

WEEK 6

Conical Billed Perching Birds: Finches

With their small, sturdy bodies and strong, conical beaks, finches are well-designed for cracking open seeds, making them a common sight at bird feeders, especially in winter. Their thick, triangular bills easily crush tough seed shells, allowing them to thrive even when insects are scarce.

As you begin your study of conical-billed perching birds, watch how finches use their beaks, feet, and quick movements to find food and interact with one another. Their lively behavior and cheerful calls make them a joy to observe in any season.

OBJECT LESSON

Watch the video, Conical Billed Perching Birds: Finches (<https://qrs.ly/hcgkwgm>, 4:23 min.)



NATURE WALK

Here are three simple goals to choose from to guide your nature walk this week:

1. Look for a finch or other birds with conical bills. They are often seen perched on feeders or trees. Observe how these birds eat—do they crack seeds or search for food in other ways?
2. Look for places in which birds may overwinter.
3. Note the altitude of the midday sun.

NATURE NOTEBOOK

This week, complete the following assignments in your nature notebook:

1. Write a description of one conical-billed bird you observed, noting any interactions with other birds. Alternatively, write a description of the nature walk you took this week.
2. Paint a picture of a conical-billed bird. (Perhaps one visible from a window in your home or paint it from memory.)
3. If you notice a seasonal “first,” such as the first time you notice the daffodil leaves pushing up from the ground or the first daffodil in bloom, then add an entry to your family’s Calendar of Firsts.

NATURE LORE

Spend a few minutes reading about birds in winter. Suggestions include:

- *The Year Round* by Hylander, Chapter 19: "Our Winter Birds" (pages 251-255).
- *Backyard Birds of Winter* by Carol Lerner (Form 1-3, single chapter)

FURTHER EXPLORATION

If your family has extra time or wants to learn more, try one of these activities:

1. Contribute to citizen science by joining *Project FeederWatch* (November–April) or the *Great Backyard Bird Count* (February).
2. Use the Merlin Bird ID app or a bird field guide to identify birds you see during your walk or at your feeder.
3. Keep a family list of the birds seen each month.
4. Watch John Muir Laws’ video “The Beak of the Finch” (<https://qrs.ly/togixdw>, first 40 min.)



Perching Birds

Songbirds



- Estimate how big the bird is? Compare it to another bird you are familiar with. Is it bigger than a hummingbird, a robin, or a hawk?

Size

- What shape is the bill? What color is it? What size is it compared to the head?
- What is the eye position on the head? (towards the front of the head or on the sides)
- Does the bird have a crest? What shape is the tail? How long is it compared to the body?
- What is the shape of the body? (round, oval)
- What is the wing shape? Using your hand, show the angle the bird holds its body. (upright or low)

Shape and Posture

✧ Embrace the mystery. You don't have to know the names of the birds to appreciate them. Just as you might recognize a familiar face and offer a warm hello without recalling their name, you can recognize a bird and delight in its presence. Wonder isn't found in knowing—it's found in seeing.



SABBATH MOOD
HOMESCHOOL

Behavior

- What is the bird doing?
- How does it move when it's on the ground or on a tree?
- How does it move when it's in the air? (up and down, soaring, a Murmuration.)
- How does it eat? (eating seeds at a feeder, insects in the air, worms on the ground)
- How does it relate to other birds of the same species? Of another species?

Color and Markings

- What color is the crown? The back? The tail?
- What color are the wings? Are there wingbars? What color?
- What color is the throat? The breast? The belly? The side?
- What color are the legs? What color is the bill? The eye?
- Is there an eye ring? A crest? An eye line? A mustache? What color are these?
- What color is the cheek? Is the male the same color as the female?

Sounds

- What sounds do you hear the bird make?
- Have you heard it make more than one sound?
- How would you describe the sound? (a call, song, chirp, whistle, buzz, trill)
- What do you think the bird's message is? (warning, sharing their location, flirting, defending their territory)
- Can you mimic its song?

Habitat

- Describe the surroundings where you see the bird.
- Does the bird stay low to the ground, high in the trees, or in between.
- Does it venture into open areas or stay hidden in bushes and trees?

Instructions to Fold a Single Piece of Paper into a Small Book

1. Fold the printed paper in half short-wise (hamburger style), aligning the shorter edges, and crease firmly.
2. Fold one short edge of the paper to meet the middle crease. Repeat with the opposite short edge so that both edges meet in the center. Crease firmly and then unfold the paper.
3. Fold the paper in half lengthwise (hotdog style), aligning the longer edges, and crease.
4. Refold the paper short-wise (along the original short-wise crease). Using scissors, cut along the gray line through both layers of paper, stopping at the intersection of the lengthwise crease. Then unfold the paper completely.
5. Refold the paper in half lengthwise again. Hold each end of the paper and gently push toward the middle. This will cause the cut section to open up and form a star shape.
6. Flatten the star by folding the left edge over the right edge, creating the cover of your small book.

Take it along on your next nature walk so you can ask questions about the objects you find.

