

Get to Know Birds



Do you love animals, including wildlife? Then you just might want to get to know the wildlife you probably see every day: birds. There are many special things about birds. For one, they have feathers. No other animal has them. Birds come in an amazing variety of colors and sizes. That's another special thing about birds—diversity.

How do you describe a bird? You may describe its colors and color pattern, the size and shape of the beak, or what its legs and feet look like. These are called field marks. Field marks are clues that people use to help them identify a bird.

When you become comfortable recognizing field mark clues, you can begin to identify specific kinds of birds. So grab a field guide or open an app and go outside! When you spot a bird, take a closer look.

This magazine has some great tips for observing, understanding, and being a friend to birds.



Snowy Egret

Standing Out From the Crowd

IT'S A VERY BIRDY WORLD!

Number of bird species on each continent:



South America:
3,400+



Asia:
2,600+



Africa:
2,400+



North America:
1,900+



Australia:
750+

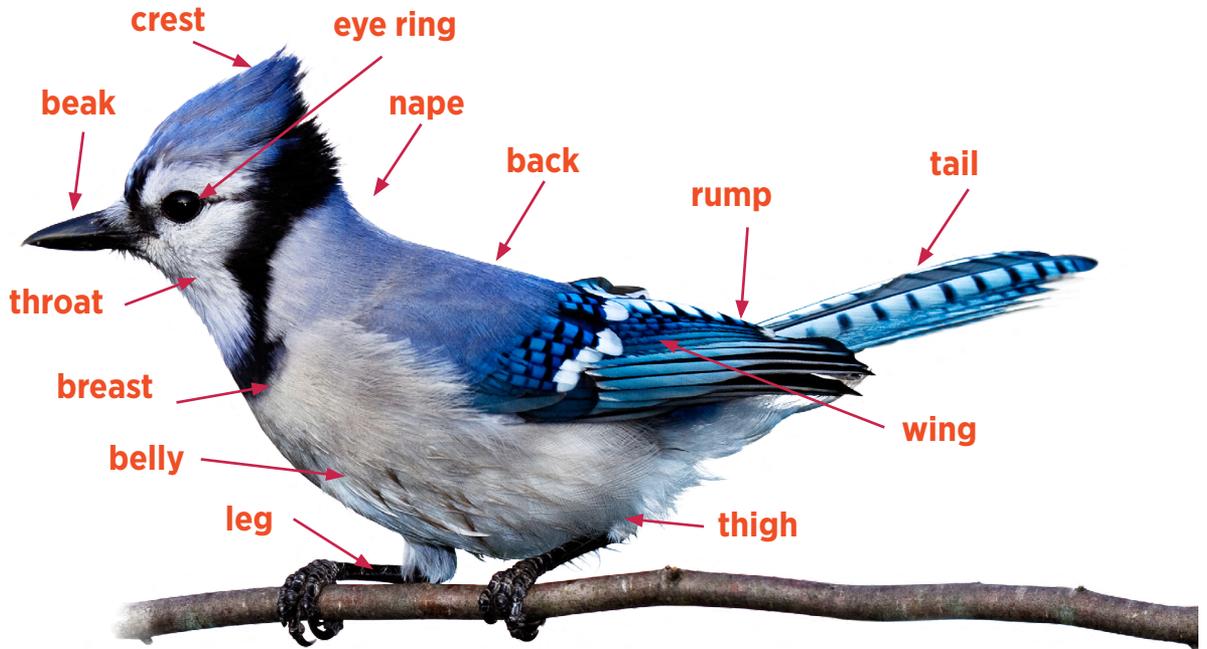


Europe:
500+



Antarctica:
45+

Number of bird species in the world, about:
10,400+



What do you think when you hear the word wildlife? Do you think of birds? If not, you should, because no matter where you are or what season you're in, birds are wildlife you can spot right outside your door.

