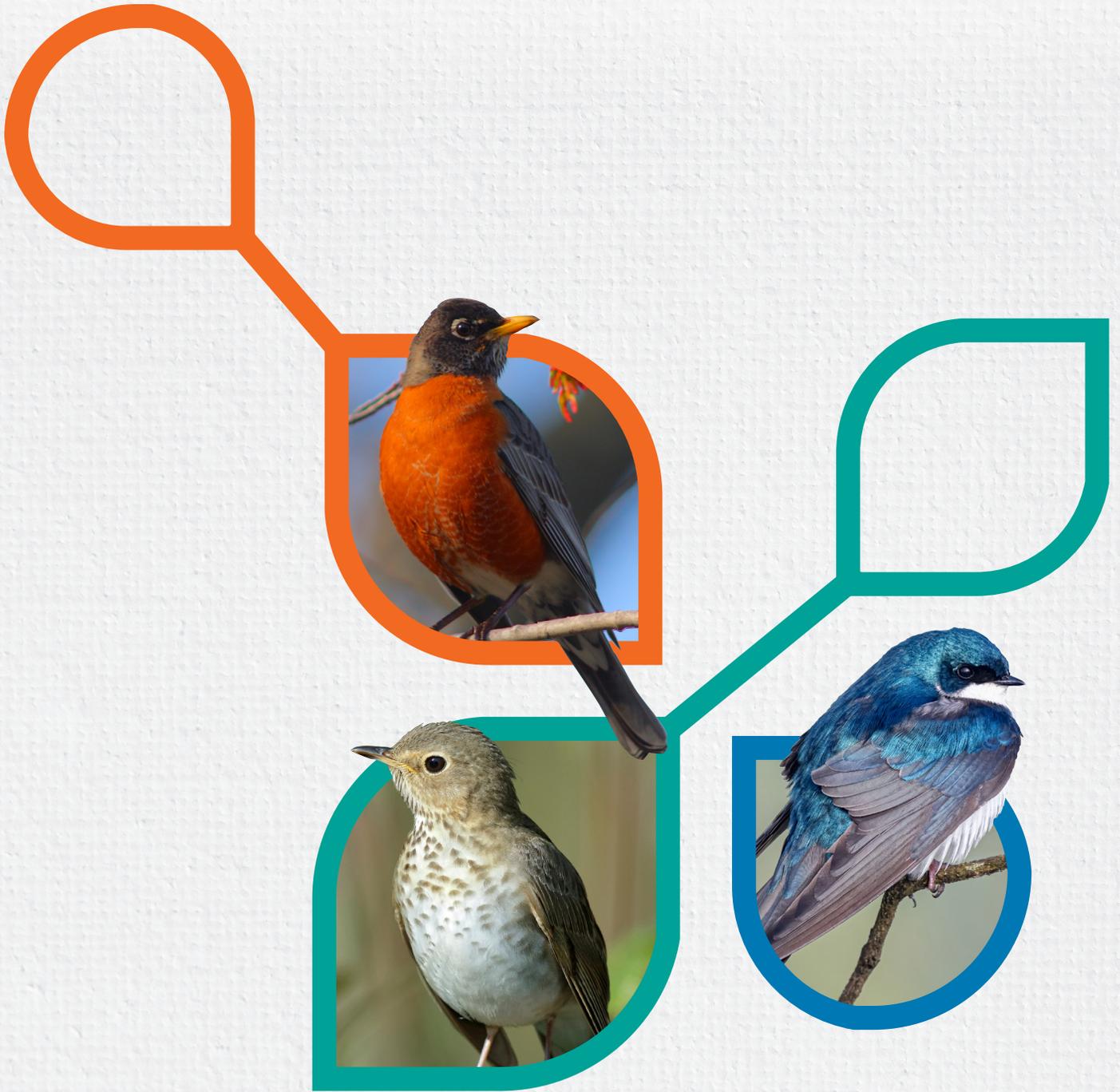


# Northbound Quest: A Migratory Tale



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# Lesson Plan

## Aim

Youth will learn about migration and the challenges faced on these journeys through a Choose Your Own Adventure story.

**Duration:** 1 hour

**Target Audience:** Students in Grades 3 to 6

## Objectives

Through this activity youth will:

- ▶ Understand what migration is and why birds migrate;
- ▶ Identify different types of migratory birds and their migration routes;
- ▶ Recognize challenges migratory birds face and discuss ways to protect them.

