

Introduction to Birding by Ear



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Why Identify Birds by Voice?

- **BIRDS HIDE!** – Birds like thickets, brambles, brush, rocks, logs, tree leaves, tree tops and other concealments that make them difficult to see.
- Some birds deliberately move to the opposite side the tree making you chase them in a circle!
- It's hard to see a bird when you're looking into the sun.
- Birds fly away before you can get your bins on them.
- Small birds like warblers, kinglets, and chickadees often move quickly, like little acrobats.
- It's frequently easier to hear a bird than see it.
- Impress your friends with a magical talent.
- **Knowing your common birds by Voice helps you focus your attention on the more unusual birds you may wish to see.**

What Do We Need to Do?



Unplug - Relax and Listen

Why Do Birds Sing?

Birds communicate with songs and calls



Northern Cardinal

(1:05-1:22)



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- **SONGS** – Used to attract a mate and claim territory. Here is the liquid whistle of the cardinal.
- **CALLS** – Why birds call.
 - ✓ Let's stay in touch – contact calls
 - ✓ Get off my Lawn! – scolding calls
 - ✓ I want my dinner! – begging calls
 - ✓ Danger Will Robinson!, Danger Will Robinson! - alarm calls
 - ✓ Clear skies ahead – In flight calls

Some other notable calls

Honking of Canada Geese in flight

Blue Jay Alarm calls when a predator is near

'Per chick or ree, Per chick or ree' of a Gold finch in flight.



Canada Goose

Carolina Wren

The little bird with the BIG voice.



- **Size and Shape:** Small and stocky



- **Field Marks:** Strong white eye stripe; short tail often cocked up; slightly decurved bill; buffy chest, belly and flanks



Voice: Sometimes hard to see BUT easy to hear!

Catch phrase *“Tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea”*

Also a 2 noted Chureey, chureey – Chureey, chureey and Scolding you as you walk near the feeder. (50 – 1:05)



Wrens

(50 – 1:05)

Bird Songs and Calls



- **Size and Shape** - Larger than a Robin at 17-21 inches tip to tale.
- **Field Marks** – Completely black including black bill and eye.
- **Voice** – The classic ‘Caw, Caw, Caw’

Difficult to tell apart by sight alone.
The voice tells the tale.

American Crow

(16-31)



Crow and Fish
Crow

- **Size and Shape** – Robin sized or larger. Size of American and Fish crows overlap
- **Field Marks** – Completely black including black bill and eye.
- **Voice** – A nasal ‘nuh-uh’. *Catch phrase* - Ask a this crow, “Are you an American Crow?” She will answer, “Nuh-uh”.



Fish Crow

(0-14)

Bird Songs and Calls



Downy Woodpecker
(1:40-1:57)

- Relative bill length – Noticeably shorter than Hairy WP
- Smaller than Hairy WP
- Long descending whinny.
- **Catch phrase**
“Descending for Downy”
- Call Note: sharp “Peek”



Hairy Woodpecker
(2:00 – 2:18)

- Relative bill length – Approx same diameter as head
- Low even-pitched rattle.
- Call Note: flat “pik!”



Pileated Woodpecker

(15 - 29)



Package

- Large bird with striking red crest and moustache
- Voice - A loud, fast wavering maniacal voice
WuK WuK Wuk Wuk, wuk wuk wuk wuk, WuK WuK
Wuk Wuk, wuk wuk wuk wuk,

Bird Songs and Calls



Northern Flicker

(30-52)



Package

- **Size and Shape** - Flickers are fairly large woodpeckers. Larger than a Robin.
- **Field Marks** - Black v-neck both sexes. Black moustache on the male. Easy to see white rump in flight.
- **Voice** – A loud repetitious even pitched ‘wick, wick, wick - wick, wick, wick – wick, wick, wick’
 - ✓ **Call Note:** sharp “Kleeyer” (I find the call note particularly useful)

Bird Songs and Calls

The Red-Bellied Woodpecker name is accurate but not of much use in the field. It is very difficult to see the red-belly unless you are holding it in your hand.

