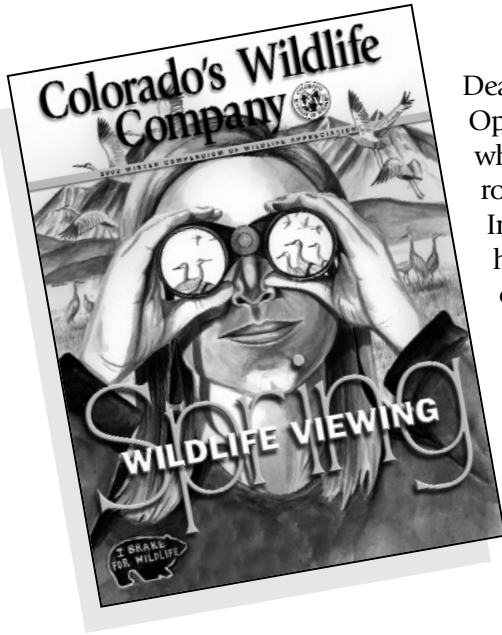


Educator's Guide



Dear Educator:

Opportunities to watch wildlife can be found at the doorstep of every school—whether rural or urban. Nearby trees and bushes host a variety of birds, small rodents, insects and spiders. Even vacant lots and asphalt often teem with life. In this edition of the Educator's Guide to *Colorado's Wildlife Company*, students have the opportunity to hone their observation skills as they have fun discovering the feathered residents of their community. *Colorado's Wildlife Company* and this publication are both available at our Web site: www.wildlife.state.co.us/colo_wild_co/homepg/cwcindex.htm.

If you have comments or suggestions for this publication, I would love to hear from you. Just contact me at wendy.hanophy@state.co.us.

