

Why count birds at Neary Lagoon?

One of the primary activities we do out at the Lagoon is an informal bird count. Our objectives for the students are to:

- Practice observation skills
- Gain knowledge about which species live at Neary Lagoon.
- Learn to record scientific data.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where birds are and what they are doing. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. Taking regular snapshots of North American bird populations (i.e. the species, variety, and number) is vital to understanding and protecting our winged friends. It helps scientists to find patterns, discover new questions and insights, and gain a better overall understanding of an ecosystem's health and stability.

The following pages contain the sheets we use to do our bird-count at Neary Lagoon. We focus on the most numerous, easy to count species. This bird-count is geared towards beginning bird-watchers. We aren't as concerned with accuracy, so much as that the students get an impression of who lives at Neary Lagoon, and what it's like to collect data.

What are our expectations for the bird-count? The bird-count is really fueled by the energy of the students. We go over bird identification skills during the classroom presentation, as well as how to make tally marks when they see a bird. But as soon as we get out into the field, the bird-count sheets are in the hands of the students, and how in-depth the bird-count becomes is up to them!

What can teachers do to make sure this activity goes well? Look over the list of bird species on the bird-count sheets and review the species with the students, so they will know them well when they are out in the field. This is very helpful!

What happens to the bird-count data? At the end of the tour, we briefly review the bird-count data. Then, the data sheets go back to the natural history museum to be inputted into the computer and analyzed. The sheets then come back to the teacher in the mail, to be used in any way the teacher sees fit.

How can I use the bird-count data in the classroom? There are many ways that teachers can use the data to facilitate math or science lessons. Since the class collects two data sets, this can be a great way to introduce averages. Also, this can be a natural way to introduce making graphs or charts.