

Learning Guide



Animals in the Backyard

We hope you enjoyed learning about the animals living right outside our doors. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen:

Check your knowledge before and after listening to the episode by determining if statements are TRUE or FALSE.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.8

Wildlife Helpers

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4-8.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; MS-LS2-2 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics; HS-LS2-7 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics; NM Social Studies: Interactions with Our Physical Environment 1.2

Wildlife Safety Challenge

NM Social Studies: Interactions with Our Physical Environment 1.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1

Square Foot Science Observations

NGSS: 5-LS2-1; LS2.A; SL.5.5; MP.2, MP.4; MS-LS2

Observe with Your Senses

NMPED SEL: Intentional Development of Skills, Mindsets, and Habits

Additional Resources and Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio



Get Set to Listen

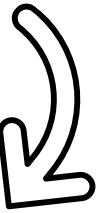
1. Before listening!

Read each statement and write TRUE or FALSE based on what you already know.



2. After listening!

Based on what the experts said in the episode, write TRUE or FALSE.



Before Listening	TRUE or FALSE?	After Listening
	1. Prairie dogs live in “towns” that can stretch hundreds of miles.	
	2. Some of the biggest threats to native wildlife in cities include cars, roads, and children.	
	3. Roadrunners have a top speed of around 20 miles an hour.	
	4. Coyotes are very smart and can learn how to use stoplights to figure out when it’s safe to cross roads.	
	5. Alaska accounts for over half of the federally protected wilderness across the country.	
	6. In India, it is illegal to kill or remove stray dogs from the street where they live.	
	7. The United States is the most biodiverse country in the world.	

What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. TRUE
2. FALSE. Cars and roads are among the biggest threats to wildlife in cities, however, children do not necessarily harm wildlife, and can learn to be great advocates for responsibly living with wildlife. Another major threat to wildlife in cities are domestic dogs and cats. They harm wildlife by preying on them, spreading disease, disturbing habitats, and harassing them. Free-roaming pets, especially cats, are a major threat to global biodiversity, having contributed to extinctions and significantly impacting populations of birds and small mammals.
3. TRUE
4. TRUE
5. TRUE
6. TRUE
7. FALSE. *Brazil* is widely considered the most biodiverse country in the world, hosting an estimated 15-20% of Earth's biological diversity and having the highest counts of various species, particularly in its Amazon rainforest and other major ecosystems like the Atlantic Forest and Pantanal. Its immense variety of plants, animals, and insects is attributed to its vast geographical size and diverse range of habitats, which continue to expand with new species being discovered annually.



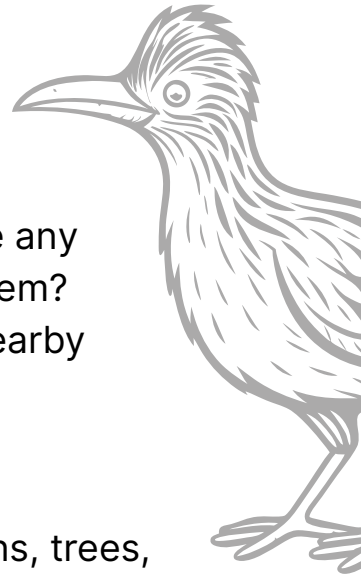
Vocabulary

urban	About a city or town, where many people live close together with lots of houses, buildings, and streets.
suburban	About the neighborhoods just outside a city, where there are more houses, yards, and parks than in the busy city.
ecosystem	A community of living things, like plants and animals, and the nonliving things around them, like air, water, and soil, all working together in one place.
keystone species	An animal or plant that has a very important role in its ecosystem, helping many other living things survive.
adaptable	Able to change or adjust to fit new situations. <i>Example: A raccoon is adaptable because it can live in forests or in cities.</i>
predator	An animal that hunts and eats other animals for food. <i>Example: An owl is a predator because it catches mice to eat.</i>
prey	An animal that is hunted and eaten by another animal. <i>Example: A mouse is prey for an owl.</i>
biodiversity	The variety of different plants, animals, and other living things in a place or on Earth.



Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of animals have you seen in your backyard (or neighborhood)?
2. Where do these animals find food, water, and shelter?
3. Of all the animals you've seen in your backyard, do you have any favorites? Do you have any special stories to share about them?
4. What signs might you look for to tell if an animal has been nearby (tracks, nests, holes, sounds)?
5. How do different seasons affect the animals you see in your backyard?
6. How do humans help backyard animals (bird feeders, gardens, trees, ponds)?
7. How might humans accidentally harm backyard animals without realizing it?
8. What could you do to make your backyard a safer or more welcoming place for wildlife?
9. If you could be any backyard animal for a day, which would you choose and why?
10. How do you think a squirrel or bird sees the backyard differently than you do?
11. What would your backyard look like if no humans lived there?



Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Imagine you are a bird or squirrel living in a city. Tell a story about your day and how humans' choices affect your neighborhood. How could people make the space safer and fairer for everyone, including humans and animals?
2. Create a tale where animals team up to solve a problem caused by humans, showing how teamwork and respect for diversity can make the community better for all.
3. Listen to ["We're Sandhill Cranes" by Dan Gribbin](#) and [the poem "The Sandhill" read by Linda Hogan \(segment 37:44-38:50\)](#). Write a song or poem about an animal you've observed.

Extensions:

- Add dialogue between humans and animals to explore perspectives.
- Include illustrations or a comic strip of your story.

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Research an animal that lives in urban or suburban areas. Explain how it survives, what threats it faces, and how fair access to green spaces affects both humans and animals.
2. Survey the parks and natural spaces in the different parts of your city. Do some neighborhoods have fewer parks and trees? Why do you think this is? Explain the differences in resources and safety. Describe how unequal access to parks or green areas can impact communities and wildlife.
3. Research and explain what you can do to responsibly support wildlife in your backyard.
4. [Listen to segment \(30:27-33:15\)](#). How does climate change affect the areas where wildlife might live?

Extensions:

- Create a poster or infographic showing your research findings.
- Use what you learned about unequal access to parks or green areas to take action to make your community fairer for both people and animals.
- Interview a local wildlife expert, park ranger, or community organizer and include their insights.

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. What do humans do to make things better/worse for animals in urban settings?
2. Write a letter to your city council advocating for more wildlife-friendly spaces in neighborhoods with fewer parks. Explain why this benefits everyone—humans and animals alike.

Extensions:

- Create a short presentation or video to share your opinion with your community.
- Organize a community project or social media campaign advocating for wildlife and equitable green spaces.



Wildlife Helpers

What Animals Live Near You?



Research

What animals live near you? What are their habits? When and where are you likely to see them? ([National Geographic Kids: Animals](#), [Britannica Kids: Animals](#)) For example, skunks are nocturnal and live in burrows or under sheds and porches during the day. Make a list of animals you might find in your backyard, neighborhood, or a local park, and when and where to look for them.

Observe and Record

Go outside and look! Use your research to help you locate animals.



Write down or **draw** the animals you see. Take note of when and where you saw them. What was the animal doing?



Record a video or audio clip of the animals you observed.



Keep an Observation Journal

Choose one animal to watch for several days. Try going back to the same place at the same time. What do you notice? Does your chosen animal have daily habits? Do you have daily habits, too?



Write a song or poem

Listen to [“We’re Sandhill Cranes” by Dan Gribbin](#) and [the poem “The Sandhill” read by Linda Hogan \(segment 37:44-38:50\)](#). Write a song or poem about an animal you observed.



Upload your observations to our Instagram [@tchradio](#), TikTok [@thechildrenshourradio](#), and [Facebook page](#), and check out what others have observed!



Mail your observations to:
The Children’s Hour
PO Box 70236
Albuquerque, NM 87197



[Record a Voice Message](#)

This might be used on The Children’s Hour!



