

S.E. MICHIGAN BIRDS of PREY

RAPTORS 101 HOW TO START IDENTIFYING

Many times, the best way to identify a Raptor is by its silhouette. Each species has a distinctive shape.

HOW BIG IS IT? Size is difficult to determine at a distance, but it can help. Sizes range from eagles, with 8 foot wingspans, to small falcons with a 20 inch wing span.

WHAT SHAPE ARE THE WINGS? Different groups of birds have different shaped wings. Falcons have pointed wings, Accipiters have short rounded wings, and Buteos have long, broad wings.

HOW LONG IS THE TAIL? Accipiters and Falcons have longer tails than Buteos.

HOW DOES IT FLAP IT'S WINGS? Study the birds wing beats. Larger birds tend to flap slower than smaller birds. Also, different birds have a characteristic "wing snap", posture, or flapping cadence that helps to identify them.

WHAT PATTERNS AND COLORS DO YOU SEE? Most raptors are made up of brown and gray colors, but some have distinctive contrasting markings, and in some cases, very distinctive colors. Take notice of these contrasting marks.



ACCIPITERS

1. Goshawk
2. Coopers Hawk
3. Sharp-shinned Hawk

Short, round wings and long tails. They alternate between flapping & gliding.



BUTEOS

1. Red-tailed Hawk
2. Swainson's Hawk
3. Rough-legged Hawk
4. Ferruginous Hawk
5. Broad-winged Hawk
6. Red-shouldered Hawk

Soars with rounded wings and short, fan-like tails. The shapes vary with the many different species here.



HARRIERS

1. Northern Harrier

Harriers are noted for their long thin wings. (often held up in a "V") and their long tails.



EAGLES

1. Bald Eagle
2. Golden Eagle

Eagles are very large with long broad wings. (up to an 8' wing-span) They are not likely to be mistaken for a Hawk.



VULTURES

1. Turkey Vulture

Vultures are large, dark birds with long tails and small pinkish colored heads. The wings are held up in a "V" shape. Mostly soars with little wing flapping



Immature
BALD EAGLE



GLIDING and SOARING: Raptors have different silhouette depending on their flight. When soaring their wings and bodies are more extended. When Gliding, they make their bodies as stream-lined as possible, and their silhouette becomes much thinner and smaller in size.



OSPREYS

1. Osprey

Ospreys have long crooked wings (6' wing-span) and is often mistaken for a Gull. It eats mostly fish & aquatic life.



FALCONS

1. Gyrfalcon
2. Merlin
3. Prairie Falcon
4. American Kestrel
5. Peregrine Falcon

Long tails, long pointy wings. Falcons are very powerful and agile flyers.



OWLS

1. Great Horned
2. Great Gray
3. Saw-Whet
4. Snowy
5. Barred
6. Screech
7. Barn

Owls come in many shapes and sizes. From the very small Saw-Whet owl, to the very large Great horned owl. They are mostly gliding birds, so they fly very quietly. They are primarily night hunters.



KITES

1. Kite

Kites have long wings and relatively weak legs. They spend much of their time soaring. They will take live vertebrate prey but mostly feed on insects or even carrion.



BIRD TRACKS

You mostly find Raptor and some other Bird tracks along stream banks and the muddy edges of ponds and lakes. All the bird tracks below are from birds who hunt fish and aquatic life for food. Tracks can tell a lot about just what the bird is doing, feeding on, and its size.

EAGLE



HORNED OWL



CRANE



BLUE HERON