## Activity Sequence

1. **Introductory session**
2. **Story – choose your own adventure**
3. **Activities**
4. **Wrap-up discussion**

## Materials

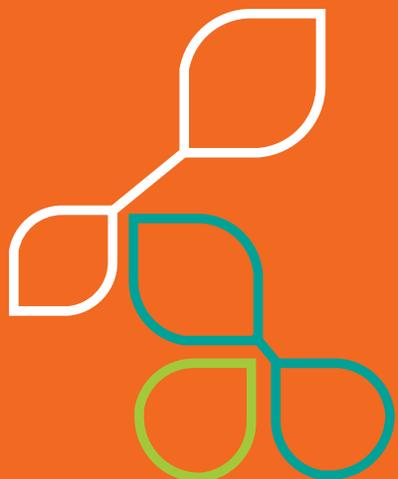
- ▶ Story
- ▶ World map or globe
- ▶ Images or illustrations of migratory birds (e.g. Swainson’s Thrush, Arctic Tern, Canada Goose, etc.)
- ▶ Colored markers or crayons
- ▶ Poster paper



## Introduction and Background Information

- ▶ Begin by asking, “**What is migration?**” Discuss how animals, especially birds, move from one place to another, typically during specific seasons.
- ▶ Define migration simply as “**the journey animals make between two places each year to survive**”.
- ▶ Explain that birds often migrate for food, nesting, or weather changes.
- ▶ Show the class examples of where birds may migrate to and from using a globe or map.

Share the following story with your students and explain to them that they will follow on the track of a migratory bird, the Swainson’s Thrush. They will be faced with choices and challenges, and they will experience the adventure of migration first-hand!





## Story

You are a three-year-old Swainson's Thrush and have spent the winter in a forest in El Valle de Anton, Panama. You spent your days eating berries, swooping through the trees, and practicing your bird song for the upcoming breeding season.

It is nearing the end of February, and the time has come to make the northward spring migration to central Quebec. There, you will return to your regular breeding grounds where you will socialize with other birds, nest, and raise your young.

You have a long journey ahead of you, but you have prepared for the trip by eating lots of fruit and insects. As you make your way north, you will encounter many obstacles that will threaten your survival. You must be careful during your travels to make it to your nesting grounds. On one early March morning, you begin your adventure.

### Destination 1

#### El Valle de Anton, Panama

You fly out of the forest and reach the town of El Valle de Anton, Panama. You are flying low over the streets, looking for insects, when a tall truck nearly hits you. You get spooked and decide to move along to your next destination. The truck disrupted your flight path, and you can't remember if you should fly more west or fly further east to reach your next stop.

#### Options:

- Fly eastward – go to [Destination 2](#).
- Fly westward – go to [Destination 3](#).

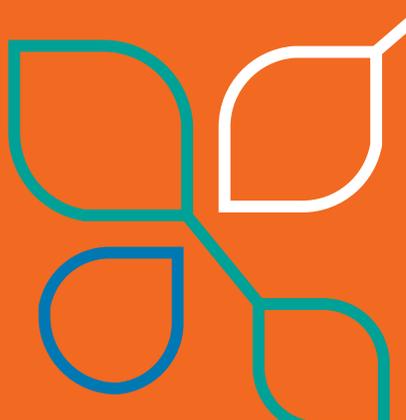
### Destination 2

#### Miami, Florida

After another week of travel, you reach Miami, Florida. You recognize this city and realize that you picked the correct direction to follow your regular route north. You spend one night in Miami, and plan to go to a patch of forest where you have found plenty of berries in previous years. However, when you search for this patch of forest, you can't find it. Instead, there are many large houses. You must decide, do you:

#### Options:

- Search for berries – go to [Destination 4](#).
- Continue onwards – go to [Destination 5](#).





### Destination 3

#### New Orleans, Louisiana

Disoriented from your near accident with the truck, you end up in New Orleans, Louisiana. It is a new place that you have never been to before. You don't see many birds like you, and you don't know where to look for the food you need to keep travelling.

##### Options:

- Forage for berries – You decide to search for berries in the area to regain your strength. By the time you forage, regain your strength, and return to your regular route of migration, you have missed the peak of breeding. You don't nest this summer. Try again next year! Go back to [Destination 1](#).
- Keep travelling – Though you are low on energy, you continue your journey and find your regular migration route. Go to [Destination 2](#).

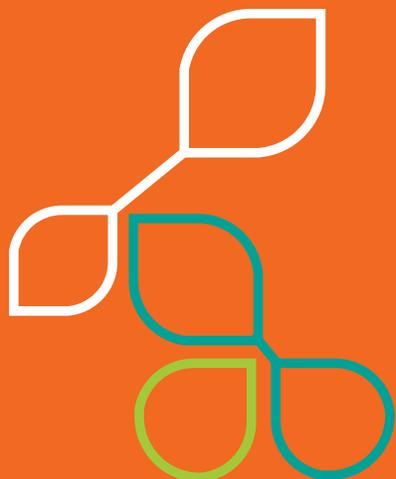
### Destination 4

#### West Palm Beach, Florida

You decide to search for berries in the outskirts of Miami, but after hours of searching, all you find are a few dry shrubs with hardly any berries. Low on energy, you push yourself north and reach West Palm Beach, Florida. There, you spot a small, wild patch of berries by a creek. You eat as much as you can, regaining some strength, but not enough. You can probably use both rest and food.