- **Size and Shape** – Robin sized, smaller than a crow.
- **Field Marks** – Zebra backed woodpecker, red cap, white rump
- **Voice** – repetitious ‘Churr, churr, churr’. Often birders hear **Catch phrase** “Sure, Sure, Sure”.



Red-bellied Woodpecker



(55 – 1:09)

Woodpeckers

Bird Songs and Calls

The **American Robin** is considered one of our first birds of spring. They migrate between 300 – 750 miles. We see Robins in winter but they may be from Connecticut!

- **Size and Shape** – This is the actual Robin. 9-11 inches tip to tale. Larger than a sparrow and smaller than a crow.

- **Field Marks** – Classic rusty red chest and gray back and broken eye-ring.

- **Voice** – *Catch phrase* “Cheerily, cheer up; cheerily, cheer up (5 noted phrase often repeated)



American Robin

(1:18 – 1:37)



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Bird Songs and Calls

The **House Sparrow** is an introduced species (like the Starling) and has adapted very, very well to living among people in urban areas. It is not actually a sparrow but rather a finch (see bill). It out competes many our native birds like the Chickadee and Nuthatch for nest space. May have up to three broods each year. A terrific competitor and certainly winning in our urban spaces if nest box help in not provided for natives.



House Sparrow

- **Size and Shape** – A small bird, only six inches.
- **Field Marks** – Gray cap with a black bib
- **Voice** – *The is no phrase for this one. Listen for a disjointed set of cackles, tweets, chips all jumbled together. Charitably, I hear small bells jingling. Identify the bird from it bad voice.*

Bird Songs and Calls

The **Song Sparrow** can be found year-round in the backyard or open fields. It prefers a low perch in shrubby areas.



Song Sparrow

(30 - 49)



Song Sparrow

- **Size and Shape** – A small bird, 5-6 ½ inches.
- **Field Marks** – Notice striped head with streaky flanks that **come to spot in the center of the Chest.**
- **Voice** – *Catch Phrase - Maids, Maids, Maids put on your tea kettle, ettle, ettle, ettle. The first three notes are strong introductory notes all on the same pitch.*

Bird Songs and Calls

The **Goldfinch** is a common backyard bird and loves to feed on thistle. It inhales seeds from cone flowers and black-eyed Susans. This bird looks so differently in winter that you may not know it's the same bird. While the looks are different the flight Calls are the same.

- **Size and Shape** – Slightly smaller than a sparrow at about 5 inches.
- **Field Marks** – Brilliant yellow body with a black cap. Sports black wings with white wing bars.
- **Voice** – This bird's Latin name is tristis, meaning sad. Its song is sad with no mnemonic. But during its undulating flight it clearly calls, 'Per chick or ree, Per chick or ree'



Goldfinch in breeding plumage

(1:14-1:30)



Goldfinch



Winter plumage

Bird Songs and Calls

The **White-Breasted Nuthatch** is often seen traveling headfirst down a tree trunk looking for insects. To eat acorns and seeds it jams a seed into tree bark using it like a vice. It then pecks away until the seed cracks open.

- **Size and Shape** – This is a sparrow sized bird. 4.5 to 5.5 inches tip to tale.
- **Field Marks** – Male has a black cap with a white face, belly and flanks. Has a blue grey back and wings.
- **Voice** – Both song and calls have a extreme nasal quality. The song is rapid whi, whi, whi but the Call note has better handle/ **Catch Phrase** saying 'Ank-Ank-Ank '.



White Breasted Nuthatch

(1:10 – 1:25)



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Bird Songs and Calls

The **Tufted Titmouse** is an alert and active bird. Often this bird is seen in a mixed flock with chickadees, kinglets and nuthatches. It does not migrate overwintering in its breeding range. It has many different chips and whistles but listen for its catch phrase.

- **Size and Shape** – This is a stocky sparrow sized bird with a tufted crest.
- **Field Marks** – Tufted crest, mouse grey back and wings with faint rusty wash on flanks.
- **Voice** – *Catch Phrase* -- a clear whistled “Chiva, Chiva, Chiva” or a rapid “Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter”



Tufted Titmouse

(54-1:09)



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Bird Songs and Calls

The **Blue Jay** is a noisy and aggressive bird that is often seen in company of other jays. Jays will mob hawks, owls and crows.



