

THE BIRD NERD RESOURCE PACK

*Bird-themed dance and movement
session plan for primary schools*

with Marie-Louise Flexen



INTRODUCTION

This resource pack has been developed as part of 'Bird Nerd and The Red List', a dance theatre project by Marie-Louise Flexen, funded by Arts Council England.

Marie-Louise is a choreographer, performer and dance leader with over 30 years experience.

Please see more information here (www.marielouiseflexen.com)



The pack is to be used for bird-themed dance and movement sessions, typically in primary schools and other educational facilities. Participants will experience the joy of movement, music and song with sensory props, visual stimuli, storytelling and crafting.

They will discover more about the behaviours and habitats of four UK birds currently of conservation concern.; Lark, Nightingale, Swift and Woodpecker, while being encouraged to explore their own connections with nature and the mindfulness of birdwatching.

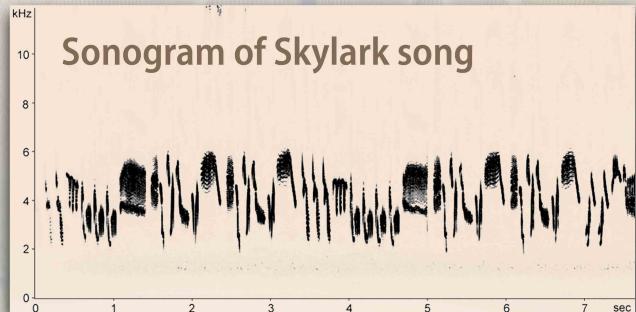
Workshops are especially suitable for primary school children and children with Special Educational Needs. They are aimed at key stage 1 or key stage 2 children.

BEFORE YOU START

Throughout the pack you will find prompts and instructions. These are suggestions, so please feel free to adapt, modify or omit as you see fit. We suggest you have some well illustrated books and visual stimuli on display or to pass around. A4 laminated images are a really useful way of introducing participants to each bird at the start of an activity.

We encourage you to include sound recordings as part of the workshop. www.fssbirding.org.uk/sonagrams is a great resource, providing downloadable MP3 recordings of each of the birds- plus a sonogram image of the sound recording.

The music pieces can be found on YouTube, Spotify or Apple Music. The **Soundbyte app** allows you to organise your sound files (MP3s or WAVs) and play them instantly. Each track will stop automatically once finished, making it easier to manage the flow of the workshop.



Here are the titles of the music tracks used:

Dawn chorus: Pixabay - Dawn Chorus freesound_community

Lark section: 'Lark Ascending' by Ralph Vaughan Williams

Swift section: 'Cambridge, 1963' by Johan Johannsson

Woodpecker section: 'Woody Woodpecker Song' by Kay Kyser and His Orchestra

Emperor's garden: 'Sacred Grounds' by Christian Andersen

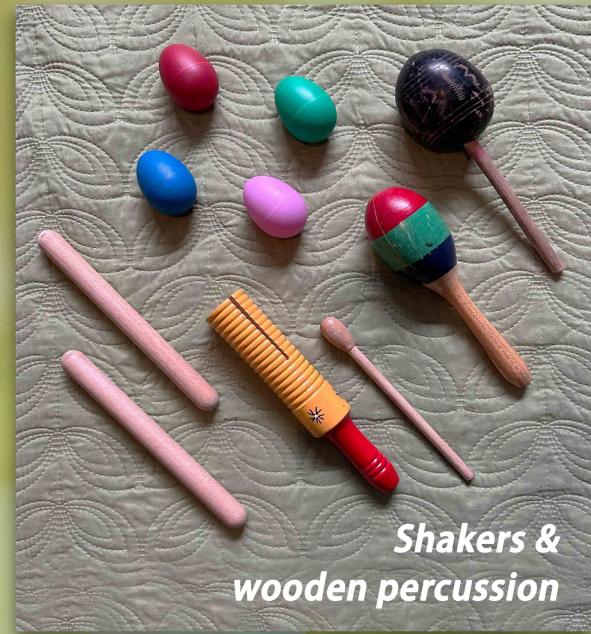
Palace dance: 'Voices of Spring' by Johann Strauss

