

MIGRATING TO EXTINCTION

Activity 26

AGE LEVEL = 8-12 (5-7)
DURATION = 15-30 min.
LEARNING STATION = Wetland, Grassy area,
Classroom, Indoors
RELATED ACTIVITIES = None

WHEN =



UNDERSTANDING: How human activities affect the ecology of an area. An excellent activity for studying the importance of salt marshes and wetlands to migratory birds and other wildlife.

MATERIALS:

- Sticks 2 to 3 feet long (indoors, tape or string works well)
- Laminated cards of herons, geese and ducks
- Wetland pollution items such as:
 - trash (represents a dump or land fill)
 - empty oil can (represents toxic waste)
 - sketch of oil tanker ship (represents oil spill)
 - paper cups (stack upside down to represent a condominium development)
 - egg carton (place upside down to represent a factory)
 - others of your own creation

PREPARATION: Using the sticks, tape or string, mark out a hopscotch-type board in an open area. Each square should be about two feet on each side (see diagram).

LESSON:

Warm-up: Start the discussion with several probing questions: "What is migration? Why does it occur? When does it happen? What animal life is known for migration? What kinds of birds would you expect to see in a salt marsh or wetland?" (geese, swans, herons, ducks). Explain that these birds use salt marshes and wetlands up and down the Atlantic coast for breeding, nesting and feeding, as well as a resting spot during migration.

Activity: Tell the children they are going to be migrating birds (let them choose the species). Then set the scene by explaining that summer is ending in Maine, and it is almost time for them to begin their winter migration south to Florida. Have the birds migrate by hopping on one foot through the hopscotch board from Maine to Florida. Each square represents a marsh or wetland area. If the migrating birds don't make it to the next wetland or if they step on a line, they die. The first time through, usually everyone makes it.

Explain that they then spent a healthy winter in Florida. Now it's time to return to their breeding grounds. In their absence, people have drained the water from some marshes, filled them in, and built some condominiums and factories (place the cups and egg carton in two squares). The birds can no longer land or rest on these squares. During this migration north, some of the birds may die.

The next round, tell the remaining birds that over the summer all the factories and condominiums generated tons of garbage and more wetlands were drained and used for dumps and land fills. Place trash on two more squares. On their way south, more birds may die and only a few will be left.

Tell the lucky (unlucky?) survivors that the garbage has gotten so bad from all the condominiums, factories, roads and traffic that the water in the wetlands is now contaminated with toxic waste. Also, while they were wintering in Florida, there was an oil spill along the coastline that contaminated one of their favorite salt marsh feeding grounds. Place the oil can and the oil tanker ship in two more squares. This time all the migrating birds will likely perish.

Wrap-up: Ask the students: "Is this activity realistic? What could the community and developers have done to save the wetlands and their wildlife? How could you satisfy the needs of migrating birds and human growth? How did you feel as it became more difficult for you to migrate? What other plant and animal life may have been affected? What type of action could you take to save the wetlands?"

OPTIONS AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

For further studies on salt marsh ecology, consult the Connections to the Sea. This publication offers several hands-on activities for children to understand the values of the sea and surrounding coast.