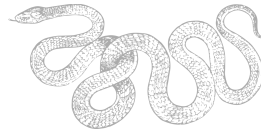
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Wildlife Helpers

Challenges Animals Face



Think about the animals you saw. What problems might they have living near people? Check all that you notice:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Losing their homes (trees, bushes, nests) | ☐ Pollution (trash, chemicals) |
| ☐ Not enough food or water | ☐ Other: _____ |

How Can We Help?

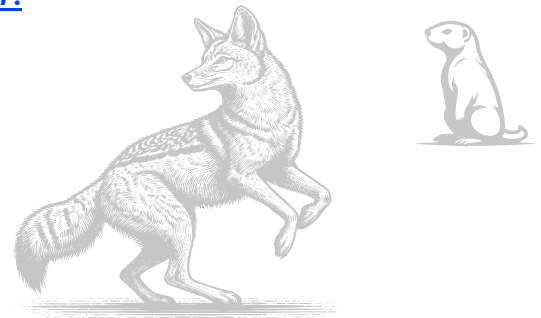
Write or draw some ways you can help animals safely. Check out [backyard wildlife programs](#).
Examples: *planting flowers, building a small habitat, and making a bird feeder.*

Share Your Discoveries!

How can you tell others about what you learned? Draw, write a story, make a poster, or create a short video. And [share them with us at The Children's Hour!](#)

Reminders:

- *Never touch or feed wild animals directly.*
- *Be kind and quiet when observing.*
- *Always respect their homes and habitats.*



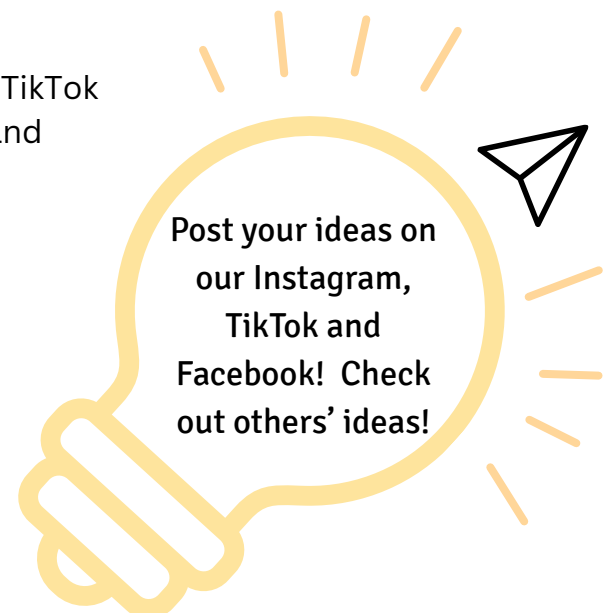
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Wildlife Safety Challenge

Animals sometimes come too close to our homes because they are looking for food or shelter. This can put people, pets, and wildlife at risk.

Design Challenge: *Design a system or structure that helps keep people, pets, and wildlife safe in your community.*

Materials

chart paper, markers, sticky notes, paper, pencils, “Wildlife Safety Challenge” worksheet
optional: recycled materials for model-building (cardboard, tape, bottles, string, etc.)

Watch

[this short video](#) of raccoons getting into trash cans.

Discuss

Why do you think animals come so close to people’s homes?

What problems can this cause for people? For animals?

Chart responses under two columns: “Risks to Humans/Pets” and “Risks to Wildlife”.

Create

Students brainstorm in small groups. Options may include:

- Wildlife-proof trash bins
- Pet enclosures with safe fencing
- A neighborhood compost and recycling system that animals can’t break into
- Motion-sensor lights/sounds that don’t scare pets but deter wildlife

Groups **create** a sketch or mini-model of their idea.

Share

 **Upload** your ideas to our Instagram [@tchradio](#), TikTok [@thechildrenshourradio](#), and [Facebook page](#), and check out others’ ideas!

