

Balancing Birds



DID YOU KNOW?

Cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) prefer their meals to go. These medium-sized white herons travel with grazing animals such as cattle, horses, and oxen to feed. When cattle move through the grasses, their hooves stir up insects which the opportunistic birds eagerly devour.

The egrets are frequently seen balanced on the swaying backs of their large hosts relieving them of biting flies and ticks. Grateful, the big grazers encourage the birds and are careful not to hit them with their switching tails.

GET OUTDOORS!

Cattle egret eat insects, spiders, worms, and tree frogs. What are the birds in your yard and neighborhood eating? Do they take advantage of other wildlife or people for their food? How do you know? In your nature journal, note what you find.

Play Balancing Birds! Have a relay race with your friends with a stone balanced on two sticks held together in one hand. Now see if you can balance on logs, stones, or seesaws like egrets on the backs of cattle. Careful!

*Balancing birds biting bugs on beasts
Is one of the strangest to-go feasts
You'll ever see on the open range,
With fly-control as the interchange!*



Dental Diversity



DID YOU KNOW?

Cownose rays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*) have unusual teeth. Unlike the sharp teeth of most carnivorous fish and mammals, these rays have two dental plates. Each plate consists of four to seven rows of flat hexagonal teeth that lie next to one another much like tiles or bricks on a floor.

While the rays' bones are made of flexible cartilage, their teeth are mineralized and hard like ours, and perfect for crushing the shells of clams and oysters—their favorite foods!

GET OUTDOORS!

Look at the animals in your yard or neighborhood. What kind of teeth do they have? Are they useful for eating their favorite foods? How do you know? Do you see animals without teeth such as birds and insects? How do they eat? In your nature journal, note what you find.

Play Clam Crusher! Hold two flat rocks in your hands like dental plates. Can you crush an acorn between them? Seeds? An empty shell? Now, run and flap your fin-wings like a ray in the water.

*Teeth are made in many shapes;
Mine are flat, hard dental plates
To crush the shells of food I eat—
Oysters, clams, and snails so sweet!*



Raindrop Rainbows



DID YOU KNOW?

Rainbows are circular. Part of the circle is hidden by the horizon, so we see only a portion in the shape of an arc or bow. When the sun is close to the horizon we're able to see more of the rainbow, and when the sun is overhead we can't see the rainbow at all.

Sunlight's colors are refracted (bent) in round raindrops, forming a circular reflection of the spectrum from red to violet.

If you stand with your back to the sun as a shower passes, and if you're lucky, you will see a beautiful rainbow before you.

GET OUTDOORS!

Look in your yard or neighborhood for nature's circles and arcs. Can you find flowers with circular centers and arc-shaped petals? Insects with circular spots and arced wings? Birds with arced claws and circular eyes? In your nature journal, note what you find.

Gather friends and play Arc Animals! Take turns bending your arms, legs, and body into the arc shapes of different animals. See if the others can guess what animal you are. Now, run in arcs and circles—never in a straight line!

*Rainbows arc with colors aglow,
Red on top and violet below;
Lucky are we, to see the grand show
When sunlight beams and raindrops flow.*



Fooling Fosters



DID YOU KNOW?

Brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) lay their eggs in other birds' nests.

Cowbirds originally lived on the open plains following herds of buffalo and feeding on insects. As land opened because of agriculture and development, the cowbirds' range spread.

A nomadic lifestyle leaves no time for building nests or tending broods. So birds such as sparrows and warblers are fooled into becoming foster parents to hatch a cowbird's egg and raise the large chick.

GET OUTDOORS!

Look in your yard or neighborhood for nests. Can you see the large leafy nest of a squirrel? Small, silky nest-like spider webs? Bird nests in different sizes and shapes?

Gather a pile of small sticks, dried grass, and other materials for nest building. Are birds using your supplies? How do you know?

Play Cowbird Catch! Choose someone to be Cowbird and form a circle around him or her. Cowbird tosses a pinecone to each person. If you miss the catch, you're out. The last one becomes Cowbird.

*It's the pirate's life for me!
On the open range I'm free
To fool an unsuspecting pair
And leave my eggs in foster care.*