Sad violin: 'Broken Heart (instrumental)' by Sulaiman Ahmed Sami

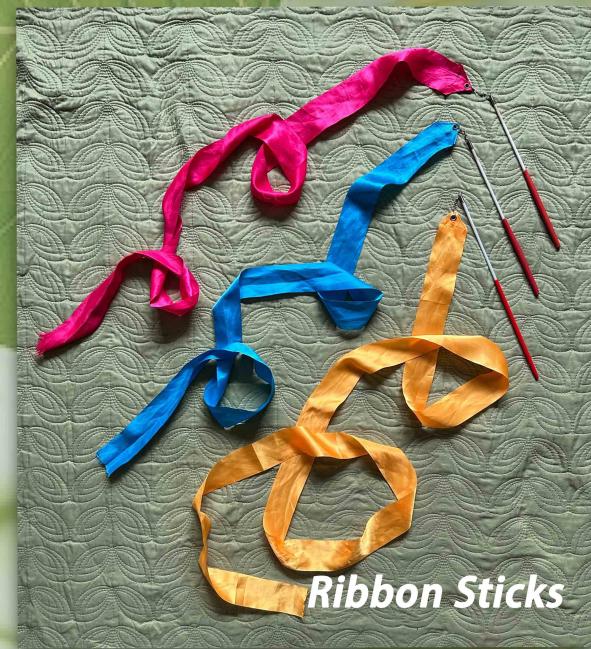
Emperor waking: 'Peer Gynt-Morning Mood' by Edvard Grieg

Palace party: 'I Gotta Feelin' by Black Eyed Peas

Using props adds another sensory level to the experience.



Throughout the pack you will be prompted to use props for each specific activity. These props can sourced on-line or through your usual suppliers.



BIRDWATCHERS & THE BIRDS SCHOOLS WORKSHOP

Music: Dawn Chorus/ Birdsong

Today we are going to learn about 4 very special birds that live here in the UK. Did you know that every Winter, some of these birds travel thousands of miles, to much warmer countries like Africa, to find food and safer nesting sites.

You can go bird-watching outdoors, in the woods or the countryside, even while walking in the park. You can also watch from your bedroom window.

Which birds do you like? If you don't know their names, don't worry, you can tell us something about it, what colour it is, whether it's big or small.

I use binoculars to watch birds which look like this (*show binoculars*) They help us to see the birds from a distance.

We are going to make our own binoculars either using our hands circled around our eyes, or we can use two cardboard tubes stuck together and painted.

Have a look at the person next to you, Look at your foot, a piece of furniture, a picture, a clock. Point out different things in the room. See how they make you look at those things differently

THE SKYLARK

The first bird we are going to learn about is called a Sky Lark. It looks like this (*show picture*) and sounds like this (*Music: Lark song*) Skylarks live in wide open spaces such as grasslands and fields. Females make their nests on the ground by weaving grasses together. Larks fly straight up in to the air and climb so high that you can hardly see them. They have a very distinctive song and sing it all day long especially when they are hovering in the air. (*listen to the lark song and look at the picture*)

Hanging out feathers. Music: 'Lark Ascending'

This piece of music was written in 1914 by the Gloucestershire born composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams. Many poems, stories and songs have been written about larks. Perhaps you could write a poem about your favourite bird?

LARK NEST DANCE

Sit on the floor as if you are in your nest.

With feathers in both hands can you
rise up on to your toes until you
are as high as you can be,
like a lark hovering in the sky?

How long you can stay on tip toes?

Can you circle around?

Can you circle the other way?

Can you swoop down and glide
using your feathers as wings?

Imagine you are hovering way above
the treetops and buildings.



SWIFT

These birds move very very fast, up to 65 miles per hour. They don't really stop except to nest. They eat, sleep and even clean themselves when they are flying. They fly great distances, up to 500 miles in one day. That's 4 trips to the moon and back in one lifetime! They can live up to 20 years.

They first appeared on earth between 35 and 45 million years ago.

They like to nest in nooks and crannies found in old building like churches and barns. They dart about playfully, in large groups called screeching parties.

(Music: Sound of common swift)

Can we move as fast as a swift ?
(On the spot, to avoid crashing about)
How fast can you move your hands?
How fast can you move your feet ?
How fast can you move your body?