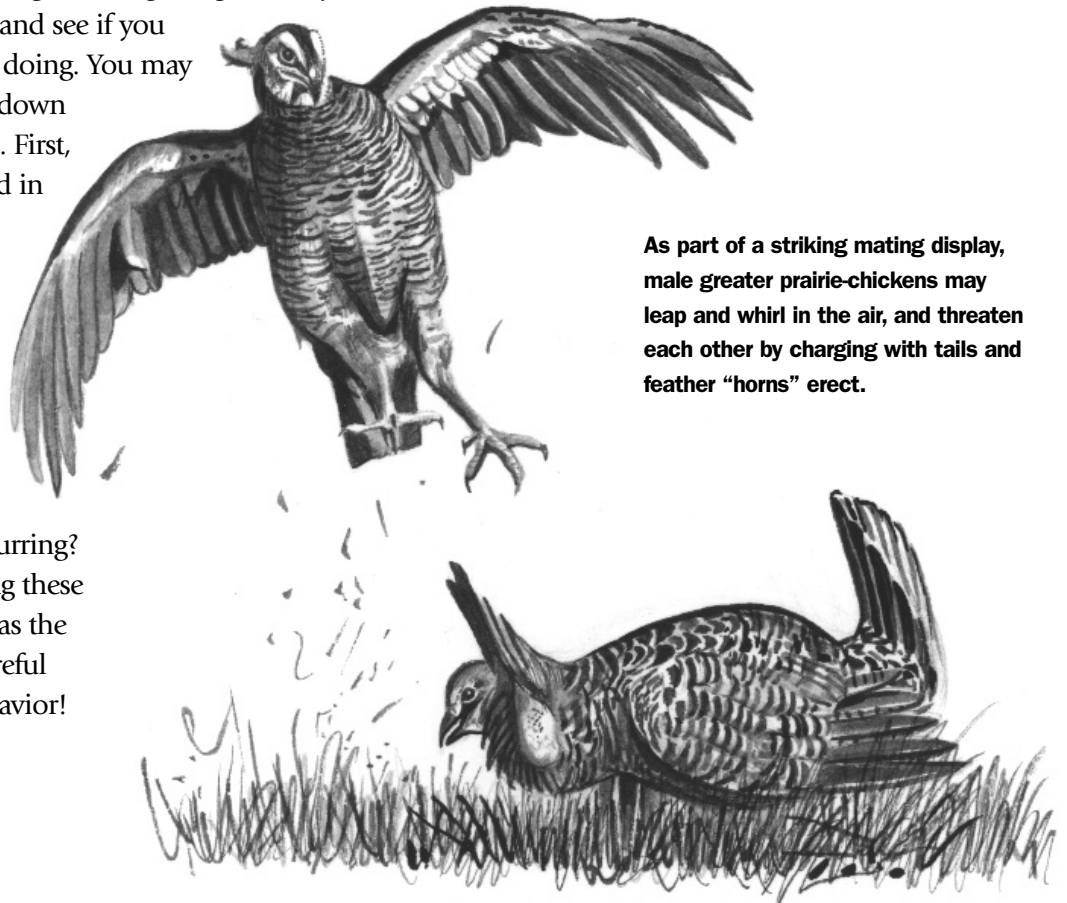
Enjoy the view!
Wendy Hanophy



Birds Will Be Birds!

SCIENCE

Anything and everything that a bird does is bird behavior. Some common bird behaviors include foraging, singing, defending territory, bathing, preening, courting, nest building, roosting, flocking, and migrating. When you see a bird, focus on observing its behavior, and see if you can figure out why it's doing what it's doing. You may even want to write your observations down while they are still fresh in your mind. First, describe the bird's behavior. Is the bird in a group or solitary? Is it getting food? What kind of food? Is the bird preening? Is it diving into water or swimming? What can you observe about the bird? Then, think about environmental factors that might affect the bird's behavior. What season is it? What is the time of day (or night)? Where is the behavior occurring? Is there other wildlife around? Keeping these factors in mind, what do you think was the cause or purpose of the behavior? Careful watchers see lots of amazing bird behavior!



As part of a striking mating display, male greater prairie-chickens may leap and whirl in the air, and threaten each other by charging with tails and feather "horns" erect.

Become a Bird Brain!

SCIENCE

Have you ever been around somebody who had an uncanny ability to identify birds? Imagine that you and a friend are hiking along one of Colorado's lovely foothill trails. A bird darts out from beneath a bush and in an instant it disappears into the distance. Your companion tells you it's a dark-eyed junco. Later, a dinky bird pops its head out of a cavity in a ponderosa pine and then retreats into the tree. You hear many high pitched peedee sounds and your friend remarks on the good fortune to come upon a pygmy nuthatch on this beautiful day. Are you beginning to wonder if your buddy is making this up? After all, how could anyone confidently name a bird after such a brief encounter?

Rest assured that your friend isn't pulling a fast one, nor has he or she spent weeks memorizing a field guide to birds. Your pal just knows what to look and listen for. You too can learn a few strategies to make bird identification less complex. It all begins with watching the bird as long as it is visible and making note of some important clues. Later, you can compare your observations with information in a field guide. Over time, you too will develop some "bird sense."



As Big as a Bread Box?

Most field guides list the average size of each species of bird. Of course, you aren't carrying a ruler, and even if you were, it would be ludicrous to think of trying to measure the bird that just caught your attention. So what do you do? Think of some birds you are familiar with, such as sparrows, robins, starlings, crows, magpies, ducks, and geese.

Use these familiar birds for comparison when trying to judge the size of a wild bird. If you think that your bird is about the size of a robin, and field guides list robins as being about 10 inches long, then you know your bird is about 10 inches long.

All the Right Moves

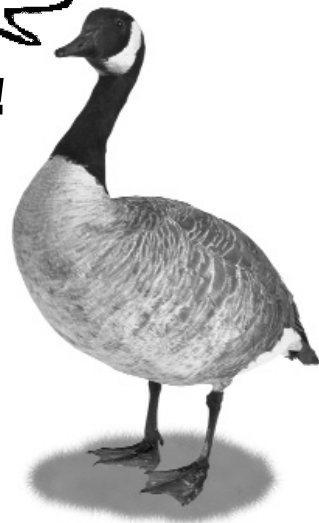
Just like some people you may know, birds have characteristic gestures, mannerisms, and ways of moving that stand out. Does the bird stand up straight or is it bent over? Does it bob its head or tail constantly? Maybe the bird swishes its tail back and forth or flicks it up? Does the bird walk or hop on the ground? Does it climb around on the bark of trees? Does the bird flap its wings a lot or mostly glide when it flies?

