



Backyard Bird Identification

To enhance this activity with more information, please download the free Merlin Bird ID app by Cornell Lab!

Audience

Activity designed for ages 12 years old and up.

Goal

Students will be able to identify common bird species found in Oklahoma.

Objective

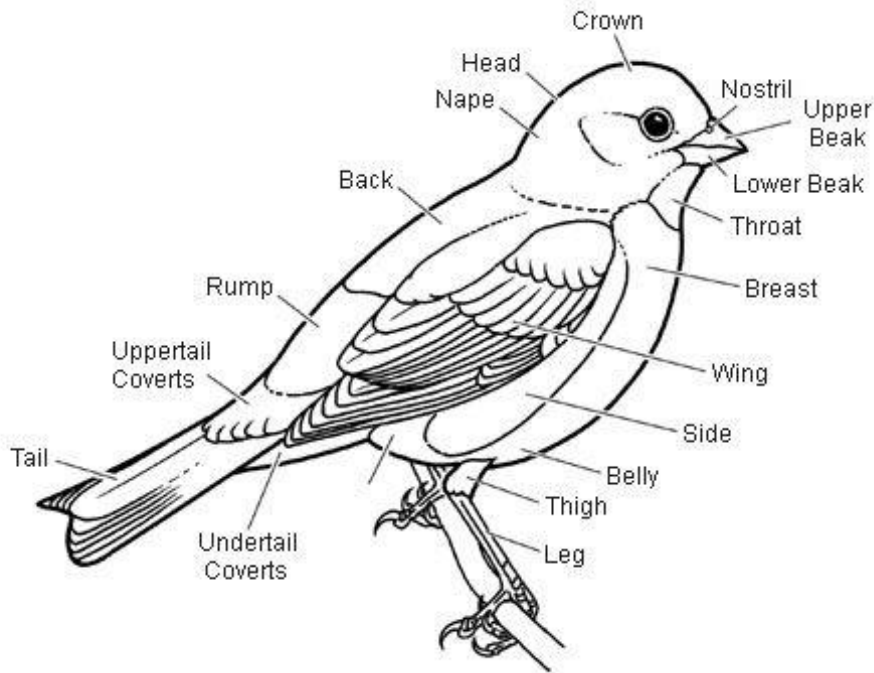
- To get outside and observe nature.
- To learn how to properly identify native birds.

Conservation Message

There are many different species of birds that have adapted to living in urban areas. These species are very important to have a healthy predator/prey cycle. Many of these bird species play an important part of seed dispersal for plants.

Background Information

Identifying birds seems like an easy task but there is more to it than looking at bird's color. There are many species that look very similar and only small details separate them. For example, the Carolina Chickadee and Black-capped Chickadee look almost identical with their black crown, white nape and black throat. The small difference is the Black-capped Chickadee has more white edging on the wing coverts (edges of the wings). The picture below shows some terms that birders use to identify certain areas of the bird. In a lot of songbird species, the males are generally more vibrant and easier to identify. For this activity, we will be looking at just the characteristics of the male bird of the species.



Materials Needed

- Backyard Bird ID Sheets
- Paper and pencil (optional)
- Binoculars (optional)
- Merlin Bird ID app (optional)

