

Creature Feature: Bird Beaks

Objective: Students will understand that birds have beak shapes related to their diet.

Materials: turkey baster, tall vase filled with water, Styrofoam balls in a fake plant, tongs, rice krispies in a bowl of water, strainer, chopsticks, plastic insects in test tube holder, salad tongs, plastic animals, nutcracker, nuts, makeup brush, flour in a jar, forceps, sunflower seeds.

Procedure

1. Have students think of a bird that is familiar to them. Then, have them describe that bird's beak. Ask them how that bird uses its beak to eat.
2. Explain to the students that bird beaks have many different shapes, and each beak allows that bird to feed on a particular food. For example, could a hummingbird eat a rabbit or could a hawk drink nectar from a flower? A bird's beak shape determines what it can eat.
3. Show the students the tools and tell them that each tool works the same way a bird beak works. (see list)
4. Show a picture of a bird. Tell them what the bird is (or let them tell you if they know) and tell them how the bird uses its beak to eat.
5. Then, ask them to find the tool which works the same way. Have one student in the group demonstrate how the tool works. Reiterate how a beak working in this way allows that bird to capture and eat its food.
6. Use this method to explain a couple of bird beaks. Then, have the students choose a tool first and try to match it to a beak.
7. Encourage the students to look for different shaped bird beaks around the Zoo and try to figure out how each beak shape allows the bird to eat its food.

Bird Beak Demonstration

The following birds' beak shape and food source are represented by household objects.

Hummingbird – long, thin beak to drink nectar from flowers.
Beak = turkey baster. Food = water in a tall, thin vase.

Toucan – large beak with sharp point to precisely pull fruit from among leaves.
Beak = tongs. Food = Styrofoam balls.

Flamingo – sieve-like beak for straining tiny crustaceans from water.
Beak = strainer. Food = rice krispies in water.

Ibis – long, thin, curved beak for probing in mud for small invertebrates.
Beak = chopsticks. Food = spider rings in a test tube holder.

Kookaburra – strong, wide beak for capturing small animals
Beak = salad tongs. Food = toy animals.

Parrot – strong, thick beak for crushing nuts and fruits.
Beak = nutcracker. Food = nuts.

Lorikeet – typical parrot beak, but not as strong. Has brush-tipped tongue for licking nectar out of flowers.
Tongue = makeup brush. Food = flour at bottom of a jar.

Seedeaters (such as sparrows) – have small, stout, strong beak for picking up and crushing small seeds.
Beak = forceps. Food = sunflower seeds.