(Music: 'Cambridge, 1963' by Johan Johannsson, twice around)

Place 4 coloured cones in the space. Organise children at one end of the room. With your arms outstretched can you swoop and skip across the room, one at a time, to the different coloured cones, flying from one cone to the other 4 times.



Can you circle around each cone before you go to the next one? Let's imagine that the cones are the tops of towers and churches or old school buildings. Be careful not to go too fast as to trip!

WOODPECKER

There are over 200 types of woodpecker in the world but in England we only have 3 types: Greater spotted woodpecker, lesser spotted woodpecker and green woodpecker.

Woodpeckers hop up and down tree trunks using their sharp claws. They have very long tongues that flick out and lick up bugs and grubs from the ground or from underneath tree bark.

Woodpeckers drill into trees using their beaks and make holes to live in and build nests.

They make drumming rhythm sounds

Music: Sound of woodpecker

Give out wood sticks/ shaky eggs
Lets make some different rhythms

Follow me with call and response

Can we start one at a time and build up the rhythm.when

I point to you with my conductors stick

When I put up both hands in a stop sign we all try to stop at the same time

Now for something fun and silly.

Music: Woody Woodpecker Song

When we hear Woody sing “H-h-h-ha-ha” we hop forward like a woodpecker. For the rest of the song you can dance and play along with your wooden percussion sticks.

NIGHTINGALE

Show image of nightingale Nightingales are small brown birds that nest in thick dense bushes, often near water.

They have beautiful singing voices and you can hear them mostly at night although they do sing in the day time too. Let's listen to its song (Music: *Nightingale song*)

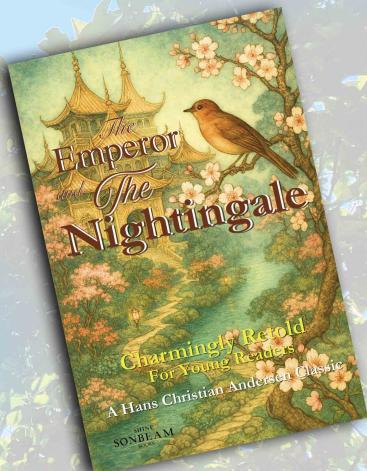


Like the lark, there are lots of poems, songs and fairytales written about Nightingales. One of my favourite stories is a fairytale written by Hans Christian Andersen about an Emperor and a nightingale. We can act out some of the characters and scenes as we go along.

THE EMPEROR & THE NIGHTINGALE by Hans Christian Andersen

Once upon a time, in a far away country there lived a powerful Emperor. The Emperor lived in a magnificent palace with a beautiful garden full of splendid flowers, trees and plants.

(Music: *Oriental Garden*)



In the palace garden, close to a stream, there lived a nightingale and oh, how sweetly it would sing. Travellers came from all over the world to visit the Emperor and while they marvelled at the palace, its many treasures and the beautiful gardens, it was the nightingale that they agreed was the best of all (if they were lucky enough to hear it singing).

(Music: *Nightingale song*)

Did you know, there are 88 notes on a piano keyboard? A nightingale can sing over a thousand different notes. That's 13 pianos worth!

“What in the world is this?” cried the Emperor. “Can there be such a bird in my palace garden and yet I have never heard it?” The Emperor had been so busy, for so long, attending so many ceremonies and meetings, writing letters, creating new laws and talking to lots of very important people, he hadn’t actually noticed the nightingale singing in his own garden. He called for the Prime Minister.

“Oh yes, it’s a nightingale, your worship” said the Prime Minister, “and they say its song is worth more than all the treasures in your palace.” The Emperor ordered everyone at the palace to find the Nightingale so he could listen once more to its remarkable singing. Sometime later, a kitchen maid found the small brown bird sitting on a tree branch.

“There it is” she whispered, “that’s the nightingale right there!” Could it be possible, thought the Emperor, that such a plain brown bird could sing so beautifully?

That evening, the Nightingale was invited to sing at the palace at a splendid party to be held in the grandest hall.