##### Options:

- Head north immediately – You feel re-energized enough to continue. Go to [Destination 5](#).
- Rest in West Palm Beach – Staying an extra night will help you recharge, but you'll be behind other birds. Go to [Destination 6](#).
- Seek more food – You need more energy; you search and find a backyard filled with lots of delicious food. Go to [Destination 6A](#).





## Destination 5

### Charlotte, North Carolina

Continuing north, you arrive in Charlotte, North Carolina. The skies are getting cloudy, and soon you're caught in a heavy rainstorm. Thunder rumbles, and you struggle to find shelter. After what feels like hours, you see a dense tree canopy that can shield you.

#### Options:

- Take cover in the trees – The storm passes, and you stay safe. Go to [Destination 7](#).
- Push through the storm – Flying through the rain, you get soaked but manage to escape the storm. You're exhausted and hungry. Go to [Destination 8](#).

## Destination 6

### Richmond, Virginia

After an extra day of rest, you fly north and reach Richmond. Here, you encounter a field full of bright, yellow flowers where insects are plentiful. While you're feasting, you notice a small flock of Swainson's Thrushes heading north. It's a rare sight to see others of your kind, so you have a choice.

#### Options:

- Join the flock – Traveling with others could offer safety. Go to [Destination 9](#).
- Fly solo – You prefer traveling on your own. Go to [Destination 8](#).

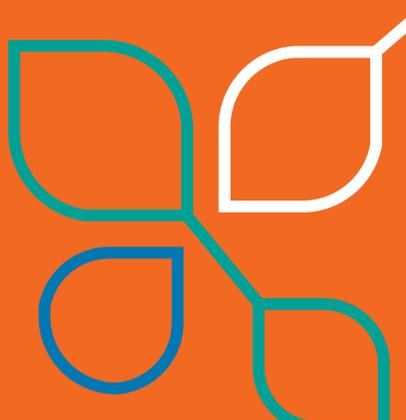
## Destination 6A

### West Palm Beach, Florida

You are exploring all this wonderful food in a quiet backyard, when you suddenly spot a shadow moving slowly and steadily towards you. Your feathers puff up as you sense danger – it's a cat! You freeze for a moment, then take off just as it pounces, narrowly escaping its claws.

#### Options:

- Stay on high alert: You decide to stay extra vigilant and keep an eye out for other dangers. This cautious approach slows you down but keeps you safer. Go to [Destination 7](#).
- Fly to another area: Shaken by the close call, you leave the area immediately to find a safer place to rest. Go to [Destination 5](#).





## Destination 7

### **Albany, Massachusetts**

You safely reach Albany, Massachusetts, but all the extra stops and challenges have put you behind. You notice fewer Swainson's Thrushes on your route, and your energy reserves are running low. Fortunately, you find a city park with plenty of insects.

#### **Options:**

- Stock up on food – Take extra time to eat and gain energy. Go to [Destination 10](#).
- Fly ahead – You want to make up for lost time. Go to [Destination 8](#).

## Destination 8

### **Montreal, Canada**

You're almost at your destination! As you approach southern Quebec, bright lights attract your attention. The city is mesmerizing, but also dangerous—while swooping through the maze of buildings, you're lured toward what looks like open sky. Wait! It's just a reflection on a glass window! As you speed toward it, disaster seems certain, but thankfully, properly placed stickers on the glass catch your eye just in time. You pull up and avoid a crash.

#### **Options:**

- Find a place to rest and recover from that near miss! Go to [Destination 11](#).
- Fly through the city now to get out of the chaos. Go to [Destination 12](#).

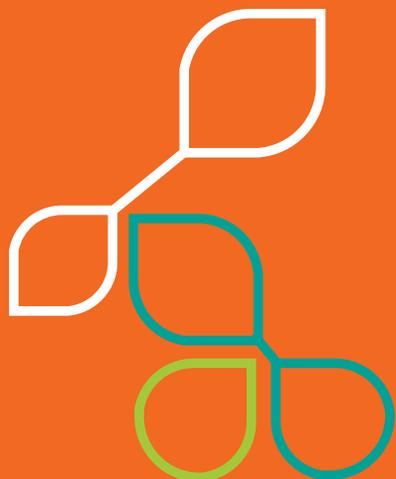
## Destination 9

### **Point Pelee National Park, Canada**

With the flock, you fly safely and reach Ontario. Together, you've found a large patch of forest with ample food and shelter. Though you're behind schedule, you're closer than ever to Quebec.

#### **Options:**

- Follow the flock to Quebec – You all head to Quebec together. Go to [Destination 12](#).
- Rest and replenish – Take a break in the city. Go to [Destination 11](#).





