



# Jake's Nature Guide

**BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS**

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# **JAKE'S NATURE GUIDE: BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS**

**BASIC INFO ON BIRDS AND TIPS ON SEEING AND  
IDENTIFYING BIRDS IN THE FIELD**

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## BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS

Hello, and welcome to the wonderful world of birds! I am very excited that you are reading this eBook now as it means that you have already taken the first step towards learning about the natural world all around us.

I think that learning about birds is a great first step to take towards becoming an amateur naturalist. Before you know it you will be able to identify birds you see when you are out hiking, at the park, or at a friends house.

Birds are a good introduction to learning about the natural world because they are all around us and they are easy to see and study. It seems like anytime you look outside of your window you can see birds flying through the sky or perched in a tree. They are much more common and easier to see than other animals such as many insects, fish, reptiles, and mammals.

How many times have you been on a hike and seen a bear? Personally, I love hiking and get out as often as possible, but I still can remember on two hands the times that I have seen a bear in the wild. It is a rare and exciting occurrence. Now compare that with the number of times you see a bird? Just about any time you look outside you see a bird – too many to count.

However, like everything we can't just pick up a book and instantly become an expert. It will take time, patience, and practice to gain knowledge about bird behavior and to be able to identify birds.

This e-book is designed to give you a little bit of background information about the bird lifecycle, bird behavior, and tips to help you see and identify birds. I hope that you find the information useful!



### CURIOUS FOR MORE?

If you enjoy learning about the natural world and are hungry for more information then check out my blog: [Jake's Nature Blog](#) or you can buy my paper book, [Jake's Nature Guide: Rocky Mountains](#), which covers all aspects of the Rocky Mountains in addition to just birds.



## A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR BEGINNING BIRDERS

Beginning birders should follow a few simple steps to become familiar with birds.

I know I've remarked on it before, but I'm going to say it again. Anytime that you go or even just look outside you are likely to see birds. This makes learning about birds a great first step towards gaining a better appreciation of the natural world around you. Here are some simple steps to help set you on your way.

### A Starting Point For Beginning Birders

Please think of this step-by-step guide as simply a starting point for beginning birders. As you learn more about birds you will come up with your own ideas and practices. I put this together to simply help those people who are looking for some general guidance to get them started.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that you are doing this for fun! Don't ever forget why you are doing this. It is fun to go for walk, hike, or sit outside and observe birds.

**1. Congratulations on your interest in learning about birds!** You have already taken the first step, which is the interest or desire to learn about birds.

**2. Buy a field guide to the birds of your area.** A good field guide will help you know what birds are in your area. It is important that you find a guide to your area as opposed to all of North America. There are way more birds in all of North America than just in your area and that book will simply complicate finding a bird in the book.

Once you have the book, I would suggest just flipping through it to become acquainted with how it is organized. The more familiar you are with the book, the easier it will be to use in the field when you are actually trying to figure out what a bird you see is.

**3. Start observing the world around you.** This sounds simple and obvious, but as Sherlock Holmes says, 'seeing and observing are not the same.' When I say observing, I mean that you need to really pay attention to what is around you. Look closely at the trees and you may see some birds. What was that flash of movement down by those bushes?

As you observe closely, begin to get a sense of the overall size, shape, and color of a bird in a flash. Oftentimes you will not have a lot of time to look at the bird and you need to take in as much as you can in that brief snapshot.

**4. Learn about the basic features of a bird** so that you know what to look for when you are in the field. This is important because knowing the general features of



a bird will help you know what to look for when you see a bird in the field. Some of the things that you may want to look for is the tail, beak shape, crown, legs, habitat, and color. You can use the simple bird diagram on page 9 to help you.

**5. Start to observe bird behavior.** After you have familiarized yourself with the basics to identify the bird, the next step is to watch how the bird behaves. This is the fun part. Stay still, either standing or find a nice place to sit and just observe a bird. How does it fly? Does it soar high up in the air or does it fly around quickly like a tiny fighter plane? Does it perch high up in a tree alone or does it fly in a flock?

There are an endless list of things that you notice and learn about bird behavior. I would suggest that when you being you just start watching birds and see what interests you. Afterwards, when you return home you can research that behavior to see why the bird was doing what it did.

**6. Use these skills and knowledge and now move on to watching birds and identifying them in the field.**



A Clark's nutcracker is a common Rocky Mountain bird.



