

Seed Eaters Undercover!

Essential Question:

What do animals eat?

Are seed eaters specific to certain seeds?

At a Glance:

Learners will investigate the eating habits of seed eating animals on their school site by setting up a seed eating station in order to provide food for the seed eaters on their site.

Learners will observe the food that is eaten each day in order to determine the types of seed eaters that live on their site.

Background Information:

Different animals (insects, birds and mammals) have very different feeding habits. Some only eat seeds, some eat other insects, and some eat dead animals. Some eat more at night while others eat during the day. Still, others prefer to eat in the open while others eat in covered areas. When people eat fruits and vegetables, we are often eating seeds as well. Other seeds that you may not consider eating are grass seeds. Wheat is a common grass where the seeds are used to make food for people. In this activity, learners will explore animals' seed eating behaviors. Seeds not only provide an important source of food for humans, but also for other animals. Some animals that eat seeds include: birds, squirrels and mice.



Procedure:

1. Learners will devise an experiment to investigate the seed eating habits of different animals. Place some seeds in the open, under a piece of cardboard or newspaper, and in a box with an entry hole. Check stations every day for 1 (or more) weeks. Record the number and kinds of seeds left at each station before and after animals have had an opportunity to visit. Look for signs of different animals such as tracks and animal poop.
2. Put equal numbers of the same kind of seeds in containers with different entry holes (big or small; covered by a flap of fabric or open, on the top, bottom or side of containers) to compare how quickly the seeds disappear.
3. Put a known number of seeds in piles of different materials (ie. twigs, leaves, pebbles) to see how many disappear from each and how quickly they disappear. Compare this with the disappearance of the same seeds when they are not buried.

CAUTION!

Location: School site

Objectives: Learners will

- 1) investigate eating habits of seed eating animals on their school site

Skills: communication, observation, listening, analysis

Supplies:

- small cardboard boxes (or toilet paper tubes or food boxes)
- seeds of different sizes (shelled and unshelled sunflower seeds, wheat, millet, peanuts etc.)

Subjects: science

Time: 20 minutes

- Use small quantities of baits so that animals don't become dependent on the food you are providing, and so you don't attract foreign animals to the site.
- Never feed any animal directly by hand.
- Never approach or touch a wild animal.

Adapted from Eco-Inquiry by Kathleen Hogan, Kendall Hunt publishing, 1994

Discussion/Assessment:

What animals visited the bait?

What did the animals eat?

Did you test a good sample of seed eaters?

What factors affected the presence or absence of seed eaters?

Food Production Department

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Team Members: _____

Date: _____ Time we set out our experiment: _____

Location for our experiment _____

Time we revisited our experiment site: _____

HYPOTHESIS: I think that _____

Sketch of our Experiment:

Variables to control:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Results: _____