

## STEPS TO FOLLOW IN IDENTIFYING A BIRD

**STEP 1.** Look and listen carefully. If you only caught a glimpse, close your eyes and try to see it again, like studying a snapshot in your mind. Going to the books right away may confuse the images in the book with what you actually saw.

**STEP 2.** Take notes, at least mentally, of the following:

- Size – Was it bigger, smaller, same size as a robin, crow, etc. using birds that you know?
- Shape – Note the proportions, e.g., small head, fat body, long tail, etc. How was it shaped differently from birds you know well?
- Special features – For instance down-curved bill, notched tail, crest on head. Bill shape and size are very important.
- Color pattern – “A flash of yellow” won’t help much! Which colors were on which parts of the bird, especially face, wings, tail?
- Voice – Note the quality (e.g., raspy, like a flute) and the pattern (e.g., long and varied, or 2 notes followed by a trill). Try to write it down in syllables (e.g., “Konk-la-reeah,” “Witchity-witchity-witchity”).
- Behavior – Was it soaring, hitching up or down a tree trunk, walking vs. hopping, etc.?
- Habitat – Was it in tall trees, brush, out in a meadow, in the water, etc.? Make sure it wasn’t just flying over the habitat.

**STEP 3.** NOW go to the bird ID books and the Not-Really Key! Although the color may be the first thing you noticed, it is often the last thing to work with, but will be important to get the exact species. Instead, work first with the size and shape of the bird, although sometimes the habitat or behavior will get you to the right group first. The mapped range of each species during each season can usually narrow down your choices of species. Assume it is the commonly occurring one until you can prove it was the rare one.

---

## A FEW TRICKS FOR FINDING WILDLIFE

- \* Can’t find the bird through your binoculars?  
Keep your eyes on the bird, then bring the binoculars up to you eyes.
- \* Can’t find the bird up in a tree?  
Keep you eyes focused on one spot. When the bird moves, your eyes will notice the motion more easily.
- \* Can’t see anything but a silhouette?  
Try to walk around to get the sun behind you rather than behind the bird.
- \* Can’t quite hear a distant song? Cup your hands behind your ears and push them slightly forward, aiming toward the song.
- \* Don’t see any wildlife in what seems like a perfect habitat?  
Look around the edges rather than in the middle. Edges between forest and meadow, marsh and open water, under the edge of a bush or log are safe and inconspicuous. You should stop and look from edged, too.
- \* Can’t quite see the wildlife in near-darkness?  
Look slightly to one side of it, rather than directly at it. At least you might be able to see the size and shape, if not the color pattern.

**NOT-REALLY-KEY**  
**to Smaller Birds of W. Oregon and Washington Forests**

1. **Weensy size; hovering flight** – HUMMINGBIRDS
2. **Feeding in water or water's edge:**
  - a. Marsh or pond; long legs and bill – SNIPE, SANDPIPER, RAIL
  - b. Streams; frequently bobs or dips – DIPPER, SPOTTED SANDPIPER
  - c. Dives into ponds or rivers; huge head with crest; rattling call – KINGFISHER
3. **Mostly flying, soaring and veering, often in loose flocks; long pointed wings:**
  - a. Soaring flight; perches in open often on phone lines; many are colorful – SWALLOWS
  - b. Flight soaring or fluttering bat-like; thin wings; stub tail; gray – SWIFTS
  - c. Soaring or irregular slow flapping; white bar across very long wings – NIGHTHAWK
4. **Hitching up or down tree trunks, using tail as brace:**
  - a. Pecks or drums on trees; or on ground eating ants; tan with colorful wings – FLICKER
  - b. Straight bill; pecks or drums; often black and white – other WOODPECKERS
  - c. Tiny; often upside-down working down tree trunk – NUTHATCHES
  - d. Tiny; works up tree trunks; long down-curved bill – BROWN CREEPER
5. **Flying out after bugs then back to perch; large head; drab colors** – FLYCATCHERS
6. **Medium-sized; noisy; actively flying around in open; often several or many nearby:**
  - a. Strong walking (not hopping); males black and females brown – BLACKBIRDS
  - b. Hopping (not walking); mostly in trees; blue or gray – JAYS
7. **Tiny; perching or moving about in trees & shrubs:**
  - a. Tail cocked up; low in brush; slightly down-curved bill; long loud song – WRENS
  - b. Up in trees; long tail; tiny bill; dark cap and bold white cheeks – CHICKADEES
  - c. Plump; short tail; often hover briefly; olive drab – KINGLETS
  - d. Line of head/neck/back rather flat; straight thickish bill; olive drab, nice song – VIREOS
  - e. Round head; thin straight bill; hyper-active; often some yellow; pretty song – WARBLERS
  - f. Delicate tapering bill; streaky all over and usually shows some yellow – PINE SISKIN
8. **Small size; short conical bill (thick at base); in shrubs or trees and on ground:**
  - a. Streaky brown or gray at least on back; often strong face pattern; nice song – SPARROWS
  - b. Streaky back and sides; males red on head; rich song – FINCHES
  - c. Pale bill; white outer tail feathers; black or gray hood – JUNCOS
  - d. Pale bill; at least some yellow; high fast chattering; undulating flight – GOLDFINCHES
  - e. Large bill with twisted tips; often in flocks; “Kip-kip-kip” calls – CROSSBILLS
  - f. Alpine areas; walks on ground or snow – ROSY FINCHES
9. **Medium-sized; perch and feed in trees and on ground:**
  - a. Bold; often noisy; strong bill; long tail – JAYS
  - b. Runs and stops; in open meadows or trees; flute-like song – ROBIN
  - c. Walking (not hopping); often hide in brush; flute-like songs; tan/gray – other THRUSHES
  - d. Hopping (not walking); scratches in leaves, often hides in brush – TOWHEE
  - e. Rather plump; open habitats; at least some blue; very soft voice – BLUEBIRDS
  - f. Plump body; eats berries or flycatches from branch; pointy crest – CEDAR WAXWING
  - g. Small head; long neck, long tail, soft cooing or hooting – DOVES and PIGEONS
10. **Medium-sized; in trees; bold color pattern or patches; bright loud song:**
  - a. Pointy, tapered bill; male black, female streaky – RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD
  - b. Long, pointy, tapered bill; orange or yellow – ORIOLES
  - c. Thick, short, tapered bill; yellow and some red on male – WESTERN TANAGER
  - d. Huge, conical bill; large head – GROSBEAKS