## 6 BIRD WATCHING TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

Bird watching in the Rocky Mountains can be difficult when you first try to do it or if you simply don't know what you are doing. Luckily, with a bit of practice and by following these tips you can quickly learn to hear and see birds all around you.

**1. Stay quiet and listen** - Birds are always talking and listening to each other. This means that they can hear if there are people around, which sometimes can get them to be quiet. A good way to notice birds is if you are very quiet and listen yourself. You may surprise yourself at how many different kinds and numbers of birds that you can hear at any one place. Once you hear where the noise from the birds is coming from the trick becomes trying to see the bird.

**2. Walk/hike slowly** - If you go for a fast hike or walk you are not going to see very many birds. The best way to see and hear many birds is to walk slowly and pay attention to the sounds and movements along the trail.

**3. Sit still** - Even better than just walking slowly is to pick a nice spot and just sit or stand still for several minutes. By sitting still and keeping your eyes and ears open you will give yourself a chance to see or hear all the birds in the area.

**4. Best places to watch for birds** - You can see birds in any habitat because birds live everywhere. You can see birds near water, in forests, open meadows, or high up in the mountains. Keeping that in mind, the best places to see the most birds are near water and at the edge of two different habitats, such as on the edge of a forest next to a meadow or at the very edge of the meadow near the forest.

**5. Watch for movement** - Often you may just see a flash of movement in the corner of your eye that is a bird darting from one bush to another. If you hold still and look towards that spot you may see the bird move again. It can be hard to see a bird holding still on a bush or tree. But, once that bird moves you will easily see it and can see where it lands.

**6. Best times to look for birds** - Birds tend to be more active at certain times of day, which makes them easier to spot because they are flying or moving around a lot. In general, the best times to see birds are early in the morning or in the evening, since those are when birds are the most active.

Following these simple tips will make bird watching more fun and will help you to see lots of birds anytime that you are outside. This includes your backyard, the park, and the next time you go for a hike in the Rocky Mountains. The next step is to learn how to identify birds.





## 6 TIPS ON IDENTIFYING BIRDS FOR BEGINNERS

Identifying birds in the Rocky Mountains can be a fun thing to do when you are out exploring. It may be challenging to identify birds in the field when you are just starting. Fortunately, by knowing a few tips, identifying birds becomes much easier.

The first thing in order to identify birds is to follow the tips on bird watching, which will help you see lots of birds. Once you start seeing lots of birds when you are outside then you are ready to take the next step and learn how to actually identify the different kinds of birds.

A key and big help to identify birds is to purchase a field guide to the birds in your area. I strongly suggest a guide to just your area as opposed to birds of North America or some other large area.

**1. Size of Bird** - How big is the bird? This can be difficult to guess, especially if the bird is far away or is sitting on a branch of a tree way up high. A good way to guess is to think of something that you know the size of and try to compare the size of the bird with that. For example, you may know how big a soccer ball is. Does the bird look bigger, smaller, or about the same size as the soccer ball. This will just give you a general idea if the bird is small, medium, or large.

Another way to estimate the size of the bird is to compare it to the size of birds you are familiar with. For example, a sparrow is a small bird, a pigeon is a medium sized bird, and a hawk is a large bird. Does the bird you see look similar in size to one of those?

**2. Shape of bird** - What does the overall shape of the bird look like? Is it short and fat or is it tall and thin with long legs? Does it have a short tail or a long tail? Does it have feathers standing up on the top of it's head or not? This does not need to be done in detail, but you can just glance at the bird and note the overall appearance. This shape can help you identify what kind of bird it is.

**3. Shape and length of bill** - this may be hard to see, but try to look closely at the bill of the bird. The shape of the bird's bill will actually tell you a lot about the bird. It will give you an idea as to what that kind of bird eats and therefore may help you figure out where it lives.

**4. Behavior of the bird** - What is the bird doing? Is it flying around the tops of the trees or is it going up and down the trunk of a tree looking for food? Also, notice if the bird is part of a flock or is alone. Does it stay up on trees or shrubs or does it get down on the ground? If it is on the ground how does it move around - by walking or hopping?

**5. Color of the bird** - This may seem simple and easy to do, but can be harder than you think. You may not have a lot of time to look before the bird flies away, so do



your best to look and remember. Focus on the head, neck, back, breast, and the tail feathers when it flies.

