



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Identifying Birds by Sight and Sound

You will need to use your observation and listening skills to complete this activity.

Description: Learn how to identify birds by sight and sound; identify birds found in this area

Location: Corn Creek Trails, Desert National Wildlife Refuge

Materials:

True or False - what makes a bird a bird?

There are an estimated 2,059 bird species in North American and about 490 species can be found in Nevada. Do you know what makes birds different from other animals? Test your knowledge by answering the following questions:

T / F Birds are the only living animals that have feathers

T / F All birds fly

T / F All birds have two wings

T / F All birds lay eggs

T / F Most birds eat worms

T / F All birds have thick, heavy bones that provide the structure they need to fly

T / F All birds migrate

T / F Male and female birds of some species look different

*Answer key on last page

**The mountain
bluebird is the
official state bird
of Nevada**



Identifying Birds by Sight – Details Matter!

Just here at Desert National Wildlife Refuge there are at least 320 species of birds. So how do you start to tell them apart?

In a few words, describe how you would start identifying a bird: _____

The best way to begin your identification journey is to start with the most obvious details. These are called the four main keys:

- 🔑 **Size & Shape** – Is the bird large or small? What shape are the wings? How is the tail shaped? What size and shape is the bill?
- 🔑 **Color Pattern** – What are the main colors on the body, wings, head? Are there any noticeable patterns?
- 🔑 **Behavior** – What is the bird currently doing – flying, sitting in a bush, swimming, eating at a feeder?
- 🔑 **Habitat** – What does the surrounding area look like? Is it a dense forest, an open field, a shrubby desert?

Now you should have a good idea of what group of species your bird belongs to. From here you can narrow your identification down even further using **field marks**.

Head and wing field marks:

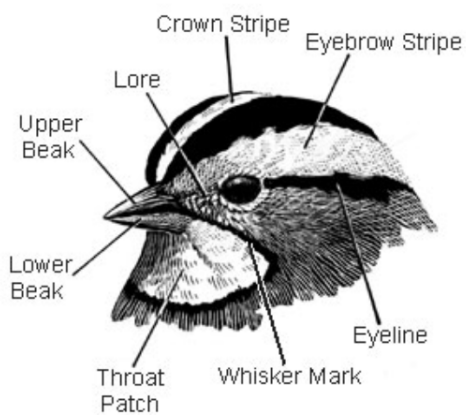


Image by John Schmitt/Cornell Lab.

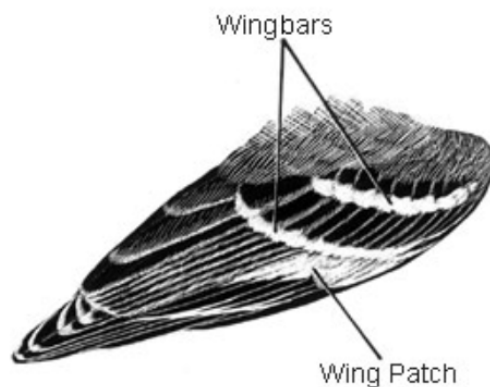


Image by John Schmitt/Cornell Lab.

Identifying Birds by Sound

Birds are a noisy bunch, and the sound they make is a great way to identify them.

Let's Practice!

As you walk the Corn Creek trails look and listen for birds and record your observations in the boxes below. See if you can identify four different species.

Size & Shape:

Color Pattern:

Behavior:

Habitat:

Song:

Bird #1 _____

Common Birds of Desert National Wildlife Refuge

Black-throated sparrow

Le Conte's thrasher

Sage sparrow

Loggerhead shrike

Cactus wren

House finch

Mourning dove

Greater roadrunner

Phainopepla

Gambel's quail

Lazuli buntings

Blue grosbeaks

Lucy's warblers

Cedar waxwings

Hooded orioles

Bullock's orioles

Lesser goldfinch

Prairie falcon

Red-tailed hawk

Hooded warbler

Hummingbird

Horned lark

Bushtit

Spotted towhee

Pinyon jay

Answer Key

True or False?

Credits:

["Mountain Bluebird at Badlands National Park"](#) by [Photomatt28](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)