

# Feed the birds

## What types of food do different garden birds prefer?

### INTRODUCTION

Glass is an excellent material to use as a bird feeder as in addition to being abundant and recyclable, it is inert, so won't harbour dangerous chemicals and can easily be cleaned to maintain fresh supplies for the birds.

In this activity, younger children could build or simply place feeders around the school grounds and observe the birds that feed. Older children will build a bird feeder from a recycled glass ramekin dish and could investigate which food is the most popular with the local bird population, linking to the shape of their beak. Prior to building the bird feeder, pupils should have conducted a survey of birds found in the school grounds.

### LEARNING INTENTIONS



- To be able to explain the relationship between the shape and size of the bird's beak and the food it eats
- To be able to name and identify a variety of common birds



### WHAT TO DO:

Today we are going to be ecologists

1. Use pictures of common birds to allow children to discuss local bird populations and beak types before encouraging them to plan an investigation of popular food types for the feeders they will create.
2. Explain to the children that they are going to make feeders and investigate bird behaviour at the feeders.
3. Show the children the resources for making a bird feeder and demonstrate the construction (see images) and support groups to make these.
4. Discuss the materials the bird feeder is made from and how it needs to be regularly cleaned to prevent birds passing disease to each other. Glass can be sterilised by heating in an oven or washing in very hot water, making it a good choice for the feeders.
5. Position feeders in the school grounds. The positioning of the feeders will need careful consideration as they will need to be viewed from a distance, so the birds are not disturbed.
6. Discuss ways of gathering data about the birds, e.g. watching birds at different times of day; tallying visits to the feeder over a fixed amount of time; recording the amount of food left in a location at the end of the day; taking pictures of birds on feeders, etc.

### RESOURCES (PER GROUP)

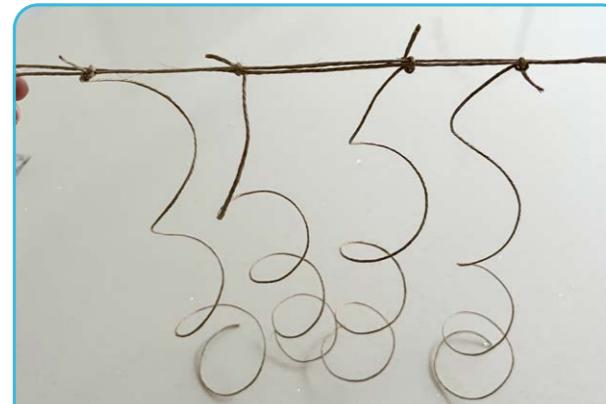


- Glass ramekin
- String
- Marker pen
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Plastic plate or container lid pre-drilled with 4 holes or provide a bradawl and block of wood if the children are drilling the holes themselves. Using a piece of masking tape over the plastic may help to prevent cracking
- 4 plastic straws (non-bendy)
- Different types of bird food

### To make the feeder:



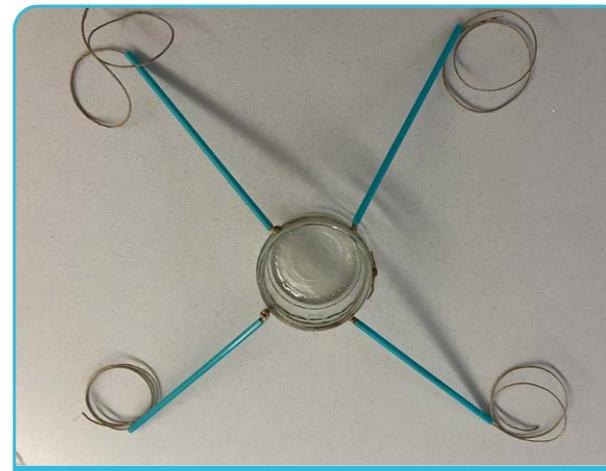
1. Cut a piece of string that will wrap around the top of a ramekin twice. You need to allow extra for tying a knot. Double the string and lay out on the table.



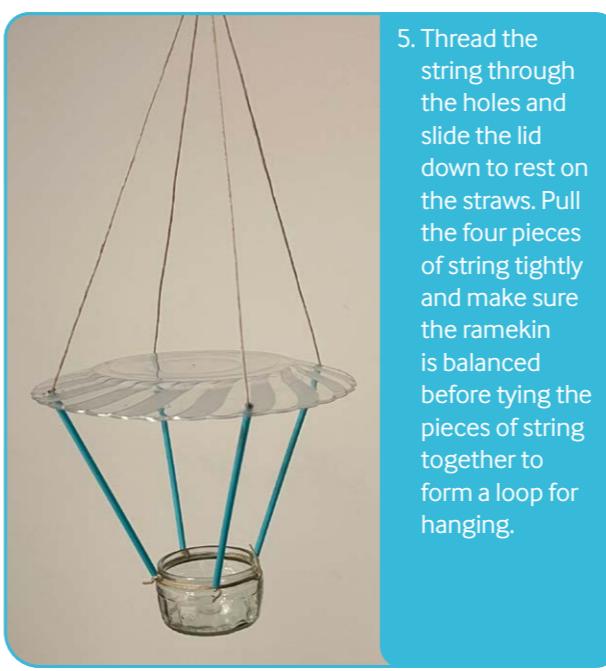
2. Cut 4 x 60cm pieces of string and tie these onto the doubled piece of string. Space them out leaving a gap at each end to allow for tying to the ramekin.



3. Tie the doubled string around the glass ramekin, ensuring that it is tightly knotted.



4. Space the 4 pieces of string evenly and slide a straw onto each piece.



5. Thread the string through the holes and slide the lid down to rest on the straws. Pull the four pieces of string tightly and make sure the ramekin is balanced before tying the pieces of string together to form a loop for hanging.

Note: If the children are drilling their own holes for the lid, make sure that they mark the position first. If you are using a lid with a groove, add extra holes around the side for drainage.

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the local birds usually eat?
2. What do bird seed packs (the type you might buy) contain?
3. Where are the best locations for hanging feeders?  
Why do you think this?
4. Do you think all species birds eat the same type of food?  
Why do you think this?
5. Why do you think beak shape might determine what food a bird eats?

## KEY VOCABULARY



Beak	Adaptation
Food	Organism
Habitat	Reproduce
Environment	Generation
Food chain	Natural selection

## EXTENSION / FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

Carry out investigations into bird behaviour.

Investigate which bird seed is the most popular in the local bird population – you could weigh food placed in the feeder or tally visits to the feeders for a given length of time. Compare with an earlier survey of birds seen in the same location to see what impact the type of food offered has on visits.

Investigate the best location for bird feeders in the school grounds.

Investigate whether birds prefer to feed at certain times of the day.  
It may be helpful to use a camera to monitor a feeding station.

Children could grow their own bird food, e.g. sunflowers, thistles, teasels and berry plants.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (IF REQUIRED):

- Binoculars
- Bird identification book/chart
- Pencil and clipboard
- Printed recording sheet

ANTICIPATED ACTIVITY TIME: Building feeder: **45 MINS**

Observation of feeders: **2 WEEKS**