If you have some time, then look at the overall colors of the bird. Is the entire bird one color or is the back one color and the breast a different color? Is the head of the bird one color or are there stripes running down the head? Are there any markings on the neck of the bird? What about the wings?

Keep in mind that certain kinds of birds may be different colors at different times of year. Also, some young birds may be a different color than the adults or females and males may differ in their coloring. Just look at the coloring of the bird you see and look that up in your guide book.

**6. Where are you?** Look around you to see what kind of habitat you are and what kind of habitat you see the bird in. Are you near a lake? In a forest? On a mountain slope? Walking across a mountain meadow near forest?

#### **To use binoculars or not for identifying birds?**

Binoculars are not necessary to see and identify birds. But, if you have a pair bring them along because you will be able to get a closer look at birds and it will help you to identify more birds than you would be able to without them.

Being good at identifying birds will give you another way of understanding the natural world around you. If you are very interested, you can always learn more about the common birds of the Rocky Mountains or even other birds such that you can go beyond just identifying them but even begin to understand their behavior, about bird reproduction (baby birds, nests, and raising their young), or how birds stay warm in winter.

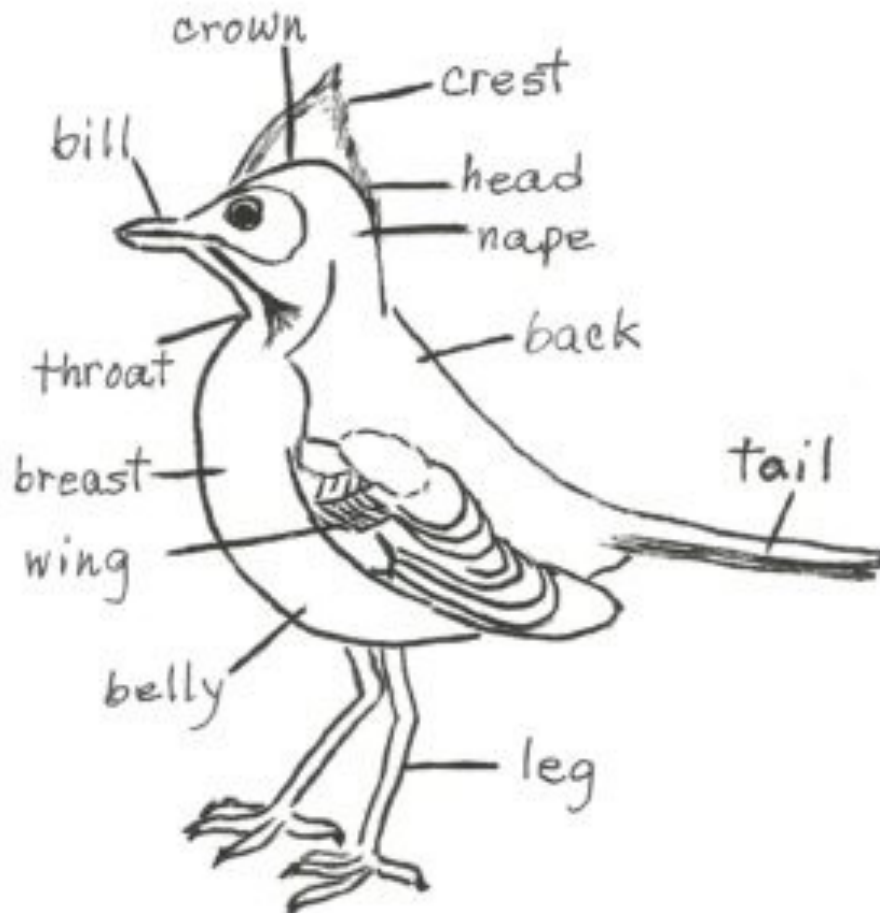




## ABOUT BIRDS

When I first became interested in birds I was overwhelmed at how many different kinds there were. I wanted to learn more about them and be able to identify the different kinds, but I simply didn't know where to start. I had no idea what the different parts of the bird were called or which were important for identifying birds. Well, here is a diagram and a short explanation of what to look for.

