

The Project Approach to Learning at

RisingOaks
Early Learning

| John Sweeney

Project Name: Birds

Age Group: Toddler (15-30 months)

Project Start Date: May 5, 2021

Project End Date: July 22, 2021



RisingOaks
Early Learning

Growing minds through play

Background

Our bird project began May 5, 2021 and ended July 22, 2021. The age range of the 16 children who participated are 15 months to 30 months. The educators that led and expanded the project were Debbie M., RECE, Emily R., RECE and Sierra R., RECE.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

Jake (2y.) had always shown an interest in birds. While on the playground he would immediately stop his play to observe the birds flying by. As spring approached, we began seeing more and more birds in and around the playground. This sparked an interest in several of the children. Debbie posted a few photos of birds on the closet door and the children immediately gathered around, curious and interested to learn more. Questions immediately began coming, and Gavin (2y. 5mo.) asked “what bird, Debbie?”. With the help of the toddlers, the educators then compiled lists of “What do we know?”, “What do we want to know?”, and “Who can we ask?”



What do we know?

- Birds fly (*Flapping arms*- Jake)
- “Feathers”- Gavin
- “Eggs”- Gavin
- *Eat* “Bugs”- Jake
- Noisy – All children
- “Knocking” (Hearing a woodpecker) - Jessa (2y. 3mo.)
- “Beaks”- Jessa
- “Peacock! Flamingo!”- Gavin
- “Blue Jay”- Jake

What do we want to know?

- Where do birds live?
- What do birds eat?
- How big are birds?
- How many eggs can a bird lay?
- Different kinds of birds
- How does a bird make a nest?
- Can all birds fly?

Who can we ask?

- A book
- Birdwatcher
- Google
- Shannon (Bird owner)
- Laurel Creek – Nature Centre
- Ornithologist (Bird specialist)
- Nikolas' (2y. 1mo.) Papa (Bird owner)

Phase 2: Developing the Project

In order to gain a better understanding of what the toddlers and their families already knew about birds, Emily created and sent home a quick survey for each of them to fill out. We asked that they be returned as soon as possible. We received 13 surveys back! Below are the results from the survey.

Do you have a pet bird?

YES: 0, NO: 13

Does your family enjoy bird watching?

YES: 12, NO: 1

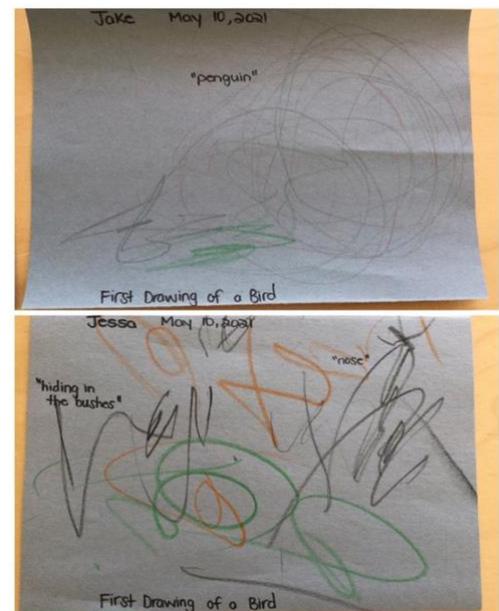
Do you know someone who works with birds?

YES: 1, NO: 12

Do you have a bird feeder at your home?

YES: 6, NO: 7

The toddlers continued to display their knowledge of birds by creating their first drawing of their interpretation of a bird! Several of the children verbalized what they were creating on their paper, such as “eyes” and a “penguin.”





While outside as the Toddlers were digging in the sand, they came across a worm! We explained that birds love to eat juicy, slimy worms. Blake (1y. 7mo.), Alex (2y. 5mo.), Jake, Ksenia (2y. 5mo.) and Jessa were very interested in holding the worm.



