

THE Kids' Guide TO
OF

Birds of California

Fun Facts, Activities and 86 Cool Birds



Stan Tekiela

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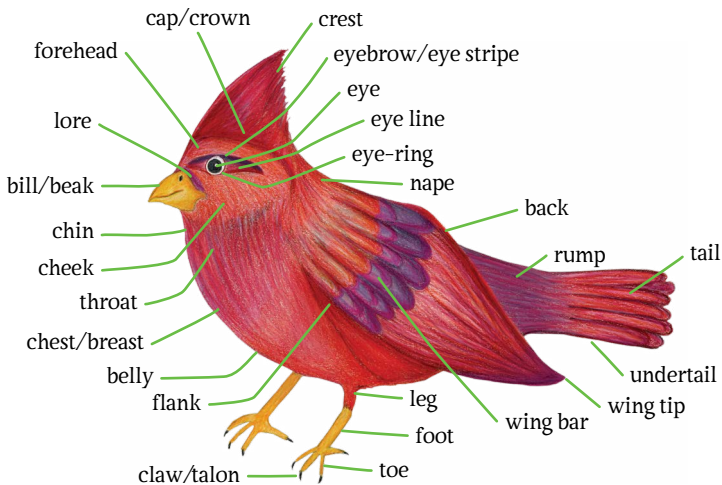
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BODY BASICS OF A BIRD

It's good to know the names of a bird's body parts. The right terminology will help you describe and identify a bird when you talk about it with your friends and family.

The basic parts of a bird are labeled in the illustration below. This drawing is a combination (composite) of several birds and should not be regarded as one particular species.



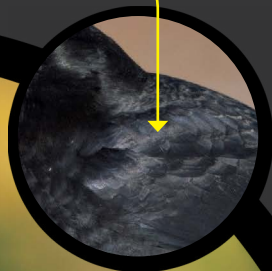
AMAZING NESTS

I am fascinated with bird nests! They are amazing structures that do more than just provide a place for egg laying. Nests create a small climate-controlled environment that's beneficial for both keeping the eggs warm and raising the young after they hatch.

From the high treetops to the ground, there are many kinds of nests. Some are simple, while others are complex. In any case,

American Crow

Look for the glossy black feathers



What to look for:

glossy black all over and a black bill

Where you'll find them:

all **habitats**—wilderness, rural, suburban, cities

Calls and songs:

a harsh “caw” **call**; imitates other birds and people

On the move:

flaps constantly and glides downward; moves around to find food; gathers in huge communal **flocks** of more than 10,000 birds during winter

What they eat:

fruit, insects, mammals, fish and dead carcasses (**carrion**); visits seed and **suet** feeders

Nest:

platform; adds bright or shiny items and often uses the same site every year if a Great Horned Owl (pg. 131) hasn't taken it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

4–6 speckled bluish-to-olive eggs; Mom sits on the eggs; Mom and Dad feed the youngsters

Spends the winter:

in California

Size
18"



Nest

PLATFORM



Feeder

HOPPER



year-round
winter



SAW IT!



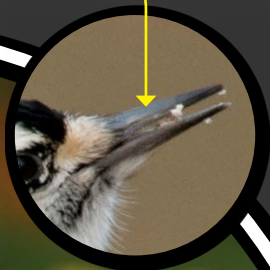
STAN'S COOL STUFF

The crow is one of the smartest of all birds. It's very social and often entertains itself by chasing other birds. It eats roadkill but avoids being hit by vehicles. Some can live as long as 20 years! Crows without mates, called helpers, help to raise the young.

Hairy Woodpecker

Look for the large bill

MALE



FEMALE



What to look for:

spotted wings, white belly, large bill and red mark on the back of the head; female lacks a red mark

Where you'll find them:

forests and wooded backyards, parks

Calls and songs:

a sharp chirp before landing on feeders; drums on hollow logs, branches or stovepipes in spring

On the move:

short up-and-down flights from tree to tree with rapid wingbeats

What they eat:

insects, nuts, seeds; visits **suet** and seed feeders

Nest:

cavity; prefers a live tree; **excavates** a larger, more oval entry than the round hole of the Downy Woodpecker (pg. 37); usually excavates under a branch, which helps to shield the entrance

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

3–6 white eggs; parents sit on the eggs and bring food to feed their babies

Spends the winter:

in California

REAL QUICK

Size
9"



Nest
CAVITY



Feeder
SUET



year-round



SAW IT!



STAN'S COOL STUFF

The Hairy is nearly identical to the Downy Woodpecker, but it's larger and has a bigger, longer bill. It has a barbed tongue, which it uses to pull out bugs from trees. At the base of its bill, tiny bristle-like feathers protect its nostrils from excavated wood dust.

