



Yellow-butt
Gargler

The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of the Whole Stupid World

Matt Kracht

Tacky
Poo-Can



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Matt Kracht



CHRONICLE BOOKS

SAN FRANCISCO

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For my mom, who raised me with love and laughter,
encouraged my imagination from the beginning, and who
made me sit down and finish that bird report.

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Introduction

While I have already related the sordid details of my personal introduction to the study of birds in my first book, *The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of North America*, I feel the basic facts bear repeating here for the sake of context.

I was introduced to bird-watching around the age of ten by a lovely primary-school teacher who was an enthusiastic amateur ornithologist in her own right. Thanks to her passion for all creatures feathered, our class was introduced to the study of birds and benefited from a number of field trips to various bird sanctuaries and misty forest trails around northwestern Washington, where I grew up and still reside.

I even remember a rainy white-water rafting trip down the Skagit River to experience nature's drama of bald eagles arriving in great numbers to feast on salmon exhausted from their annual struggle upriver from the Pacific Ocean to spawn. In retrospect, there may have been a few minor rapids on this part of the Skagit—it was hardly what you would call white water—but to me, it was pure, unadulterated adventure in the great outdoors.

I have fond memories from this formative time of my youth centered around the exploration of ornithology and the natural world, but there was also one somewhat traumatic

experience regarding a bird report that was assigned to me and that became, in my ten-year-old mind, my first great academic failure.

It involved a number of miserable excursions in the cold, wet landscape of the Pacific Northwest, and frustratingly unsuccessful attempts to observe the notoriously difficult-to-spot golden-crowned kinglet (which was assigned to me in spite of my request to study and write about my favorite bird at the time, the ever-present black-capped chickadee). I suppose I could have simply gone to the library for my information in the first place, but in my mind, this was *a matter of science*, and it required firsthand observations gathered in the field. Yes, I was that kind of child.

Ultimately, after spending all of my field research time definitely *not* observing a single kinglet, my bird report effort culminated in spending the last day of my Christmas break trying to cobble together a substandard report based on what I could glean from an old *Peterson Field Guide* and the family *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all while choking on tears and deadline anxiety. I think I received a satisfactory grade, but it felt like a bitter humiliation, and I had no one to blame but myself.

Over time I managed to get over that particular episode of academic underachievement, eventually forgetting about the report altogether, until thirty-some years later when, having never managed in my entire life to observe one in the field, a goddamn *golden-crowned kinglet* appeared in the brush near a path I was walking on. It proceeded to openly taunt me by foiling all of my attempts to capture a clear photo of it and then flew away forever. To this day, I still have not spotted another.

This was the genesis of my first book. In the end, thanks to an educator who went above and beyond to share her love of birds, I have had a lifelong fascination with them. But, thanks to that cursed report, I also might harbor a bit of subconscious anger toward them. So while I have enjoyed and been intrigued by watching and learning about birds, I have also learned to enjoy taking the little fuckers down a notch when I can.

Having accomplished that to some limited extent with my first field guide, *Dumb Birds of North America*, I have now set my sights on the rest of the world. No one else will give it to you straight, and it is my mission to bring this truth to the whole world: birds are fascinating, wonderful, and stupid, and they are jerks.

golden-crowned
dumb-shit



How to Use This Book

If you are new to bird-watching, you may benefit from familiarizing yourself with this guide and its different parts, especially the part with the birds in it. In addition to a drawing of the bird, each entry includes a description and notes on its geographical region, behavior, calls, and general disposition. These are intended not only to aid with proper identification, but also to help you on your way to a deeper understanding and appreciation of their nature.

Beyond the descriptions and specifics of the birds covered in this volume, you will also find useful information on many topics such as bird regions, methods of identification, the ethics of bird-watching, and even a short section on how birds have been depicted in art throughout human history. Additionally, I have included a section containing a number of resources and activities that I have personally developed to help sharpen the bird-watcher's critical bird-watching skills and hone the ability to quickly recognize them for the feathered shits that they are.

Section 1:

The Great Big World of Fucking Birds

If you ask a scientist how birds are distributed across our planet, they will likely try to tell you all about “zoogeographical regions.” Like most science, it’s pretty accurate but boring and very sure of itself. It is also subject to change over time.

Feel free to tune out and think about something pleasant while your scientist friend goes on and on about the quantification of phylogenetic affinities and uses phrases like “further elucidating phenomena,” because they are a didactic prick and much too busy enjoying the sound of their own voice to notice that your eyes have glazed over. Here is all that you really need to know about this:

There are six or seven areas across the globe that have been defined by animal geographers based on the distributions of distinctive animal life.

There. That’s really it. But if you are interested in the history of this, a whole bunch of scientists in the 1800s argued about these regions and how many there were. In 1876, a British explorer and naturalist named Alfred Russel Wallace won this tedious nerd competition, so now we all have to call him the father of biogeography and reference the regions he defined. (Sorry, Ludwig Karl Schmarda, your book, *Die geographische Verbreitung der Thiere* [1853], was an

excellent try, but you can shove it, as far as biogeographical scientists are concerned.)

Today we call these zoogeographical regions the Nearctic, Neotropical, Palearctic, Afrotropic, Indomalayan, and Australasian realms—although, when they were named by Wallace, the Afrotropical realm was known as “Ethiopian,” the Indomalayan realm was called “Oriental,” and the Australasian realm was considered simply “Australia.” It’s fucked up, I know. I guess it was a different time. It’s kind of like when your grandfather tells a story that begins with the phrase “Now, you know I’m not racist, but . . .”

Zoogeographic Regions



For the purpose of this book, however, let us ignore Wallace and the culturally insensitive ideas of biodistribution, which predominated the nineteenth century's scientific thinking.

I find it much more useful to categorize birds by their basic type and simply identify their general range according to a system of regions that I have devised based on what nonscientists already know about our planet, which is that it has continents.

I call it the Major Bird Regions of the Whole World, and it's actually pretty simple, even if you don't have a master's degree in phylogenetics. You're welcome.

Major Bird of The Whole

↑
ARCTICA

(bunch of
ISLANDS*)

1

2

Antarctica
↓

NEW CONTINENTS

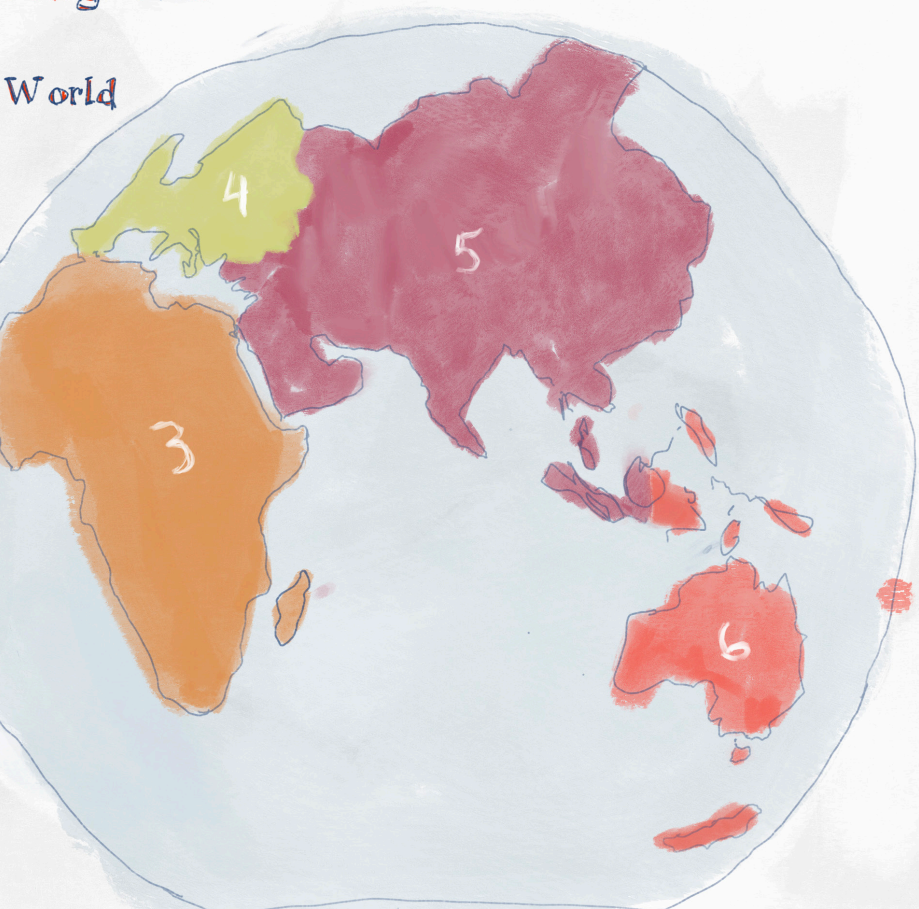
1. NORTH AMERICA

2. South AMERICA

*(Bunch of islands in the pacific
ocean - probably should be in oceania.)

Regions

World



OLD CONTINENTS

- 3. AFRICA
- 4. Europe
- 5. ASIA
- 6. "OCEANIA"

North America

The North American region includes the United States, Canada, and Mexico but don't hold that against it. It is home to more than two thousand species of birds, according to data from both Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and upward of a dozen of those species have delivered various personal affronts to the author of this book.

South America

South America resides right under the ass of North America, with Central America dangling in between. (According to leading continent experts, Central America is actually part of North America. However, if you live in Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the United States, or Mexico, you might disagree.) In any case, scientists have discovered that South America has a fuck-ton of birds in it, claiming the greatest number of bird species of any region.

Africa

Some scientists have recently argued that using bird species as the primary indicator of diversity is misleading, suggesting instead that counting the higher taxonomic levels (e.g, genera and families) provides a better gauge. This makes sub-Saharan Africa the most diverse bird region of the world, technically. There are a number of complexities involved in this calculation, revolving around phylogenetics and distributional data, but this thinking comes from the *South African Journal of Science*, so it smells a lot like scientific biodiversity-envy to me. I mean, what is the big need for Africa to prove that it has the most bird diversity, anyway?

It's already accepted as the cradle of humanity, and why ruin that for everyone?

Europe

Situated between Asia, Africa, and the Atlantic Ocean, Europe covers a little over ten million square miles at the time of this writing, and sadly most of it has birds. Bird-watching is quite popular, especially in the United Kingdom, where people are alarmingly obsessed with it. To be fair, there are bird freaks throughout all of Europe, and many of these birders will proudly remind you that the field of ornithology was invented by Europeans, but in fact the systematic study of birds began in the fourth century BCE with Aristotle, and he was Greek at the time.

Asia

This region is almost too big to talk about. Let's break it down into smaller areas: Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Southeast Asia, Southern Asia (which is so big it includes India—do you even know how fucking big India is?), Western Asia . . . There's probably one or two Asias that I've forgotten; geography is not my area of expertise. One thing we do know is that there are birds all over Asia, and some of them are pretty weird looking.

Oceania

"Oceania" sounds a lot like a fantastic secret undersea kingdom, one ruled by an ancient race of intelligent merpeople who carry tridents and wear vaguely Hellenistic-period clothing even though they live underwater, and who have vast undersea libraries containing millennia of secret

undersea knowledge, which is inscribed on giant clamshells, and who also communicate telepathically with their allies, the dolphins. Amazing! But don't get excited—Oceania is really just Australia and New Zealand, and possibly even some other islands. There is no undersea kingdom, which is really very disappointing, especially when you consider that the ocean floor may be Earth's only remaining bird-free zone.

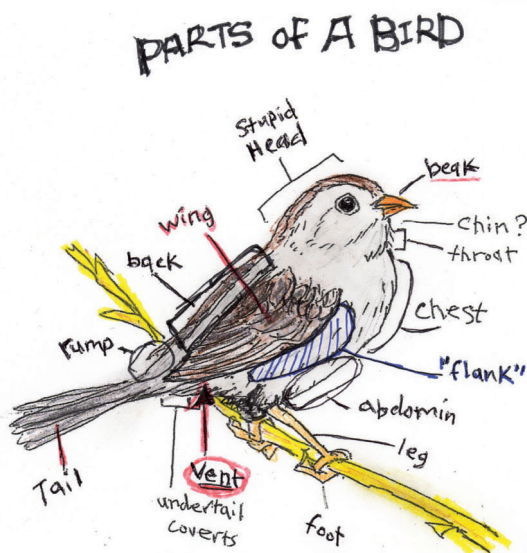
Where to Look for Birds

Actually, birds are more or less everywhere you look—whether you want them to be or not. Once you start looking, they're all over the place. But if for some reason you still need some help, here are a few suggestions on where to find them:

1. **Obviously, out in nature.** If you don't immediately spot one in the air, you can find them in trees, in bushes, on the ground, floating in water, etc. If you don't see them, try listening, because they're frequently making a whole bunch of noise and ruining the peaceful quietness of nature. Nature is infested with birds.
2. **Your own garden.** If you have even a modest garden or some trees outside your home, try looking there—most birds are too dumb to know the difference between your garden and nature.
3. **The city.** You don't have to live in a country house to find birds. You may think that birds only reside in beautiful forests and cheerful meadows, or maybe in suburban parks. But one look at the mess on any public bench or outdoor cafe table will prove otherwise. Watch where you sit.
4. **Virtually the whole world.** From one pole to the other—in climates hot and cold, in the desert, by the sea, in a tropical jungle, you name it—in nearly every environment on this planet: *birds*. I'm telling you, there is no getting away from them. Not ever.

