



TOWER GROVE — PARK —

Bird Behavior in a Solar Eclipse

While observing the solar eclipse shadows near a tree, don't forget to listen to and observe the critters living on, in, and near those trees! In particular, let's take a look at birds.

Have you noticed that just before sunrise and into early daylight, you will hear birds singing? What about at night? Do you notice that many birds quiet down in the evening? (Except nocturnal birds such as the Barred Owl, which you'll hear at night with its signature "Who-cooks-for-you" call.) Why do these bird calls align with the sunrise and sunset?

- Listen for bird song in the early morning at your home. This "dawn chorus" is often performed by male birds to defend or claim their territory and attract mates. The pre-sunrise timing ensures that they won't be spotted by potential predators. With the still and quiet air, their song also carries further!
- You will continue to hear bird calls and songs throughout the day if you are listening for it. Take a few moments to observe this prior to the eclipse.
 - *Tip: check out the Robert and Martha Gaddy Wild Bird Garden at the northwest corner of Tower Grove Park. This lovely refuge is a hotspot for migrating birds in the spring and fall due to its prime location on the Mississippi Flyway!*
- Conversely, listen for bird song at night. Do you notice that it has quieted down? While birds do sleep at night just like us, they must also keep quiet to stay safe from predators. Some birds, like blackbirds, will even roost in flocks at night, taking turns watching and listening for predators while others sleep.

So, what happens when the sky goes dark during the solar eclipse? Will birds think that nighttime has come? How will this change their behavior?

- In past solar eclipses throughout history, the loss of sunlight has been shown to trigger nighttime routines in songbirds, such as returning to their evening roosts to seek shelter from nighttime predators, preening quietly, singing quiet evening songs or becoming totally silent, and feeding heavily as darkness approaches. Nocturnal birds have been shown to suddenly increase their activity as if night has fallen.
 - What do you observe (hear) in bird behavior as the sky darkens?
- As the light increases towards the end of the eclipse, birds have been observed to reset to their morning behaviors, beginning with the dawn chorus.
 - Do you notice a difference in bird behavior as the eclipse comes to an end?
- Our April 8, 2024 solar eclipse will also align with spring bird migration. How do you anticipate this will affect their flight patterns?