

Introduction

Neotropical migratory birds are birds with two homes. They spend our winter in Mexico, Central America, South America, and/or the Caribbean Islands and come to the U.S. and/or Canada to breed during our spring and summer. Through their annual journeys between their summer and winter homes, these birds connect distant places and, by extension, the people who live there.



It's amazing to think that the tiny ruby-throated hummingbird you could see sipping nectar in your schoolyard one spring day spent the winter in Mexico or Central America. Or that the wood thrush singing its flute-like song in a nearby forest flew thousands of miles from its winter home, which could be in a forest outside a Mayan village in Guatemala, or on the slopes of a volcano in Nicaragua. The ruby-throated hummingbird and wood thrush are just two examples of the over 200 species of birds that connect Latin America and the United States through their migrations.

As part of the Bridging the Americas/*Unidos por las Aves* program, your class will have the opportunity to learn about these birds with two homes and to communicate with a class in one of the distant places where "our" birds go for part of the year.

What follows is a short and flexible, interdisciplinary unit on migratory birds for grades 2 to 4 which is aligned with specific Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, as well as Next Generation Science Standards, and Virginia State Standards of Learning for English, Science, History and Social Studies (see Appendix 1).

This unit is intended to be completed during the months of September, October and November, leading up to a December 10 due date for mailing in the materials your class has prepared to have sent to your Latin American partner class. In the spring, as the migratory birds are returning to our area, your class should receive a packet from your partners in return. Your class may also have the opportunity to communicate with your partner class via video-calls or email.

Unit overview

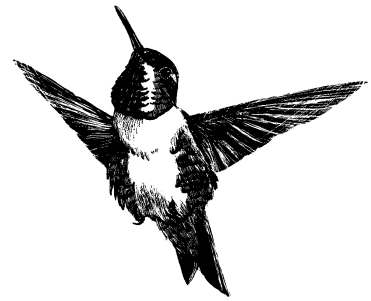
September and October: Exploring the wonder and challenges of bird migration

1. Engage students in thinking and learning about bird migration by reading aloud the children's book *Flute's Journey: The Life of a Wood Thrush* by Lynne Cherry. This book tells the realistic tale of the first year in the life of a wood thrush that migrates from Maryland to Costa Rica and back again (grade level equivalent for independent reading is 5.5; Lexile measure 1030).

Two lesson plan approaches to using this book in your classroom are provided, one for grade 2 and the other for grades 3 and 4. Through *Flute's Journey*, students will practice reading comprehension skills while learning what the journey is like for a migrating bird, about the hazards they face, and how people's actions can have a positive or negative effect on the survival of birds.

An alternative engagement activity for grade 2 Spanish immersion classes entitled *Is this Nicaragua?* is available in the Bridging the Americas online teacher resources on the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's web site.

2. In the *Great Migration Challenge* game, students participate in a migration simulation to learn about the challenges and dangers birds face, and brainstorm actions that people can take to help birds survive.
3. Explore with your students the question of why some birds migrate through a lesson entitled *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* Students will learn about the foods different kinds of birds eat, and how seasonal weather changes affect the availability of those foods. Based on this information, students can hypothesize as to whether certain bird species of our area are resident (that is, stay here year-round) or migratory.
4. Assign or have students select a migratory bird species that breeds in your area and winters where your partner class is located. They will research and write about this species, illustrate it, and show on a map of the Americas the range in which their species is found during the breeding and non-breeding seasons.



The students' research worksheets and bird illustrations will be compiled to send to the Latin American partner class. This compilation can be in the form of a class book.

November: Cross-cultural connections

5. Explore with your students what it is like where your partner class lives using printed materials and a PowerPoint presentation that are provided, and involve your students in writing a letter to send to your partner class. Students will also participate in answering eight questions found on the "Tell Your Partner Class About Yourself" form which will also be sent.

If students want to share more info about themselves as individuals, they can each complete an "All about Me" form that is provided or create a visual collage of photos or drawings that reveal important details about themselves without English words.

6. By December 10, mail the following to the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center in the 12" X 15" envelope that's provided:
 - o Class book or other compilation of the bird illustrations, range maps, and research done by the students

- Class letter of introduction and a few photos of you and your students
- A completed "Tell Your Partner Class about Yourselves" form
- Optional: "All about Me" forms or collages

If your class is partnered with a class that has internet access, you will have the opportunity to have one or more video calls or internet exchanges with them between mid-February and the end of your school year.

If all goes according to plan, you will receive a packet in return from your partner class in mid- May.