Think about birds you've seen in your neighborhood. Do they all look alike? All birds have feathers, two legs, and a beak, of course, but once you really start noticing birds, you'll be amazed by their variety. You'll see birds of different sizes, shapes, and colors and you'll hear them making many different sounds.

So Many Kinds of Birds

Scientists group birds into categories. Owls, hawks, eagles, and falcons are raptors, or birds of prey—birds that hunt other animals by seizing them with their powerful feet and sharp talons. Perching birds or songbirds are the birds you see flying over city streets, flitting through the trees, sitting in a row on a telephone line, or looking for insects or seeds in the grass. There are many types of birds: tiny hovering hummingbirds, strong-billed woodpeckers, waterfowl like ducks and geese with their webbed feet, long-legged wading birds, shorebirds, and even birds that don't fly, like penguins and ostriches.

Field Marks Are the Key

There are about 10,500 species of birds in the world. Sometimes it's easy to identify a species, and sometimes it can be hard to tell two species apart because they look so much alike. Scientists and birdwatchers start the process of identifying a bird by paying attention to its field marks—characteristics like colors, markings, size, shape, and even sounds. Take a look at this Blue Jay and its field marks.

A lot of people have fun trying to identify every kind of bird they see and keeping a list of all the different species they've spotted. Others just enjoy hearing birds singing in the trees and wondering what that song means. What about you? What do you enjoy about birds?



Who's That Bird?

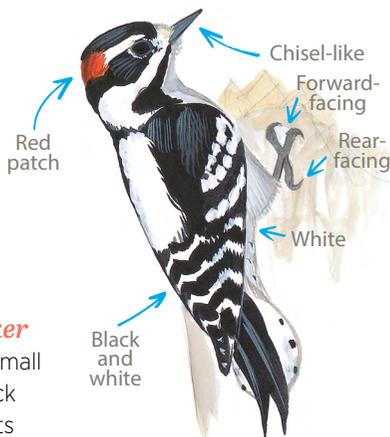
Think about various birds you've seen. How are they alike and how are they different? You already know all birds have feathers. They all have two legs, two wings, and a beak, of course. But beyond those basics, birds come in an amazing variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, with an equally amazing variety of sounds and behaviors.

Each kind of bird is called a species. Females and males of each species are sometimes different colors, but basically birds of the same species have the same look and sound. It's fun to be able to look at or listen to a bird and say, "I know what that is!" Here are some bird identification tips.

You can get lots of information about North American birds in Audubon's online field guide: audubon.org/bird-guide.

For Example

This picture shows the field marks of a Downy Woodpecker. Below is a description that you might find in a field guide.



Downy Woodpecker

Field marks: This small woodpecker has black and white upper parts and white under parts.

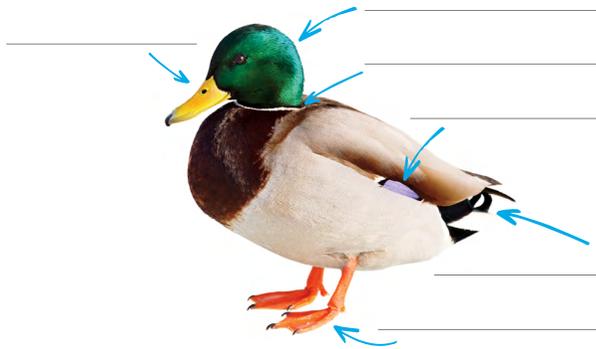
The male has a red patch on the back of its head. The bill is short, straight, and pointed. The woodpecker's two forward-facing and two rear-facing toes and sharp claws help it cling to tree trunks.

Look for Field Marks

Field marks are the physical characteristics of a bird—its color, markings, size, and shape.

- Start with the basic color or colors. Crows are all black, for example, while American Goldfinches are mostly yellow with dark wings.
- Think about its shape. Does it have a crest—feathers that stand up on top of its head? Is its tail long or short?
- What does the beak look like? Is it long or short, thick or thin, straight or curved?
- How big is it? Does it seem small, medium-size, or big? Compare its size and shape to something you know, like your fist or a football, or a bird you're familiar with, like a crow or robin.