Steller's Jay

Look for the black head and crest



What to look for:

dark blue wings, tail and belly, a black head, **nape** and breast, and a pointed black crest on the head that can be lifted at will

Where you'll find them:

mainly in **coniferous** forests

Calls and songs:

a loud repeated "wheek, wheek, wheek" and a wide variety of gurgling sounds

On the move:

short, quick flight from perch to perch

What they eat:

insects, berries and seeds; will visit seed feeders

Nest:

cup; Mom and Dad build it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

3–5 pale green eggs with brown marks; Mom sits on the eggs; Mom and Dad feed the babies

Spends the winter:

in California; moves around to find food and shelter

Size
11"



Nest
CUP



Feeder
HOPPER



year-round



SAW IT!



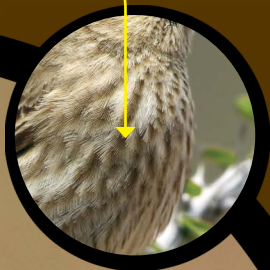
STAN'S COOL STUFF

Steller's Jays in California tend to have blue streaks on their head and crest, while ones to the east of the Rockies tend to have white streaks. They carry many seeds in their bill and bury them one by one for winter use. Sometimes they come to people looking for food.

House Finch

Look for the heavily streaked chest

FEMALE



What to look for:

brown bird with heavy streaks on a white chest

Where you'll find them:

forests, city and suburban areas, around homes, parks and farms

Calls and songs:

male sings a loud, cheerful warbling song

On the move:

moves around in small family units; never travels long distances

What they eat:

seeds, fruit and leaf buds; comes to seed feeders and feeders with a glop of grape jelly

Nest:

cup; but occasionally in a cavity; likes to nest in a hanging flower basket or on a front door wreath

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

4–5 pale blue eggs, lightly marked; Mom sits on the eggs and Dad feeds her while she incubates; Mom and Dad feed the **brood**

Spends the winter:

in California

Size
5"



Nest
CUP



Feeder
TUBE OR
HOPPER



year-round



SAW IT!



STAN'S COOL STUFF

The House Finch is very social and can be a common bird at feeders. It was introduced to New York from the western U.S. in the 1940s. Now it's found all across the country. Unfortunately, it suffers from a fatal eye disease that causes the eyes to crust over.

Northern Mockingbird

Look for the white wing patches



Size
10"



Nest
CUP

Feeder
NONE



year-round
summer

What to look for:

silver-gray head and back, a light gray chest and belly, white wing patches, a mostly black tail with white outer tail feathers

Where to find them:

on top of a shrub, where it sits for long periods; parks and yards

Calls and songs:

imitates or mocks other birds (vocal mimicry); young males often sing at night

On the move:

very lively, spreading its wings, flashing its white wing patches and wagging its tail; wing patches flash during flight or **display**

What they eat:

insects and fruit

Nest:

cup; Mom and Dad work together to build it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

3–5 speckled blue-green eggs; Mom sits on the eggs to incubate; Mom and Dad feed their young

Spends the winter:

in California



SAW IT!



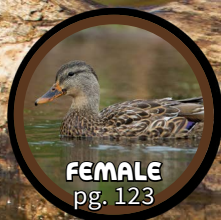
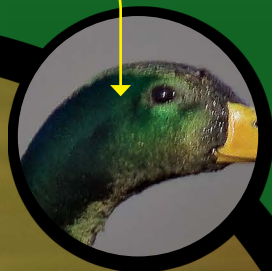
STAN'S COOL STUFF

Mockingbirds perform a fantastic mating dance. Pairs hold up their heads and tails and run toward each other. They flash their wing patches, and then retreat to nearby **cover**. Usually they're not afraid of people, so you may be able to get a close look.

Mallard

Look for the green head

MALE



FEMALE
pg. 123

Size
19-21"



Nest
GROUND



Feeder
GROUND



year-round

What to look for:

green head with a white **necklace**, rusty-brown chest, gray sides, yellow bill, orange legs and feet

Where you'll find them:

lakes and ponds, rivers and streams, and maybe even your backyard

Calls and songs:

the male doesn't quack; when you think of how a duck sounds, it's based on the female Mallard's classic loud quack

On the move:

sometimes in huge **flocks** with hundreds of ducks; mostly in small flocks of 6-10, especially in spring

What they eat:

seeds, aquatic plants and insects; visits ground feeders offering corn

Nest:

ground nest; Mom builds it from plants nearby

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

7-10 greenish-to-whitish eggs; Mom incubates the eggs and leads the young to food

Spends the winter:

in California



SAW IT!



STAN'S COOL STUFF

This is a dabbling duck, tipping forward in shallow water to eat plants on the bottom. Only the male has black feathers in the center of its tail that curl upward. The name "Mallard" means "male" and refers to the males, which don't help raise their young.

