

Exploring Animal Adaptations

Measuring Wingspans

It shouldn't come as a surprise that all birds have wings—However, what is much less commonly realized is that birds have wingspans that come in an extreme variety of sizes. A bird's *wingspan* is the measurement from the very tip of one wing to the very tip of the other wing, and it can range anywhere from a few inches to over 10 feet! Wingspan and wing shape are physical adaptations that affect how a bird flies. Long, narrow wings are stable in the air and help a bird to fly long distances at steady speed. Short, broad wings give birds the ability to quickly change direction. In this activity, we will compare the wingspans of different birds and see how our own wingspans measure up!

Material List

- Ruler
- Construction paper
- Tape
- Scissors
- Decorating materials
- Enough room for children to spread their arms out

Instructions

1. Divide the class into groups of 2 or 3, depending on the amount of students.
2. Have the kids take turns spreading their arms out wide on either side of their bodies.
3. The other members of the group should measure the wingspan of the student, starting at the very tip of the fingers on one hand to the very tip of the fingers on the other hand. Make sure they write the number down.
4. Once each member has had his or her wingspan measured, hand out pieces of construction paper and scissors to the groups. Have the children cut the paper into roughly 1-2 inch wide strips and tape them end-to-end to create one long strip the length of their wingspan.
5. If time and supplies permits, allow the kids to decorate their wingspan and hang them around the classroom.
6. Now assign each group a different bird from the attached chart and have them create wingspans for their bird. Make sure they label their wingspan so not to get our birds confused!
7. Ask the groups to come together and arrange their bird wingspans by size. They will notice the extreme variety between the lengths of each bird's wingspan. Ask the kids to brainstorm some reasons why each bird might have their respective wingspans.

Bird Wingspans



Blue Jay
15 inches



Red Tail Hawk
4 feet 3 inches



Golden Eagle
8 feet 2 inches



Great American Pelican
11 feet 9.6 inches



Hummingbird
4 inches



Cardinal
10 inches