How to Identify Birds

If you already know how to do this, feel free to skip this part. Or don't, because a refresher couldn't hurt you, could it? But maybe you are some kind of big ornithological expert who is too important to be bothered with some friendly advice. Whatever, jerk.



Bird Parts

The first step in correctly identifying which dumb bird you are looking at is knowing the basic bird parts. The sparrow is a good example; it's very boring, but it has the basic "bird" shape, and trust me, they all have pretty much the same parts.

Head: You can probably figure this one out on your own, but it's generally the thing on top of the bird. It's one of the best places to look for the eyes and the beak, which can also help you with identification.

Field markings may include the crown (top of the head), the nape (back of the head), eye-rings, eye lines, and, supposedly, eyebrows.

Bill or Beak: No one knows what the difference between a bill and a beak is, but the shape and size are pretty important if you're trying to identify a bird. Always pay close attention to this part, because this is what they will peck you blind with, if you give them half a chance.

Chin: This may be hard to see on a bird, as most birds are weak-chinned. This suggests they have a weak personality and may lack the willpower to follow projects through to completion.

Throat: Between the chin and the chest. If you hadn't guessed, this is where all that goddamn noise comes from.

Neck: Most birds don't have a neck, or at least not one that you can see, because it's typically very short. On the other hand, many wading birds have extremely long necks, which may be a good place to look for identifying markings on

these gangly looking sons-of-bitches. One thing you are never going to see is a bird with a normal-length neck.

Back: Birders should familiarize themselves with the back markings of as many species as possible, because most birds are complete assholes and will sit with their backs to you, which means you can't identify them and check them off of your stupid bird list.

Chest: Also referred to as the breast. Can be difficult to cook without drying it out.

Abdomen: Goes from the breast down to the undertail. Also called the belly, but not by anyone who's worth taking seriously.

Flanks: This is ornithologist-speak for the sides of a bird. What a bunch of a-holes. Just call it the sides.

Wings: Seriously, I'm not even going to explain this one. This is the part that makes it a bird.

Rump: The rump is the patch between the back and the tail. Basically, it's the lower back. For most birds, the rump doesn't really stand out. But a few species do have unique rump colorations that could be helpful, if you somehow managed not to be able to make an identification based on the clues from the entire rest of the bird.

Tail: This is the part that sticks off the back of the bird. A multitude of shapes, lengths, and colors make the tail invaluable in identification. Even how the tail is held can tell an observant watcher a lot about a bird. "Tail up, stuck up," is what I always say.

Vent: It's also called the cloaca, but don't let the fancy anatomical terminology fool you; this is the butthole. Birds shit whenever they feel like it, and also whenever they are above your vehicle.

Just venting: Did you know that in addition to excretion, the cloaca is also used for laying eggs? Birds are disgusting.

Undertail Coverts: This is getting boring. These are the short feathers under the tail; they may occasionally have colors or markings that could help distinguish between some species, but honestly, who's even looking?

Legs: Length, color, and even thickness can be useful for identification. If you want a good laugh some time, try imagining a bird with fat legs.

Feet: This is what birds walk on when they're too lazy to fly.

Foot fact: Most birds' feet are the same color as their legs, but not all of them! So if you see a bird from a distance and you think it might be wearing shoes, don't say anything, because a lot of ornithologists will never let you live this down.

Bird Size

Another attribute that may help you identify a bird is its size. This can be especially helpful when you can't get a clear look at the field markings. When judging a bird's size, you may find it useful to practice comparing them to something familiar that is similar in size. For example, is this bird the size of a fig, or more like the size of your fist squeezing a fig until it bursts?

Bird Shape

Does it have a small body with long, stupid legs, or is it dumpy with a fat head? While no two birds are the same, they all come in one of the six main bird shapes.

THE SIX MAIN BIRD SHAPES



BASIC



LUMP



SHITSACK



FLOATERS



WEIRD LEGS



MURDER

Section 2:

The Birds

This is the section with all the birds in it.

If you're familiar with the major field guides, you know that there are a number of ways to categorize birds. The most traditional guides follow taxonomic order, which is great if you're particularly uptight, or an ornithologist.

Other guides organize the birds in a more relaxed manner, like by family and species similarity. If you want to get really sloppy, there are even guides with birds arranged by physical characteristics, such as what shape they are or the size of their bill. This last approach can be incredibly useful when making a quick identification in the field, but believe me, there are some academics who are pursing their lips indignantly right now just thinking about it.

All of these approaches have their merits, but for the sake of promoting a better understanding of the birds themselves, in this guide they are organized according to the kind of bird they are deep down inside.

Typical Birds

You know them. These are your typical birds—sparrows, finches, warblers, and the like—all doing typical bird stuff, like chirping and flitting and warbling and taking seed from your feeder without saying thank you. They generally have bad manners, and most of them are dim-witted.

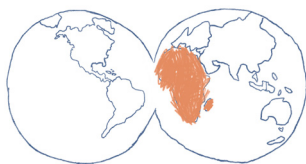
African Suck Puppet

Anthus crenatus

Common Name: African Rock Pipit

Africa has a lot of very interesting, colorful birds, and this is not one of them. *Anthus crenatus* is a small, short-legged passerine bird that spends most of its time on the ground. It has been described as “uniformly plain,” but frankly that description seems overly charitable. Let’s just say that this bird is depressingly beige, and this is possibly the most notable thing about it. It is found in South Africa and it looks like rocks.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA



African
Suck
puppet



Boring Chickadee

Poecile hudsonicus

Common Name: Boreal Chickadee

This brown-capped member of the tit family is brown and dull. It lives quietly in the forests of the far North American continent and is nonmigratory, so unless you're unlucky enough to be in Alaska or Canada, you probably won't have to see one. Not that you would probably notice it if you did. It happily visits backyard feeders within its range, but there's no compelling reason to bother looking.

Fun Fact: *Canadians are so bored with this bird that they have tried making it more interesting by inventing fun colloquial names for it, like chick chick, tom-tit, and even fillady. It doesn't really help.*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





poring
Chickadee

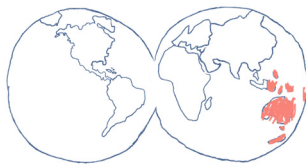
Butt-throat Finch

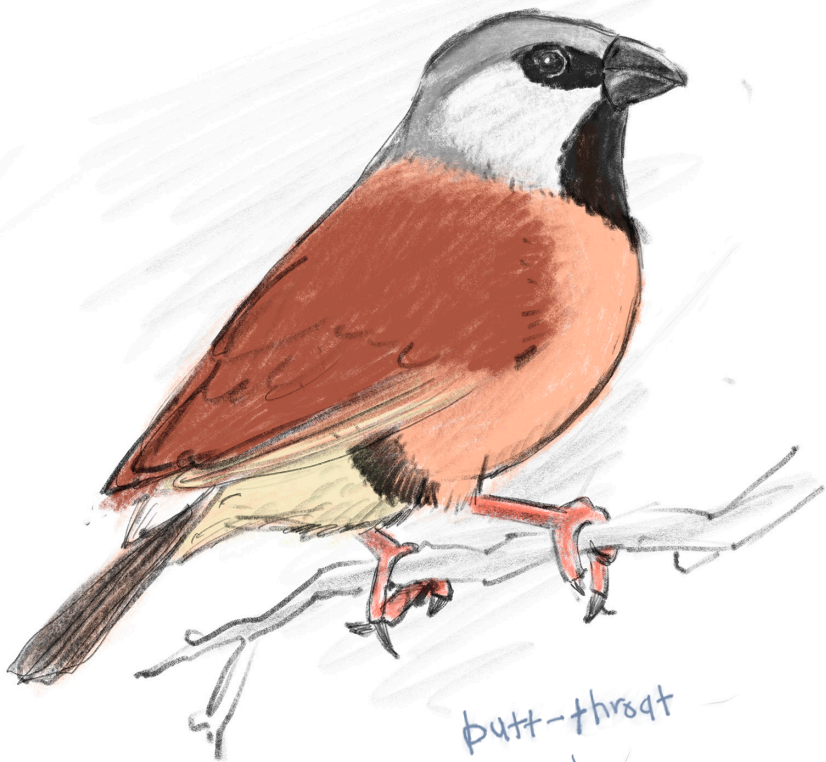
Poephila cincta

Common Name: Black-throated Finch, Parson Finch

This bird won Australian 2019 Bird of the Year, according to *The Guardian Australia*. However, it didn't win because it was such an amazing bird; it won because it is seriously endangered and received a lot of press from conservation groups who are working to keep it from going extinct due to habitat encroachment by humans. This is a little like being voted prom queen at your senior dance, but only because everyone at your school feels super guilty about how poorly they have treated you every day for the last four years. This finch seems irritatingly cheerful in spite of it all.

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





butt-throat
Finch

Dick-whistle

Spiza americana

Common Name: Dickcissel

Found throughout the eastern and Midwestern United States, *Spiza americana* has exasperated the taxonomists, who have argued for years over whether it is a new-world sparrow, a blackbird, or part of the oriole family, though currently they're trying out "a member of the cardinal family." Perhaps this designation will stick permanently, but, trust me, no one is holding their breath to find out. Its loud, bothersome song is a persistent refrain of "DICK! DICK-DICK-DICK, WHISTLE!"

Identification: *They have some yellow junk on their eyes and breast, and a black bib that kind of looks like a neck beard, which is gross.*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





Dick-Whistle

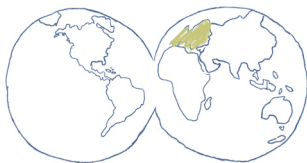
Dumb-ass European Robin

Erithacus rubecula

Common Name: Robin, European Robin

In most of Europe, it is just another member of the old-world flycatcher family *Muscicapidae*, but in the United Kingdom, this ruddy-faced dumbass holds a special place in people's hearts. In 2015 they voted it their national bird. Why? Who knows. It is clearly way too goddamn cheerful. Plus, the little son of a bitch will sing his stupid heart out in the middle of the night because it gets confused by the light from street lamps, because it is a goddamn moron.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





dumb-ass
European robin

Dumbfuck

Prunella modularis

Common Name: Dunnock, Hedge Accentor, Hedge Sparrow, Hedge Warbler, you name it

The name “dunnock” comes from the English word *dun*, which means “dull brown,” and these losers couldn’t be any more dull if they tried. Seriously, these birds look so boring that it would actually be preferable to watch eighteen holes of seniors’ golf. Some scientists believe that they may have evolved their drab boringness as a sort of camouflage. This adaptation might help them go unnoticed by predators, but their incessant vocalizations probably do not. Their loud “TSEEEEPs” and high-pitched trills are difficult to ignore, even when you’re trying.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Dumbfuck

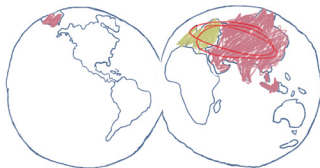
Eurasian Buttfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Common Name: Eurasian Bullfinch, Common Bullfinch, Bullfinch

Found throughout Asia and Europe, this finch is often described as “bull-headed,” but really it has a very small head for a bird with such a fat body. It is a relatively quiet little bird—however, it is still considered a major pain in the ass by farmers because the voracious little fuckers relish the tender buds of the fruit trees and can wipe out most of an orchard before the fruit has even grown. Of course, once the young buds are no longer available, they’re happy to eat your fruit, berries, and any seeds that might be left, too. What a bunch of buttoholes.

BIRD REGION: ASIA AND EUROPE





Eurasian
Bullfinch

Fucking Carolina Wren

Thryothorus ludovicianus

Common Name: Carolina Wren

In the eastern United States during the lazy days of summer, if you just close your eyes and listen for a minute or two, you will probably get an earful of the male Carolina wren's piercing fucking call, because they are in pretty much every lousy scrap of woods within its range. "TEAKETTLE! TEAKETTLE!" You can tell he thinks a lot of himself by the way the little loudmouth holds his nose in the air and stick his tail up like he's someone special, the arrogant prick.

Identification: *Brown with white eyebrows and an air of self-importance*

BIRD REGION: UNITED STATES,
PLUS PARTS OF CANADA AND MEXICO



fucking
Carolina Wren



Great Tit

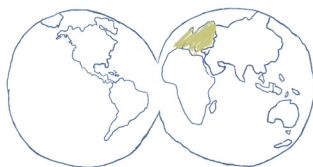
Parus major

Common Name: Great Tit (No, for real.)

