

# ***KIDS and the WONDER of BIRDS*** by Dana Richter

Kids love birds! They are naturally drawn to the bright colors and patterns of their feathers. How do birds fly like that? -- so quick and so high! What do they see from up there? Wherever kids go they can hear the songs and calls of birds. I remember the first bird I drew in grade school -- it was a meadowlark sitting on a fence post. I was fascinated with its colors and its melodious song. To me, the meadowlark in the farm fields and pastures was the song of spring! Kids and birds -- a natural and wonderful combination, indeed!

I gave a slide show about birds to elementary classes at the E.B. Holman School west of Houghton. Some of the children learned for the very first time that there is an activity such as bird-watching. That in itself was worth the drive out early in the morning through a snowstorm! The kids gave their undivided attention to the pictures of birds. I tried to show them simple but memorable things about birds. I put four pennies in a child's hand and said, "this is how much a chickadee weighs," and had them pass the pile of pennies from child to child. A little thing like this is something a child can relate to and remember for a very long time, maybe the rest of their life!

With permission of the principal, I put deer suet on a post on the edge of the woods not far from their classroom windows. A couple of kids helped, and by the time we left two chickadees were feeding on it. The teachers told me they've been able to watch blue-jays, ravens, nuthatches and woodpeckers eating the suet. I also showed them how to construct window ledge feeders outside their classroom windows, and now they are watching the birds feeding close-up and keeping track of the birds that come daily.

All of the children wrote thank you letters and the teachers sent the letters to me in a packet. Each child related a particular thing they learned from my presentation. Several of them said they learned that male and female birds are often different colors, with the male usually brighter. Another thing they learned was that the birds we have in the Copper Country are either residents or migrants. Another thing some of the children remembered is that eagles use the same nest year after year until it falls down. And many children related they learned just how little a bird weighs -- a hummingbird weighs less than two pennies!

Looking for birds with kids can teach listening and careful observation. Nature appreciation, like bird watching, can also teach patience and caring for the earth. It is easy to kindle in children and their natural excitement for birds is invigorating. One of the birds that really impressed the kids was the Painted Bunting. I had a picture of the one seen at the feeder of Kathy and Bill Forsman north of Houghton several springs ago -- this bird's name says it all: bright green and blue and red. Many of the children drew a picture of the Painted Bunting on the bottom of their letter.

We birders are ecstatic to see a new species for the very first time -- a life bird! And with childlike enthusiasm we are still able to thrill at seeing the same bird again and again. Perhaps the next best thing to seeing a new bird, or learning something about nature for the first time, is to show it to a child for their very first time -- to give them something special forever. What a precious moment! When I was all done with the pictures of birds one little girl asked, "What is your favorite bird?" I could have said any spectacular bird, but I said, "the chickadee" -- a tiny, common bird easy for kids to see and learn, and relate to -- and appreciate over and over all their life through. One child wrote in their letter that the chickadee was their favorite bird, too.

Copper Country Audubon Newsletter  
February 2010