While the children were exploring in the classroom one morning Emily and a few children came across a potato bug. Emily gently picked it up and placed it onto a shallow drum so all of the children could safely observe. Jake, Adam (2y. 4mo.) and Jessa all worked together to feed the hungry potato bug. Jake offered it a cupcake, Adam offered it a tomato and Jessa offered it a banana. The children giggled as they pretended to feed the bug. When the bug would roll onto its back, it needed help to turn back over. "Uh oh" they would all say. "Help" Jessa said concerned as she observed the potato bug wiggling on its back. When the children finished exploring, we brought the bug outside for the birds to eat. This encouraged further discussion about how birds love to eat bugs, grass, seeds and flowers



We decided to use Cheerios to make small bird feeders that we could hang from the branches of the trees outside our classroom window. The children enhanced their fine motor skills as they laced the Cheerios onto the pipe cleaners.

While on a walk to the pond to find ducks and geese, we gathered pinecones to make more bird feeders. Sierra covered the pinecones with shortening and encouraged the children to scoop up bird seed with their fingers to cover the pine cones. The children explored their senses as they buried their fingers in the birdseed and felt the different textures. Some of the children furthered their sensory exploration by even tasting the bird seed!



Emily expanded this sensory interest by creating individual bird seed sensory bins for the children. She incorporated cupcake liners, pom poms, and spoons for the children to explore however they like. Ksena placed her pom poms in the cupcake liners and called them “eggs”. Then, she sprinkled some of the seeds onto them so they could “eat”.

After plenty of discussion about how birds like to eat bugs, we implemented a dramatic play and fine motor activity that allowed us to better understand what and how birds eat! Emily provided clothespins and small plastic bugs, where the children used their fine motor skills to open up the clothespin and “eat” the bugs! It opened a further discussion when Jessa claimed that birds only eat

worms. Together we referred to the iPad to find out that small birds like worms and small bugs, while larger birds like to eat small rodents such as mice.

Sierra brought the curriculum outside when she introduced feathers to help identify the different parts of a bird. The children used the feathers to creatively express themselves as they manipulated them into tools to paint with. Adam and Blake decided to explore their senses as they splashed in the water and made handprints on the pavement, instead of painting with the feathers. Wyatt (2y. 1mo.) enhanced his pincer grasp as he pinched the feather between his index finger and thumb. He enjoyed observing the marks that the wet feather left on the pavement. Huda (1y. 10mo.) worked on her social skills as she built up the courage to join her friends and began splashing her fingers in the warm water.



Myra (1y. 11mo.) expressed her creativity during this activity as she used feathers as well as her hands to create markings on the pavement. The children continued to learn about different parts of a bird by participating in several different activities. The children painted paper plates with blue paint so we could create “Blue Jays”! They were provided with the different parts of a bird (eyes, beak, feet, feathers) and were encouraged to create their bird! The children continued to expand their vocabulary skills as they were encouraged to label and repeat the different parts! Another day while outside, Sierra brought two photos of birds (an Eagle and a Blue Jay). The children gathered and worked together to label the different parts of a bird we see! Gavin, Jessa, Wyatt, Ksenia and Adam were very helpful in labelling the bird. They each identified “eyes” and “beak” and were even able to label the correct bird as an “Eagle”. While continuing to label, we learned where the bird’s “wing” is and that they use their wings to fly! We also learned that the top of the birds’ head is called the “crown”.



While on a walk one day, we found several things to help further the development of our project. First, we stopped at the pond and found a sign labeling all of the different wildlife within the area! It showed photos of several different birds that have been observed close by. We ventured off into the forest and while there, we found a bird house, an eagle's nest, an owl's nest and even a feather laying on the ground! This led to the discussion about where birds live!

Debbie brought in an old bird's nest that was at her house. She shared it with the children and allowed them to explore what it's made of and what it's for! After observing and feeling the nest, we learned that birds build their nests with many different materials such as sticks, straw, grass, and unfortunately sometimes even litter. We found a piece of plastic in this bird's nest!

To continue learning about where birds live, Sierra read a story to the class called "Nests, Nests, Nests"! The story taught us that different birds make different types of nests, but that all the birds lay their eggs in their nest and sit on their eggs to keep their babies warm. After reading the story, the children engaged in a creative activity where they each got to create their own nests out of paper plates and paper strips. Some children chose to just glue a few pieces of paper, where others filled their whole plates! Once their nests had dried, we brought them outside along with some plastic eggs. We were curious how the children would engage. Ksenia and Gavin placed their eggs in their nests and told us they were "keeping the babies warm". When one of the eggs cracked on the ground, Jessa said "Oh no, baby!"