For fuck's sake, why would someone give a bird a name like this? For starters, not only is the name flagrant false advertising, but it makes it tremendously difficult to write about them without having every other sentence appear to be an off-color pun. Plus, if you're using binoculars in a park, you can't honestly reply to someone when they ask you what you're looking at, because if you blurt out, "some great tits," you are going to wind up with a significant misunderstanding on your hands. Thanks a ton, whoever named this fucking bird.

You know what—let's just say that this small passerine is yellowish with white cheeks on a black cap and bib and move on, shall we?

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Great Tit

Green Cat Turd

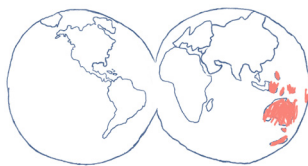
Ailuroedus crassirostris

Common Name: Green Catbird

Their loud calls are frequently described as catlike, but they vary considerably and can sometimes be mistaken for a crying child. Or the terrible shrieks of a horrible vampire-like creature. Granted, there's a pretty big difference between the sounds of a cat, a baby, and the demonic undead, but I'm sure we all agree that no one wants to be startled awake by any of these sounds early in the morning, so please shut up, catbirds.

Color: Way too goddamn green

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA (AUSTRALIA)





green
Catbird

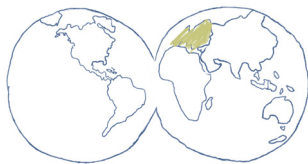
Pied Wanktail

Motacilla alba yarrellii

Common Name: Pied Wagtail

A subspecies of the white wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), these small passerines breed almost exclusively in Great Britain and Ireland. Often nesting communally in urban areas, roosts can number in the thousands. They are notable for their pronounced up-and-down tail wagging, which may appear at first to be a clumsy attempt to fan away an embarrassing bout of flatulence. However, the ceaseless nature of the wagging seems more suggestive of a severe nervous tic. Combined with their rapid walk, erratic movements, and general skittishness, it seems safe to say that this bird has some problems.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Red Breasted Butt-hunch

Sitta canadensis

Common Name: Red-breasted Nuthatch

This little bird is a crazy bastard. I'm not kidding; it's all over the place. It runs around frantically in coniferous trees looking for food, in and out of bark crevices, all over branches . . . It bobs around on tree trunks and pine cones like there's no difference between up and down. It's enough to make you feel nuts. Also, that fucking nasal call: "YANK, YANK, YANK!" God.

Description: Really, really small. Blue-gray with a rusty breast. Black-and-white head. Its tail is too short for its body, if you ask me.

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





red breasted
butt-hunch

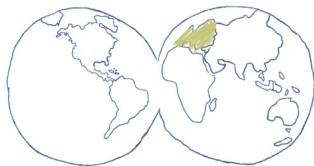
Shit-toed Tree Creep

Certhia brachydactyla

Common Name: Short-toed Treecreeper

There are four subspecies of the short-toed treecreeper, but this hardly matters, as all of them are a streaky spotted brown and look like every other treecreeper in the whole stupid world. All of these creeps have curved bills and stiff tails and spend their time running up trees and poking around under the bark for insects. Their aggravatingly repetitive “TEET! TEET! TEET!” call is bad enough, but wait until you hear its shrill “song” of high-pitched rapidly jumbled notes. It’s enough to send you over the edge, especially if you are trying to have a relaxing walk in the woods.

BIRD REGION: PRETTY MUCH EUROPE





Shit-toed
Tree Creeper

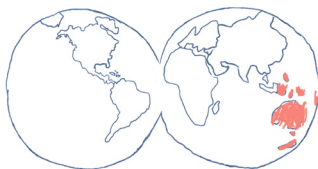
Stupid Fairywren

Malurus cyaneus

Common Name: Superb Fairywren

They're called superb fairywrens, but don't be fooled—not only are they not real wrens, but they're also not that superb. They belong to the Australasian wren family *Maluridae*, which are small passerines common to Southeast Australia. They fly around and eat insects, which you have to admit is pretty standard for a lot of birds. I guess one interesting thing is that the males have bright-blue patches on their caps and cheeks, which happen to be the color of Don Johnson's powder-blue Armani jacket in Season 2 of the hit 1980s TV series *Miami Vice*. Damn, I loved that show. Except for all the birds in the opening titles.

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





fail up,
stuck up.

Stupid
Fairy Wren

Yellow-butt Gargler

Setophaga coronata

Common Name: Yellow-rumped Warbler

Visit any mid-elevation coniferous forest or suburban backyard in North America and you'll probably see this little brown-and-yellow son of a bitch perched somewhere at some point. Technically, it's four different sons of bitches—in the early 1970s, the American Ornithologists' Union decided to lump the myrtle, black-fronted, Goldman's, and Audubon's warblers into one species, because they are all basically the same stupid bird. Predictably, these bird scientists are now arguing that it should be *reseparated* into four species. A single species or four, one thing is certain: Who cares?

BIRD REGION: PRETTY MUCH FUCKING
EVERYWHERE IN NORTH AMERICA





Yellow-butt
Gargler

Backyard Assholes

These sons of bitches are pretty common in populated areas. You're likely to see them outside your window, possibly mocking you with their friends. They are frequently very arrogant.

California Smug Jerk

Aphelocoma californica

Common Name: California Scrub Jay (formerly Western Scrub Jay)

Due to climate change, this smug son of a bitch has expanded its range from California up the western coast of the United States into Washington state, and is now regularly disturbing the peace in my backyard with its fucking loud, harsh call. It used to be called the western scrub jay, but some scientists got bored and decided to divide it into two separate species (California scrub jays in coastal areas, and Woodhouse's scrub jays in the interior). Both are still smug fucks.

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA. WEST COAST.
DEFINITELY IN THE AUTHOR'S TREES.





California
Smug
Jerk

Goddamn Northern Cardinal

~~Cardinalis cardinalis~~ Common Name: Northern Cardinal, Cardinal

Goddamn this bright-red bastard, strutting around like a bigshot in its striking red feathers. Their loud whistled notes can be heard disturbing quiet backyards from Mexico right up through the eastern United States and Canada. Males aggressively defend their breeding territory by singing or attacking other males who intrude. Sometimes they even attack their own reflections; like a lot of good-looking birds, they are stupid but they are also shallow and insecure, so they lash out at anyone they feel might be more attractive than they are.

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





Goddamn
Northern
Cardinal

Goddamned Magpies

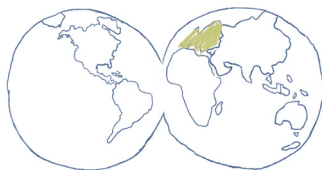
Pica pica

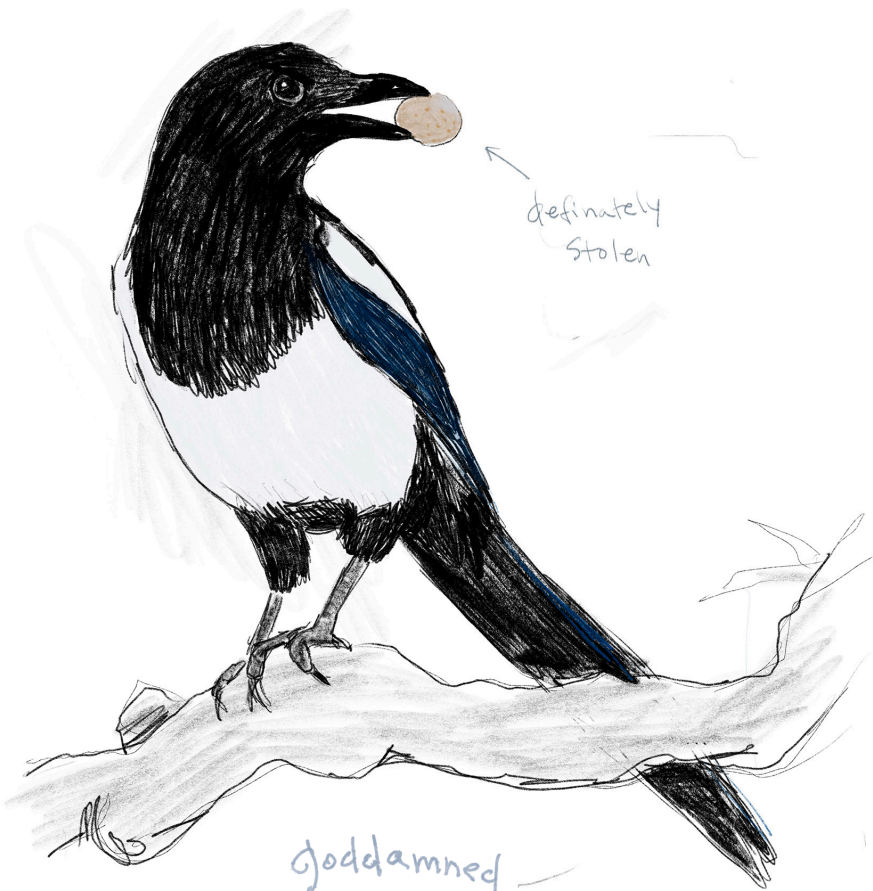
Common Name: Magpie, European Magpie

Magpies have a reputation for being thieves. Folktales tell us that they are drawn to shiny objects and love to steal coins and jewelry. But university studies in the United Kingdom have shown that this is not accurate. The fact is, magpies are actually *indiscriminate* thieves, making off with objects of all kinds, shiny or not. Even worse, these criminal assholes also frequently steal eggs and even defenseless chicks from songbird nests. Maybe they aren't specifically drawn to valuables, but I'd keep an eye on your car keys just the same.

Description: *Black and white with shifty, untrustworthy-looking eyes*

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





definitely
stolen

goddamned
Magpie

Hoodlum Crow

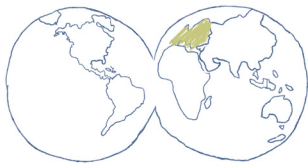
Corvus cornix

Common Name: Hooded Crow, Scotch Crow, Danish Crow, sometimes “Hoodie”

The hooded crow is closely related to the carrion crow and is found across much of Europe. In Celtic folklore it was associated with Mórrígan, the phantom queen of war and fate, who incites warriors to do great deeds in battle. This is laughable once you have watched one of these jerkwads poke through a trash bag looking for something to eat. In reality, this corvid is the kind of asshole who steals other birds’ eggs and hides bits of meat in your gutters.

Vocalizations: Incessant “croaking” . . . actually it’s really more like screaming, which they do just to make you feel insane.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Red Buttholebird

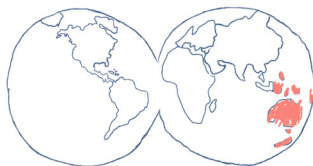
Anthochaera carunculata

Common Name: Red Wattlebird

These guys are real buttholes. They are big, noisy members of the family *Meliphagidae* (honeyeaters) and are known for their territorial and aggressive behavior. They engage in dominance displays called “displacement” in which they will immediately take the spot of a smaller bird if it leaves its perch. They will fly at, harass, and even fight with smaller birds, but they will gather in numbers to mob birds who are larger than they are. They are like a gang of juvenile delinquents: They act tough, but deep down they are cowards.

Identification: *Wattlebirds are easily distinguished by the fleshy wattles that dangle off their faces like tiny balls. Which is appropriate because they are such dicks.*

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





Red
buttholebird

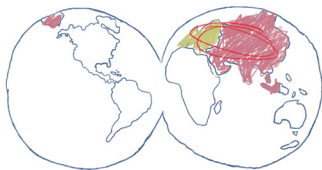
Spotty Nutt-huffer

Nucifraga caryocatactes

Common Name: Spotted Nutcracker, Eurasian Nutcracker, Nutcracker

Slightly larger than a jay, these motherfuckers like nuts, which they crack. The name sort of gives it away, though, so this shouldn't come as a big surprise. Chocolate-brown and sporting a dense pattern of white spots and glossy, almost blue-black wings, they are quite striking and could even be considered handsome. But like most members of the corvid family, they are also smug and self-satisfied, which is a real turnoff. During the autumn months, they bury enough nuts and seeds in caches to last the whole winter. I know, who cares, but watch out: They turn into real assholes if they think you might be after their stupid nut hoard.

BIRD REGION: ALL ACROSS EUROPE AND ASIA,
LIKE A BAD RASH





Spotty
Nut-huffer

Tawny Fuckmunch

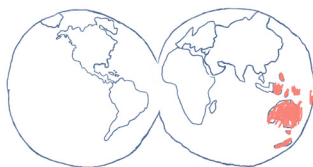
Podargus strigoides

Common Name: Tawny Frogmouth

It may look like an owl, but trust me, this big turd is not a real bird of prey. While carnivorous, it's technically a frogmouth and related to the nightjars. Its talons and legs are weak as shit, so it only catches its "prey"—mostly insects and slugs, and maybe the occasional frog or slow-moving mouse—with its beak. They are found across most of Australia in multiple habitats, including the suburbs, which they like to disturb with their deep, continuous nighttime grunting.