This simple bird diagram shows the main parts of a bird. This knowledge will help with describing and identifying different birds. Oftentimes this information is most useful when describing the coloring of a bird. A description may say something like, "the bird has a blue back, and breast with a black neck and a black stripe on the crown leading down to the nape."



This simple bird diagram shows the main parts of a bird.



If you see a bird that is sitting somewhere or flying in the air try to notice these key features, mainly focusing on the color and shape since that will help you identify the bird:

**Crest** - Does the bird have a crest on its head?

**Breast** - What color is it? Is it the same as the rest of the bird's body?

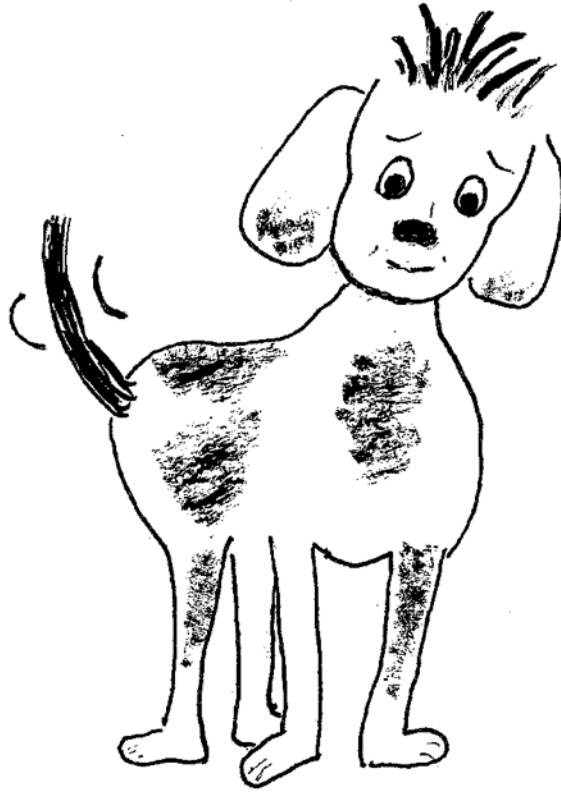
**Throat** - Sometimes birds have a stripe of a different color on their throat.

**Back** - What color is the back of the bird?

**Tail** - What color is it? Is it very long or normal? What shape is it?

**Belly** - Is this the same color as the back?

**Bill** - What shape is the bird's bill? This is important because a bird's bill gives important clues about the bird. I will talk about this later.



Did you know? Male and female birds can be different colors. Usually, male birds are more colorful than female birds. This is the male's effort to attract a mate, essentially saying, "Hey, look at me!" He is showing the female how healthy he is. Further complicating the coloring of birds, young birds are sometimes different colors than adults.



## **ALL BIRDS SHARE THESE CHARACTERISTICS**

Birds are all around us. They are one of the easier forms of animal to see when you spend time outdoors in the Rocky Mountains because they are so abundant and come in such a variety of shapes and sizes.

### **Birds Come In Many Shapes And Sizes**

Some birds, such as hummingbirds are tiny. Others are large and spend their days soaring high up in the sky like vultures. Some have very long legs that help them wade in water as they hunt for fish or frogs. Others have sharp talons and bills that help them catch small mice to eat.

### **Birds Live In All Parts Of The World**

Birds live throughout the world in all habitats. There are some that are adapted to living in wide-open fields, others live in forests, and still others live near lakes and ponds. Some of them spend their lives flying over the ocean and traveling great distances as they migrate. Birds are one of the animals that have adapted to live in all the different areas of the world and their ability to fly allows them to travel far and wide.



A turkey vulture with its broad wings soars in the air.

### **What Makes a Bird a Bird?**

All birds share certain characteristics no matter what kind of bird it is. All birds:

- Have a backbone;
- Lay eggs in nests;
- Are warm blooded, similar to reptiles and mammals;
- Have feathers; and
- Have wings.



## THE MAIN CATEGORIES OR TYPES OF BIRDS

Knowing the main categories or different types of birds will prove a great help in learning to identify birds. While it is true that all birds share certain characteristics, there are many different types of birds. If you know the general type or category of a bird you will already know a little bit about it and it's behavior.



This small bird is a Black Capped Chickadee.

I am most definitely not a professional birder, but I can identify the main types of birds that I see on a regular basis. This is something that came about over a long time, a lot of practice, and time spent outdoors observing the natural world. Now, I can recognize a black capped chickadee, cormorant, or a Steller's Jay. If I can do it, then you too can do it!