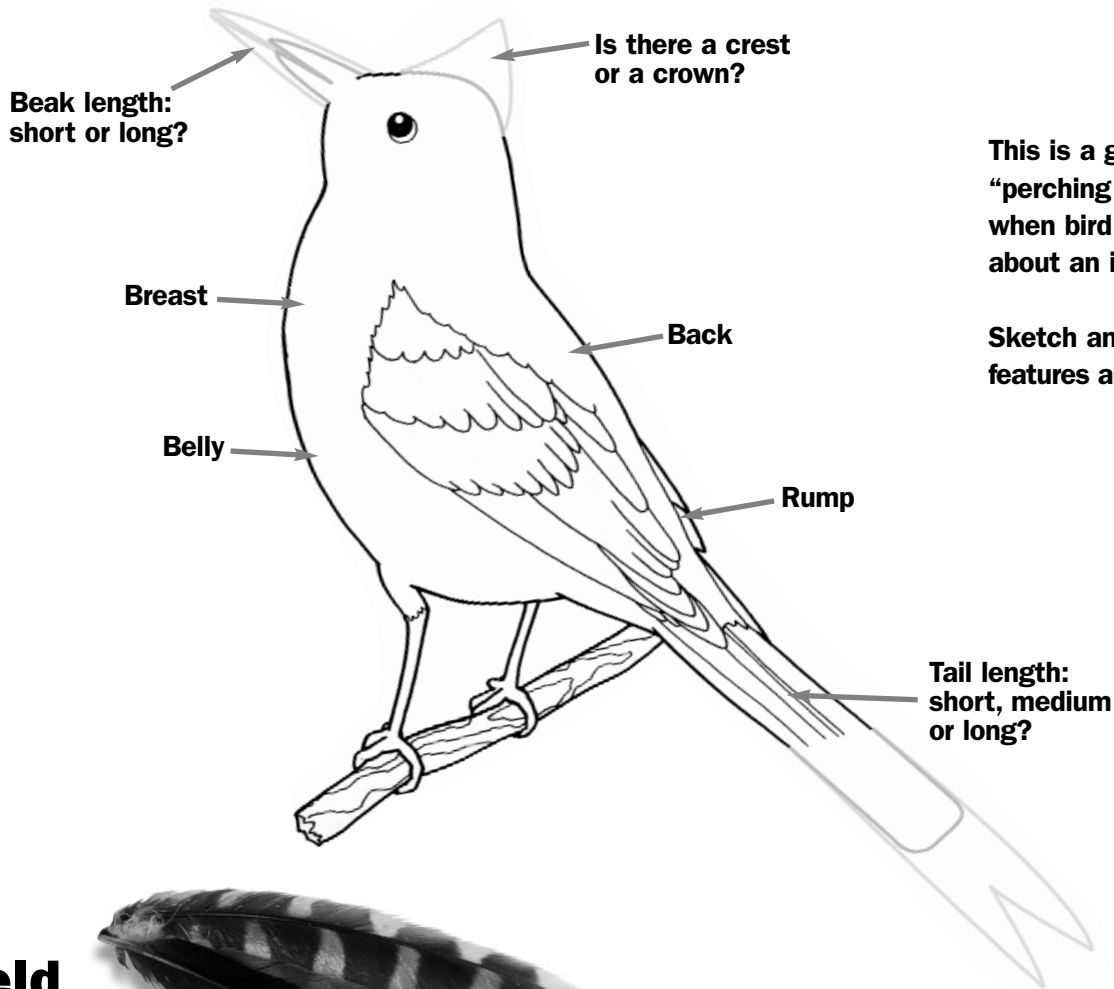


Quack? Woof? Meow?

Name That Tune!