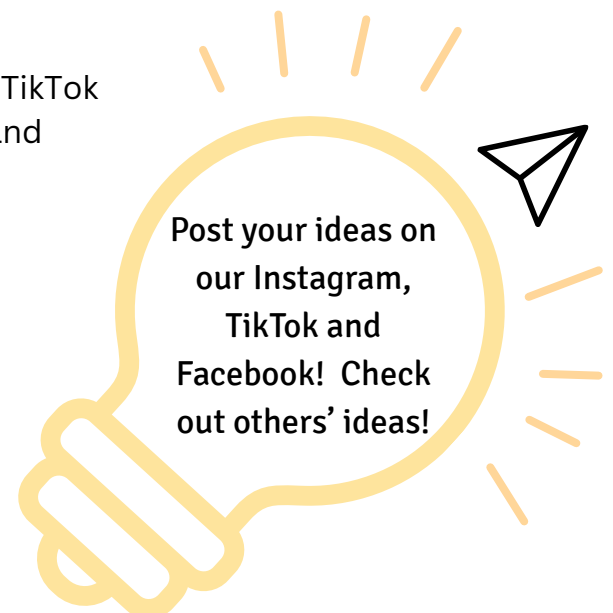
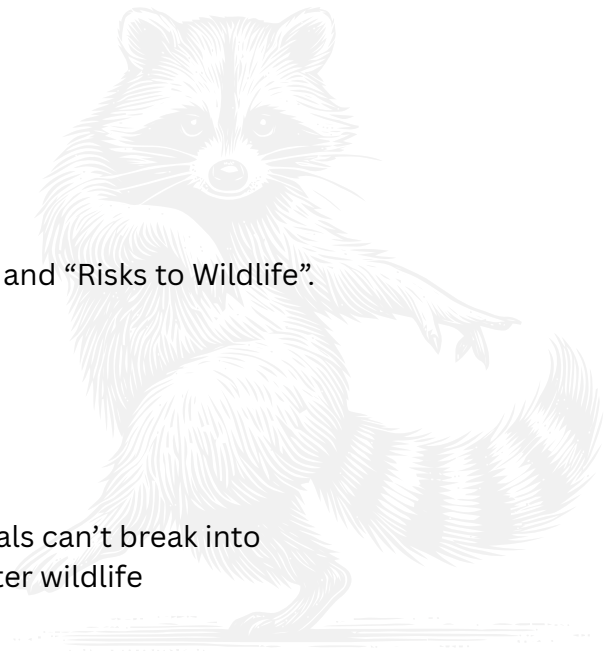


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Wildlife Safety Challenge

The Problem

Animals sometimes come too close to our homes because they are looking for food or shelter. This can put people, pets, and wildlife at risk.

Your Challenge

Design a system or structure that helps people, pets, and wildlife stay safe in your community.

Step 1: Brainstorm

Write or draw as many ideas as you can. Think about:

How can we keep pets safe from wild animals?

How can we keep wildlife safe from people's trash or pets?

What tools or materials could we use (fences, bins, lights, sounds, etc.)?

Notes / Ideas:



Wildlife Safety Challenge

Step 2: Sketch Your Idea

Draw your design in the box. Label the parts so others can understand how it works.

Sketch Box:

Step 3: Explain Your Design

- How does your design keep people and pets safe?
- How does your design keep wildlife safe?





Square Foot Science Observation

Go outside! Mark off a square foot sample area.
Identify and count *everything* you observe there.



What is it?	Draw it	Amount (tally mark for each one you saw)

What did you find? **Graph** your results.

Compare your results to another sample area a mile away, 10 miles away, 100 miles away!
How do your results vary in different settings (urban park vs. Bosque vs. Sandia foothills)?
Try going back to the same spot every month for a year. What changes do you expect to find?

Compare the number of different species as well as total number of specimens in each species. Why do you think there was greater/less variety in one sample area than another?
Why do you think there were more/fewer bugs/plants/etc. in one sample area compared to another? What does this tell you about the different sample areas?



Observe with Your Senses



Play the song “We Know the Air is There”

by Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer

How do we know what is around us? We use our senses!

Spend 1 minute observing the world around you using one of your five senses at a time. For each of the senses other than sight, close your eyes to allow you to focus more easily.



Sight: Notice the colors, light, and shapes that you see.