Here are some of the general categories or types of birds in the world. You can find birds listed in these categories when you are looking through a bird guide to help you identify birds in the field.

As I began writing this and doing more research I realized that this can be quite complicated. My goal here is to keep this simple so that beginners can begin to learn about the general categories of the birds they see during a regular day.



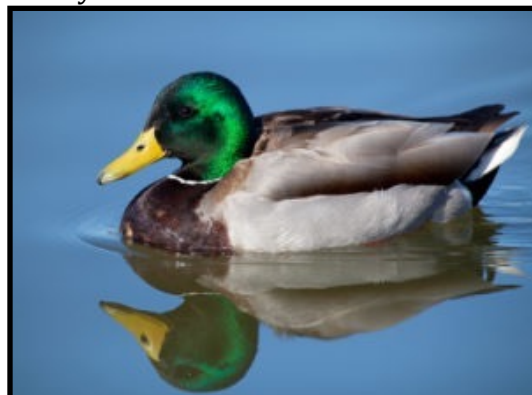


A Red tailed hawk is a ***bird of prey***.

I am going to get a bit technical for a second to give you some background information. Birds fall within the [Kingdom of Animals](#) and occupy a unique class within it called Aves. All animals within that class are birds and share certain characteristics that make them birds. Within the broad class of birds there are about 40 different families of birds, which include all of the different species of birds ranging from the large hawks and owls down to the tiny hummingbird.

I don't think knowing all of those families of birds is simple or necessary for beginners. Instead, I have decided to list several general categories of birds based on their shape and where they live. Various birding books use similar systems to help identify birds.

Knowing the general category a bird belongs to will help you narrow down your choices and help you identify the bird.



A mallard is a ***swimming bird***.

### **Swimming Birds**

Many birds live around water, but not all of them spend most of their time actually swimming on or in water. If you see a bird that is floating on water, swimming along then it is a swimming bird. Some of the swimming birds are ducks, geese, swans,



and cormorants. You will probably see some birds that are swimming, but are not one of these main ones. If that happens then you will already have a clue towards figuring out what it is.

### **Aerial Water Birds**

These birds also live near water, but instead of swimming on or sitting on water they are also often seen flying over water. Most of these kinds of birds live in the ocean and fly long distances and can easily soar in the air. Some of these are pelicans, terns, and seagulls.



An egret is a *wading bird*.

### **Wading Birds**

These birds are all tall, with long legs that help them wade in water while they hunt for food. When they see something they use their long, sharp bill like a spear to stab at and catch their meal, which could be fish or frogs. These birds include herons and egrets.

### **Shorebirds**

These are the birds that you see along the edges of water, such as lakes, rivers, or the ocean. Shorebirds do not have legs as long as the wading birds and are generally much shorter. Oftentimes these birds are fast runners as they run along the shore looking for food. Examples are plovers or oystercatchers.

### **Birds of Prey**

Birds of prey include all birds that hunt for their food. Some of them catch fish, others mice, and other small mammals or even small birds. Examples include hawks, falcons, eagles, and owls.





A Clark's Nutcracker is a **regular land bird**.

### **Regular Land Birds**

This is kind of a general category for birds that are all a medium size and don't live near water, nor are hunters. They also do not spend most of their time on the ground. Examples of these include pigeons, doves, woodpeckers, and flickers.

### **Small, Fast Flyers**

The birds in this category are all small and very fast flyers. They are like the fighter pilot birds as they zip through the sky and go in every direction. The main small, fast flyers that you will see are hummingbirds, swifts, and swallows.



A Steller's Jay is a **songbird**.

### **Songbirds**

Songbirds are those birds that you often hear singing as they are perched on trees or hidden in bushes. Some of the common songbirds include robins, and crows.

### **Small Birds**

There are a lot of these small birds that live everywhere. They are often hard to see as they live and hide in thick brush or trees. Identification of these small birds is difficult since there are so many different kinds. Examples include sparrows, finches, and warblers.





## A BIRD'S BILL HOLDS CLUES ABOUT THE BIRD

Have you ever noticed that all birds have different shaped bills? Birds' bills are like clues, telling the observant person all about the bird.

