

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

Who's That Bird?

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+

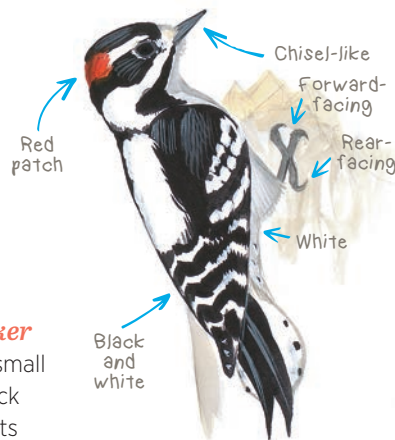
Think about various birds you've seen. How are they alike and how are they different? You already know all birds have feathers. They all have two legs, two wings, and a beak, of course. But beyond those basics, birds come in an amazing variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, with an equally amazing variety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

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.

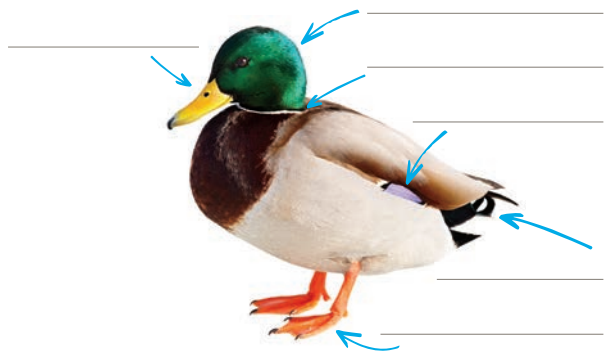


Look for Field Marks

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.

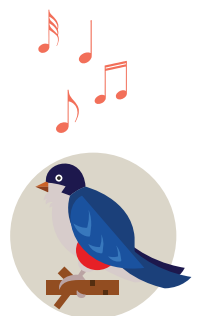
Your Turn: Fill in the field mark labels on this male Mallard using these words: Shiny green; White; Broad and flat; Purple; Black; Webbed.



Write a description of the Mallard:

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.





John James Audubon

He got to know hundreds of birds!

John James Audubon was a naturalist and artist who traveled throughout the United States in the 1800s painting birds and other animals in the wilderness. His work and his name became famous.

Audubon was born in Haiti in 1785 and spent his childhood in France. He came to the United States when he was 18. He did not speak English when he arrived, but he soon learned the language and, in 1812, became a U.S. citizen.

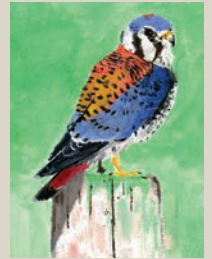
Today, throughout the United States, parks, streets, and buildings are named in honor of him. What did he do to earn such respect?

Audubon was fascinated by nature and wildlife—especially by birds—even as a young boy. He combined his love of nature with his skills of drawing and painting. In America, he quickly fell in love with the vast and beautiful wild places he saw all around him.

Audubon carried his paints and his gun into wild and unspoiled forests. He waded into swamps and drifted in small boats down rivers. He became a skillful woodsman and an expert rifleman. He faced many dangers in the frontier.