Length of Activity

45 minutes

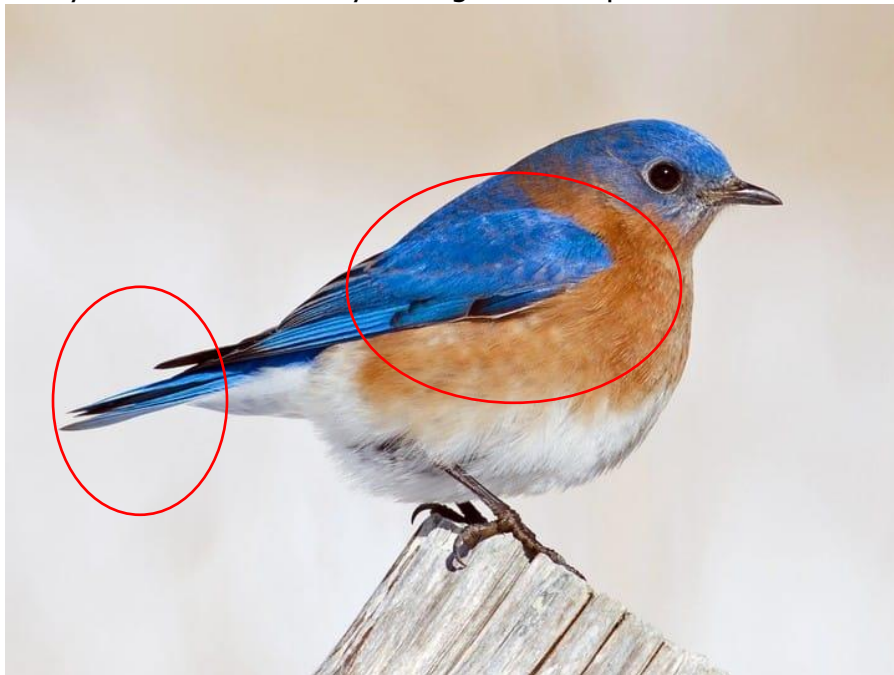
Procedure

- Read the background information and get familiar with the terms used.
- Head outside! If you have binoculars, take those with you! Also, if you have downloaded the Merlin Bird ID app, that is a great resource for birds that are not on the included Backyard Bird ID Sheets.
- Find a good spot near a tree or bird feeder. If you would like, make your own bird feeder, look for our Easy Bird Feeder Craft posted on www.tulsazoo.org/kids.
- Remain quiet and still while waiting to spot some birds. Once you locate a bird, see if you can identify the species.
- Check to see if you were right using the Backyard Bird ID Sheets or on the Merlin Bird ID app.
- Count how many different species can be found in your backyard, document them on a piece of paper.

Backyard Bird ID Sheet



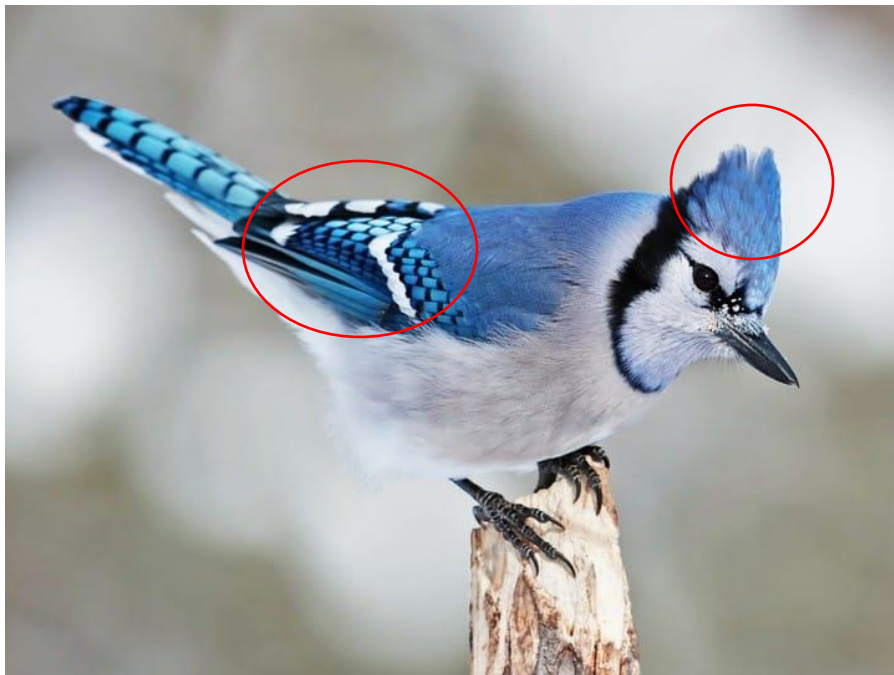
Tufted Titmouse: Small, stocky bird with a big dark eye. Grayish above and white below with a peach color on the sides. The pointed crest makes this bird easily identified. Tend to be very bold and are usually among the first species to a new feeder.



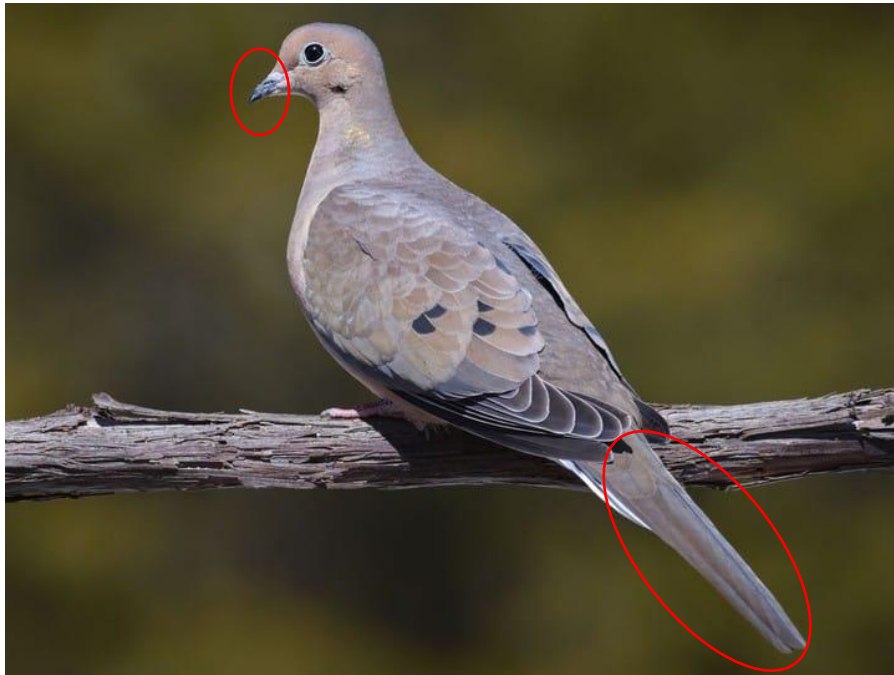
Eastern Bluebird: Small thrush species with a big, rounded head, large eye, and plump body. The wings are long, but the tail and legs are short. The beak is short and straight. Easily identified by deep blue color above and rusty or brick-red on the throat and breast.