(Give out scarves)

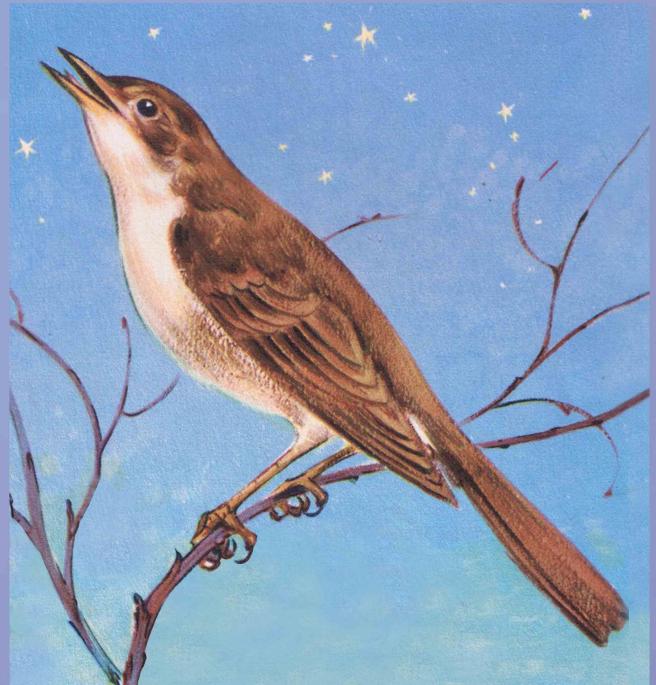
(Music: Palace Waltz music)

*Shall we all go to the ball, dressed in our finest clothes and dance ever so gracefully to the orchestra?
Greet each other and have a dance*

Once everyone had returned to their seats, the Emperor signalled for the Nightingale to sing.

(Music: Nightingale song)

The song was so glorious that the Emperor’s eyes filled with tears of happiness. From that day on, the Nightingale lived in the palace and was allowed to fly out only once in the day and once in the night.



Nightingales have inspired great poets, artists and musicians to create songs, stories, pictures and music. It seems the palace clockmaker was inspired too as one day he brought the Emperor a present. It was a bejewelled, clockwork nightingale made of silver and diamonds, and it was wound up with a golden key. When it sang, its tiny beak opened and closed and its wings and tail moved up and down.

Shall we all dance like mechanical birds?

The emperor was so delighted with his new clockwork nightingale, he thought it more perfect than the real one, which changed its song far too often and was rather plain looking. He soon forgot about the real nightingale.

The nightingale flew away through a palace window, feeling that there was no good reason for her to stay anymore.

(Music: Sad Violin Music)

The artificial bird sang on beautifully and the Emperor played it everyday. In fact he played it so often that one day there was a bang and then a whirring sound and a puff of smoke. The artificial bird stopped working. It had broken and was impossible to fix.

Five long years went by until one night the Emperor became very ill. As his health worsened the news travelled around the Kingdom. The real nightingale heard the sad news and flew immediately to see the Emperor, to pay her respects. As she sang on the bedroom window sill, the Emperor heard the song and was so moved, he gradually started to feel a little brighter. The Nightingale continued singing to him into the night. The next morning the Emperor sat up in bed, feeling much better and the tears of happiness shone in his eyes once more.



(Music: Peer Gynt-Morning Mood by Edvard Grieg)

Let's all stretch our arms.....and our legs....over to the side....over to the other side. Let's all do our biggest yawns

It seems the little Nightingale had sung the Emperor back to good health. From then on the Nightingale lived in the palace garden and was able to come and go as she pleased.

Hand out feathers/ music still playing - Let's all fly with the Nightingale

Every night she sang at the Emperors' window. The Emperor learnt that the beauty of the real Nightingale was true and pure, and that the artificial version could never surpass it.

(Hand out ribbons sticks and scarves)

The Emperor called for another party, to celebrate the Nightingale's return. His guests came from far and wide. The Clockmaker was there, the Prime Minister was there and so was the maid. They sang and danced together, long into the night.

(Music: I Gotta Feeling)

Everybody dance with scarves and ribbon sticks

THE END

The birds featured in this pack are just 4 of the 73 birds in the UK of high conservation concern. Marie-Louise has created a dance piece, 'Bird Nerd & The Red List, which highlights the problems faced by these birds and how we can help them. You can watch the film via her website: www.marielouiseflexen.com

You may also find the following organisations helpful:

RSPB

Songbird Survival

British Trust for Ornithology (B.T.O.)

BIRDA

The pack has been created by co-producer Sarah Ferris with design work and photography by Steve Skinley

For all enquiries email: mflexen@gmail.com



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