You probably know the tunes of many songs by heart and can identify a favorite song by the time the first few notes are played on the radio. It's logical that people who enjoy birds and spend a lot of time observing them begin to recognize their special songs as well. Knowing these special songs can help a birdwatcher identify a bird he or she cannot even see! The next time you have an opportunity to listen to a bird sing, try to mimic its' song. Then try to describe in words what it sounds like. It isn't easy to do, but it is fun! Then look at how that birds' song is described in a field guide. You can compare and contrast that to your own description!





This is a general diagram of a “perching bird.” Use this diagram when bird watching to make notes about an interesting bird.

Sketch and color in its unique features and field marks.

Field Marks

Most birds have colors or patterns that are particular to their species. These patterns can include bars or bands on the neck or wings or across the tail; spots and special colors on different body parts, streaks of color above the eye or eye rings, and crests (long head feathers).



Short and Squat or Long and Lean

The overall shape or profile of a bird is important. The mention of “flamingo” or “chickadee” or “goose” probably brings to mind a particular shape of bird. Is the bird short and round? Does it have long or short legs? Is its tail long, average or short? What is the shape of the tail—squarish, pointed, or forked? Does it have a thick or thin bill? Is the bill long or short, pointed or curved?

There Goes the Neighborhood

Some people prefer beaches to mountain peaks, some enjoy forests, and some prefer the bustling night life of the city. Birds also prefer different habitats, and are usually found in places most suited to their body type and food preference. For instance, woodpeckers peck into tree bark for insects and excavate tree cavities for nesting. So, one would expect to see a woodpecker in a wooded area, not sunning down by the lakeshore. Likewise, it would be odd to see a pelican, which normally hangs around lakes scooping up fish, perched atop a blue spruce in the high mountains.

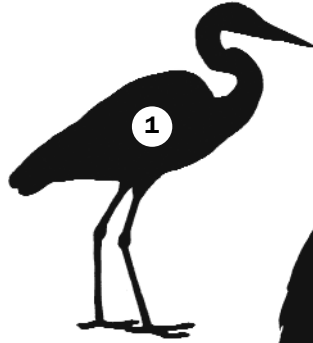


Shape Up!

SCIENCE

There are times when a bird watcher just can't see the details of a bird, but can see its profile. A silhouette can say a lot! Match each profile to specific species of bird and its unique talent. When you correctly list the birds' talents in order, the underlined letters combine into a special message.

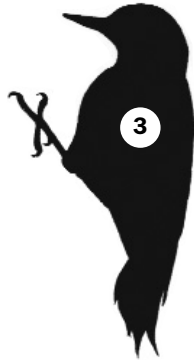
Owl



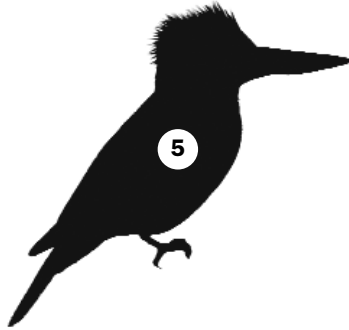
Kingfisher



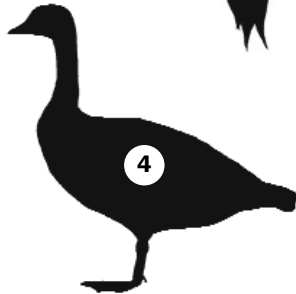
Goose



Heron



Woodpecker



Eagle



Hummingbird



Sparrow



My short beak helps me pick up seeds to eat. I usually perch in trees.

I have sharp talons on my feet and a sharp hooked beak. These tools help me catch and eat rodents and other prey.

My long thin beak helps me feed on nectar from flowers.

My webbed feet help me swim in water.

I have feather tufts that look like ears. I turn my head to look and listen for prey.

I live along lakes and streams and fish with my sharp beak. My head looks large in comparison to my body.

My long legs help me walk through water. I use my long sharp beak to spear fish.

I cling to the side of trees with my feet and use my chisel-like beak to peck insects out of trees.

Write the special message here:

