



Canada geese, Dean Birch

Lesson 1: Bird Conservation History

Theme

America's bird populations once experienced severe declines due to lack of protection and over-harvest. Today, birds are protected and many species have made a huge comeback!

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will learn about the history of humans' use of birds as a natural resource, the eventual overexploitation of birds, and the early conservation actions taken to save America's birds. Students will also learn about how the RI Division of Fish and Wildlife monitors both game and non-game bird species to keep our bird populations stable and protected.

Corresponding Activities for this Lesson

- Create Your Own Duck Stamp

Materials

- Lesson 1 PowerPoint

Lesson

1. Start by asking students what they know about humans' interactions with wildlife.

- How did people and wild animals interact in the past? Why might wild animals have been valuable to people a long time ago?
- Show students the drawing of European settlers and Native Americans trading pelts.
- Explain that Indigenous peoples relied on wildlife for food and clothing, but when Europeans arrived, they did not understand that an animal could become endangered or extinct. The Europeans also relied on wildlife for survival, but also extirpated predators, and over-harvested game, which caused the decline of many wild species.

2. Show students the pictures of market hunters. *Note: The pictures depict harvested ducks at a distance. If you feel as if these images will upset your students, skip this slide. You can still talk about market hunting without showing the pictures.*

- Explain to students that after a while, people began hunting large numbers of animals to sell at the market for food. Ducks were one of the groups of birds that were harvested. Hunters would go out and harvest 50 - 100 ducks a day.
- Ask students if they think that hunting this many animals at a time is a good idea. What do they think would happen over time?
- Explain that this style of hunting caused huge declines in duck populations across America, because there were no hunting rules.

3. Show students pictures of Victorian women wearing feathered hats.

- Ask the students what they think of the hats. Are they pretty, weird, silly?

- Explain that the hat trade in the late 1800s and early 1900s was devastating to bird populations in America. Thousands upon thousands of birds were killed just to be put on hats.
- How does that make everyone feel? Do you think this was ok to do?
- Explain that many people felt this was not right, and started to let their voices be heard. Many women gathered together to form bird conservation and education groups, and began the first chapters of the Audubon Society. In 1918, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed.
- Explain that this act prevented people from possessing, harming, killing, disturbing, trading, buying, selling (etc.) birds, bird parts, eggs, feathers, or nests. This is still in effect today.
- Ask students what migratory means.
- Explain that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act involves Canada, the United States, Japan, and Russia. Ask students why America would involve other countries in this act. If students don't guess, explain that migratory birds don't know the difference between countries, and don't follow a human-made map! Many of our birds from New England spend their winter in Central and South America. Some birds from the West Coast and Alaska fly across the Pacific. Some birds spend their summer in Canada and winter in New England. It makes sense that countries should work together towards bird conservation because we share birds!

4. Explain to students that things have changed drastically for birds since then!

- Show students the slide with pictures of Narragansett Bay's nesting colonies.
- Details about the Division of Fish and Wildlife's annual monitoring efforts of these colonial nesting species are included in the notes section of the slide.

5. Show students the Duck Stamp Act slide and explain that America's hunters became a big part of the conservation and restoration of bird populations and habitats.

- Details about the Duck Stamp Act are included in the notes section of the slide.
- Ask students how conserving wetland habitats for ducks could perhaps help other birds/wildlife.

6. Show students the pictures of RI's annual goose banding project.

- Details about goose banding are included in the notes section of the slide.
- Ask students why they think counting and tracking birds (especially gamebirds) is important.

7. Explain to students that hunters were made further responsible for wildlife conservation with the signing of the Pittman-Robertson Act.

- Details about the Pittman-Robertson Act are included in the notes section of the slide.

8. Wrap up: Review with students the timeline of events in this story of bird conservation.

- Ask what they think needs to happen to continue this story, to conserve and protect birds in the future. A KWL chart would work great with this lesson!