



# The Mate Game



**This game demonstrates how birds use song to attract mates and to stake out territories. This activity has been used successfully with students of all ages!**

## **BACKGROUND:**

**Each bird species has a unique song that the male uses to attract a mate and to alert other males of the same species that the territory is occupied.**

## **MATERIALS:**

- **Empty plastic eggs**
- **A variety of small items to fill the eggs, such as:**
  - **coins**
  - **paperclips**
  - **marbles**
  - **pebbles**



## **PROCEDURE:**

- **Divide the eggs into pairs and fill each pair with a different object. Try not to match colors within your pairs.**
- **Make certain that there are enough matching eggs for the number of players. For older children, you may want to have some eggs that do not have a match so that you can discuss the consequences of not finding a mate or use a variety of objects within the eggs.**
- **Pass out the eggs and ask the participants to hold on to them until it's time for the game. No peeking and no shaking, yet!**
- **Explain how birds attract mates and the role of song.**
- **Participants may now locate a mate by finding someone whose egg makes the same "song". When they think that they have found a mate, they may look inside the egg to see if the objects inside match. If it is not a pair, they must continue searching.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

**Ask the participants how many attempts it took to find a mate. Most will find the correct mate on the first try. Some will find that there are birds whose song is very similar to their own, and that listening closely for subtle differences is necessary in order to find the correct mate. In the natural world, there are closely related species with similar songs. These birds must find a member of their own species to breed successfully.**

**Special thanks to Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains for introducing us to the original "Mating Game" developed for Audubon California by Melanie Ingalls and Jean Dillingham!**