Bullock's Oriole

Look for the black eye line

MALE



FEMALE
pg. 211

What to look for:

a bright orange-and-black bird with a black crown, eye line, **nape**, chin, back and wings, and a bold white patch on the wings

Where you'll find them:

cottonwood groves, open forests

Calls and songs:

a rich musical song

On the move:

slow direct flight from tree to tree

What they eat:

insects, berries and **nectar**; comes to nectar, orange-half and grape jelly feeders

Nest:

pendulous; Mom and Dad build it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

4–6 pale white-to-gray eggs with brown marks; Mom sits on the eggs; Mom and Dad feed the children

Spends the winter:

in Mexico and Central America

Size
8"



Nest
PENDULOUS



Feeder
NECTAR



summer



SAW IT!



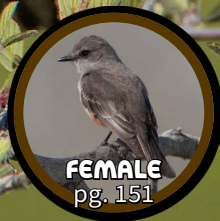
STAN'S COOL STUFF

Bullock's and Baltimore Orioles are closely related and were once considered the same species. They use long plant fibers to create a sock-like nest. One of the few species that will eject cowbird eggs from their nests. Often comes to nectar feeders for a sweet treat.

Vermilion Flycatcher

Look for the bright red color

MALE



FEMALE
pg. 151

What to look for:

a stunningly beautiful bird with a bright red head, crest, chin, breast and belly, a black back, wings and tail, a thin black bill, and a thick black line by the eyes

Where you'll find them:

parks and open areas with trees, wetlands, scrub

Calls and songs:

a rapid series of high-pitched **calls**

On the move:

often seen perched low on a tree, pumping its tail up and down while waiting for a flying insect; it flies out to snatch it, then perches again to eat

What they eat:

insects

Nest:

cup; Mom builds it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

2–4 white eggs with brown marks; Mom and Dad incubate the eggs and feed the young

Spends the winter:

In Mexico; a few stay in the southern part of California

Size
6"



Nest
CUP

Feeder
NONE



year-round
summer



SAW IT!

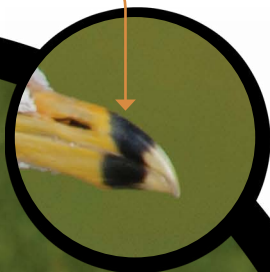
**STAN'S COOL STUFF**

A beautiful bright red bird, the Vermilion Flycatcher flies after insects or hunts them on the ground. When the male wants to attract a female, he raises its crest, fluffs out his chest feathers, fans his tail and sings a song during a fluttery, funny flight.

Ring-billed Gull

Look for the black ring on the bill

BREEDING



Size
18–20"



Nest
GROUND

Feeder
NONE



year-round
winter

What to look for:

white gull with gray wings and a yellow bill with a black ring near the tip; winter **plumage** has speckles on the head and neck

Where you'll find them:

shores of large lakes and rivers; often at garbage dumps and parking lots

Calls and songs:

calls out a wide variety of loud, rising squawks and squeals—classic gull sounds

On the move:

strong flight with constant wing flaps

What they eat:

insects and fish; it also picks through garbage, scavenging for other food

Nest:

ground nest; defends a small area around it

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

2–4 off-white eggs with brown marks; Mom and Dad take turns incubating the eggs and feeding their young

Spends the winter:

in California



SAW IT!



STAN'S COOL STUFF

This is one of the most common gulls in the country. Hundreds of these birds often **flock** together. The ring on the bill appears after the first winter. In the fall of the first three years, the birds have a different plumage. In the third year, they grow adult plumage.

American Goldfinch

Look for the black forehead

MALE



FEMALE



REAL QUICK

Size
5"



Nest
CUP



Feeder
TUBE OR
HOPPER



year-round
winter

What to look for:

male is a bright canary-yellow bird with a black forehead, wings and tail; female is olive-yellow and lacks a black forehead; winter male resembles the female

Where you'll find them:

open fields, scrubby areas, woodlands, backyards

Calls and songs:

male sings a pleasant high-pitched song; gives **twitter calls** during flight

On the move:

appears roller coaster-like in flight

What they eat:

loves seeds and insects; comes to seed (especially thistle) feeders

Nest:

cup; lines the cup with the soft, silky down from wild thistle

Eggs, chicks and childcare:

4–6 pale blue eggs; Mom incubates the eggs and Dad pitches in to help her feed the babies

Spends the winter:

in California; **flocks** of up to 20 birds move around in winter



SAW IT!



STAN'S COOL STUFF

The American Goldfinch is often called Wild Canary due to its canary-colored **plumage**. This cute little feeder bird is almost always in small **flocks**, visiting thistle tube feeders that offer Nyjer seed. A late-nesting bird with most nesting in August.



The Must-Have Beginner's Guide to Bird Watching

Stan Tekiela's famous *Birds of California Field Guide* has delighted bird watchers for many years. Now, the award-winning author has written the perfect bird identification guide for children and grandchildren!

Inside You'll Find

- 86 of the most common and important California birds to know
- Species organized by color for quick and easy identification
- Full-color photographs and full page of information for each bird
- Field marks, favorite hangouts, range maps, Stan's cool facts and more
- **BONUS:** Fun activities for the whole family to enjoy

**The perfect introduction to bird identification
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