

# Life-sized Bird Silhouettes

A Search Image Tool from *The NatureMapping Program*

**Life-sized Bird Silhouettes** were ‘designed’ as a tool for anyone teaching, mentoring, and/or learning the process of bird identification.

**Bird identification** can be a tricky and difficult thing to feel comfortable about. Field guides can often seem to have endless pages of birds that can look very similar.

In order to fit on the pages, the images of birds in field guides are nearly the same size, so it is often difficult at first glance to know whether a bird is crow-sized, robin-sized, or sparrow-sized. Integrating the Life-sized Silhouettes in your learning process helps to **pattern your mind** to more quickly and effectively learn to identify birds.

To be successful in the field, you must have a confidence in identifying the things you see, and beginning with the common birds is a great way to start. Any learning is a process, and making effective use of these silhouettes is about complimenting them with the use of field guides, binoculars (optional), discussions, and outdoor experiences. Silhouettes help to develop the observational patterning, or **search image** that grows with experience.



These silhouettes represent some of the more common birds, or often birds with some distinctive shape or feature, such as the crest of a jay or the forked tail of a Barn swallow. These shapes and features can be used as key **characteristics or field marks** when learning to distinguish different species of birds that may otherwise have similar size or shape.

Placing the silhouettes across the wall can be a good exercise in understanding the relationship between the types of bird, i.e. the size differences between the Downy, Hairy, and Pileated woodpeckers, but the silhouettes are designed to be **located in your indoor world** in such a way to mimic the outdoor world.

The silhouettes are intended to be placed in the room to reflect where you would likely search for the bird in the field, hence **developing your search image**. A **Junco** would most likely be found hopping along the ground, so place the silhouette along the base of a wall, or in a location where your eyes would be drawn down.

A **swallow** is typically seen flying in hunt of insects. Note the silhouette representing the swallows is not a perching silhouette, but rather in flight.

When placing the woodpecker silhouettes, it might be most effective to locate the silhouettes on a door jam or some upright column in order to represent them on the trunk of a tree. See the **enclosed instructions** and suggestions for information on placing the variety of silhouettes that came specifically with your set.

Silhouettes can be used for **more than just identification**. You’ll note the silhouettes are designed with some posture. Just as people can be recognized in different postures, birds (and other animals) can be observed in various postures. We recognize when a person is cold (drawn tight), or angry (very tense), or even happy (a bit bouncy). The silhouette postures are meant to provide some indication of the bird behavior. A bird happily singing has a posture that is different from an alert posture. We often trigger alert postures and behavior. The alerts we trigger are also a reason that we often only get a fleeting glance of a bird. It is in their interest of survival to know when we’re approaching, and then react when we get within their comfort zone.

The silhouettes in your set can be associated with various behavioral postures. Some are in a posture that reflects comfort, and others are more representative of being in an alert posture. The best way to utilize the silhouettes is to first develop the confidence in recognizing the bird, or type of bird represented by the silhouette. Learning to recognize behavior through posture is a more advanced skill that comes after successfully identifying the bird, and then starting to ask questions about **what** the bird is doing, and even **why**.

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### Keeping an eco-friendly footprint

The silhouettes are made of **recycled x-ray materials** that have been provided from local veterinary clinics. The x-ray images had been maintained in files and held by the clinics. There comes a point when the material is no longer needed, and must eventually be discarded.

Your **Life-sized Silhouettes** are made of a durable plastic material would otherwise be discarded to the landfill. Providing these silhouettes as educational tools keeps them in a productive cycle.

Attempts are made to use the darkest portion of the x-ray material to represent the silhouette, but you may see an x-ray image, or light area on the silhouette. This makes for the **unique nature of the silhouettes**.

The silhouette material makes them **durable and long-lasting**. They will not discolor or fade, so can be a valuable asset for any long-term display. They can also be easily removed and relocated if needed. Taping or stapling are effective ways to display the silhouettes.

The material is prone to creasing if bent sharply or folded, so it is suggested to **keep the silhouettes flat** if storing or moving.

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### Silhouette Production

Each silhouette was **hand-drawn**. The image was then translated to a template, and the template of each silhouette is traced on a sheet of x-ray material and then hand cut. The silhouettes are hand cut by volunteer students and community members in support of a local Nature Center. The funds received from the sales of the silhouettes goes to support various youth and **community adventures** and explorations.

Your commitment to learning, and teaching, is also a commitment to supporting some part of a local landscape, which supports the larger landscape that we all share. The world works better when we work for a better world.

**Many thanks,**

**Dan Hannafious**

Wildlife Biologist

*NatureMapping* Lead Facilitator

P.S. I would appreciate any comments, suggestions, or stories that you may have associated with these Life-sized Silhouettes. Please contact me at 360-275-3575, or [dan@hcseg.org](mailto:dan@hcseg.org)

## **SET B**

### **Barn swallow**

The Barn swallow is only swallow with a deeply forked tail. It can be found in tireless flight over meadows, fields, marshes, and ponds catching insects. They have the longest migration route of any North American land bird, flying from Alaska to Argentina.