Fun Fact: Tawny frogmouth are nocturnal hunters, but sometimes during the day they will just sit with their mouths hanging open and hope a bug will fly into it because they are that fucking lazy.

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





Color of
tree bark

Tawny
Fuckmunch



← waiting
for a bug
to fly in.

Yellow-bill Ox-fucker

Buphagus africanus

Common Name: Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Tickbird

Found throughout the savannas of sub-Saharan Africa, this bird uses its sharp claws to cling to the backs of large mammals such as wildebeests and cattle, where it eats ticks. I know, it's super gross, but it gets worse: After eating the blood-filled ticks, this nasty *Nosferatu* motherfucker continues to peck at the wounds and *drink the blood of the host animal*. Nonbreeding oxpeckers roost on their hosts at night, but when nesting, they line their horror-holes with hair ripped from the animals' backs. If that all isn't enough to give you the shudders, they fucking *hiss* when alarmed. Is there anything about this bird that isn't horrifying?

Identification: Red-tipped yellow beak, unholy lust for blood

BIRD REGION: AFRICA



horrible

Yellow-bill
Ox-fucker



Hummingbirds, Weirdos, and Flycatchers

From personality to personal appearance, these dorks of the bird world tend to struggle with appropriate social decorum. You could almost feel sorry for them if they weren't so weird.

African Pygmy Kingfucker

Ispidina picta

Common Name: African Pygmy Kingfisher

Ha ha, look at this bird. This colorful little fuck is probably the dumbest-looking of all kingfishers, by far. It's all beak and it looks like someone clipped a real bird in half. I mean, really, it barely even has a tail. Also, the tiny feet. It must be difficult for this bird to sleep without the weight of that ridiculous orange bill sending it ass over teakettle. This bird is all messed up.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





African Pygmy
Kingfucker.

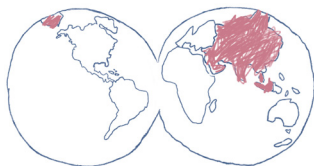
Black Donghole

Dicrurus macrocercus

Common Name: Black Drongo

Dicrurus macrocercus is a small Asian passerine with dumb tail feathers. It eats insects and is known for its aggressive defense of its territory, even dive-bombing larger birds that it considers threatening. This sort of poor behavior has earned it the nickname “king crow,” which must be a bitter embarrassment for real crows everywhere.

BIRD REGION: ASIA





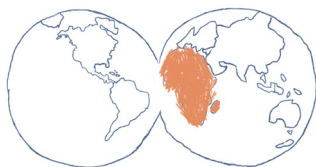
Crap Sugarbird

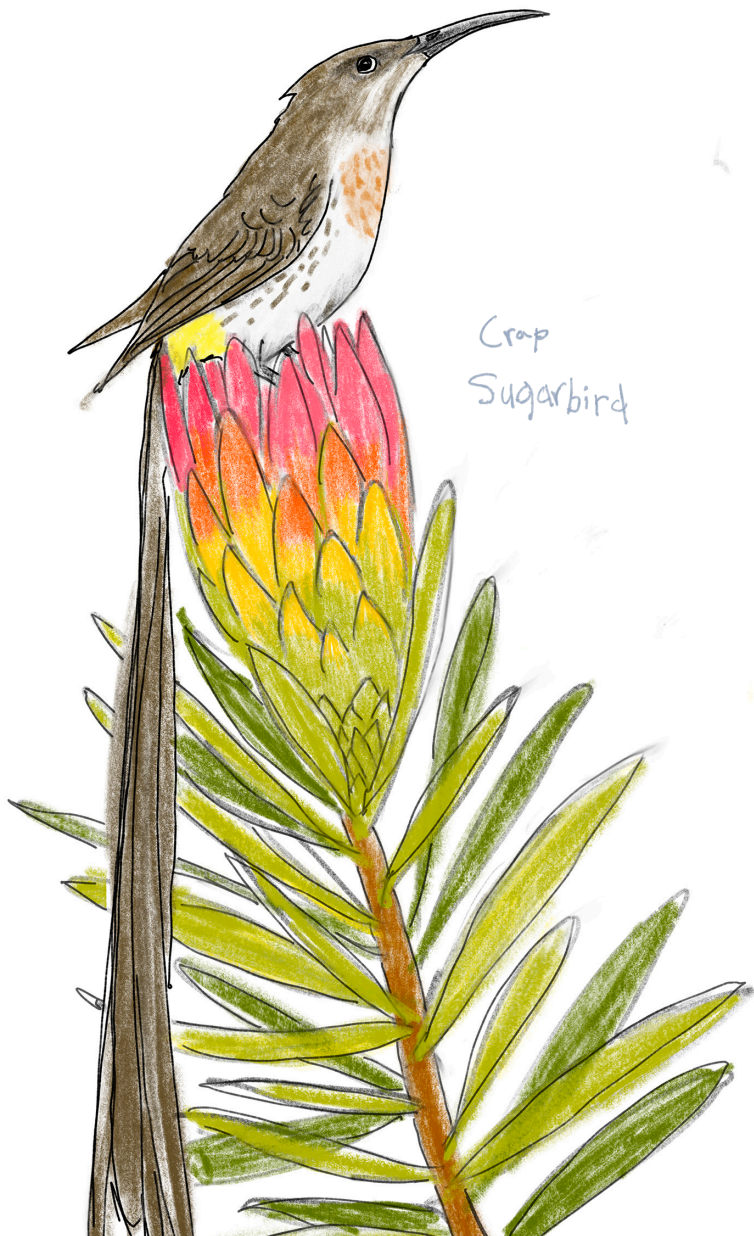
Promerops cafer

Common Name: Cape Sugarbird

Oh my god, this bird is stupid. Its tail is literally twice as long as its body. The males fly around trying to attract females with that ridiculous thing, but good luck because what kind of mate are you going to end up with if tail length is their only criteria? Sugarbirds have long, downward-curved bills for sucking the nectar out of flowers or whatever. Apparently, they play a role in helping to pollinate the protea plants of South Africa's Cape region—this is because they get pollen stuck to their faces whenever they have it shoved down a flower. What a bunch of slobs. This bird should wipe its stupid beak.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





Crap
Sugarbird

Creepy Skull-bird

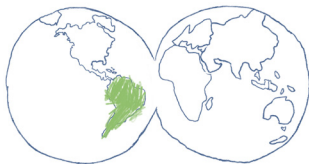
Perissocephalus tricolor

Common Name: Capuchinbird, Calfbird

These weird-looking shits can be found in the rain forests of northeast South America and are sometimes called a “calfbird” because their call has been likened to the moo of a cow. But fuck that, because this creepy bird’s calls sound a lot more like an angry, demonic soul trapped in the body of your jungle expedition’s missing cartographer and hate-growling in the distance to warn you that it will come for the rest of you one by one . . . when night falls.

Identification: Look for cinnamon plumage, black wings, and, oh yeah, a motherfucking skull-face.

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA





creepy
Skull-Bird

to
looks like
Halloween

Great Butt-tard

Otis tarda

Common Name: Great Bustard

This colossal bastard has the distinction of being the heaviest living animal that can fly, with males standing three feet tall and weighing up to forty pounds. Though they *can* fly, they are ground dwellers who mostly walk around making farty-sounding grunts. They actually seem reluctant to take flight, and let's face it, these fat sacks of bird should probably not be in the air. They would pose a serious danger to anyone below if a wing ever gave out while trying to keep that huge brown load aloft.

Fun Fact: *This bird was once found in Great Britain, but the Brits shot them to extinction in 1832. They have recently been reintroduced on army training grounds, presumably for target practice.*

BIRD REGION: ASIA, CENTRAL EUROPE



Great
Butt-tard



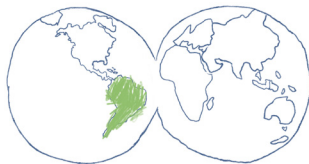
Great Poo-poo

Nyctibius grandis

Common Name: Great Potoo

A hunter of large insects and small vertebrates, the great potoo is the biggest member of the order *Caprimulgiformes* (nightjars and allies). This comes as no surprise if you've ever seen one, because like all members of this order of freak-birds, it is disturbing to look at with its bulging eyes and weird gaping maw of a beak. Also, like other *Caprimulgiformes*, the "great" potoo is nocturnal, which means that this lazy shit sleeps all day and doesn't get going until the sun goes down. Too bad for anyone trying to sleep in South America, because this big, ugly bird sits in the trees and makes loud moaning noises all night long.

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA



Great
Poo-poo



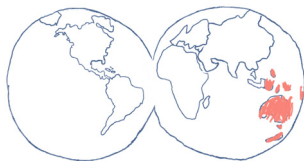
Laughing Goddamn Kookaburra

Dacelo novaeguineae

Common Name: Laughing Kookaburra

At eighteen inches and weighing up to a pound, this chunky donkey is the biggest of all the kingfishers. You'd think they would have named it "maximum kingfisher" or something like that, but its great size is completely overshadowed by a different character trait: its loud, irritating, cackling call. Native to Australia, it has also been introduced to New Zealand and Tasmania, and can be found in eucalyptus groves and city parks annoying the living fuck out of everyone with its nonstop demented laughter.

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





Loser Diarrhea

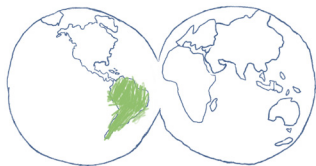
Rhea pennata (formerly *Rhea darwini*)

Common Name: Lesser Rhea, formerly Darwin's Rhea

It was during the second voyage of *HMS Beagle* that Charles Darwin encountered the ostrich-like greater rhea (*Rhea americana*), but it had already been described in the 1750s and he was hot to discover something new that he could name after himself. In July 1833, he heard reports from *gauchos* of a very rare, smaller rhea in Northern Patagonia. The young naturalist embarked on repeated searches for a specimen, but without success. It wasn't until January 1834, while dining on an undersize rhea shot by the expedition's artist, that Darwin "discovered" the elusive smaller species, but not until he had already eaten most of it. Good job, Charles.

Anyway, this bird stands about three or four feet tall. Like an ostrich, it can't fly but has long legs and a small head, so it looks stupid. In fact, it's so much like an ostrich that it probably wasn't really worth discovering. Basically, it's useless as a bird.

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA





Loser
diarrhea

Northern Buttwipe

Colinus virginianus

Common Name: Northern Bobwhite, Virginia Quail,
Bobwhite Quail

Short and pudgy even for a quail, this ground-dwelling dump of a bird is native to Canada, the eastern United States, and Mexico. Its loud whistling call, “BOB . . . WHITE!,” can really echo across the semi-open grasslands and shrubby meadows in which it forages. It might explain why they have been hunted so extensively—once you’ve listened to these birds go on for a couple of hours, it’s difficult *not* to want to shoot them.

Description: *Short, dumpy*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA



Northern
Buttwipe



Peruvian Shart-tail

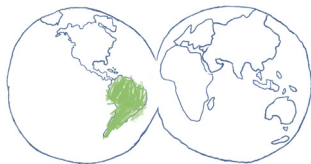
Thaumastura cora

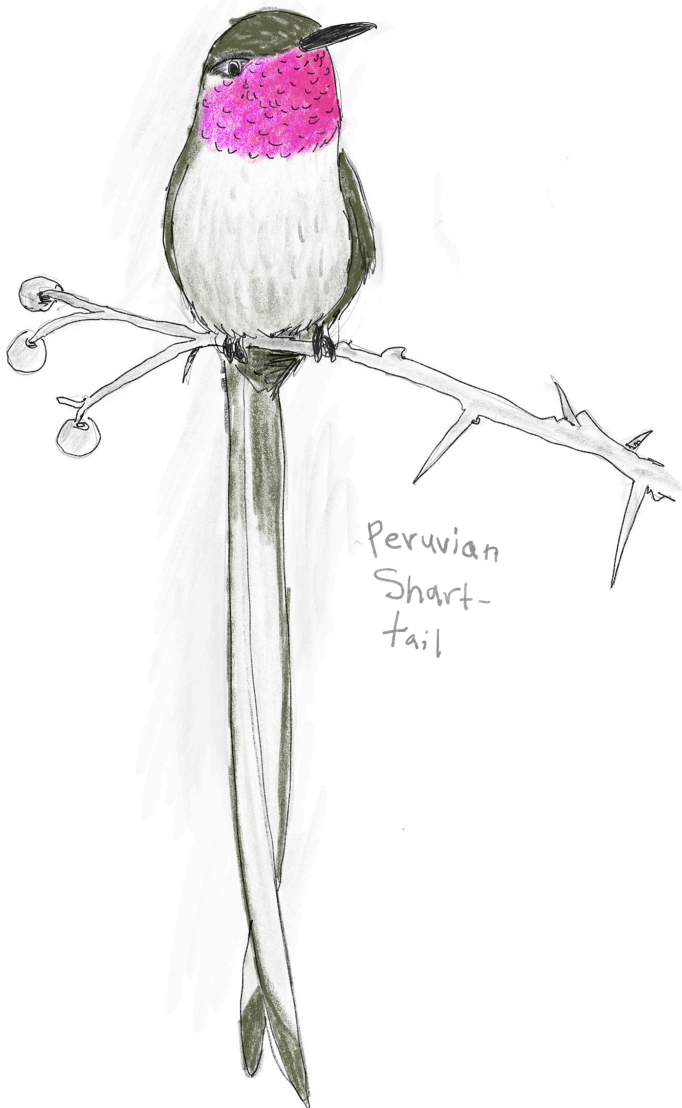
Common Name: Peruvian Sheartail

Wow, look at this bird's tail feathers. Yes, this tiny member of the family *Trochilidae* is easily identified by its extremely long tail feathers, but in the end it's just another hummingbird that does all the usual hummingbird stuff, like hovering around and drinking nectar from flowers. Boring.