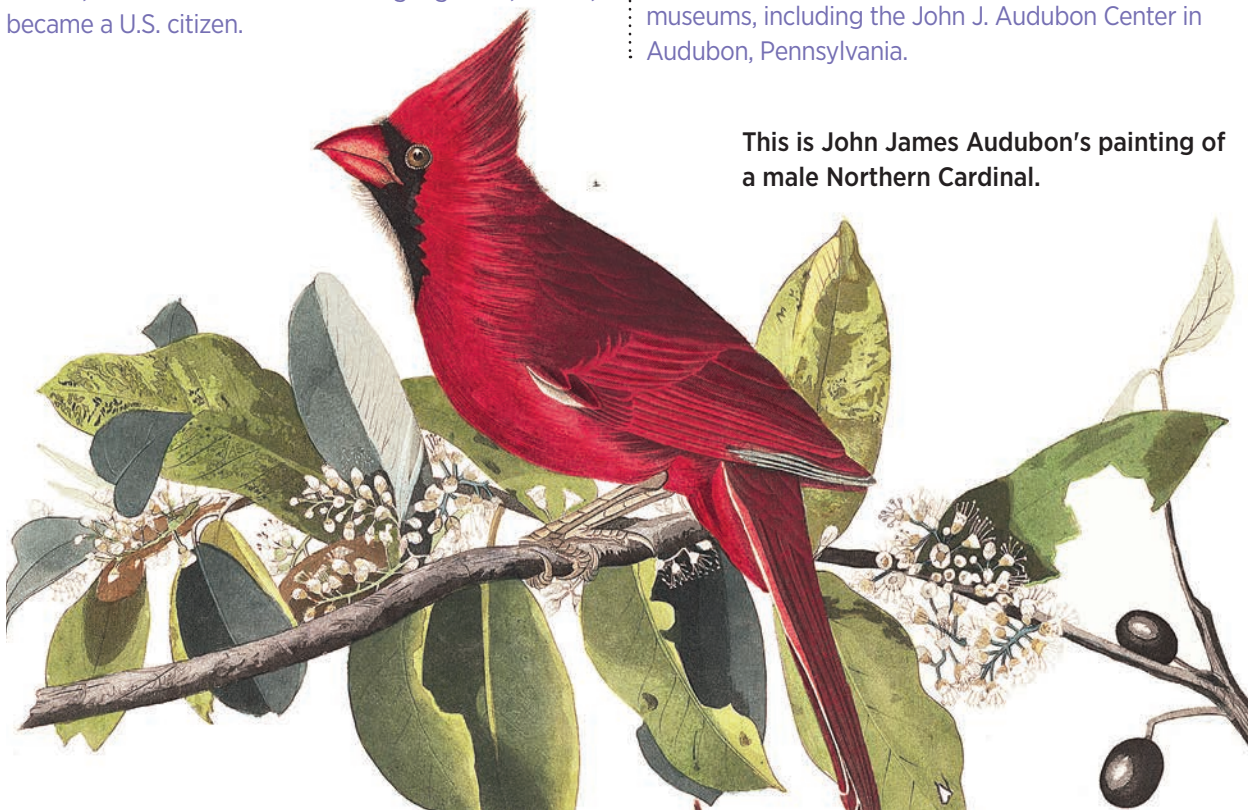
Wherever he went, Audubon looked for birds. Some of them were unknown to scientists. His travels let him observe North America's birds in their natural habitats.

Audubon believed birds were so exciting that he wanted to paint them as big as life. He insisted on using the biggest paper available to create the book of his bird paintings. The sheets measured a little more than three feet by two feet, and were called “double elephant sheets.” When it was published, Audubon's book, *The Birds of America*, was a great success, first in Europe and then in the United States. It had life-size paintings of 497 species of birds, more than half of the birds found in North America. Today copies are owned by many very wealthy people and large museums. It would cost you more than a million dollars to buy one! But there are copies that people can see in some museums, including the John J. Audubon Center in Audubon, Pennsylvania.



IN AUDUBON'S FOOTSTEPS

These works of art were created by students 14, 15, and 11 years old. Inspired by John James Audubon, they made 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!



This is John James Audubon's painting of a male Northern Cardinal.



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 life and work of John James Audubon 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.

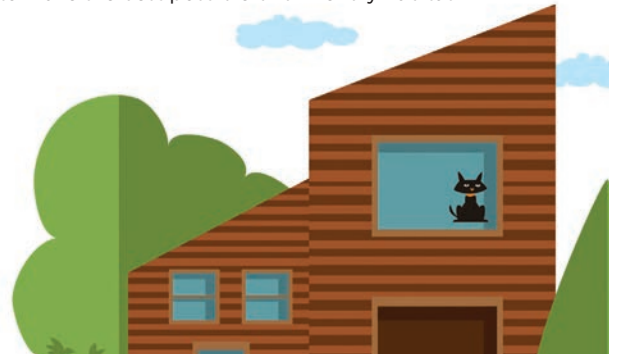
Imagine yourself as a naturalist and a conservationist. How would your life be different?

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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.

Credits: P1: Sandy Ashley/Audubon Photography Awards; CCO Creative Commons (bird tracks) . P2, clockwise from center: David Allen Sibley; iStock; Katemangostar/Freepik; iStock (8). P3, clockwise from top right: Louise Showers, Anthony Richards, Jesse Nelson; John James Audubon; courtesy Audubon. P4, clockwise from top left: Camilla Cerea/Audubon; Vexels.com (2); Sean Fitzgerald.

We're correlated! For correlations to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Next Generation Science Standards, go to: audubonadventures.org/Teach_Standards.htm
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