

Southeast Alaska Discovery Center - Ward Lake Lab-to-go

Bird Skulls Activity Instructions

Activity Goal:

In this Activity, we explore the Raven, Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, and Great Blue Heron. We investigate the skulls of these birds, identify their unique adaptations, and find the links between beak shapes the food sources and eating behaviors.



Supplies:

1. Skulls of
 - a. Great Horned Owl
 - b. Raven
 - c. Bald Eagle
 - d. Great Blue Heron
2. Safe transport boxes for the skulls
3. Printable support packet



Instructions:

1. Holding up a skull, say “You are allowed to hold the skulls; however, the skulls are breakable and need special care. There are three rules I would ask you to agree to before you start passing the skull around...
 - a. Please use both hands to hold the skull.
 - b. When handing the skull to a classmate, be sure the person you are handing the skull to is using both hands and says thank you before letting go of the skull.
 - c. Please be gentle as the skulls are delicate, so I ask that you stay on task and be aware of your movements when you are holding the skulls.”
2. Begin to talk about the skull you are holding: its eyes, beak, and food.
3. Hand a student the skull and check they are following the activity rules.
4. As they are passing it around continue talking about its unique adaptations, and behaviors.
5. Once all students have held the skull ask for 3 questions about that skull or bird.
6. Put the skull back on the table before handing out the next skull.
7. Repeat steps 2-6 for the rest of the skulls.

Facts:

Great Horned Owl

- Its beak is larger than it looks, hidden mostly by feathers but still about 1 1/2 inches long. The edges of its beak are used to help dismember its prey.
- Eyes are locked into its skull so it must move its whole head to look at something. That’s why owls can rotate their head 270 degrees.
- This owl eats mostly small mammals like rats, mice, and rabbits, but it has been known to try for bigger prey like skunks or opossums.

Raven

- Beak is curved and almost knife shaped.
- Eyes are very sharp like most birds but an interesting fact about ravens is their intelligence. They can learn and even imitate noises and sometimes human voices.



- This bird is an omnivore, meaning they will eat anything and everything, but most of the raven's diet consists of animal matter. Often, ravens will work in pairs to help flush prey out. The raven is an opportunist and will take advantage of any short-term food sources, like garbage and pet food. They also are like eating carrion or scavenging.

Bald Eagle

- Their beak is yellow and curved. It is made of keratin like our fingernails. Normal use in the wild keeps their beaks at a healthy length.
- Eagles have incredible eyesight. They can see a rabbit on a hill 3 miles out. They can see about 2ft down into the water from a mile away.
- Favorite food is fish. They are perch hunters; this means they can often be seen high up in treetops waiting and watching for prey.

Great Blue Heron

- Beak is long and used for fishing. Hunting behavior includes standing still in shallow water, waiting, and watching for the perfect moment to strike. Typically, they will grab the prey in their beak, like using chopsticks to pick up food. On rare occasions they have used their beak to spear their prey.
- Eyes can look through the bottom of their head or mouth area to see straight down at the fish beneath them.
- Food is most commonly fish or other animals that live in or near the water, including frogs, crustaceans, or other small animals.