Notes: *Its rapid high-pitched call sounds like repeated bursts from a tiny but very annoying machine gun.*

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA
(WESTERN ANDES, PERU, TO NORTHERN CHILE)





Peruvian
Short-
tail

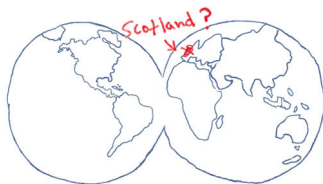
Scottish Fuck-face

Loxia scotica

Common Name: Scottish Crossbill

The British Ornithologists' Union declared this bird endemic to the United Kingdom in 1980, but there was ongoing debate about this until recently, when it was shown to be a distinct species existing only in the Caledonian Forest of Scotland. Prior to this, many argued that it was just a red crossbill with an exceedingly difficult-to-understand accent. Either way, who cares, because the important thing is *look at that fucked-up face*, which it uses to pry open pine cones or something. Fuck. No wonder they are reproductively isolated.

BIRD REGION: JUST SCOTLAND, APPARENTLY





Scottish Fuck-face

Southern Yellow-bill Horse-face

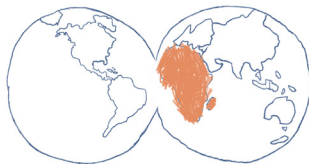
Tockus leucomelas

Common Name: Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

This is one ugly bird. It looks like an overexcited child put it together from a sack of random bird parts. Seriously, no sense of grace or proportion. Also, “southern yellow-billed hornbill”? I guess they let the kid name it, too.

Anyway, these little abominations sometimes eat snakes, which they kill by snatching them up in their big, horrible bills and then gleefully bashing them on a hard surface until they are dead. This bird is wrong on so many levels.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





Southern
yellow-bill
Horse-face

Stupid-eyes

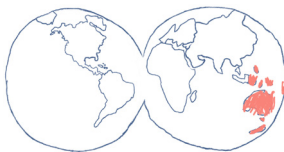
Zosterops lateralis

Common Name: Silvereye, sometimes Wax-eye or White-eye

Common throughout the islands of the Southwest Pacific, this chatty little songbird is only about four inches and, for such a tiny bird, it sure packs an awful lot of stupid. It's small enough to easily slip through bird netting and dine on fruit, but it still forages for insects on the ground, which, incidentally, is where most cats live. As if that isn't dumb enough for a small bird, you will often find the chicks on the ground with the parents. It's incredible that any of these fuckwits survive.

Description: *Prominent white eye-rings make it look perpetually alarmed, as though it has just noticed a cat approaching, which is a real possibility for this miniature imbecile.*

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





White Crested Loserthrush

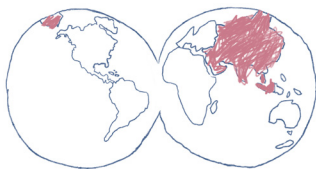
Garrulax leucolophus

Common Name: White-crested Laughingthrush

This stocky little member of the *Laughingthrush* family can be found in forests and foothills from the Himalayas through Southeast Asia. It gets its scientific name from the Latin *garrire*, which means “to babble.” This seems pretty accurate if you’ve ever had to listen to a bunch of them chattering away like over-cafeinated idiots.

Notes: Brown with a prominent head and crest of pure white with a black mask. Very social and very vocal, making it a real pain in the ass.

BIRD REGION: ASIA





Egoists and Show-offs

Bright, colorful, or striking in some other way, these conceited dicks are all flash and very little substance. They are full of themselves and seem to love the sound of their own voices.

Indigo Buntnick

Passerina cyanea

Common Name: Indigo Bunting

The male indigo bunting sings his song from dawn until dusk and does it loudly and enthusiastically, like someone who is completely unaware of his lack of musical talent. His call varies greatly within his range, but is often made up of distinct, repeated high-pitched syllables sounding something like, “FIRE! FIRE! WHERE? WHERE? HERE. HERE.” It sort of makes you wonder whether they are all would-be arsonists. Keep a close watch on these birds if you see them near your home.

Color: *Take a wild guess.*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA



Indigo
Buttnick



Lilac-breasted Tossler

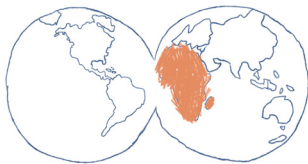
Coracias caudatus

Common Name: Lilac-breasted Roller

This bird is a fucking show-off. Seriously. It is always conspicuously perched on top of some tall tree, convinced that everybody wants to get a good, long look at its colorful fucking plumage and stupid tail streamers. And then there's its unnecessarily acrobatic displays of high-speed swooping and midair barrel rolls, performed like a pilot in some kind of air show like it expects us all to be cheering and applauding. Like anyone cares.

Identification: *Showy, big head for a small bird*

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





huge eggs.

Lilac-
breasted
Tosser

Red-bill Firefuck

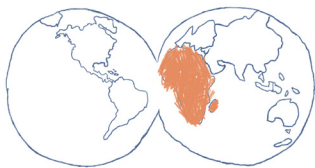
Lagonosticta senegala

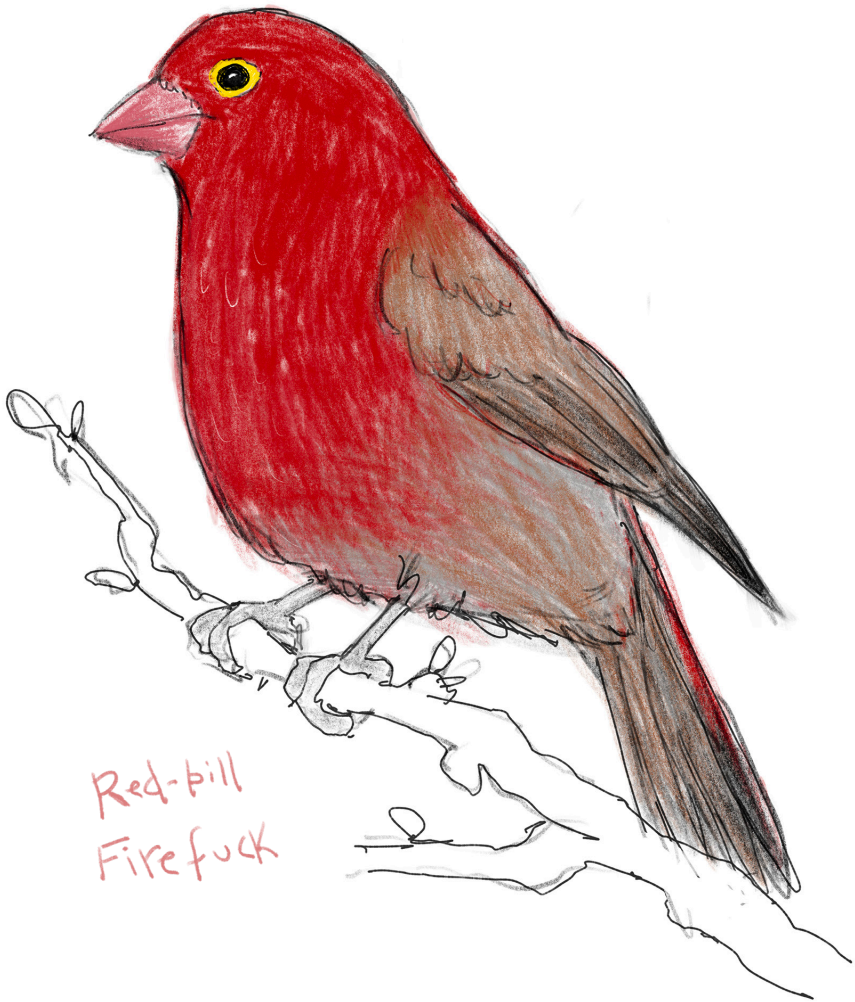
Common Name: Red-billed Firefinch, Senegal Firefinch

These gregarious little finches are a very vibrant red. They look exciting at first, but don't be fooled—they basically just act like normal birds. Widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, they are frequently found in areas of human habitation, drawn by the likelihood of an easy meal. Like finches the world over, they are usually clustered in small groups making too much noise and messily eating the seeds in someone's garden.

Color: Males are mostly red; females are mostly brown. Both have a yellow ring around their eyes, which makes them appear vacuous, even for a bird.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





Red-bill
Firefuck

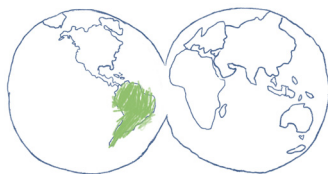
Tacky Poo-can

Ramphastos toco

Common Name: Toco Toucan

With their big, fat beaks making up more than a third of their length and half of their surface area, these dorks have the highest beak-to-body ratio of any bird on Earth. This is not really that interesting, but it does make them look preposterous. They suck at flying, so mostly they just hop awkwardly among the branches in order to pluck pieces of fruit. They love fruit. Their mating display involves using their ridiculous *beaks* to shove fruit offerings at a potential partner who then just shoves it back at them. They do this over and over and over, until one of them gives up and lays some eggs.

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA





Tacky Poo-Can

Yellow bastard Chat

Icteria virens

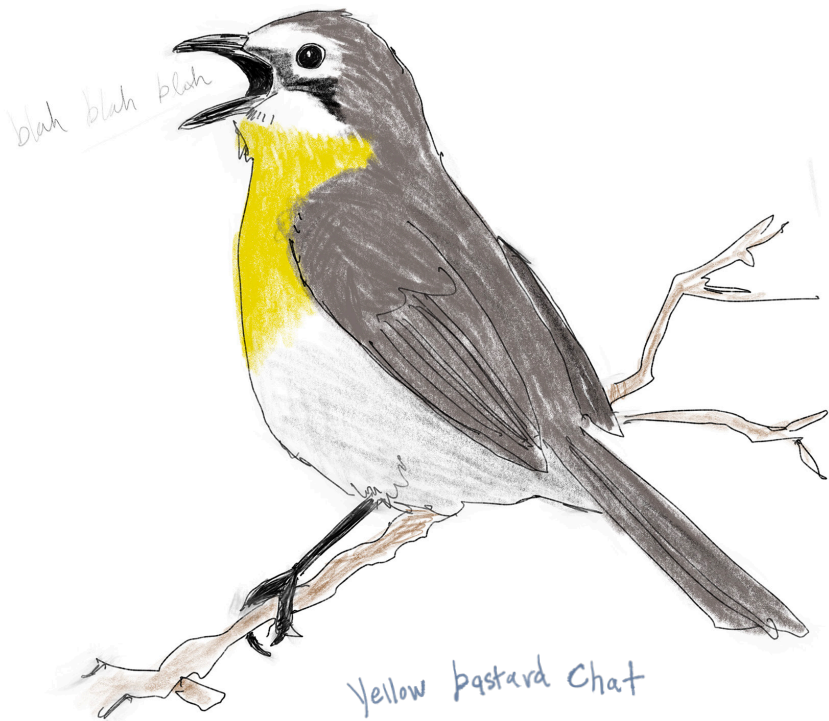
Common Name: Yellow-breasted Chat

This obnoxious shit can never be serious. He may look pretty, but he's a goddamn clown. He's the kind of bird that's always chuckling. Or gurgling. Or making various squeaks and squawks. He gets a real kick out of hiding in hedges and mimicking a crow or maybe a car horn. It's pretty much impossible not to hate this bird as soon as he opens his fucking beak.