## Destination 10

### Laurentide Wildlife Reserve, Quebec

After a long, challenging journey, you arrive in central Quebec! The familiar sights and smells of your nesting grounds welcome you back. Though exhausted, you've successfully completed the migration, ready to start the next season of nesting and raising young.

- Congratulations! You successfully completed your migration journey!

## Destination 11

### Montreal, Canada

You decide to wait until dawn to cross the city. In the early morning light, the city is clearer and quieter, and you cross safely. You're feeling tired from the long journey but relieved to be so close to home. With just one last push, you take off toward your final destination.

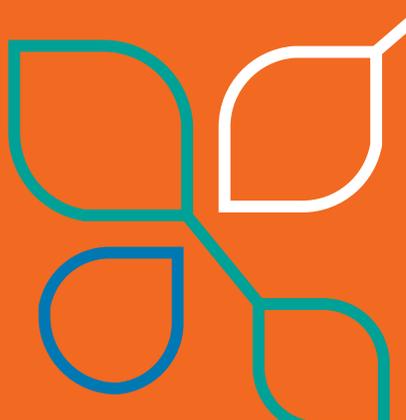
- Go to [Destination 12](#).

## Destination 12

### Laurentide Wildlife Reserve, Quebec

After weeks of travel, navigating cities, storms, and highways, you've finally made it back to your familiar breeding grounds in central Quebec. You spot other Swainson's Thrushes already there, singing their songs, building nests, and preparing for the season. Exhausted but proud, you find a safe spot to settle in, ready to start the next chapter: nesting and raising young.

- Congratulations! You successfully completed your migration journey!





## Migration Routes and Types of Migratory Birds (15 minutes)

Discuss how different birds migrate different distances (short, medium, and long migrations). Introduce the Swainson's Thrush, Arctic Tern, and Canada Goose as examples:

- ▶ **Swainson's Thrush** migrates from Canada to South America.
- ▶ **Arctic Tern** makes the longest migration from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back.
- ▶ **Canada Goose** has a more regional migration across North America.

Hand out a world map worksheet and have students draw or trace the migration paths of one or more of these birds, using different colours for each bird. You can also ask them to research and find other examples of migratory birds.

## Challenges Faced by Migratory Birds (15 minutes)

Talk about some challenges birds face during migration, like:

- ▶ Weather (storms, strong winds, cold spell).
- ▶ Predators (cats, hawks).
- ▶ Loss of habitats for foraging (food), breeding (having babies) or rest (forests, wetlands).
- ▶ Human obstacles (buildings, power lines, lights, trucks, windows).

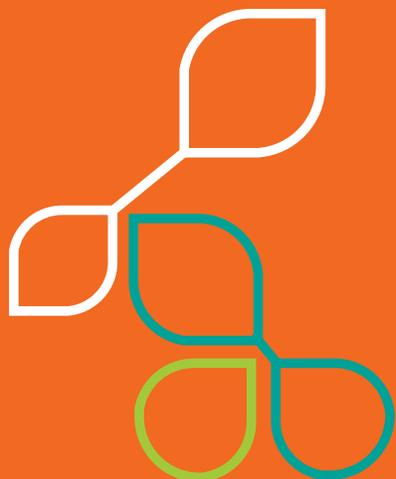
**Discussion:** Ask students how they think these challenges might affect the birds and their survival.

## How Can We Help Migratory Birds? (10 minutes)

Discuss ways people can help protect migratory birds:

- ▶ Keeping windows bird-safe by adding decals or stickers.
- ▶ Protecting habitats like forests and wetlands.
- ▶ Reducing light pollution to help birds navigate.
- ▶ Participating in citizen science projects to help track birds.

**Activity:** Ask students to brainstorm and draw a simple poster promoting one way people can help migratory birds.





## Wrap-Up and Reflection (10 minutes)

Summarize key points: what migration is, examples of migratory birds, challenges they face, and how we can help.

**Reflection Questions:** Have students answer in their own words.

- ▶ Why do birds migrate?
- ▶ What is one challenge migratory birds face?
- ▶ What is one way people can help migratory birds?

**Optionally, show a short video clip on bird science.**

- ▶ [Arctic shorebirds – spanning continents for survival](#)
- ▶ [Kirtland’s Warbler | A Biodiversity Success Story](#)
- ▶ [Studying Birds at the McGill Bird Observatory](#)

## Extension Activity

**Bird Observation Journal:** Encourage students to watch for birds around their home or school and note any birds they think might be migrating.

## Other resources

- ▶ [Bird Friendly window poster](#)
- ▶ [Birds and urban areas factsheet](#)
- ▶ [Swainson’s Thrush](#)
- ▶ [State of Canada’s Bird Report 2024](#)
- ▶ [Migratory Birds ECCC](#)

