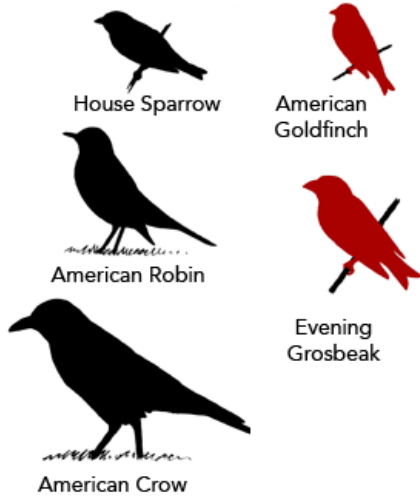


HOW TO LOOK AT A BIRD

Field Marks. These are the unique combinations of color, pattern, and shape that mark and separate each species. Field marks are not always visual; behavior plays an important role in most identification and is often more important and visual details in separating one species from another.



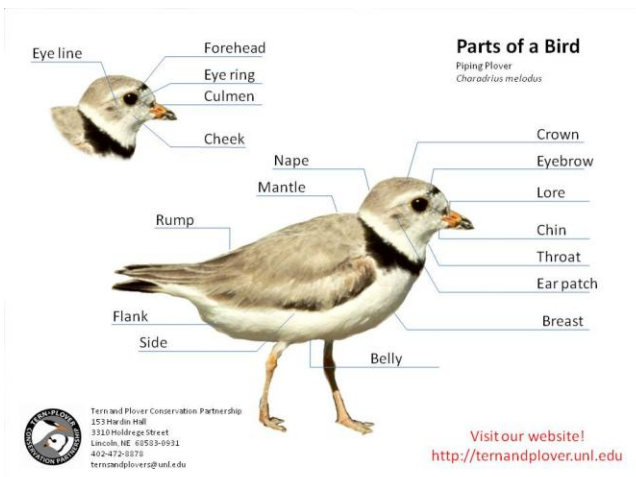
Shape and Silhouette. What body type does the bird have? Is it slender or chunky, long or short necked? Long or short legged?

Postures and Flight Patterns. What pose is the bird in? Does it perch with an upright or horizontal stance? Does it have a flapping or gliding flight? When soaring does it hold its wings flat or in a V?

Behaviors. What is the bird doing? Is it feeding on the ground or in a tree? If it is swimming, does it feed by diving or by tipping?

Size. How big is the bird? Is it larger or smaller than a bird you are familiar with (i.e., American Crow, Blue Jay or House Sparrow)?

Compare Body Features. Look at the birds' extremities (i.e., beak, legs, tail) for clues based on proportions. Is the beak longer or shorter than the head? Is the top of the head rounded or flat?



Head. Look for a stripe over the eye (eyebrow stripe), a line through the eye (eye line), a stripe along the midline of the head (crown stripe), a ring of color around the eye (eye ring), and a throat patch.

Bill Shape and Color. Look for the shape of the beak. Is it conical, hooked, flat (spatulate), decurved, or recurved? Look for the color of the upper and lower beak and the area between the base of the bill and the eye (lore).

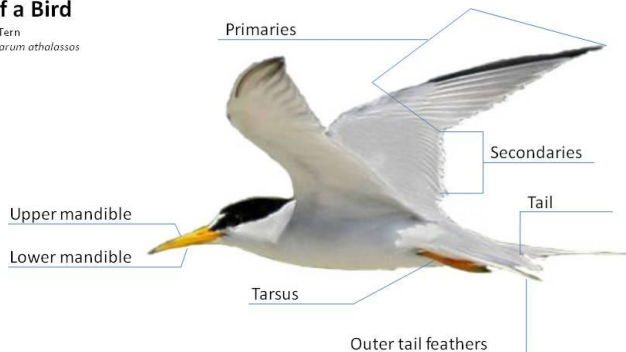
Wings. Look for the shape of the wings. Are they long and slender or short and rounded? Look for wing bars (stripes on the wing) or wing patches (block of color). When the bird is perching, note the length of the wings compared to the tip of the tail.

Tail. Look at the length and shape of the tail. Is the end notched, forked, wedge-shaped, rounded or straight? Are there stripes, bars or color patterns on the tail?

Legs. Look for the length and color of the legs. Look at the feet. Are they webbed? Are there two, three, or four toes pointed forward? Are there talons on the toes?