Blue Jay

(50 - 102)



Crow and Fish
Crow

- **Size and Shape** – Slightly larger than a Robin.
- **Field Marks** – Blue crest and long, rounded blue tail with a white fringe.
- **Voice** – **Catch Phrase** - **Queedle, queedle. queedle.** Jays have an alarm call and are also known to mimic the Red-tailed hawk, Red-Shouldered hawk and Broad-Winged hawk

Bird Songs and Calls

The **Carolina Chickadee** is a common small and active bird. When seen at a feeder the chickadee takes and single sunflower seed at a time. That's all its little beak carry.



Carolina Chickadee

(21-39)



Carolina
Chickadee

- **Size and Shape** – Smaller than the sparrow.
- **Field Marks** – Has a black cap and bib that sandwich white cheeks and neck. The Carolina Chickadee also has a more northern relative, the Black Capped Chickadee. They are almost identical and can be best be told apart by voice.
- **Voice** – a very rapid *dee-dee-dee-dee. dee-dee-dee-dee. The* whistle is a 4 syllable ‘fee-bee, fee-bay’.

Bird Songs and Calls

The **Mourning Dove** often seen perching on telephone lines or browsing the ground around our feeders. When startled from the ground it takes off quickly and one can hear its pleasant 'wing whirr' as it flies away. This bird is often confused for an owl when first heard by beginners.



Mourning Dove



Mourning Dove

- **Size and Shape** – Larger than a Robin and slimmer than a pigeon.
- **Field Marks** – Brown with long white fringed pointed tail and white eye ring.
- **Voice** – A slow mournful 'oo-ah, whoo, whoo, whoo'. Many confuse this with the hoot of an owl.

Bird Songs and Calls

Barred Owl -

Owls have large eyes for night time hunting and facial disks to reflect sound to their ears. The Barred owl has been tested and found to have the ability to capture prey by sound alone in a completely dark room. Here is its call and as some others join in the conversation.



Barred Owl

Barred Owl

1:13 – 1:38



Voice – *Catch phrase* - Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?

Bird Songs and Calls

Bonus Birds seen in the Spring



Common Yellowthroat
'Witchity, Witchity, Witchity'


Common Yellow
Throat
(1:56 – 2:16)



Yellow Warbler

'Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, Little-more-sweet'


Yellow Warbler 2:
25 – 2:40
(2:25 – 2:40)



Black-throated Blue
Beer, beer, beer, beee

(1:58 – 2:19) 
Black Throated
Blue

More Bonus Birds

Red-tailed Hawk, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo



Red-tailed Hawk – Default hawk recorded in most all movie soundtracks. ‘Keeyurrrrr’



Red-tailed Hawk
(21 – 32)



Wood Thrush – Considered one of America’s foremost songsters. Voice - Flute like ‘eee-oh-lay’ song and a Pip, Pip, Pip, Pip, Pip as a Call.



Wood Thrush
(2:54 – end)



Red-eyed vireo
(1 – 12 seconds)

Red-eyed vireo – **Catch phrase** - “Here I am, where are you; Here I am, where are you?” Repeated and repeated and repeated high in the tree tops. Just try and see this bird.

More Bonus Birds



Eastern Wood Pewee – A name-sayer vocalizing
'Pea-a-wee, Pea-a-wee'



Eastern Wood
Pewee

(1:21 – 1:35)



White-throated sparrow –
Voice *Catch Phrase*
“Poor Sam Peabody, Peabody,
Peabody”



White-throated
sparrow

(0:00 - 0:25)



Red-winged
blackbird

(0:00 – 0:16)

Red-wing blackbird – Heard singing in marshes among the cattails in wetlands with a loud
KonklaRee, KonkLaRee

Bird Identification

Songs and Calls – Useful Tools

•Voice Identification

- **Birding By Ear (CD) – A Guide to Eastern Bird-Song Identification**, narration by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 1989. This is an excellent way to learn songs and calls. Using an interesting approach, the CD places birds in general groups like whistlers, sing-songers, mimics, name-sayers and high-pitchers. The narrators give useful tips, catch phrases and groupings to help you hear and decode bird song. ISBN 0-618-225900
- **More Birding by Ear (CD) – Guide to Eastern Bird-Song Identification**, narration by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 1994. Same approach but takes on more warblers and shorebirds. ISBN 0-618-22592-7
- **A Field Guide to Bird Songs (CD) : Eastern and Central North America (Peterson Field Guides)** ISBN 0-618-22594-3. 267 birds groups by species. A catalog of songs and calls.

