

GENERAL BIRD FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

This is a list of bird characteristics to look for in the different families of birds. Knowing these characteristics will help you to more easily separate similar species of birds within families, and may help you to become more familiar with the characteristics of a particular species.

Obvious characteristics are not mentioned such as coloration, and range. Most bird families with two or more species are included in the list. Characteristics in boldface are typical of the entire bird family, such as eye ring, and wing bars. Therefore, they should be looked at carefully to observe the slight differences between species. Specific markings between two very similar species are given on occasion.

<u>FAMILY</u>	<u>CHARACTERISTICS</u>
Swans	bill shape, coloration, size
Geese	color, bill shape (Ross'/Snow Geese)
Ducks	wing pattern (flight) eclipse plumage, head shape (Scaup)
Grouse	sounds, habitat, tail banding
Loons	bill size, shape and color, back markings
Grebes	bill color, face, neck
Herons	size, back, wing pattern (in flight), bill, leg/foot color
Ibises	face markings
Rails	voice, size, bill size
Plovers	face/throat markings, bill color, underwing (American Golden/Black-bellied)
Sandpipers	bill size, shape & color, eye stripes, leg color,
Gulls	size, leg, head & bill color, bill marks, wing pattern
Terns	bill and leg color, tail forks, hood, wing tip color
Eagles	tail and underside patterns (Bald immatures)
Accipiters	size, outer tail shape, front streaking, head shape
Buteos	wing shape and patterns, size, tail banding, back, shoulders
Falcons	size, face marks, tail banding (Peregrine/Prairie)
Doves	vocalizations, size, range, back, wing pattern
Cuckoos	bill color, tail banding
Owls	vocalizations, size, habitat, ear tufts, streaks or bars
Nightjars	vocalizations, throat marks, tail marks
Swallows	wing size and shape, tail shape, back, rump, throat
Woodpeckers	sounds, wing patches, back markings, nape, crown
Flycatchers	tail marks, wing bars, eye ring, vocalizations
Jays	throat, bill size and color, range
Crows/Ravens	size, range,
Nuthatches	eye stripe, cap, flank color
Wrens	vocalizations, eye stripe, throat, tail size, size of bird
Thrushes	eye ring , wing bars, behavior, cheek color (Swainson's/Gray-cheeked)
Shrike	range, bill shape, front barring
Vireos	eye ring, eye stripe, wing bars, vocalizations
Warblers	vocalizations, rump, streaking, eye ring, wing bars, face
Towhees	face markings, habitat, back, crown
Sparrows	crown, tail patterns, eye stripes, front streaking
Longspurs	wing and tail patterns, behavior, breast markings
Tanagers	wing bars, eye rings (females), face patch
Meadowlarks	vocalizations, tail pattern, behavior
Blackbirds	tail shape, size and shape of bill
Orioles	wing bars, face, head color pattern
Finches	wing bars, eye stripes, bill size, shape and color
Grosbeaks	face markings, habitat, vocalizations