



Black-throated Finch Trust

Classroom Worksheet Year 10

Visit the home of the Black-throated Finch

Learning Areas

Science / Year 10 / Science Inquiry Skills / Planning and conducting.

Plan, select and use appropriate investigation methods, including fieldwork and laboratory experimentation, to collect reliable data; assess risk and address ethical issues associated with these methods (AC SIS199).

English / Year 10 / Literacy / Creating texts.

Create sustained texts, including texts that combine specific digital or media content, for imaginative, informative, or persuasive purposes that reflect upon challenging and complex issues (ACE LY1756).

Overview

There are over 400 endangered animals in Australia. The Black-throated Finch is one of them. A number of environmental factors are needed for the birds to thrive. Students will participate in an activity that helps them understand what environmental factors need to be present for the birds to have a healthy habitat.

Estimated Time

5 hours.

Objectives

The students will be able to:

1. Learn what makes a good habitat for Black-throated Finches.
2. Understand what people can do to protect and create habitat.
3. Understand what threatens habitat and the Black-throated Finch.

Background

The southern sub species of the Black-throated Finch is endangered. This means it is facing a *high risk* of extinction in the wild. For more information refer to the Black-throated Finch flyer or landholder Management Guidelines available at www.blackthroatedfinch.com or www.nqdrytropicals.com.au.

See the Australian Government's Black-throated Finch information webpage for general information about the bird <http://tiny.cc/wgyha>.

In this activity students will participate in a field visit to a known habitat area of Black-throated Finches. Students will use observation skills and write down what they see and hear around them. This activity will also encourage them to see and analyse the field site through the eyes of a land manager responsible for looking after habitat.

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Materials

1. Sun safe gear.
2. Binoculars.
3. Pen and paper.
4. Camera.
5. Field guide to plant species (one shared copy is fine).
6. GPS (optional).

Activity

1. Prepare students for field trip by sharing information about Black-throated Finch habitat. The Townsville City Council has great facilities for this activity at its Oak Valley Nature Reserve, about 20 minutes from Townsville. It is easily accessible by buses and has a shed where classroom activities can be held, trails and a viewing platform. To make sure trails are open call the Council's environment management officer Alma Ridep-Morris on 4727 8947 or email alma.ridep-morris@townsville.qld.gov.au.

- Discuss the environment and plant species Black-throated Finches prefer (i.e. types of trees, water sources, the species of grasses they eat seed from and where they nest etc.).

- Indigenous uses. To give students an appreciation of the value the habitat they are about to see has to Indigenous Australians talk about the traditional human uses of some plant species that are used by Black-throated Finches. Refer to the NQ Dry Tropics website for more information www.nqdrytropics.com.au

2. Ask students about their expectations of the field site based on information they have from landholder Management Guidelines and other online research (the library section of the Black-throated Finch website www.blackthroatedfinch.com has some useful research papers).

- Students could write an hypothesis about the number of birds they expect to see there, what the ground cover will be like, types of trees, general land condition etc.

3. In the field students record how many Black-throated Finches they see

(remembering they can be mistaken for other species. See www.blackthroatedfinch.com for details about how to identify them).

4. Record bird behaviour.

- Are they feeding on seed by the side of the road or on the ground? Are they drinking? Are they flying around? Take photos if they have cameras. Note which areas of the site the birds are using.

5. After half an hour of observation (and hopefully at least one bird sighting) students walk around and record the species of vegetation they see. If you don't have identification guides with you take photos and use information in the Black-throated Finch Management Guidelines to see if the species match those recommended in the Guidelines. Internet searches will help you find images of species.

- Make general recordings about whether it appears to be a healthy or unhealthy habitat for Black-throated Finches. Is there plenty of grass cover? Is the water clean?

6. Take photos of the field site to take to classroom. Plot the site on a GPS if available.

7. In the classroom talk about the observation findings.

- Did the observations meet expectations that were discussed before the field work? If not, why not? If they did, how? What influenced observation results? The time of day, disturbance, lack of experience in identifying?

8. Record sightings of Black-throated Finches from the field visit on the Black-throated Finch website. The Black-throated Finch Recovery Team is keen to monitor

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accurate recorded sightings of the bird to add to its understanding of the remaining populations in Townsville and other regions. For this purpose it holds an annual waterhole count each year where volunteers visit a nominated area around Townsville and record their sightings on a database. The website www.blackthroatedfinch.com has more information about this.

9. Some argue the job of protecting endangered species in Australia and internationally is sometimes left up to volunteers and that it is poorly resourced and funded. Much of the research to date about Black-throated Finches is done in a volunteer capacity; however some university research is being funded.

- Discuss distribution records shown in the landholder Management Guidelines. What influences these data and their reliability? I.e. the counts are done by volunteers. Lack of resources could mean the count is only done in areas where there are volunteers (most observers are in Townsville).

- Discuss what scientific ramifications this has and whether the class thinks it has consequences for the future of Black-throated Finches.

10. Ask students to comment on the likely accuracy of the distribution data in relation to their experiences in the field?

11. Appoint the students as park rangers responsible for looking after the site they visited.

- Could the environmental site be improved? If so how? More nesting sites, more native grasses, better access to water? What would students do to preserve the area for Black-throated Finches in the long term keeping in mind other human and wildlife users of the area? If you visited the Oak Valley Nature Reserve and want to take this further the Townsville City Council welcomes recommendations from students about how to improve management of the area. For a land management plan template see the schools section on the NQ Dry Tropics website.

12. If students visited a site other than the Oak Valley Nature Reserve, pretend the site is open to the public as

an area for viewing Black-throated Finches. Ask students to write and design signage. If they visited the Oak Valley Nature Reserve reflect on whether the signage was appropriate. How could it be improved? Was any information missing?

- The signage informs visitors of important features in the area like grass species favoured by Black-throated Finches and trees that provide good nesting sites. Consider communicating to the visitor what they can do to protect Black-throated Finches.