

Identifying Bird Groups by Silhouette



Birds in the same general group often have the same body shape and proportions, although they may vary in size. Silhouette alone gives many clues to a bird's identity, allowing birders to assign a bird to the correct group or even the exact species.

In the above illustration are 23 different birds. How many can you recognize just by their silhouettes? Look carefully - don't miss the ones hiding in the leafy tree!

Pay attention to the following:

- **body shape**
- **proportions of the head, legs, wings, and tail**
- **shape and length of the bill**

Need some more help? See below for silhouette descriptions to help you.

Cardinal

- Medium-sized finch-like songbird with long tail
- Strongly conical, seed-eating bill
- Crested head



Crow

- Large size
- Stout body, medium-length tail
- Heavy, strong bill



Dabbling Duck

- Typical duck shape, with heavy body
- Short tail, held above water's surface
- Horizontally flattened bill



Dove

- Plump body, with short legs and neck
- Small head
- Pointed wings
- Slight swelling at base of upper bill



Finch

- Small to medium size
- Conical, seed-eating bill
- Notched tail





Grackle

Grackle

- Slender body, long tail
- Strong, slightly curved bill



Jay

Jay

- Mid-sized crow-relative with long tail
- Some have crest on head



Kestrel

Kestrel

- Small bird of prey
- Typical streamlined falcon shape, with long pointed wings and long tail
- Short raptorial (sharply hooked) bill, feet with sharp talons



Kingbird

Kingbird

- Medium-sized perching bird with relatively large head
- Broadly-flattened, typical flycatcher bill



Kingfisher

Kingfisher

- Large head, often with shaggy crest
- Very short legs and tail
- Long, strong, pointed bill



Meadowlark

Meadowlark

- Chunky body, short tail
- Strong legs
- Straight, strong, pointed bill



Mockingbird

Mockingbird

- Long, slender body, long legs and tail
- Small, slender bill



Nuthatch

Nuthatch

- Small size, chunky body, short tail
- Straight, slightly upturned bill
- Strong legs and feet
- Clings to tree trunks, usually head downwards



Plover

Plover

- Small to medium-sized shorebird
- Relatively large head, short neck
- Short, rather thick bill, sometimes slightly swollen at tip
- Ground dwelling



Quail

Quail

- Chunky, rounded body, with short tail
- Small head, very short neck
- Ground dwelling



Screech-Owl

Screech-Owl

- Small nocturnal bird of prey
- Chunky body, large head
- Feathered tufts on head resemble ears
- Upright stance



Shrike

Shrike

- Medium-sized predatory songbird
- Relatively large head
- Perches horizontally
- Bill with strong hook at tip



Starling

Starling

- Chunky body, short tail
- Strong legs and feet
- Straight bill



Swallow

Swallow

- Small size
- Very slender body, short legs, and long, pointed wings
- Small bill with wide gape



Vireo

Vireo

- Small, tree-dwelling bird
- Small, cylindrical bill (slight hook at tip, visible only at close range)
- Perches horizontally, often leans forward while foraging



Warbler

Warbler

- Very small, tree-dwelling bird
- Perches horizontally
- Slender insect-eating bill



Woodpecker

Woodpecker

- Clings to tree trunks, head upwards
- Uses tail as prop as it hitches its way up tree trunks
- Strong but short legs and strong feet
- Straight, strong bill for excavating wood



Wren

Wren

- Very small size
- Compact body, with relatively long legs
- Thin, slightly curved bill
- Holds tail upright
- Skulking habit

from

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/Birding123/IdentifyingBirds/idFieldMarks.htm>