

Many Birds Are International Travelers

Why do birds migrate?

In order to survive, birds need basic things such as food, water, shelter, and a place to breed. As seasons change, an area that may have been ideally suited to provide all of these necessities may no longer offer what the bird needs. Food and water supply can diminish and plant cover may dwindle. Since some bird habitats may only be suitable for part of a year, many birds have a tool that enables them to continue to survive. This tool is migration. With the power of flight, birds are able to leave areas that no longer meet their needs and travel to new places to maintain food, water, and shelter.

A very important part of migration is stopover sites. These are areas where birds can stop to rest, eat and drink, nest, and find shelter. Without these vital stopover sites, many birds cannot survive migration. Birds may use the same stopover sites year after year for nesting and replenishing themselves. If one of these stopover sites is destroyed, either by humans or by a natural occurrence, it can leave migratory birds with nowhere to rest or find shelter.

The path that birds follow when they migrate usually goes along a geographic feature such as a mountain range or a river. River corridors provide many of the needs of waterfowl as they migrate each year. They can provide quiet beaches for species such as the interior least tern to fish, drink, and replenish themselves in preparation for continued migration. Birds may fly thousands of miles during their migration just one way, and it is vital that they have places where they can stop and rest.

How can you help migrating birds?

- Protect their stopover sites!
- Create a resting place for migrating birds in your own backyard.
- Put out a bird feeder.
- Plant fruit trees.
- Keep your bird bath full of water.
- Avoid using herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides on your yard. These chemicals can be very harmful for birds. Instead of using the pesticides, just try to attract a lot of birds that can feast on the insects in your yard!

Activity - What Is It Like to Migrate?

Imagine you are a bird that has just finished migrating for the season. Tell the story of your migration including...

- Why you migrated
- How you prepared
- When you left
- Your starting point and destination
- At least one major obstacle along your way and how you over-came that obstacle
- The things that helped you on your journey
- The things that made your journey difficult

Your story should be biologically accurate and can even be the specific journey of a bird species you have learned about in class. Illustrate your journey on a map, including major landmarks that may have helped along the way.