



**LAKEHEAD REGION**  
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

## BEAUTIFUL BIRDS



### HURKETT COVE CONSERVATION AREA



The shores of Lake Superior provide amazing opportunities for us to enjoy the birds that visit our area throughout the year. Head out to Hurkett Cove, only a 1h drive from Thunder Bay with your binoculars and enjoy this great location for relaxing and getting to know both resident and migrant birds.

#### Let's start with what make a bird a bird?

Birds are **homoeothermic** just like humans which mean they keep a constant body temperature and are warm blooded. They **lay eggs** to reproduce just like amphibians and insects but birds will keep their eggs warm by sitting on them in nests. All birds **have wings and most birds fly**, but there are a few exception who do not, like penguins and ostrich. All birds have **beaks, or bills** if referring to waterfowl, which they use for feeding, and sometimes building nests. Bird **legs** are very strong with sharp toes which are used for perching, digging and grabbing prey. But what makes bird completely unique is that they are the only living animals to have **feathers**, which keep them warm, aid in flight, protect from the elements and are often used to attract a mate.



Beyond these common characteristics of birds there is **enormous variations** among bird species, which have each adapted to their environments over time. But with so much variation amongst birds and because they are always moving how do we get to know them better and actually **identify them?**

Here are some insider tips for identifying birds that you can use while watching these amazing creatures; **size and shape,, behaviour, habitat and range, and colour pattern.**

Let's start with size and shape. Look at the **bird's silhouette and compare bird sizes**, such as a robin is bigger than a sparrow but smaller than a crow. Then look at the overall build, beak, head, body shape and tail length. You can also compare its body parts to its other body parts. For example a downy wood beaker's beak is much smaller than its head, whereas a hairy woodpecker's beak is almost as big as its head.

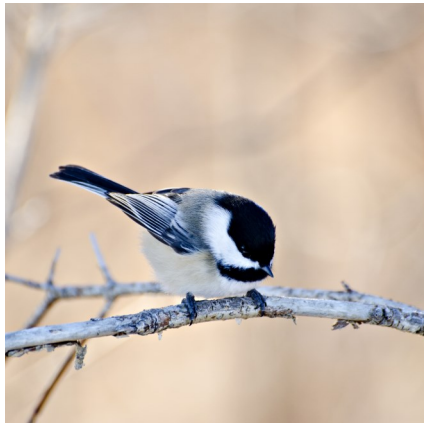
Next, let's look at **habitat**. There are 4 broad groupings of habitat; Forested, aquatic, scrub or open habitats. Here by the water's edge who can assess if the bird is n the water, on the shoreline, in the forest trees, or on the forest floor. A bird's habitat has all the things that species needs to survive , food, water, shelter and space. **Range** is where you will find the bird in the world at a given time of year. You can expect to see black-capped chickadees here throughout the whole year, but you won't even see flamingos in the Lakehead region.





Certain **behaviours** of a bird species are unchanging throughout the year and can we can see them do every day. Look at the birds posture (including where and how the bird is perched or standing, and if there are repeated movements), foraging (including where, how and what they forage) and flight style (including wingbeats and directness of flight), all of which can tell you a lot if you take the time to observe and appreciate the wonders of the bird.

**Colour pattern**, although attractive can be the most difficult way to identify a bird. Start by getting to know the bird's distinctive field markings such as cap, back, tail, wings, throat, eyes, breast, belly, legs and side. These are extremely helpful but should be the last characteristic used to identify the bird as plumage can change from season to season, from male to female and can be difficult to see quickly.



By starting bird identification with the **birds you already know** and getting to know them by watching them in detail you will soon be able to recognize them quickly, just like you would an old friend. From there you can build your knowledge of bird identification as more birds become familiar to you.

Some of the **birds you might see** include: Canada geese, wood ducks, mallards, mergansers, ruffed grouse, rock pigeon, plovers, ruby-throated hummingbird, swans, chickadees, woodpeckers, crows, house sparrow or red-winged black-bird.

Bring a field guide or use an app like **ebird or Merlin**.

### Challenges:

Head outside and **listen for the birds**. Once you can clearly hear one create a mnemonic, description, or memory trick for yourself to remember it. Write it down or simply remember it. For example, a chickadee call sounds like chickadee-dee-dee-dee, and their song sounds like phee-be phee-be.

Make an **edible sculpture** that birds can enjoy.

- In a sauce pan, boil 1/2 c water and 3 tbsp corn syrup. Reduce heat and add 2 1/2 teaspoons unflavoured gelatin, such as Knox. Heat until dissolved.
- In a mixing bowl, add liquid from saucepan to 3/4 c flour (any type). Mix then add 4 c bird seed (whatever suits your backyard birds).
- Mix then add clumps to non-stick sprayed cookie cutter shapes. Allow to cool. Cut small hole for twine then hang outside for your feathered friends!

See what species you can attract and track your bird visitors using the free **iNaturalist app** ([www.iNaturalist.ca](http://www.iNaturalist.ca)) and help contribute to this community science project monitoring biodiversity worldwide.