Birds' bills are not all the same! Some birds like the chickadee have a small thick bill, but others are very different. For example, a hummingbird's bill is long and thin.

Birds have different bill shapes and sizes, just like different mammals have different shapes and sizes of their teeth. This is because birds, just like mammals do not all eat the same kinds of things nor do they all live in the same place. Some birds eat fish and frogs and live by water, while others eat berries, nuts, or insects and live in forests.

I know that mammals' teeth and mouth are different based on what kinds of food they eat. For example, predators such as cougars have sharp teeth for tearing and ripping meat, but deer or moose have teeth that are made for chewing. Birds are exactly the same - their bills are shaped for whatever kind of food they eat. You can look at any of the common birds of the Rocky Mountains and learn about the bird based solely on the shape of the bird's bill.

The shape of a bird's bill will give you clues about what kind of food that bird eats. Knowing what kind of food a bird eats will help you figure out where that bird lives.

### Examples of Bird's Bills

Look at the photo and think to yourself what this bird may eat and where it may live before you read the text below the photo.



A hummingbird.

**Hummingbird** - a hummingbirds' bill is long. It is also thin, which makes it perfect for sipping or drinking nectar from flowers. Since it drinks from flowers, it probably lives near areas where there are lots of flowers, such as meadows.





A Downy woodpecker.

**Woodpecker** - notice his sharp, strong bill that is perfect for hammering on wood to look for insects in the tree. Since woodpeckers look for food in trees they need to live near trees so they can be found in forests or woodlands.



Black capped chickadee

**Black Capped Chickadee** - notice that this bird has a small, short bill, which allows it to eat insects, seeds, and berries. It is poky enough that it can stab at small insects, yet also strong enough for it to break small seeds. These different kinds of food are all available in forests, which is where they live.



Red tailed hawk

**Red Tailed Hawk** - Look at that bill. It is pointed and sharp on the end, which makes it perfect for ripping and tearing into food. This makes it a carnivore. Red tailed hawks need to live somewhere high up where they can see over a lot of terrain. This is actually one of the most common birds in the USA and can be found in many different types of habitat, but they prefer open areas such as fields and deserts.





Snowy egret

**Snowy Egret** - Wow! Look at that long, pointed bill that is like a spear. It is perfect for stabbing at fish or other small animals in the water. Since Snowy egrets eat fish and frogs they live near water. This could be near marshes, ponds, or even flooded fields.



This is a magpie. What do you think that bill is used for? This is a hard one.



## BIRD MIGRATION

The main thing I remember hearing about bird migration is that birds go south in winter and north in summer. That is not entirely true.

In the Rocky Mountains, fall is an important time for wildlife, especially birds. As the days get colder and shorter birds need to do what is in their nature. For some, this means migrating long distances and for others it means staying put, but changing their diet. Here is why birds migrate and the different options that birds choose when it comes to migration.

### Why Do Birds Migrate?

Birds migrate or not in order to find better resources of nesting sites. In other words, birds may go south in the winter because they know they can find more food there. Then in the summer they travel back north as food becomes available and they find a place to nest and raise babies.

### Bird Migration - Complete Migrators

Some birds, the ones that we think of with the old saying that birds fly south for winter, are complete migrators. In wintertime these birds travel long distances to the south where it is warmer. These complete migrators may travel from the Rocky Mountains to Central or South America. Then in summer they migrate back to the Rocky Mountains where they breed (have babies). Roughly, birds migrate south in July to November and to the north from March to early June.



A turkey vulture migrates long distances.

An example of a complete migrator includes the Turkey Vulture, which migrates to central America or South America.

**Did you know?** Some large birds migrate during the day, but most birds, especially small insect eating ones, migrate at night and rest during the day. They may be found in large groups during the day feeding in a forest or along a stream.



### **Bird Migration - Short Distance Migrants**

Many birds migrate short distances. These birds are simply going somewhere else where they know food is more available. They may migrate from higher to lower elevations.

### **Bird Migration - Non-Migrants or Resident**

Some birds do not migrate during the cold winters of the Rocky Mountains. Rather they stay all year and adapt. This may mean they change their behavior such as what they eat or where they roost.



A black capped chickadee is a resident or non-migrator.