American Robin: Large songbird species with a round body, long legs, and long tail. They are gray-brown birds with warm orange underparts and dark heads. Robins make a good reference point for comparing the size and shape of other birds, too.



Blue Jay: They are blue above and below with a noticeable crest on top of the crown and bold black necklace on the throat. They have a checkered pattern on the wing. Larger than a robin but smaller than a crow, their tail at the end is rounded. Tend to be very loud!



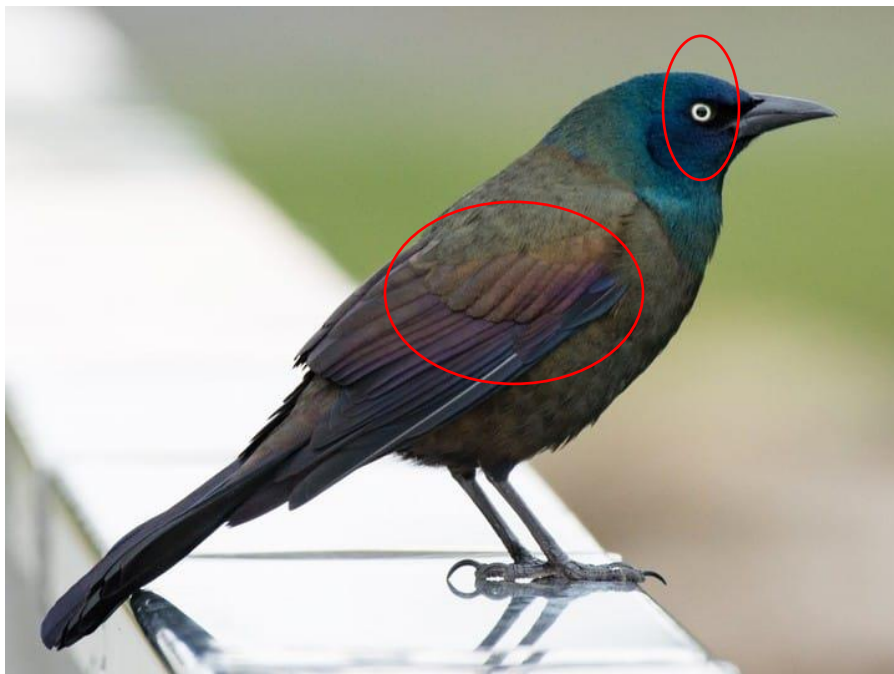
Mourning Dove: Plump-bodied and long-tailed, with short legs, small beak, and a head that looks particularly small in comparison to the body. The long, pointed tail is unique among North American doves.



Northern Cardinal: Larger songbird with a long tail and a short very thick bill as well as a notable crest on top of the crown. Males are a vibrant red with a black mask and throat.



American Crow: A large, long-legged, thick-necked bird with a heavy, straight beak. In flight, the wings are broad and rounded with the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. The short tail is rounded or squared off at the end. They are all black, even the legs and beak.



