder why birds don’t hang out at their feeders. What are some reasons that birds may not want to visit feeders? (Cats, wind chimes, location, the wrong food, etc.) Have you ever noticed that birds may not be on the feeder, but they may be on the ground underneath. Some birds feed on the ground and some feed only on certain seeds or foods.

‘Birds require foods with high nutritional content, especially protein and fat. A bird’s diet must fuel a metabolism that can require up to a whopping 10,000 calories a day (equivalent to a human consuming 155,000 calories). A bird’s inner furnace burns especially hot during flight and the breeding season and on the coldest days. This means birds must make highly efficient choices about what they eat. A backyard feeder is an especially efficient place to forage because it mimics what scientists call a “resource patch,” a cluster of food much like a fruit-laden apple tree. Eating is not only about nutrition but about consuming a lot of food very quickly while avoiding predators. Research has shown that given a choice between high-quality, cumbersome seeds or low-quality, easily handled seeds, birds consistently choose the latter.” —National Wildlife Federation

Let’s take a look at some birdseed. Let participants look at some cheap birdseed in ziplock bags. Can you describe what you see? Do you recognize some of the seeds? What color and shape are the seeds you don’t recognize? Sort them out and identify them. Point out milo (sorghum) and millet, in particular. Milo is a large round red seed that most birds won’t eat. Don’t buy seed with milo because it is just a filler. Millet can be red or white and attracts starlings, doves or pigeons, and sparrows. Pigeons and doves feed on the ground so it doesn’t make sense to put milo and millet in a hanging feeder.

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What seeds do you think that finches and chickadees like best—and that aren't the main ingredients of the seed that we just looked at? The seeds that have the most nutrition for these birds are sunflower seeds and niger seed (nyjer seed). Show niger seed and have participants describe it and feel it.

We are going to make a very simple feeder that is perfect for attracting finches and chickadees. We will make one together and then you can make more on your own if you want. Show a photo or video of birds feeding at a sock feeder.

We are going to take a woman's knee-hi nylon stocking. We put it in this tennis ball container or in a cup and stretch the top of the sock over the lip. Putting a small jar lid in the bottom of the sock may give the feeder a slight bit more structure and keep the seed from falling out of the bottom if the sock gets snagged on the bottom. I want each of you to put a handful or cupful of seed into the sock. How does the seed feel to you? Why is it so tiny? After each person puts seed in the sock, tie the top of the sock as close the seed as possible. You can fill it with more seed and tie another not and repeat. Wherever the sock is tied can be decorated with a colorful ribbon, but the ribbon must be small so that it does not interfere with the birds clinging to the sock or accessing the seed.

Discuss with the residents and staff a good place to hang the feeder.

### **Closure**

Have each participant share one thing that they learned during the activity. When each person tells something they learned, dub them a bonafide "bird nerd" who is not obligated to feed birds and teach others to look for birds.