•Field Guides and References

- **A Field Guide to the Birds**, Roger Tory Peterson, Fourth Edition, 1980. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston
 - Yes 1980. This is a genuine Field Guide that fits into your back pocket. It emphasizes Field Marks – the characteristics you can actually see in field verses in the hand. You can get it on Amazon for about \$4.00. Then, when you get home, look up the strays using Sibley’s reference work. You can also get more recent editions. Taxonomic classifications have changed over time – but not the field marks.
- **The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America: Second Edition**, David Allen Sibley , Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2016.
- **The Sibley Guide to Birds**, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2014 – This is a reference book.

Bird Songs and Calls – Useful Tools

Mobile Application Field Rule

DO NOT PLAY BACK Sounds aloud in the field. It causes birds to react, defend territory, scold, investigate, or take off. It wastes energy that migrating birds do not have. It could cause nesting birds to abandon nest sites or potential nest sites, leave a productive foraging area and result in real life harm to the bird. **Use field playback with a earpiece** or play very, very quietly so the person next you will Not hear it.

Mobile Applications

- **Merlin** – Free from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.
<http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/download/>
- **Sibley's Birds of North America** – A mobile version of the Sibley reference guide.
- Audubon, National Geographic and Peterson all have good mobile applications at various price points.
- If you are really **CHEEP** like me. Use Google voice search on your phone and say the magic phrase, "Identify White-throated sparrow". Google usually takes you to Cornell's website All About Birds and retrieves the species you requested. Touch listen. (assumes good internet connection)

Helpful Mnemonics

Bird Name	Sound
Carolina Wren	* Tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle (3-noted) * Chewy, chewy, chewy (2-noted phrase repeated) * Scolding calls
Robin	Cheerily, cheer up; cheerily, cheer up (5 noted phrase often repeated)
Cardinal	cheer (downward slurring whistle), wheat (quick upward slur). Cheer Wheat - purdy, purdy, purdy
Mourning Dove	oo-ah, whoo, whoo, whoo
Blue Jay	tweedle, tweedle, tweedle (musical)
Pileated Woodpecker	kik, kik, kik - kik, kik, kik (loud, wavering each 3 noted phrase - Sounds maniacal to me)
House Sparrow	Dry non-musical chirps and scolds. No phrasing
Canada Goose	Sounds like alternate honking and barking
Tufted Titmouse	Peter, peter, peter (this bird also has a large number of different calls and conversational notes)
American Crow	Caw, Caw, Caw
Downey Woodpecker	A decending whinnie. 'Remember Decending for Downy'. Call note a flat 'Pic'
Carolina Chickadee	Chick-a-dee-dee-dee and a whistled Fee-bee-bee-bay
Barred Owl	Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?
White-breasted Nuthatch	Ank, ank, ank (very nasal)
White-throated Sparrow	Poor Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody
Common Yellowthroat (warbler)	Witchity, witchity, witchity
Red-tailed hawk	Keeeeeeeeer! (Just like in the movies)
Song Sparrow	Maids, maids, maids, put on your tea, kettle, ettle, ettle
Red-eyed vireo	Here I am, where are you? - Here I am, where are you? (This just keeps going and going and going in the tree tops - very repetitious)
Wood Thrush	Ee-o-lay (very musical - really beautiful)
Red-winged Black Bird	KonkLaReee (3 notes)
Pewee	Pee-a-wee, Pee-a-wee; pee yeer
American Goldfinch	PerChickaRee, PerChickaRee, PerChickaRee (repeated only while in flight)
Flicker	Weaka, weaka, weaka (repetitously mostly on same pitch) Call note - Cleear!
Yellow Warbler	Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet, Little-more-sweet

