

DISCOVERING THE WONDER OF BIRDS

By Diane Geerlinks
KONOS-CanadaEast

As I look to the skies to see a Bald Eagle soaring and gliding, or sit near the seashore watching the Snowy Egret swish its feet in search of its next meal, or listen to the Pileated Woodpecker drill into a tree, I stand in awe at the wonder of God's creation. And I am reminded that I haven't always had this interest in birding. It all began when....

A local wildlife centre was holding a "MAY BIRDING BLITZ". Every participant was encouraged to record the number of birds spotted during a specific time period, with prizes awarded for numerous sightings. And so began our family's unit study on 'Birds'. A trip to the library to gather books, and a set of binoculars placed at the kitchen window, along with a recording sheet, and the unit was well under way. We could never have imagined how many birds actually appeared outside our window. The world of birding opened up before our eyes.

The excitement built as we listened to birdcalls on a tape player and tried to identify them one by one. Our five children, ages 3 to 13 at the time, were all involved in this study. The three year old identified various body parts, while the thirteen year old researched and plotted the migration route of Sandpipers. Each child created a small lap book while researching a bird of his/her choice. E.B White's, The Trumpet of the Swan, was enjoyed as our read-aloud. As we looked at a bird's feather with a magnifying glass, we could see how the hooks and barbs joined together, just like Velcro, and then we understood how the Robin uses its beak to preen itself. What a discovery! Of course, the highlight of this unit for my 7-year-old son was to build a bird feeder. The question still remains to this day, "How do we keep the squirrels out?"

I can vividly recall my husband being in awe of the excitement and wonder that the children were expressing as a result of this unit. So much learning was taking place, without effort. It just grew and grew and grew. Oh yes, it meant that I was reading through books at night, looking for a simple bird house design, and gathering utensils from the kitchen cupboard to compare with bird beaks, but it still seemed so effortless. Why? It was because we were all engaged in this topic, mesmerized by the activities, and eager to find out more fascinating facts: Did you know that an Albatross has a wingspan of 12 feet? Did you know that Ostrich eggs are 3 lbs.? Did you know that a Hummingbird's nest is the size of a pop bottle lid and that their eggs are the size of navy beans?

It is these very experiences that make homeschooling worth it! In all of my twenty years of home educating our five children, I recall the times that we were actively involved in a unit study with fondest of memories. I know that it was during these times that we grew together as a family, and that the children's love of learning was developed. But even more than that, I would say that it was these actual UNIT STUDIES that kept me on this

homeschool journey. I was learning so much, and having so much fun watching my children learn. If a unit wasn't under way, I felt like we weren't really homeschooling, but instead I was just nagging my kids to get their work done.

It is no wonder that the homeschool founders such as Charlotte Mason, Susan Schaeffer Macaulay, Raymond and Dorothy More, and Ruth Beechick were all advocates of learning by doing, reading good books and allowing the child to discover the wonders of this world. Learning does last a lifetime and it begins with opening the doors of discovery. For my family, unit studies have given us this opportunity.

This past February, ten years later, I was sitting at the water's edge in Florida with my husband, once again marvelling at God's design, watching the birds. And I'm thankful for the years that I've been able to teach and direct my children's learning. Have they graduated with a LOVE OF LEARNING? Absolutely...and so have I!

Diane, and her husband, Harv have been home educating their five children since 1988. She has taught the "unit study" way, using KONOS for all of these years, adding bits and pieces of other curriculum to this approach.

Diane is the KONOS – Canada East Representative. She has been sharing these resources and her home schooling expertise at various support groups, conferences and all-day seminars for the past ten years. For more information, check out the website at www.konos-canada.com.