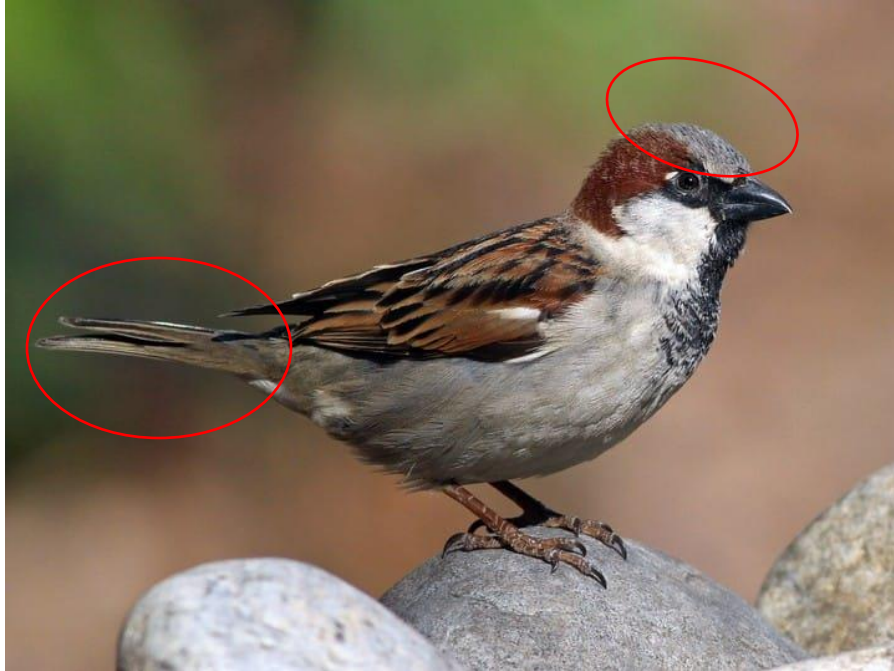
Common Grackle: A large lanky blackbird with long legs and a long tail. They can appear completely black, but up-close their glossy purple heads contrast with bronzy-iridescent bodies. A bright golden eye gives grackles an intent expression. They are commonly found in parking lots begging for food.



European Starling: Smaller than a robin, they have short tails and long slender beaks. In flight their wings are short and pointed, making them look rather like small, four-pointed stars (where they get their name). They look black but in the sun their feathers are iridescent.



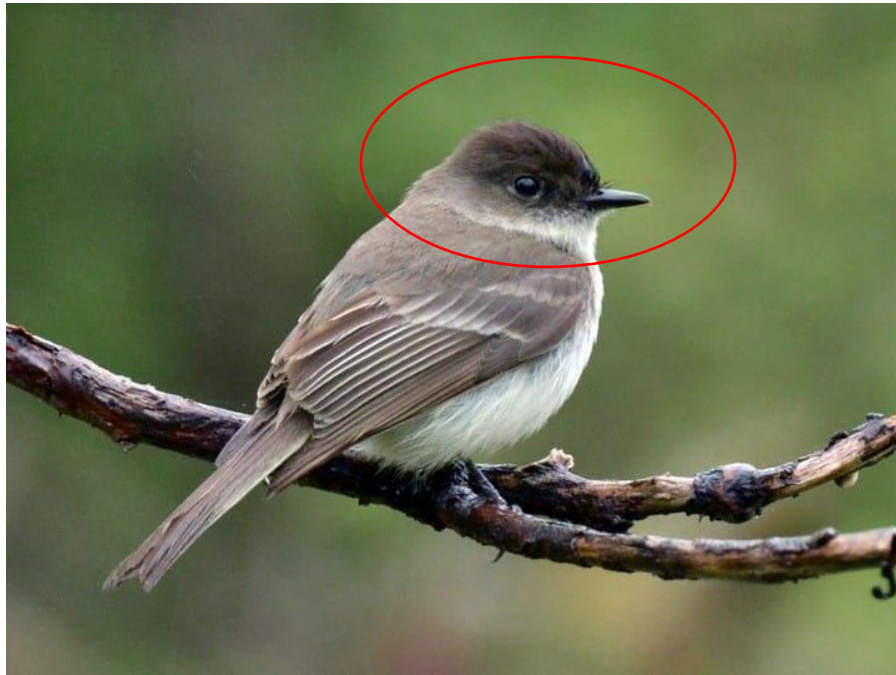
Dark-eyed Junco: A medium-sized sparrow with a rounded head, a short, stout beak and a long tail. They are typically gray with a pink bill and white outer tail feathers; they do vary in color by regions.



House Sparrow: Males have grey crowns, white cheeks and black throat with a chestnut nape. House Sparrows aren't related to other North American sparrows, and they're differently shaped. House Sparrows are chunkier, fuller in the chest, with a larger, rounded head, shorter tail, and stouter beak than most American sparrows.



Downy Woodpecker: Small body size, straight chisel-like beak and a blocky head. Checkered black and white pattern on the wing, males have a small red patch on the back of the crown. They are often confused with the nearly identical Hairy Woodpecker that is slightly larger.



Eastern Phoebe: Plump songbird with a medium length tail, short and thin beak used for catching insects. The head is usually the darkest part, the breast is an off-white color and the back is brownish-gray.



American Kestrel (Sparrow Hawk): Small species of falcon that often bobs its tail while perched. Males have blue wings and black vertical slashes on the sides of their faces. They have black band near the tip of their tail.



Red-tailed Hawk: Large species of hawk that is easily identified by its red tail. They are brown on the back and have pale breasts. They are most commonly seen soaring in the sky or perched on top of telephone poles.



Red-shouldered Hawk: Medium sized hawk that has reddish-brown color on the chest. Checkered wings and the tail is black with narrow white bands.