Color: *Bright yellow and whatever. I hate this guy.*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





Yellow pastard Chat

Fuck these fuckers.
~~Fuckers~~

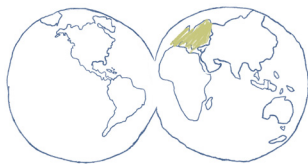
Big Shitty Woodpecker

Dendrocopus major

Common Name: Great Spotted Woodpecker, Pied Woodpecker

Very similar in appearance to the Syrian woodpecker, this medium-size member of the *Picadae* family is found across blah blah blahhh . . . Basically, this prick is yet another woodpecker with black-and-white plumage and some red crap on it, and for god's sake, how does anyone *not* find this deathly boring at this point? Oh, wait, they do make a loud drumming noise on—oh, nope, sorry, that's also the same as every other woodpecker in the world. For fuck's sake. Next bird.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Big
Shitty
Woodpecker

Green Woodfucker

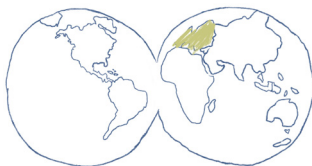
Picus viridis

Common Name: Green Woodpecker

This ass is actually green, and thank god, because I was getting tired of writing “black and white.” It has a bright-red head and mustache and a short tail. They are bigger than most other European woodpeckers, so they have to make their nesting cavities extra big in order to accommodate their big, dumb bodies. They make a loud, sharp, laughing call, but nobody else is amused. Normal woodpeckers are probably embarrassed by them.

Identification: *Green. Fat for a woodpecker. Stupid laugh can be heard for miles.*

BIRD REGION: EUROPE





Green
Woodfucker

Himalayan Woodfucker

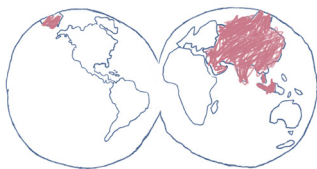
Dendrocopos himalayensis

Common Name: Himalayan Woodpecker

Quite common in the Himalayas and northern regions of the Indian subcontinent, this pied *Picidae* is interchangeable with nearly every other goddamn woodpecker in the world. Medium size. Black and white. The males have a red crown. It forages tree trunks for insects. We get it already.

Fun Fact: *The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has listed Dendrocopos himalayensis's conservation status as being of "least concern" because who the hell cares.*

BIRD REGION: ASIA





Himalayan
Woodfucker

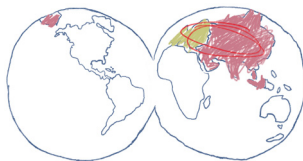
Wang-neck

Jynx torquilla

Common Name: Eurasian Wryneck

This little bird is one weird motherfucker. Unlike other woodpeckers, it does not peck wood, but that's not the weird part. Normally, it holds its head high, beak pointed slightly upward—you know, like a stuck-up prick. Anyway, when threatened, this freak writhes its neck around like a goddamn drunken snake. I mean, what the fuck? Maybe that's supposed to frighten predators. It can't be that effective, though, because mostly it just looks like a bird with severe neck spasms. Also, it will sometimes let its whole neck go limp and its head dangle like it has died. Charming.

BIRD REGION: EUROPE, I GUESS;
PROBABLY ASIA, TOO





"Snake-like"
head movements



Floaters, Sand Birds, and Dork-legs

There are many kinds of water fowl, shore, and seabirds, but these idiots like to hang around the water, making noise and looking stupid, like teenagers on summer break.

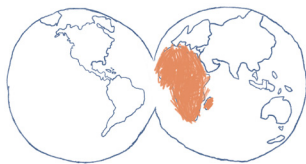
African Goblin

Spheniscus demersus

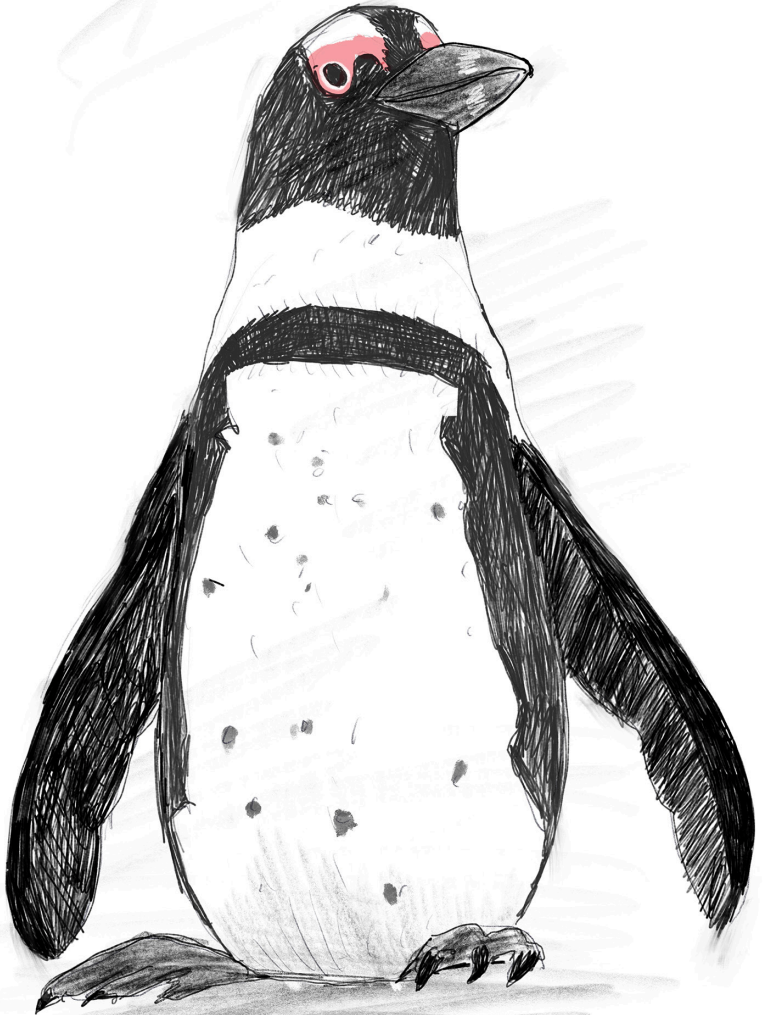
Common Name: African Penguin, Cape Penguin

Oh my god, look at this waddling fuck. Penguins are frequently described as having the appearance of birds wearing tuxedos—ha ha, how cute—but really, no. Far from looking sharp in formal attire, these shits look more like they are wearing rented dinner jackets and no trousers, and if there was any chance of them not appearing ridiculous, the pink eyebrows ruin it for sure. Most penguins only ever bother the odd polar expedition, but this fucker hangs around the coastal areas of South Africa making loud donkey noises. Jesus.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA



African Goplin



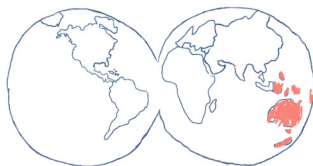
Australian Farter

Anhinga novaehollandiae

Common Name: Australian Darter, Australasian Darter

This dimwit's feathers soak up water, so it floats around mostly submerged with only its long, stupid neck above the surface. It uses its long, sharp beak to impale fish underwater. Damn, being able to *literally become a spear* sounds badass, doesn't it? Yes, it does, but in practice it's stupid—once you have your whole face rammed through a fish, how the hell are you going to eat it? Hint: It's not easy and involves a lot of awkwardly trying to shake the fish off without losing it just so you can open your beak to eat it. Trust me: The cool factor of being a living weapon is basically blown by the end of that process.

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA



Australian
FARTer



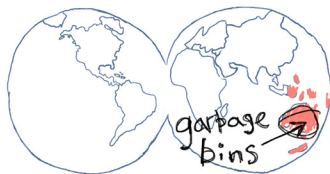
Australian Shite Ibis

Threskiornis molucca

Common Name: Australian White Ibis

Scientists are uncertain whether Australians love this city-adapted ibis or are repulsed by it. On the one hand, it was voted #2 in the Australian Bird of the Year (2017) poll, losing first place to the Australian magpie by a very slim margin. On the other hand, Australians call these gangly birds “bin chickens” or “trash turkeys” because you will find them guzzling endless amounts of nasty-ass garbage from dumpsters and public trash bins, and then shitting it all over the city.

BIRD REGION: AUSTRALIA, WHEREVER THERE
IS SOME GARBAGE TO BE EATEN



Australian
White Ibis



Black-crown Night Moron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Common Name: Black-crowned Night-heron

A medium-size member of the night heron family and common throughout North American wetlands, this short-necked moron is relatively squat compared with most real herons. It has embarrassingly short legs for a wading bird and is therefore relegated to standing at the water's edge and waiting to ambush small fish, frogs, and aquatic insects. This is probably why they are nocturnal, preferring to forage in darkness, when other birds are less likely to see them and laugh at their stature.

Identification: *Short and funny looking. Probably has bad fish breath.*

BIRD REGION: NORTH AMERICA





Black-crown
Night Heron

Blah Crane

Grus paradisea

Common Name: Blue Crane

This species of pale-blue cranes is listed as “vulnerable” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, which is not really a surprise, because anything with such a knob-like fat head attached to a neck that thin must be in danger of snapping its own spine whenever it moves.

Apparently these birds did not get the memo that they are adapted for wading, because they spend most of their time walking around on their spindly stick-legs in dry, grassy areas and eating sedges. Their posture and droopy tail feathers indicate weak character and poor self-esteem.

BIRD REGION: AFRICA



Blah Crane



Caped Tool

Anas capensis

Common Name: Cape Teal

This medium-size dabbling duck is dumb and mind-numbingly gray. It does appear to have made a half-hearted effort to spruce itself up a bit with a pale-pink bill and bright-green speculum feathers, but this is an off-putting color combination, even for a duck. It really makes you question their aesthetic standards. These ducks are not usually very vocal, which is a good thing because the females make sad, weak quacks and the males just produce a shrill, high-pitched whistle.

Fun Fact: *This duck is depressing.*

BIRD REGION: AFRICA





Caped fool

Cruddy Sheldork

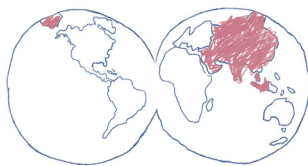
Tadorna ferruginea

Common Name: Ruddy Shelduck

Common throughout China, Central Asia, and southeast Europe, and wintering in India, this member of the family *Anatidae* has a vast range. It is distinguished by its striking brownish-orange plumage and deep-black tail feathers, but ultimately is just another obnoxious duck. They are typically found in pairs or in small groups and rarely form large flocks—probably because their loud, breathy honking and insistent cooing are delivered in a weird duck falsetto, which is just too much to take, even for themselves.

Identification: *Deep orange-brown plumage, emotionally needy*

BIRD REGION: ALL OVER ASIA



Cruddy
Sheldork



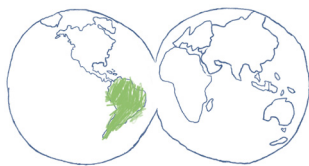
Goddamed Screamer

Anhima cornuta

Common Name: Horned Screamer

These goose-size birds are closely related to ducks, but they have chicken-like beaks and a stiff spike growing out of their heads, so they look extra stupid. They also have possibly the loudest calls in the world, putting them at the top of the Most Goddam Irritating Birds in the Whole World list. There are other screamers, but *Anhima cornuta* really takes the cake with its booming “SHRIEK-HONKK!!” calls, which can be heard up to two miles away. They swim well and can fly just fine, but they’re nonmigratory and prefer to run around screaming out of their stupid chicken faces. Everyone wishes they would shut up.

BIRD REGION: SOUTH AMERICA





Goddamed
Screamer

Gross Cormorant

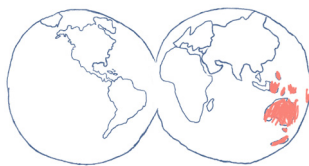
Phalacrocorax carbo

Common Name: Great Cormorant, Great Black Cormorant

This large, black seabird can be found feeding in the sea, in estuaries, and even in freshwater rivers—basically anywhere it can find a supply of fish to choke down its long, stupid neck. It is sometimes called a black shag in New Zealand. I looked it up, and in local parlance, “shagging” definitely means having sex. I’m not saying that people from New Zealand like to shag birds; I’m just saying it makes you wonder.

