

What You Can Do For Shorebirds!

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Grade Level: upper middle school/ high school

Duration: varies, a long-term project (generally one semester or more) for older students but perhaps just 30 minutes for younger participants.

Skills: application, discussion, problem solving, evaluation, vocabulary, presentation, team building observation, prediction, using technology

Subjects: social studies, language arts, science, and technology

Concepts

- Taking an active role in shorebird conservation requires that we apply knowledge
- Sharing our knowledge about shorebirds with others is one way we can help shorebird conservation
- Environmental stewardship is vital for the long-term conservation of our shared natural resources

Vocabulary

- problem
- projects
- responsibility
- authority
- compromise
- alternatives
- political action

Overview

Students participate in a conservation project to improve the environment and help wildlife. The situation may involve “hands-on” experiences, like planting or picking up litter, or a political campaign in which students participate in influencing the actions of others.

Objectives

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify a local wildlife or habitat problem.
- Suggest ways they can help solve or at least lessen the problem.
- Identify at least one other activity they can get involved in to help shorebird conservation.

Introduction

Perhaps one of the most powerful environmental lessons a student can learn is that he or she does have the power to make a difference. For some, all they need to understand this lesson is one positive experience. A good experience not only gives them the confidence to participate in conservation and stewardship projects, but it also teaches them the tools of planning, presentation, design, and follow through.

If your students have difficulty thinking of a local project, offer them some of the suggestions below to get them thinking. Check with your local land-use planners, natural resource agencies, volunteer organizations, or local environmental or hunting clubs for other ideas.

Conservation Project Examples

Initiate or Participate in a Wetland Water Quality Testing Program

There are several programs available:

- Adopt a Stream: <http://www.streamkeeper.org>
- Adopt a Wetland: There are numerous state and federal agencies involved in region-specific programs. Do a search on the World Wide Web for an Adopt a Wetland program in your state.
- Adopt a Watershed: <http://www.adopt-a-watershed.org>

Initiate a Recycling Program in Your School

Help preserve wildlife resources by reducing the demand for mineral resources often found in wildlife habitats.

Plan a Litter Clean-up Day

This might focus on your own school grounds or an important shorebird habitat. Advertise your efforts in your local school and community newspapers.

Create a Wetland or Grassland Plan

Map the wetlands and grasslands around your school or local community. Evaluate their functions. Are they being protected from polluting run-off, pesticide spraying, littering, disturbing recreation? If not, create a plan that offers solutions to these problems.

- Contact your local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office to learn more about the Schoolyard Habitats program or go to <http://partners.fws.gov/OurPartners/schools.htm>

Propose a Wildlife Enhancement Project

If there are no wetland or grassland habitats around your school or in your community, can you find areas where they might be created? Is there a stream or beach that needs improvement? Propose your suggestion for a wildlife enhancement project to the appropriate government agency. Grants may be available from local civic groups, government organizations, or sport-fishing organizations to help you. To get more positive publicity and support, develop your project around a theme such as Arbor Day, Earth Day, or International Migratory Bird Day.

Develop an Information Program

Educate others in your community about the danger litter is to local wildlife and shorebirds. Address local wetland problems. Bring attention to threats to the shorebirds of your area. Whatever the conservation topic, make sure you let people know what they can do to help. Create informational posters, flyers, displays and newspaper articles.

Develop a Wildlife Calendar

Focus on a local wetland or grassland, wildlife observation spot, or park. Interview people in the community; or make your own observations to determine when, and which, species of migratory birds migrate through, feed, nest, and roost in the area. Present this information in a wildlife calendar and post it at the site.

Materials

- This will vary with the project your class selects

Procedure

1. Have the class brainstorm a list of activities on the school grounds or in the community that may be negatively impacting wildlife or, more specifically, shorebirds. Some possible answers are: litter, spraying pesticides that kill the “pest” but perhaps affect other plants and animals too, and removing food and cover plants.

Note: It may also be appropriate to consider helping with habitat-improvement projects identified by the local community or participating in ongoing conservation projects.

2. Select one of the problems to work on--something the students think they could realistically handle and do something constructive about in the time they have available. If they have difficulty coming to a consensus, allow them an opportunity to speak in support of their choices. If necessary, have the class vote and select the project with the most support.

Note: Assist students in selecting a project that is realistic, constructive, and possible. If not, the students may experience an activity that contributes to their thinking that they “cannot do.” Encourage community involvement to help tackle a potentially large project, and give students an opportunity to learn from others and about other points of view. If adults take part, make sure that students are still allowed to take leadership roles and “own” their plans and actions. Through proper evaluation, students can learn from failures, as well as from successes.

3. Once the problem has been selected, ask the students to work alone or in small groups to generate ideas for possible solutions to the problem and ways to implement the project. Each individual or small group should come up with a plan, including written descriptions and sketches (perhaps in the form of a “flow chart” with arrows indicating the order of procedure) illustrating how to accomplish the project, step-by-step.
4. Have the groups present their plans to the rest of the students. Students may ask questions of the groups. Once all the plans have been presented, ask the students to select the plan that seems the most (a) constructive, (b) realistic, (c) helpful to wildlife and (d) likely to make a lasting contribution.
5. Have the students select one or more alternate plans in case their first choice is not acceptable to school or community leaders. Check that the selections are well thought out, include time lines, and are complete.
6. Once a plan and backup alternatives have been selected, have the students select a delegation to present their proposal to the school principal or the appropriate authority. Remember to include anyone who would be physically or officially involved (maintenance people, ground keepers, school board, etc.). Plan a “dry run” in front of a test audience and respond to any audience questions that might come up. Make adjustments in the presentations as needed.



7. Have the students make an appointment to present their proposal and then report back to their classmates. If their plan is accepted, they should know whom to contact next in order to successfully complete their project. Once they have all the necessary permissions, the students should begin work.
8. Once the project is complete, ask the students to analyze their results. Did things work out the way they wanted? Were there any surprises or unforeseen problems? How might the students or plans have been more effective?

Additional Activities



Cultural Connections

Through the Shorebird E-mail Network, your class can connect with another class along the flyway to share what it is doing to help conserve habitat for shorebirds and other wildlife species.

How To Do a Community Service Project

Document the entire process of developing and completing a community service project on video or photographs for other students. Include the mistakes you made, as well as the successes. Submit your video/pictures to the Shorebird Sister Schools Website <http://sssp.fws.gov>