## BIRD NEST OR ROOST?

One of the animals that you are almost guaranteed to see every time you go outdoors are birds. I hear birds chirping away somewhere in the trees or shrubs when we walk by. Sometimes I spot a few birds flying from tree to tree and darting off the trail to hide in the bushes. Very rarely, I have even seen a bird sitting on a nest. I haven't seen that very often for some reason. Well, here is an explanation of why that is and what a roost is.

I always imagined that birds' nests were like their homes and that they use them all of the time. I thought that since birds take so much time to build a nice nest they would use it all of the time. I pictured the birds flying around doing their thing all day, then in the evening the mom and dad would return to the nest sit down next to each other and fall asleep.



I was surprised to find out that is not true. Birds actually only sit on their nests when they are having babies. Most of the year they are not using their nests.

Instead at the end of the day when they are ready to go to sleep they simply go to a nice, safe spot somewhere and fall asleep. These places that they stay at night are called **roosts**.

I just want to explain the difference between a nest and a roost:

**Nest** - a place where birds have their babies and raise their chicks until they are big enough to fly. Generally, a nest is used only once (although a few birds will reuse a nest for many years).

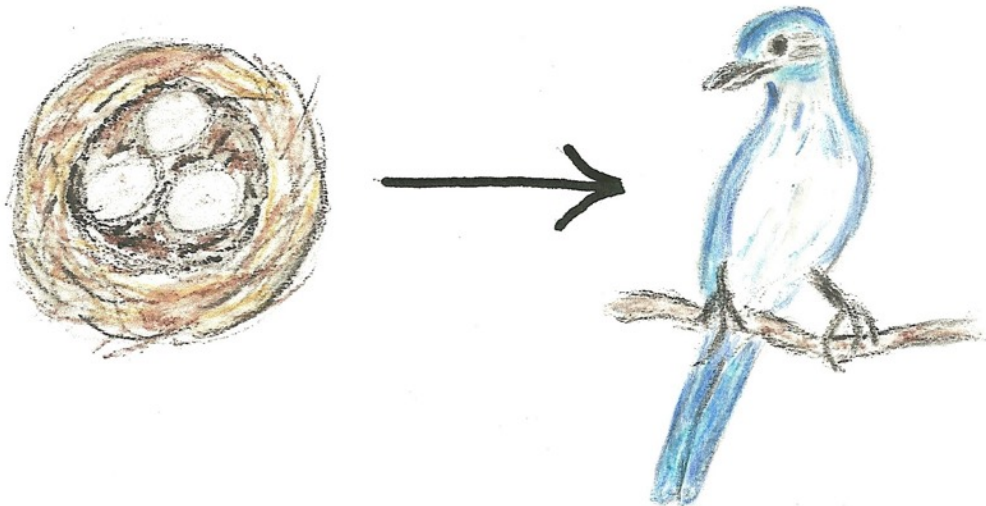
**Roost** - a place where birds go to rest or sleep at night. The main thing a bird is looking for in a nice roost is a place that is safe from predators and is warm. A roost could be a spot within thick bushes, the top of a tree, or even on water. Some birds roost with lots of other birds in a place called a communal roost and many roost alone. Generally, a roost is located in the same kind of area/habitat that the bird lives.



## BABY BIRDS – NESTS AND REPRODUCTION

Most people are familiar with the general process of how birds have babies. They mate; they lay an egg in a nest; they sit on the egg until it hatches; then they feed the baby until it is able to leave the nest and fly away. In fact that final part has become a common saying among people - to leave the nest. It has the same meaning for people as it does for birds - it is the time in a young birds life when it is becoming independent.

While all birds follow this general process for having babies, there are many different ways to go about it. It is helpful to take a little bit of time and understand bird behavior to really understand the many different ways that birds make and raise babies. For example, some birds make nests on the ground and others in trees. Here is an overview of the different steps in making and raising baby birds. Each of these just give the range of possible choices that a bird makes.



### **Bird Nests**

The nest is incredibly important when it comes to baby birds because this is where the parents lay the eggs that become baby birds.

***Most birds build a new nest every year.*** However, some birds, such as the Peregrine Falcon, may reuse the same nest every year.

The first step in building a nest is choosing the location. It may be towards the bottom or top of a tree, on a cliff face, in a hole in a tree for woodpeckers, or on the ground. Wherever it is, after the location is selected the bird then somehow builds its nest.

