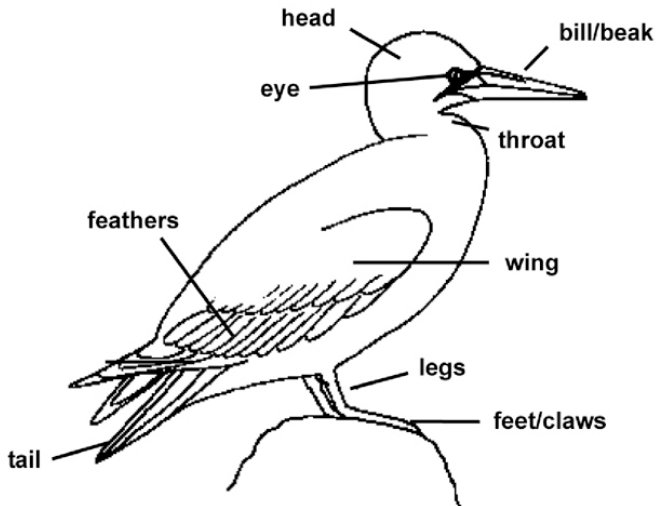


Bird Life

Study of Birds

The study of birds is called **Ornithology**. To be able to identify a bird there are a few things to note; its size, colour, shape of bill, length of legs, its call or song, the shape of its wings, the shape of its tail and how it flies.



Bills

The shape of a bird's bill usually depends on the type of food the bird eats. For example: the heron has a long bill (to spear fish), and curlews have long curved bills (to find worms and molluscs).

Claws and Legs

Some birds have long legs which help them walk through deep water. Other birds have short legs which allow them hang upside down to get at food. Their feet are also very important. Most

have four toes - three that point forwards and one that points backwards. They come in different shapes and sizes and can be used for various activities i.e. walking, running, hopping, perching, climbing, clinging, hunting, wading, swimming and fishing. The type of feet a bird has depends on where the bird lives and what the bird eats.

Singing and Calling

Every bird has different calls and songs. Each noise will have its own meaning. Songs may be used for pleasure and to show how happy a bird is. Calls can be used to pass on news about food and nesting sites, to warn off predators and to attract a mate.

Sight and Sound

Birds spend their day searching for food, preening, courting, and defending their territory.

For all these activities they will need good eyesight and hearing. Birds have very large eyes and the bigger they are the better the bird will be able to see. Birds can even see colour like we do. Hearing is also very sharp in birds but they have no visible external ears; the 'ears' on some owls are not really ears at all but tufts of head feathers.

Feather care

There are many ways in which a bird can look after its plumage (feathers). Preening, which involves taking oil from the preen gland above its tail and covering each feather to protect them; bathing, which cleans the feathers and also spreads the oil over the body; scratching, which removes parasites; sunning, which involves spreading its wings so as to cool the body, and dusting, which involves lying in dry earth or sand to help get rid of parasites.

Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus* Meantán gorm

Both the male and female blue tit collect moss, grass, wool and hair and make a nest in the holes of trees, walls and nest boxes. Blue tits are very clever when it comes to getting food. They peel bark off trees to get at insects underneath. During courtship the males fluff up their wings and crown feathers to attract a female.

Colour: Blue tail, wings and top of the head. Green back, yellow belly, white cheeks and black stripe across eyes.

Length: 10½-12 cm

Diet: Insects, berries, seeds, caterpillars, spiders, nuts and seeds on bird tables.

Habitat: Woodlands, gardens and hedges.

No. of eggs: 8-15



Sketches: Audrey Murphy

From February onwards each year you can help birds build their nests by leaving different things out for them. Hair collected in your hair brush, odd bits of wool and fluff from your carpet can all be used by birds to make a soft nest for their eggs. Never touch a bird's nest as birds will smell you have been near it and may never return! If eggs are inside it they will be left to die.



Nesting Birds!