Identification: *Black plumage, yellow bill. Unattractive, except to other cormorants and possibly certain New Zealanders.*

BIRD REGION: OCEANIA





Little Regret

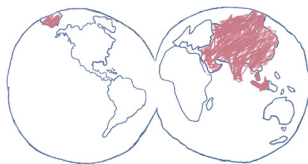
Egretta garzetta

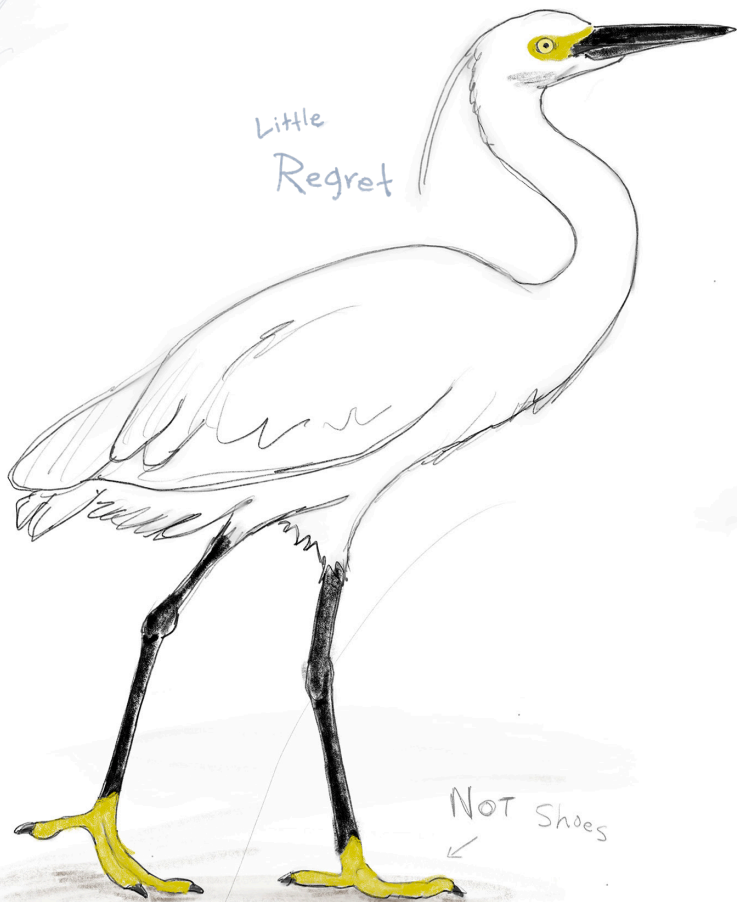
Common Name: Little Egret

The breeding range for this small egret is much of southern Asia as well as parts of Africa and the Middle East. It even started appearing in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, so before you know it, these skinny little fish-eaters will probably be everywhere. At least they're good for a laugh if you see one—they are slender and elegant with thin, black bills; pure white plumage; long, black legs; and, get this, big, yellow feet. Seriously, they look like they are wearing oversize yellow shoes.

Note: Again, while they may *appear* to be, they are **NOT** wearing shoes. Don't ever make this mistake in front of a "serious" birder, because they can be cruel.

BIRD REGION: ASIA, BUT ALSO LOTS OF OTHER PLACES





Little
Regret

NOT Shoes

Loser Yellowlegs

Tringa flavipes

Common Name: Lesser Yellowlegs

This medium-size shorebird is just another dopey sandpiper. They have long legs, which happen to be—you probably guessed this—yellow. They are not actually that closely related to the greater yellowlegs; they appear very similar, but in reality, *Tringa flavipes*'s closest relative is its stodgy cousin the willet. Aside from that, there's not much to say about them other than that they are light beige and brown, the most boring colors in nature.

Fun Fact: *There is nothing fun about this bird. It is truly just lesser.*

BIRD REGION: ALL THE FUCK OVER NORTH AMERICA



Loser yellowlegs



Murder Birds

These birds are purpose-built for killing, and they like it that way. They are easily distinguished by their sharp talons and hooked beaks, which are for clutching their prey and tearing flesh, respectively. They have no capacity for sympathy or remorse, but they really do enjoy a good murder.

Common Bastard

Buteo buteo

Common Name: Buzzard, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Buzzard

In the United States, these medium-large members of the family *Accipitridae* would be called hawks, but the rest of the world insists on calling them buzzards. Like all birds of prey, their hooked beaks and sharp talons are perfectly adapted for killing small animals. Although *Buteo buteo* primarily hunts rodents, it will sometimes eat carrion, I guess because being a full-time bird of prey is just too taxing. Occasionally, they do take other birds—this sounds tough, but most small birds can totally outmaneuver these doofs, so they generally just half-ass it and try to snag an unprotected nestling.

Fun Fact: *Often seen soaring as though hunting, they are actually just loafing.*

BIRD REGION: EUROPE, BUT ESPECIALLY THE
UNITED KINGDOM FOR SOME REASON





Common
Bastard

Red-tailed Fuck

Buteo jamaicensis

Common Name: Red-tailed Hawk

Look at this smug fuck. You can tell he thinks he's some kind of hot shit, but don't be fooled, because he often gets chased around by smaller birds such as crows. He can be found just about anywhere in North America, even in big cities like New York, which might be why he's such a prick. He sometimes kills pigeons, so that's a plus, but basically he's just another asshole with talons and a high opinion of himself.

BIRD REGION: ALL OVER NORTH AMERICA





narcisist?

always showing off
that bright red tail.
no one cares..

Red-tailed
Fuck

Section 3:

Birds Throughout History

Depending on your definition of a bird, birds have existed since the Archaeopteryx emerged in the Late Jurassic Period, and for about 145 million years they went about the slow business of evolution before the first humans even arrived on the scene.

The earliest humans, members of the Homo genus, first appeared in Africa something like 2.5 million years ago, and it took them another 500,000 years to spread themselves through Eurasia. Little is truly known about these early humans, and even less is known about how they may have interacted with the birds of the prehistoric era, but we can speculate that it is around this time that avians first created a sense of deep irritation in our ancestors' developing brains.

We will never know what rude exclamations some forgotten Homo habilis gatherer shouted as she hurled stones at a bird stealing from her stash of hard-won berries, and we can only imagine what primitive curses might have been uttered as a hapless Neanderthal climbed a rocky cliff face to hunt ibex, only to discover that he had put his hand in prehistoric pigeon shit. Because, while we humans have inhabited this planet for approximately 2.5 million years, we have only managed to leave record of our history and culture for the last 5,000. Nonetheless, it is clear that birds have left a

mark on our collective unconscious, because they show up regularly across all cultures in the combined writing and artwork of humankind.

What follows is a small selection of bird-related human artifacts for your consideration. These objects and artworks depict birds in some fashion. Whether the birds in these historical examples are decorative embellishments on everyday items, or they play a symbolic role in an artist's allegory, they are all evidence of our ancient relationship with birds.

By studying art and images, we may gain a better understanding of the people of that time and place by trying to see the world through their eyes. By studying how something is represented we may attempt to intuit what it meant to the people of that time.

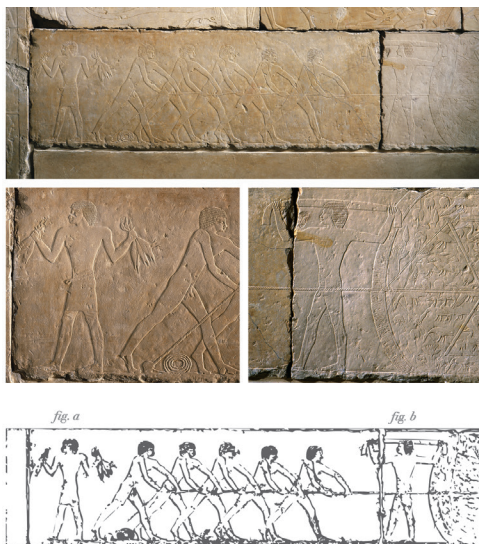
While this is an ongoing topic of research for me, this small selection only scratches the surface. However, it surely hints at what humans have known in their hearts for 2.5 million years: that birds are the worst.

Tomb Chapel of Raemkai (west wall)

ca. 2446 to 2389 BCE

Egyptian

The bottom register of this Egyptian tomb wall depicts a fascinating scene of bird-catching. In the center is a row of men pulling taut the line on a large net to their right, which is packed with all kinds of birds. One of the men on the right (*fig. b*) holds a towel above his head in a display of triumph! On the far left is another figure (*fig. a*), perhaps not part of the group, who seems to say, “Don’t bother with that net; these birds are so stupid you can just grab them around their necks by the handful!”



Gold Ring

Late 5th century BCE

Greek

The relief on this ring from ancient Greece depicts Eros presenting a bird to a seated woman. Note how she leans forward, her face and posture indicating determination, resolve, and perhaps even righteous fury as she chokes the life out of the stupid cherub for his impertinence.



Limestone Temple Boy

Late 5th century BCE

Cypriot

Carved from limestone, this temple boy sits casually with one hand grasping a bird by its wings and holding it to the ground in front of him. His other hand holds what appears to be a small stone. The subtle expression of guilty anticipation on his face tells us what will likely happen next.



Terra-cotta Oil Lamp

ca. 40 to 100 CE

Roman

This Roman terra-cotta oil lamp was certainly a functional object, and the placement of a solitary bird perched on a branch in the center of the oil reservoir could be seen as purely decorative. However, does it not also hint that the maker dreamed of setting birds on fire? It seems likely.



Mirror with Birds

2nd to 7th century CE

Moche

The Moche civilization flourished from around 1 to 800 CE along the northern coast and valleys of ancient Peru, and this decorative Moche hand mirror reminds us that ancient peoples probably shared many of the same vanities that we are familiar with today. The artist who created it certainly designed it as a functional object, but the decorative aspect was probably meant as a reminder to the owner: “Yes, you look good, but don’t forget that birds are everywhere and there is no getting away from them, and they are watching you.”



Medallion with Archer Shooting a Bird

ca. 1240 to 1260

France

Little is known for sure about this medallion from thirteenth-century France, but we do know that medieval archers were highly skilled with their powerful longbows. To shoot a bird with one from barely a foot away, as is depicted here, must surely indicate an overwhelming desire to just kill the fuck out of that bird.



Eros Stealing Man's Shield

Agostino Veneziano (Agostino dei Musi)

ca. 1514 to 1536

Italian

Yes, yes, of course, the metaphor for how love and desire strip us of our emotional armor and blah blah blah . . . I can almost hear the art historians clucking proudly about their adroit interpretation of this sixteenth-century engraving. But they never talk about how this scene of theft is portrayed using the image of a fat little *flying* shit-heel. Here, Eros is obviously used as a metaphor for birds, with the little perpetrator flying away on feathered wings with items that don't belong to him, just like a bird will do when you set your chips down for a moment to pay for your beer. Note how self-satisfied the cherubic bastard looks.



Infant Hercules Asleep

Wenceslaus Hollar

ca. 1639

Bohemian

Born in Prague in 1607, Wenceslaus Hollar was one of the most prolific Bohemian artists of the seventeenth century and is well known for his etchings. In this one, he shows us an infant Hercules asleep beneath the shady branches of a tree. Above him, two birds fuss around in the leaves, disturbing his peaceful nap. Hollar has beautifully captured a sleepy, half-awake look of confusion, which seems to say, “What the fuck, birds, are you serious right now?” Baby Hercules must now decide whether to try to fall back to sleep and hope the birds move on, or to rouse himself completely and reach for his club.



Mimizuku Uso

Utamaro Kitagawa

1790

Japanese

Master of the Ukiyo-e woodblock print, artist Utamaro Kitagawa (1753 to 1806) presents the viewer with an owl seated near a pair of talkative bullfinches (clearly the gray-bellied variant of the Eurasian bullfinch, *Pyrrhula pyrrhula griseiventris*). The duo's ceaseless jabbering about seeds and fruit buds has reached the point where the owl is rolling his eyes in disbelief. So emotive is the artwork that one can almost feel the artist's desire for the owl to eat the bullfinches, if only to shut them up.



Young Woman with Ibis

Edgar Degas

1860 to 1862

French

When Degas made the original sketches for this painting, he did not include the birds, only a portrait of a woman. Why he later added two big, red fucking ibises on either side of this poor lady, crowding her and rudely getting all into her personal space, is a real mystery. Whoever she is, perhaps he had a falling-out with her between the time he made the sketches and the painting. He was probably like, “Hi, remember me? Here’s your damn portrait. Hope you like big, red fucking birds.”



Section 4:

Getting Along with Birds

Fact #1: Birds are everywhere.

Fact #2: They do not give a damn about us or our feelings.

We must abide by a code of ethics when watching birds; otherwise, we are no better than they are. It is a frustrating imbalance that can feel unfair at times, to be sure. But, on the bright side, one great benefit of acting with integrity and empathy for the well-being of another living creature is that it gives you a certain amount of license to point out where that creature comes up lacking in the same areas. In fact, one might consider it a moral obligation. Who knows? Is it not possible that eventually this creature may take some of your observations and comments to heart and maybe think twice before wantonly shitting all over your car or eating all of the cherries off your tree before they are even ripe enough for you to enjoy a few? I mean, they are *your* goddamn cherries, after all, but why should that concern them? Is it too much trouble to maybe just leave enough cherries for a pie or a cobbler?

But I digress.

Where was I? Oh, yes, ethical bird-watching. Ethical bird-watching has been codified by a number of organizations

that feel they need to write a lot of rules because otherwise, what would be the point of creating a whole bird-watching organization and electing officers and keeping meeting notes? It would just be a bunch of people watching birds without rules, and we can't have that, can we? Anyway, you can read all about it on the internet if you want to, but if you break them down, most of them largely agree on these basic tenets:

1. The welfare of the birds comes first.
2. Try not to disturb the birds or impact their behavior.
3. Be respectful of the birds and don't get too close to them or their nests.
4. Wear drab colors and try to blend in to the natural surroundings so you don't frighten the birds. (I have found that an unintended benefit of this rule is that it also makes it much easier to hide from other bird-watchers, many of whom are kind of annoying.)
5. Do not use audio playback or calls to attract birds. It can distract them from important activities such as feeding and breeding because they are stupid.
6. No flash photography; the birds don't like it.
7. Don't handle the birds.
8. Don't yell at the birds.
9. Don't trespass.
10. Use common courtesy.*

** "Sadly, we really shouldn't need to include this one in the rules, but after what happened at the last meeting of the Ornithological Society, we felt it was necessary. Enough said. But everyone knows we're talking about you, Brian."*

As you can see, these rules are pretty bird-centric. But whatever.