**Placement** - on open area of wall.

### **Swallow spp.**

They are most often seen in graceful flight as aerial acrobats in search of flying insects. They can be found in open areas, parks, and in developed residential neighborhoods. North American swallows are among the earliest migrants in the fall. Their migration follows an isotherm of 48F, which is their 'trigger' during their large daytime movements.

**Placement** - on open area of wall.

### **Junco spp.**

The Junco is associated with forest edges and shrubby thickets. They will most likely be found feeding on the ground where it hops in search of insects and seeds amongst the leave litter. In flight, they 'flash' white on the edges of their tail feathers. Juncos tend to make quiet calls to their mates when feeding in the thickets.

**Placement** - low on wall near floor or at bottom of door.

### **Chickadee spp.**

Chickadees are often a wintertime resident, and prefer mixed woodlands. They also come readily to a well supplied bird feeder. The chickadee has a flitting, quick flight and can be seen in small groups with some often hanging from the end of branches in search of seeds and insects.

**Placement** - at about eye level on wall near door jam or window frame to represent the end of a limb.

### **Flicker spp.**

The flicker is a medium-sized woodpecker which prefers dead trees for feeding and nest building. Most nest holes are drilled facing south or east. The flicker can often be seen on or near the ground of wooded regions where it feeds primarily on ants. Their longer flights somewhat resemble a rollercoaster by alternating between strong rising flight and slow descending glide with their wings against their body. They also eat other insects, fruits, and berries.

**Placement** - on wall along vertical structure such as door jam or room partition.

### **Downy woodpecker**

The Downy woodpecker is most often found in mixed forest along rivers and in parks. They will move up and around the tree trunk while foraging under tree bark for insects. They are typically fairly shy and will slip around and down the trunk to elude an intruder or predator.

**Placement** - on wall along vertical structure such as door jam or room partition.

### **Hairy woodpecker**

The Hairy woodpecker is a resident of forest, but moves into orchards, parks, and scattered woodlands during the fall and winter. They will strike their bill into the bark and hold it there to detect insect movement.

**Placement** - on wall along vertical structure such as door jam or room partition.

### **Pileated woodpecker**

The Pileated woodpecker is a large woodpecker and is often a resident of established, relatively undisturbed mixed forest. It will chisel out rectangular holes of various sizes in search of ants and beetles. The nest cavity is usually made in dead trees amongst shaded woodland habitat. This woodpecker can typically be found on an old snag or dying trees and may be near the ground or high in a tree.

**Placement** - on wall along vertical structure such as door jam or room partition.

**Screech owl spp.**

The Screech owl is the only small owl with ear tufts. It is often associated with wooded areas, orchards, and the edges of small population centers. During the daytime, it will roost in a hollow tree. The Screech owl is often quite approachable. It can often be found hunting shortly after dusk along the edges of fields and in the open areas of forests.

**Placement** - chest to eye level on wall next to vertical structure which represents tree trunk.

**Great-horned owl**

The Great-horned owl is the largest eared-owl of North America. It can often be found during the day roosting against the trunk of a large tree. Mainly nocturnal although can be found hunting during the day in a variety of habitats such as mixed woodlands, mountains, and marshes. The specially adapted leading edge of the primary flight feathers allows all owls to fly silently. Known to feed on a wide variety of animals such as; mice, weasels, squirrels, opossum, geese, grouse, hawks, other owls, woodpeckers, jays, smaller birds, fish, and insects. This owl makes the typical hoot noise that we often associate with all owls. Known to live over 20 years.

**Placement** - fairly high up on wall next to vertical structure which represents tree trunk.

**House wren**

All wrens are noted for their narrow tails that are often pointed upwards at an angle to the rest of their body. Different types of wrens are common to different regions, and the House wren is distributed across much of the US. Their songs seem particularly big for such a small bird and can be very distinct, so it is good to learn to the wren in your area. Wrens tend to be found in thick brushy/wooded/vegetated areas.

**Placement** – since these little birds are associated with low-lying thickets, placing this silhouette in the lower shadow of an open door or other ‘hidden’ space is good.

**Brown creeper**

The Brown creeper is a relatively common but inconspicuous small woodland bird. It ‘creeps’ up the trunk of trees in short lunges using its still tail feathers as a prop. In its search for insects, it will work its way up and around a tree trunk and then fly to the base of another tree and start working its way up again.

**Placement** – place this silhouette with its beak pointed upward and placed along the edge of a door jam, or something that resembles an upright feature.

**Sparrow spp.**

There are a great variety of sparrows and sparrow-like birds that show up in field guides, but many of them are associated with a regional or even more local distribution. It is very important to make a list of the sparrows that are likely to occur in your landscape, and then determine which of those sparrows will be present at any particular season. Many sparrows are migratory but some can be found year around. If you have year around residents, get to know them well. Sparrows can be fairly specific to the type of habitat they will be found. It is good to learn habitat associations, and then rely on field marks since many look similar.

**Placement** – the silhouette representing the sparrow should be placed accordingly to the type of habitat it will likely be found. Some will be found on the lawn, and others are more likely found in some thicket or vegetated area. Building the appropriate search image will depend on the sparrow(s) that are found in your region.