

Behave Yourself!

Grade Level: lower elementary

Duration: one 30 to 40-minute class period.

Skills: communication, observation, application, and comparison of similarities and differences

Subjects: science, fine arts, and physical education

Concepts

- Shorebirds have elaborate behavioral adaptations for courtship display and protection of their nests and young.
- Elaborate courtship displays include vocalizations and gestures to attract mates.
- The elaborate behaviors of shorebirds for attracting mates and protecting young are some of the most spectacular and complex of all birds.

Vocabulary

- gestures
- breeding territory
- nonbreeding grounds
- mates
- aerial displays
- vocalizations
- polyandrous

Overview

Students participate in a game in which they attempt to communicate with each other by acting out shorebird gestures and vocalizations.

Objectives

After this activity, students will be able to:

- Give three examples of shorebird gestures or vocalizations.
- Explain why shorebirds make these gestures and vocalizations.
- Identify that males are most often the ones that perform vocalizations and gestures.
- Define the term polyandrous.

Materials

- One classroom set of *Shorebird Behavior Cards*
- One classroom set of *Shorebird Charades Cards*

Introduction

Shorebirds are renowned for elaborate mating *gestures*, *vocalizations*, and *displays*. Some of these displays are *aerial* (performed in the air), while others are performed on the ground. Shorebirds engage in these complex displays for a variety of purposes. The most spectacular displays sometimes involve plunging and hovering flights, accompanied by trilling, hooting, or buzzing sounds. They are used to attract and court *mates* and to protect nests and young. They are also performed as acts of aggression, particularly when defending *breeding territories*. Many shorebirds also defend their winter feeding territories on their *nonbreeding grounds*.

Gestures and vocal displays are vital forms of shorebird communication. Repeated, commonly understood rituals help shorebirds express their intentions quickly. This is especially important to tundra-breeding birds that are rushed by the short Arctic summer. Territorial displays allow birds to retreat from another's territory without risking a battle.

For more information about shorebird breeding and nesting, read *Elaborate Shorebird Mating Systems and Displays* in the *Shorebird Primer*.

Activity Preparation

1. Photocopy and cut out a set of *Shorebird Behavior Cards* (included in this activity). There should be one card for each student.
2. Photocopy and cut out a set of the *Shorebird Charades Cards* (included in this activity). There should not be duplicate cards. There should be one card per pair of students. To personalize your card set, write a few shorebird scenarios that are specific to your local species or issues on the blank cards provided.

Procedure

1. Have students stand in two lines facing each other. Join the line if there is an odd number of students. Students in one line are male shorebirds. These are the ones who will act like shorebirds trying to get the attention of a possible mate. The students in the second line represent female shorebirds.
2. Choose a pair of *Shorebird Behavior Cards* for each pair of students. Separate the cards into two identical decks. Shuffle each deck.
3. Take one of the decks and pass out a card to each "male shorebird." Let the students look at the cards, then collect them. Pass out the other deck to the "female shorebirds." The students can huddle with the shorebirds of their gender for help reading or understanding their cards. But male shorebirds cannot see the females' cards or vice versa.



4. Now explain to the “male shorebirds” that they must attract their mates by acting out the gestures listed on their cards. The female shorebirds must find their matches as quickly as possible. “Male shorebirds” need to exaggerate their gestures and sounds and repeat their actions until they are recognized.
5. Give a signal like “Behave Yourself!” to prompt the “male shorebirds” to begin.
6. End the round when all the students have found their mates.
7. Pick a shorebird pair to select a *Shorebird Charade Card* from the deck (maybe the last or the first pair to have found each other, the loudest “male shorebird”, etc.). Give them a few minutes to decide how they

can act out the scenario. After they perform their charade, ask the class to guess the sentence that was on their card. It is not necessary to guess the exact words—only the general meaning.

8. The pair that correctly guesses the charade can pass out the next round of cards.
9. Repeat the activity until all students have had a chance to perform displays and charades. Alter the roles by announcing that the class is now a flock of *polyandrous* shorebirds, and the “female shorebirds” must gesture to attract the males!

Additional Activities

Shorebird Simon Says

(good for younger groups)

Use the shorebird action cards to play “Simon Says” and follow up with a game of charades afterward.

Escalating Confusion

Increase the complexity of the game by asking the “male shorebirds” to make four to five different gestures at the same time. Add sound distractions into the game by playing background music. The “male shorebirds” will have to be even louder and gesture more wildly to be recognized.



Shorebird Behavior Cards

(Make one photocopy.)

Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Wing flash Bow Hoot	Wing flash Bow Hoot
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Purr Stretch neck Walk stiff-legged	Purr Stretch neck Walk stiff-legged
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Stamp feet Stretch/extend neck High trill	Stamp feet Stretch/extend neck High trill
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Wing spread Hop Whistle	Wing spread Hop Whistle
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Beat wings rapidly Open bill Call loudly and endlessly	Beat wings rapidly Open bill Call loudly and endlessly
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Dip-shake Food exchange Purr	Dip-shake Food exchange Purr

Shorebird Behavior Cards

(Make one photocopy.)

Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Droop wings Scrape (kick backwards) Chatter gurgle (gargle)	Droop wings Scrape (kick backwards) Chatter gurgle (gargle)
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Flutter wings Zig-zag chase Hoot loudly	Flutter wings Zig-zag chase Hoot loudly
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Beat wings slowly Wing-vibration Hum	Beat wings slowly Wing-vibration Hum
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Bow Lunge head first Laugh	Bow Lunge head first Laugh
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Rear up Spread wings Hoot loudly	Rear up Spread wings Hoot loudly
Actions and Sounds	Actions and Sounds
Dance Jump Whistle	Dance Jump Whistle



Shorebird Charades Cards

(Make one photocopy.)

Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
I am a wounded rabbit and you can catch me.	I am retreating (running away) from you.
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
My leg is broken and you can catch me.	You are in my territory (home) and I want you to stay.
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
I am a hungry chick.	Look at me!
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
Where do you want to build the nest?	My eggs are gone!
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
I am going to migrate now.	I am thirsty.
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
I see a fox.	Get out of here!

Shorebird Charades Cards

(Make one photocopy.)
(Write your own scenarios on the
blank cards provided.)

Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
Get down, kids!	Come back here, kids!
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
I like you.	
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade
Shorebird Charade	Shorebird Charade