Hearing: Can you identify all the different sounds you hear? Do you notice some sooner than others?



Touch: Pay attention to the feel of the air on your skin, the temperature, your clothing, and the pressure of the chair you're sitting in.



Smell: Take a deep breath and inhale the smells around you. Observe the thoughts, emotions, and feelings that surface. Do the smells bring back any particular memories? This can be done either with whatever smells are around you or with specific, intentional fragrances.



Taste: Eat something and really pay attention to flavors. Do they change as you chew?



Additional Resources

[ABQ Backyard Refuge Program Educational Resources](#)

The ABQ Backyard Refuge Program helps people turn their outdoor spaces into certified habitats for local wildlife and plants.

[National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat Program](#)

From window boxes to large spaces, this program offers simple steps to support local species and practice sustainable gardening.

[iNaturalist](#)

Share your observations about animals in your backyard using this free app and website for science and conservation.

[The Children's Hour "Community Science" episode](#) and ["Every Kid Outside" episode](#)

Be sure to listen to these episodes about how everyone can contribute to active scientific research and the importance of getting outside. It comes with a free Learning Guide full of fun activities and resources!

[Copopa Elementary Animal Research Resources](#)

Copopa Elementary compiled this list of websites and readings for animal research reports.

[Project Refauna](#)

Learn about a project to bring back species and rebuild ecosystems in the Atlantic Forest of Brazil.

[Thai Monkey Buffet Festival](#)

The Thai Monkey Buffet Festival is a major cultural event--but it's not without its problems.

[Make a Field Guide...to Your Yard!](#)

These tips from the National Wildlife Foundation Blog will help you get started!

Videos

[The Trash Panda Challenge: How Raccoons Outsmarted Toronto City](#)

[Wild to Know](#)

A collection of fascinating stories from the natural world, including some about urban wildlife.

[San Diego's Urban Wildlife](#)

Explore the most biodiverse place in the country.

[From the Wild to Miami: The Parrot Invasion Story](#)

[Ways Livestock and Predators Can Coexist](#)

This video takes a nuanced look at how to protect livestock and wildlife.

[Rewilding Rio](#)

In Rio de Janeiro, scientists are helping animals return to the city's big rainforest, Tijuca National Park.



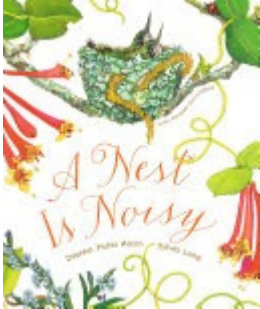
Book List



Finding Wild

by Megan Wagner Lloyd, illustrated by Abigail

A lyrical picture book with beautiful art that shows how the wild appears in our lives and is closer than we realize.
ages 3-7



A Nest is Noisy

by Diana Hutts Aston, illustrated by Sylvia Long

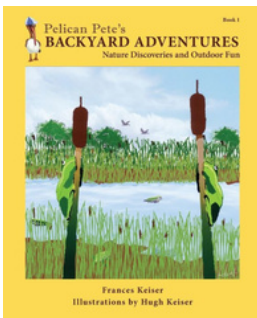
A stunningly illustrated and informative exploration of nests, from tiny hummingbirds to orangutans in the rainforest canopy.
ages 5-8



[Backyard Wildlife collection on Epic Books](#)

by Derek Zobel

An online collection of backyard animal books, with a read-aloud option.
ages 5-7



Pelican Pete's Backyard Adventures

by Frances Keiser, illustrated by Hugh Keiser

This book shares fun facts about nature with outdoor activities, games, rhymes, and colorful art, plus space for kids to record their own discoveries.
ages 5-12



Ruby's Birds by Mya Thompson

A spirited young girl named Ruby discovers the joy of birdwatching and quietly observing nature with her neighbor, and inspires her family to join in the adventure.
ages 4-8



One Small Place in a Tree

by Barbara Brenner

An exploration of the hidden world inside a tree, revealing how a small hole becomes a thriving home for many forest creatures over time.
ages 4-8