Thing about this, somehow without any plans or hands, birds build their nests. They make the nest strong enough to withstand storms, big enough to hold their entire





family, and waterproof enough to keep out the rain. Can you imagine building a new house for your family without any hands or plans every year?

Bird nests are made of natural things in the area, such as sticks, feathers, mud, or dried grass. Nesting material is limited to what a bird can carry in its beak. Most nests take between one to two weeks to build! There are four main kinds of nests:



Ground nest



Cup nest



Platform nest



Pendulous nest

## Bird Parents

Most birds have one mother and one father that raise them. But, how that is done and how long it takes can be very different for different types of birds. In other words, which bird builds the nest, sits on the eggs, or feeds the baby birds can differ.

For some birds the males build the nest and the females sit on the eggs the entire time. For others the female builds the nest and the male never sits on the eggs. For example, it is mainly the female Robin that builds a nest. The male may bring her supplies, but she is the one that does the building. Then she is the only one that



sits on the eggs until they hatch. Once they hatch, both the male and female feed the baby birds until they leave the nest.

As another example, both the male and female Peregrine Falcon parent take turns sitting on the eggs until they hatch. This allows one of them to fly off in search of food while the other is with the eggs.

### **Baby Birds or Bird Reproduction**

**Eggs** – This is the period from when the egg is laid until it hatches. For songbirds, it takes on average 10 – 20 days for an egg to hatch. Raptors (hawk or eagle) eggs' take longer to hatch, up to 5 weeks. During this time one of the parents is sitting on the nest the entire time to keep the eggs warm and to protect them from predators. The parents keep the eggs warm in order to allow the eggs to develop into baby birds.

**Nestling** – This is the period from when a bird is born until it leaves the nest. Most baby birds are born blind and without feathers. During this time, the parents must keep them warm and feed them every fifteen minutes.

Some birds leave the nest within hours, but others may be in the nest for weeks. For songbirds, it takes on average 14 days till it can leave the nest. Raptors may remain in the nest for 6-8 weeks.

**Fledgling and Juvenile** – This is the period from when the bird leaves the nest until it is independent (not rely on adults for food).

When the bird first leaves the nest it may not be able to fly yet and can only hop. It may still rely on it's parents for food. Over time it will be able to fly and feed itself. The length of time it takes a bird to go from a fledgling to a juvenile varies greatly. It can take anywhere from a few weeks for a songbird to 6 months for a Raven.



## **BIRD MOLTING – WHAT IS IT? WHEN AND HOW OFTEN DO BIRDS DO IT?**

Many animals, including insects, reptiles, and birds molt. It is obvious when a snake molts because it crawls out of its old skin. For birds, molting may not always be as obvious of that, but it is just as important. Here is all you need to know about what is molting in birds, and why and when they do it.

### **What is Molting?**

In birds, molting is the process when birds replace some or all of their feathers with new ones.

### **Kinds Of Molts:**

**Complete molt** - when a bird loses all of its old feathers and replaces them with new ones.

**Partial molt** - when a bird only loses some of its old feathers and replaces them with new ones. For example, a bird may molt its flight feathers.

### **Why Do Birds Molt?**

Birds molt in order to keep their feathers in a good, healthy condition which is crucial for their flying. Some of the other reasons that birds molt is that it provides the bird with a new look or color. After they molt their new colors will serve as a sign of the bird's age, sex, or the time of year.

### **When Do Birds Molt?**

It takes birds a lot of energy to molt and grow new feathers. Due to this birds try to molt at times of year when there are not other activities occurring that need a lot of energy, such as building nests or migrating. The two most common times of year for birds to molt are either before or after the breeding season.

### **How Often Do Birds Molt?**

Most birds molt according to one of the following three main patterns:

**One complete molt per year** - many birds only have one complete molt per year.

There are many kinds of these birds, including chickadees, flycatchers, hawks, hummingbirds, swallows, and woodpeckers.

**One complete molt and one partial molt per year** - many other birds will molt all of their feathers after nesting. Then before the next breeding season, they will have a partial molt. At this time the males will grow bright colors in order to attract a mate. Birds with this approach to molting include buntings, tanagers, and warblers.

**Two complete molts per year** - The final approach, which only a few birds choose, it to make two complete molts every year. These birds tend to live in areas that put a lot of damage on their feathers and so they need to be fully replaced. Some of these birds include Marsh Wrens.



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