Debbie introduced a special song to the Toddlers called “5 little Chickadees”. This song helped us learn that there isn’t just one bird, but several different types of birds! The children loved waiting for their turn to remove a chickadee off the board and sit with it. When the song was finished, they all ran back to place their chickadee back onto the bird house.

5 Little Chickadees

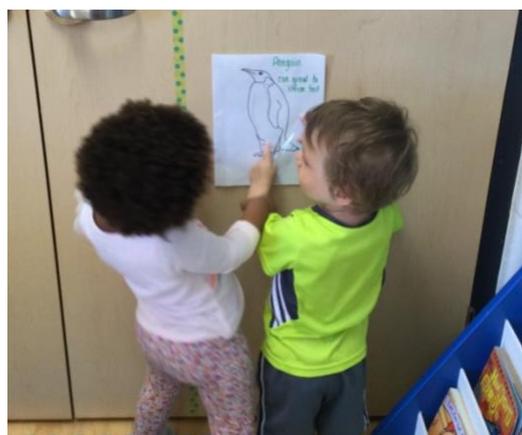
Five little chickadees knocking at the door
One flew away and then there were four.
Chickadee, chickadee, happy today.
Chickadee, chickadee, fly away.

Four little chickadees singing in a tree
One flew away and then there were three.
Chickadee, chickadee, happy today.
Chickadee, chickadee, fly away.

Three little chickadees didn't know what to do
One flew away and then there were two.
Chickadee, chickadee, happy today.
Chickadee, chickadee, fly away.

Two little chickadees sitting in the sun
One flew away leaving only one.
Chickadee, chickadee, happy today.
Chickadee, chickadee, fly away.

One little chickadees not having any fun
She flew away and then there were none.
Chickadee, chickadee, happy today.
Chickadee, chickadee, fly away



As we continued to expand on their interests, and as the toddlers became more aware about the different birds in our area, we decided to go birdwatching! Emily encouraged the children to decorate their own paper towel roll, then it was cut in half and turned into binoculars! We went out to the field to see what birds we could find. Each of the children had their own set of binoculars that they were able to use. As the children looked through their binoculars, they told us what they could see. "Airplane!" Jake told us as he looked up into the sky. "I see Sierra" said Gavin as he looked through his binoculars towards his educators. While some children were not interested in their binoculars, there were others, such as Jake, that didn't put them down for the rest of the day!

To continue the expansion of knowledge on different types of birds, Debbie created a book showing and labelling several different kinds! The book was left on the bookshelf for individual exploration, but we also took it out during group time so we could talk about the different birds! Myra (1y. 11mo.) and Ksenia loved flipping through the pages and labelling each different bird (Flamingo, Turkey, Peacock, etc.). In order to further learn about these different birds, Debbie put a comparison chart up on the wall so we could visualize their difference of sizes. We learned that the tallest bird is an Ostrich, and the smallest bird is a Hummingbird!