Parts of a Bird

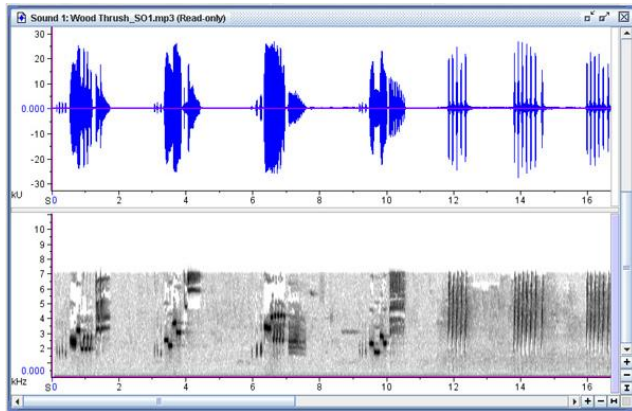
Interior Least Tern
Sterna antillarum athalassos





season and the age and sex of the bird. Finally, the color reproduction in field guides only approximates a bird's color and the quality of the color in a field guide can vary.

Colors and Plumage Patterns. Look for the color of the feathers. What color are the wings, the top of and bottom of the tail, the breast and lower belly, and the rump and back? Color is useful in bird identification, especially when observing birds that are nearby and in direct light but can be misleading if the lighting or angle of view is bad. Also, keep in mind that the color of birds changes with the



Songs and Calls. Bird songs and calls come in a huge variety and knowing them will help you find birds you otherwise might overlook. Learning bird songs and calls takes a great deal of practice in the field and usually comes after learning to recognize the species by sight – you see the bird and learn its song and calls by association. Does the song have a trill, or is it buzzy, does the bird whistle, rattle, squeak, squawk or croak?

Left: *Spectrogram of a Wood Thrush.*

Habitat. Each species of bird is predictably found in a particular habitat and each habitat contains a predictable assortment of birds. Having knowledge of bird habitat preferences is one of the best ways to sort out which birds you are most likely to encounter. Is the bird in grassland, a forest, a wetland or an urban area?



Source: ProjectBEAK

Range and Abundance. Birds generally stay within a certain geographic area or range and knowing the relative abundance of different species in your area is helpful. Using range maps can be helpful in deciding which birds are in an area, but birds don't look at maps or read field guides and wandering (vagrant) individuals do occur in most species.

Time of Year. Some birds are year-round residents in an area, some pass through an area on migration and some spend the summer in an area breeding and leave for warmer climates for the winter. Spend some time learning which birds live in or visit an area at different times of the year.

GISS or JIZZ. In time, by paying attention to the "General Impression of Size and Shape" of birds, you will be able to identify them quickly without having to rely on field marks and field guides. **JIZZ** describes your immediate, gut reaction to the total impression the bird makes on you and not the minute details of field marks.



Get a Better Look at a Bird

Sitting Quietly. The best way to observe birds is also the easiest – sit quietly for 10 – 30 minutes until the birds in the area are no longer alarmed by your presence and resume their normal behavior.

Pishing and Squeaking. When alarmed by an intruder many birds give a call to attract others to help chase it away – the call typically sounds like a “psh” or “spsh”; imitating this sound can bring birds closer. “Squeaking” by kissing the back of your hand makes a similar sound.

Mobbing. Birds mob potential predators to chase them away from their nests or out of their territories. Owls inspire the most vigorous mobbing so by playing a recorded owl call (Screech or Barred works best) you can attract small birds ready to mob the predator. Don’t overdo this activity – you may cause birds to squander important time and energy resources.

Playback Songs. Bird song is used to attract mates and to defend territorial boundaries. A bird that starts to sing in an already established territory will soon be confronted by the residents. Play a recording of a species’ song within its territory and the territorial male (and maybe the female) will quickly appear. Don’t overdo this activity – you may cause birds to squander important time and energy resources.

Blinds. Most birds recognize the human shape so anything that disguises it can function as a blind – as soon as the birds no longer see the intruder (you) they will resume their normal activities.

Pointing Out Birds to Others. Use precise descriptions rather than vague directions.

1. Refer to the most obvious landmark near the bird and then narrow the field until you come to the bird.
2. Use the “clock” technique to describe the birds’ position.
3. Avoid using distance measurements.

Best advice.....PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!



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