

Project WildLIVE – Wild Bird Project (Saw-whet Owl banding) Educator Resource Sheet

Post-video Activity suggestion:

To imitate how different sizes of mist nets are used to capture different sizes of birds, assign an activity where your students find and use different household materials to sort items by size. For example, a fishing net is more practical to hold larger items when compared to a butterfly net or a kitchen sieve, whereas a kitchen sieve is more practical for catching pieces of small things like popcorn or rice. Students can be as creative or as simple as they choose in their item exploration. Explain to your students that just like the different size household materials they found, there are different size mist nets to capture different size birds. To capture small birds like warblers you need nets with smaller space between the net threads, but to capture larger birds like raptors or owls, you need nets with large spaces between net threads.

Owls have some amazing characteristics and adaptations that allow them to survive in the wild. These characteristics, like size, shape, color, and more, can vary depending on the species of owl because each serves a unique purpose for the owl in its lifestyle and habitat. Students can try this fun and creative activity to explore how different owl characteristics help those animals survive in the wild. Create a list of specific characteristics that owls have and assign a number to each that corresponds to the numbers on a die. Have students role the die to create their own owl species with a mix of unique characteristics and have them explain (in their own creative way) why these characteristics help the owl survive. For example, I could role a die and create an owl who is small, dark-colored, and has tufted ears. I could hypothesize that the reason this owl is small is because it lives and hunts primarily in the forest, where it has to navigate flying around branches and vegetation; it is dark-colored because during the day it roosts in dark green pine trees, where its color helps it blend in and hide from daytime predators; it has tufted ears because it can raise these ear tufts to help it blend into the pointed sticks and vegetation around it. Students can have fun creating owl species with “natural” or “unnatural” characteristics (like purple feathers for camouflage in a meadow of purple flowers or extra-long legs to help in running across land). Let them be creative! Encourage students to draw pictures of their owl species and share them with the class along with explanations how their unique characteristics serve the owl in its behavior, habitat, and lifestyle.

How your students can get involved at home:

Encourage your students or class to learn about birds or start birding! Bird conservation starts with people (especially youth) being passionate about birds. Explore <https://www.audubon.org/> for information about getting into birding, species ID information, and more. Check out free bird ID apps like Merlin Bird ID and encourage students to participate in valuable citizen science by cataloging their bird sightings in eBird (website and app).

If you are interested in visiting Linwood Springs Research Station to see and learn more about Northern Saw-whet owl banding, evening community programs for kids, adults, and



families are hosted in the fall. Here is the link to the website for more information and to make reservations for a program: http://www.raptorresearch.com/?fbclid=IwAR0QUBa8B0i4-cggRTEVz4tWWcK28UkpHu_DhutPpW05qBdEONd47fl7tWg and https://www.facebook.com/LinwoodSpringsResearchStation/about/?ref=page_internal

Why is this research important?

Like all bird banding, owl banding is helpful to the protection of the owl species in question because it provides biologists with data that can be used to justify conservation actions and protection. These data can indicate the overall health of the population and population trends from year to year as well as migration times and routes. This can greatly aid biologists in determining which areas and habitats to protect and when. Banding data can also be very helpful in discovering the average lifespan of a species in the wild and how far / fast individuals can travel from where they were first banded to where they were recaptured. For more information on why bird banding is important, visit https://www.usgs.gov/centers/pwrc/science/why-do-we-band-birds?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects or <https://www.manomet.org/publication/owl-banding-fall-2020-update/>

Resources for further learning:

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/northern-saw-whet-owl>

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Saw-whet_Owl/id

More about Saw-Whet Owl banding: <http://www.projectowl.net/>

How owls fly silently: <https://www.audubon.org/news/the-silent-flight-owls-explained>