Your Turn: Fill in the field mark labels on this male Mallard using these words: Shiny green; White; Broad and flat; Purple; Black; Webbed.



Write a description of the Mallard:

More Bird ID Tips

Observe Behavior

Observing what a bird is doing and where it is can help you narrow down your choices.

- If it's swimming, there's a good chance it's a member of the duck family, but no chance it's a dove.
- If it's clinging to the side of a tree, it could be a woodpecker, but not likely to be a duck.
- If it's hopping in the grass, it might be an American Robin or some kind of sparrow, but probably isn't a hummingbird.



Listen for Calls and Songs

You can often hear a bird before you see it, and sometimes you will hear it but not see it at all. A bird's call or song can tell you what it is and even what it is doing. Birds make different sounds in different circumstances. Also, some birds are only active at night. Listening for birds like owls after it gets dark can be fun! If you become familiar with the kinds of birds likely to be in your area, you can begin to match up sounds with species.



PORTRAITS OF LOCAL BIRDS

These works of art were created by students 14, 15, and 11 years old. They were inspired to make portraits of birds they found in their communities. They learned about the birds' habitats, behaviors, and field marks. Everyone can show love of nature through art. Try it!



Try This!

- **Explore** nature wherever you find it—even in your own backyard or a city park.
- **Observe** birds and other animals—spy on them to see their natural behavior; try to figure out what they're doing and why.
- **Protect** the natural world in any way you can.
- **Keep a journal** for recording your observations from nature.
- **Draw, paint, or photograph** the plants, animals, and natural places around you.
- **Inspire** other people to care about and protect the natural world by sharing what you learned.



Be a Naturalist

The National Audubon Society gets its name from John James Audubon. He traveled the United States in the 1800s painting beautiful pictures of birds. His work inspired Americans to think about, care about, and get out and enjoy nature. That's what conservation is all about. *Conservation* means to protect and save wild plants and animals and the places they live. That way, those places and those plants and animals will remain for all people to enjoy in the future.

Audubon was a naturalist, which means he was a person who loved being outside in nature finding animals and plants. During Audubon's lifetime, much of our country was wilderness. Even without wilderness, you can still be a naturalist close to home any time of the year, no matter where you live.

Imagine yourself as a naturalist and a conservationist. How would your life be different?

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Be a Friend to Birds

Some birds live in your neighborhood year-round, some stay for a season, and others pass through once or twice a year on their seasonal migrations. Here are some actions you can take in your own yard, schoolyard, or neighborhood to make the best possible bird-friendly habitat.



1. Prevent Window Crashes

Stop birds from hitting windows by putting up screens, closing drapes and blinds, or sticking decals on the outside of the glass.

2. Keep Kitty In

Cats that go outdoors kill birds and don't live as long as indoor pets.

3. Go Native

Planting native plants provides birds with the foods they need, including fruits, seeds, and tasty bugs.

4. Water the Birds

Provide birdbaths and protect natural water sources in your yard. Be sure to replace the water regularly to prevent mosquitoes from moving in!

5. Let It Be

Leaving dead trees, fallen branches, and brush piles creates nesting habitat and provides birds with shelter to keep them safe from predators and bad weather.



6. Lights Out

Bright lights at night can confuse night-migrating birds, so close your curtains or blinds and turn off unneeded lights.

Director; Melanie Ryan, Senior Designer; Mike Fernandez, Video Producer; Camilla Cerea, Photo Editor/Photographer; Lia Bocchiaro, Associate Photo Editor
Credits: P1: Sandy Ashley/Audubon Photography Awards; CCO Creative Commons (bird tracks) . P2, clockwise from center: DepositPhotos; iStock (7). P3, center, clockwise from top left: David Allen Sibley; iStock; Katemangostar/Freepik; right, from top, Louise Showers, Anthony

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