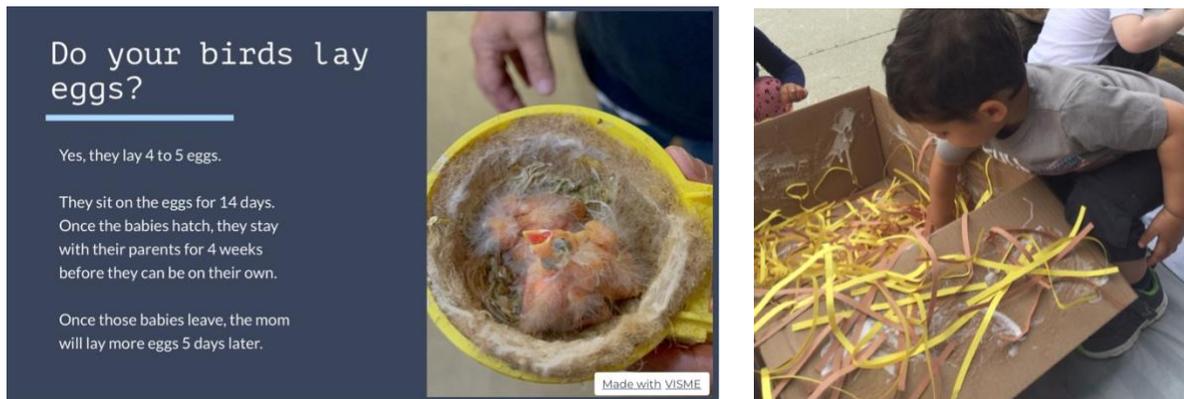
In order to further grasp the knowledge of different birds, Emily sang the song "Sleeping Bunnies" but would change the animal. We "flew" like birdies, "waddled" like penguins, and even "soared" like an eagle! The children loved waddling the most. Throughout free play, Jake and Jessa loved waddling around the room, saying "waddle, waddle, waddle". Debbie introduced a fun dramatic play experience where the children got to practice their waddling! We placed small and large balls between the toddler's legs and they were able to practice waddling! Luka (2y. 1mo.) was extremely proud of himself when he was able to waddle around the room without losing the ball! After this experience was introduced, we noticed a few toddlers repeating the activity on their own during outside time!

As the project began coming to a close, it was a good time to complete our final drawings of a bird! Though their creative skills don't accurately represent their new knowledge and path of learning, the children vocalized their drawings as they create them. Jessa said "Oh wow a bird!" as she pointed to her drawing. Gavin told us he was "Making a bird" and a "face"!



Phase 3: Concluding the Project

We knew the project would come to a close once the older children moved to Preschool in July, as they were the main children interested and engaged in the activities. In order to wrap it up before they headed off, Emily helped the children make a large bird's nest for our classroom! We used a large cardboard box and the same paper strips from our small nests. Outside, the children worked together to cover the box with glue and paper strips. Once the nest had dried, we placed eggs in it one day during sleep room and when the children woke we told them that a bird laid eggs in our nest! Luka pushed the box closed and Gavin said "stay warm"!



For our final event for the project, we invited Nikolas' Papa to do a zoom call with our class. We learned through our survey and through parent interaction that his Papa owns several birds and works closely with them each day. We thought it would be a great opportunity for family engagement! Unfortunately, Papa works during day time hours but Mom and Dad were kind enough to create a slideshow answering several of our questions! We even got to see photos of the birds that he owns! The slideshow was shown to the group and then turned into a book that was available on our class bookshelf for several weeks after. The children continue to look back at it and remember the birds!

Teacher Reflections

It was such a fun and interesting experience facilitating a bird project in the Toddler room. Initially, I was unsure how much information the children would be able to grasp. By the end of the project, I was absolutely shocked by the information that not only the toddlers learned, but myself as well! I think the most rewarding experience from the whole project was when we got to spend time birdwatching in the field. The children immersed themselves into the experience, and learned how to become independent observers. The children were not only excited to find birds in the sky, but they got to verbalize absolutely everything they saw through their binoculars! It was even more exciting when the project concluded and the children continued to use their new knowledge in their everyday play! – Sierra R., RECE

I have been involved in a toddler project about birds in the past and I've learnt that each group's interests and ideas are different as well as how they respond to the activities we provide so it's just as much fun the second time as it was the first. We are lucky enough to be close to the forest so we

were able to use our environment as a third teacher. We had the perfect location to do some bird watching, we found a bird house and a nest, and even used the pine cones we collected on a walk to make bird feeders. I am surprised how valuable the books from our class were and how much we used them during the project. The children were very engaged in listening to stories, labelling the pictures and several discussions and activities were the result of what we had seen in our books. Gavin and Jake seemed to be the leaders of this project and their enthusiasm was contagious! – Debbie M., RECE

I really enjoyed co-learning with the Toddlers during this project. It was interesting to learn about the different foods each species of birds can eat. Being located so close to the forest, it gave the children and educators several opportunities to expand their curiosity of birds, through bird watching, pine cone collecting for feeders and also being able to observe a variety of bird's nests. I was surprised at how much information was retained by the children during this project. I now have a better understanding of the importance of project approach in the early years, as it absolutely improves language/vocabulary, knowledge and various other areas of developmental growth.

Emily R., RECE