If you want to be treated with courtesy and have *your* feelings and boundaries respected, I suggest you stay the hell away from bird-watching and find another hobby, because birds are self-centered assholes who don't give a shit about ruining your day by dive-bombing your perfectly planned beach picnic.

In the end, the fact is that as bird-watchers, no matter how we truly feel about birds, we simply *must* follow these ethical rules. Otherwise, we lose our moral superiority, and birds start believing that they are better than us—and believe me, it's a downward spiral into chaos after that.

I have checked the rules, though, and there's nothing that explicitly says that you can't emphatically employ rude hand gestures when a group of terns flies overhead and interrupts you mid sentence with their loud, grating shrieks.

Good luck and good birding.

Sharpening Your Skills

(Resources and Practice for Bird-watchers)

BIRD-WORD MATCHING GAME

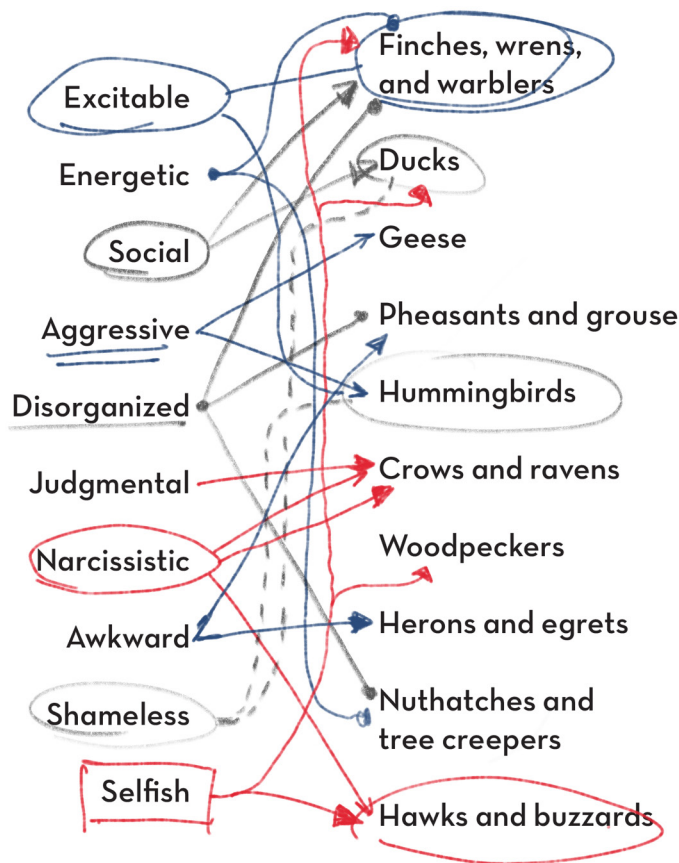
Let's test your knowledge! This exercise is a fun way to see how much you know about some familiar bird types and their common traits. Draw a line from each word to the type of bird it describes. (The answers are on the next page.)

Hint: *Some birds have more than one word associated with them, and some words may describe more than one type of bird. It's messy, but that's just how birds are.*

Excitable	Finches, wrens, and warblers
Energetic	Ducks
Social	Geese
Aggressive	Pheasants and grouse
Disorganized	Hummingbirds
Judgmental	Crows and ravens
Narcissistic	Woodpeckers
Awkward	Herons and egrets
Shameless	Nuthatches and tree creepers
Selfish	Hawks and buzzards

BIRD-WORD MATCHING GAME ANSWERS

Let's see how you did! Score 1 point for each correct match. Subtract 1 point for each *incorrect* match. Then consult the scoresheet on the next page.



Scoresheet

-4 points or fewer	Wow, you're pretty bad at this.
-3 to 2 points	It kind of seems like you don't really care. Actually, in this case, that's probably a healthy attitude.
1 to 6 points	Nicely done. You know a thing or two about birds.
7 to 12 points	Oh, so now you're some kind of bird expert?
13 points or more	Seriously, no one likes a show-off.

BIRD DESCRIPTORS CHECKLIST

While you study, observe, and identify birds, it is helpful to note traits and general impressions. You may wish to copy this easy checklist into your field notebook for reference. You can make a photocopy for personal use, but do not tell my publisher I said this was okay.

SIZE

- ☐ Small
- ☐ Too small
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ Fat
- ☐ Tall

STANCE (PERCHED OR STANDING)

- ☐ Normal
- ☐ Upright
- ☐ Casual
- ☐ Rigid
- ☐ Slouched

BEHAVIORS

- ☐ Lots of hopping
- ☐ Just sits there
- ☐ All over the place
- ☐ Running
- ☐ Scratching / digging
- ☐ Flying around
- ☐ Swimming
- ☐ Just floating
- ☐ Staring at you
- ☐ Pecking
- ☐ Theft
- ☐ (Other) _____

FLIGHT

- ☐ Standard
- ☐ Substandard
- ☐ Rapid flapping
- ☐ Soaring or diving
- ☐ Erratic / dumb

PERSONALITY

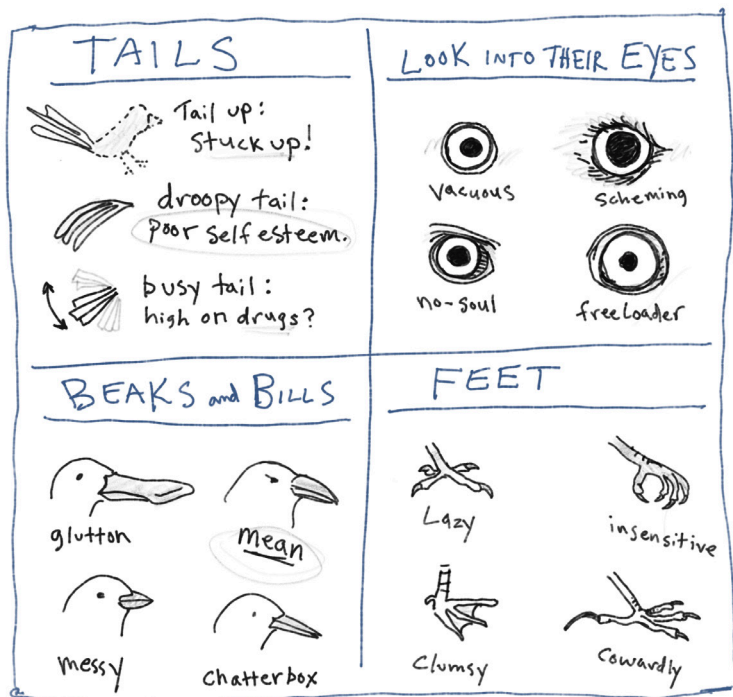
- ☐ Energetic
- ☐ Cheerful / stupid
- ☐ Greedy
- ☐ Lazy / entitled
- ☐ Noisy
- ☐ Very cocky
- ☐ Dull / boring
- ☐ Impertinent
- ☐ (Other) _____

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

- ☐ Typical for a bird
- ☐ Okay, but nothing special
- ☐ Mildly irritating
- ☐ Total bore
- ☐ "A" is for asshole
- ☐ Up to no good
- ☐ Probably steals things
- ☐ (Other) _____

HOW TO READ A BIRD INSTANTLY

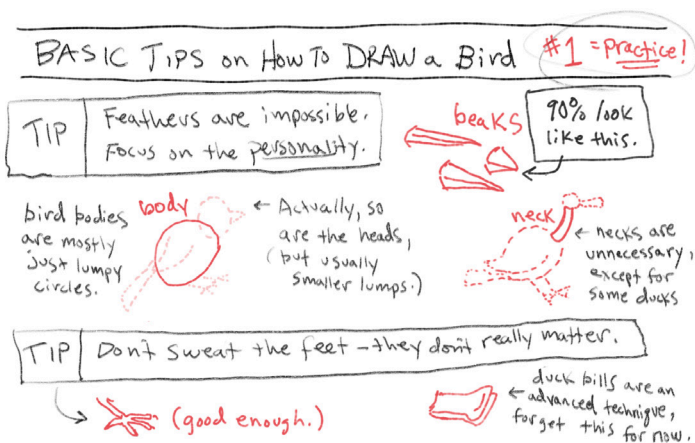
Even for a seasoned bird-watcher, it can be difficult to make a solid identification when a bird is particularly fast moving or partially obscured. This is why I have distilled many years of field experience into my *Birder's Low Information Rapid Designation System (BLIRDS)*. With practice, you should be able to accurately describe and thus better identify a bird, even from a brief glimpse.



HOW TO DRAW A BIRD

How to draw a bird is an excellent question, and one that I am hardly qualified to answer. For me, learning to draw birds began as an exercise in documenting what I saw in the field. These initial drawings were sketchy and unrefined, but through the course of time and practice, they began to better reflect the personality of the birds I observed, if not their strict appearance.

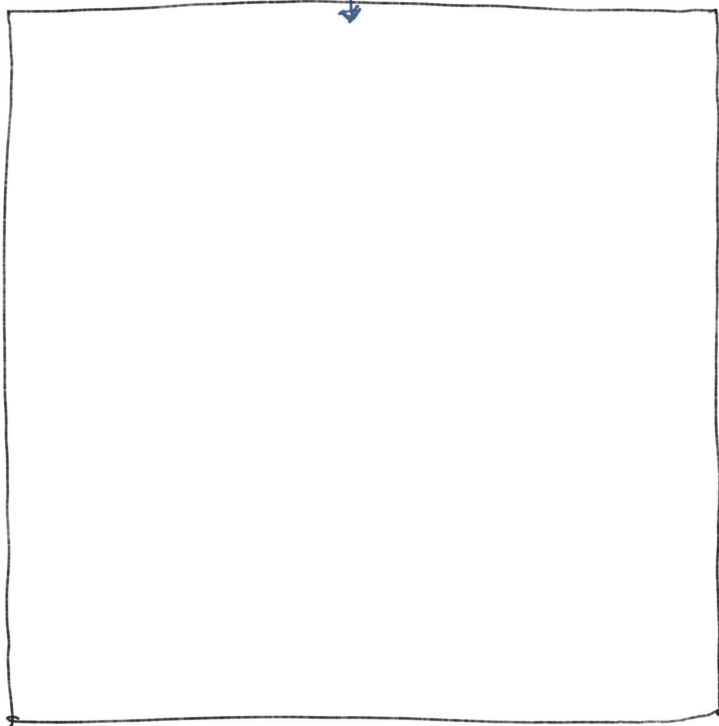
The fact is, there's not really much need to be proportionally accurate or to capture every color and detail of plumage like some kind of modern-day John James Audubon, because that paint-spattered know-it-all already did it, like a hundred years ago. Besides, we've invented cameras, and let's face it, you are never ever going to capture a bird more accurately than a DSLR with a 200-500mm f/5.6 lens. Yet, as many great portrait artists would tell you, there is still a great deal of personal gratification to be had in capturing with your own hand the truth of the fucker in front of you.



DRAW YOUR OWN DAMN BIRD

I'm starting to get tired here. Just draw your own bird, for the love of fuck.

practice drawing it here



(Try to capture the personality)

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to my editor, Becca Hunt; not only is she a pleasure to work with, but also her sharp wit, sense of humor, and writing chops have undoubtedly made this a better book than it would have been otherwise. Thanks to everyone at Chronicle Books who contributed their effort and expertise along the way; for better or worse, you've helped bring this work to life and put it into people's hands. Heartfelt thanks to my agent, Rosie Jonker, who got it from the get-go, and who's advice, encouragement, and hard work on my behalf continue to make me thrilled to have her in my corner. And most of all, to my long-suffering wife, Gina, thank you; it would take a far better author than me to find the words to express the depth of my gratitude for your support, love, and unwavering belief in me and my crazy ideas.

Thank you all: I am grateful to have such amazing people in my life.

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It turns out that birds are idiots no matter where they live. In this sequel to the bestselling *Field Guide to Dumb Birds of North America*, professional birding amateur Matt Kracht takes you around the world to remind you that these dum-dums are freaking *everywhere*. Kracht's anger-filled illustrations and snarky-yet-accurate bird names, not-so-fun facts, tedious maps, and more will help you identify these assholes on a global scale.

Warning: Birds are boring on all continents so don't expect to have your mind changed about them.

African Suck Puppet

Anthus crenatus

Common Name: African Rock Pipit

Africa has a lot of very interesting, colorful birds, and this is not one of them. *Anthus crenatus* is a small, short-legged passerine bird that spends most of its time on the ground. It has been described as "uniformly plain," but frankly that description seems overly charitable. Let's just say that this bird is depressingly beige, and this is possibly the most notable thing about it. It is found in South Africa and it looks like rocks.



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