

MiBC Guidelines for “By the Book Sightings”

Birds are marvellous in their variety. In any given geographic or habitat environment, just a few identifying features is often enough to correctly identify what you have sighted. You may be surprised that noting where the bird was and what it was doing are just as important as its size and colour.

Next time you see a bird, start to look for one more detail each time. Most everyone here knows the American Robin. So the next time you see one, ask one or more of the questions listed below. As you consciously ask more questions, it'll naturally become part of your birding technique.

To fall into the By the Book category, you likely need to peg details broken into 3 broad areas and listed below. Don't be put off by the reams of words – they're meant to prompt you. If you can manage to get a photo of the bird, we can attach it to your report – they're quick though so are hard to come by.

1. Where? (Habitat)

- in the air, fresh water, salt water, marshes, conifer trees, deciduous trees, forest understories, tree canopies, thickets, shrubs, brush, on the ground, on bare earth, short vs. tall grasslands, sandy vs. rocky shores, on the shore near a freshwater inlet/outlet, in bays, intertidal flats, riparian groves, ground burrows, beside ditches...

2. Doing What? (Field Behaviour)

a) Activity:

feeding, singing, flying, nest building, nesting, preening, roosting, swimming, wading, sleeping, parenting, nocturnal, tree-climbing, perching, watching silently, gregarious, solitary, with a flock, standing erect, mixing with other species, teetering walk, waddling walk, head-bobbing walk, hopping, hanging upside down, flushes up, wing or tail flicking, sitting erect, solitary and motionless, stalking, tail pumping, fidgety, tail wagging, hop and scratch with both feet simultaneously...

b) Nests

On the ground, on tree limbs, in thickets, in tall grass, on the ground, in caves, on cliffs, on floating mats, in reeds, under eaves, on rooftops...

c) Foraging

Fishing, plunge diving, submerging by head-first flip or sinking slowly, float with head submerged but tail sticking out of the water, ground pecking vs. hoeing or raking, fruit and berry plucking, stealing food from other birds, insect-gleaning from limbs or leaves, grazing on plants in shallow water, wading...

d) Flight Pattern

Fly silently in lines or Vs, flitting, flying, soaring, swooping, flapping vs. slow wing beat, smooth vs. undulating, hovering aerobic vs. fast and direct, flying high, flying low, flying over water, flying in trees or bushes, solitary or in a group, jump off the water into flight, run across water to gain momentum for flight, can hear wing's whistle during flight, constant vocalisation...

e) Vocalisation

Melodic, rasping, screeching, one note, pipping, cheeping, screaming, knocking, thumping, drumming, tapping, low sound, high thin sound, deep throaty sound, loud, quiet, constant series, periodic bursts, shrieks, whines, barks, hisses, whistle, grunts...

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3. Looks Like... (Appearance)

a) Size

Compare to the size of a well-known bird (robin or eagle), if it helps.

Under 4”, 5-10”, 11-15”, 16-20”, large, small, tiny, long or short legged, slim, stocky, plump, long vs. short necked, curved vs. straight necked, throat pouch, steep vs. sloping forehead, muscular legs, sharp talons, narrow pointed vs. broad blunt wings...

b) Colouring

Any vivid colours or markings, iridescent, blended, striped, spotted, barred, mottled, under-wing flashes, eye colour, eye-markings, leg colours, wing or tail tip markings, facial discs, noticeably coloured bill, orbital bill-rings, noticeably coloured legs, throat or under-belly patches, capped in alternate colour, clean breaks between colours, wing bars...

c) Beak Type

Pointed bug-eater, conical seed-crushing, probing long-curved, probing long-straight, sharp hooked, flat duck-billed, straight crow-like, short curved, broad flat fly-catcher, slender, long or short compared to overall head size, coloured rings or spots, noticeable colour of any shade, fleshy or bony protuberances and knobs, swollen tip, serrated edges, bill shield on forehead, upturned vs. downturned...

d) Tail

Short, long, broad, pointed, rounded, blunt, fanned, forked, splayed, square, tapered, wedged...

e) Feathering

Head tufts, neck ruffs, leggings, bare legged, horns, ear tufts, nose tufts, hooded, shaggy crest, unfeathered heads, facial plumes...

f) Looks like... but isn't

Consider other possible identities and, using multiple field marks, eliminate.