

# Bird Songs, Getting Started

All Ages

We generally look straight ahead, but we hear in all directions. Often the first indication that a bird is nearby is a sound – a song, whistle, chirp, hoot, honk, quack, twitter or other noise. When birdwatching, your ears tell your eyes where to look for a bird. To practice locating sounds, try making a sound map with our **Make a Sound Map** activity.

Birding by ear starts with learning just one bird; ideally one you see regularly and can identify. Bird songs are easier to remember when we see the bird singing. There are resources to help you hear the various songs, calls, alarm calls and other sounds. Visit [All About Birds](#) and search for your bird by name.



A trick for remembering a bird's song is to say it to yourself in words. This is called 'mnemonics'. This trick can make it a snap to identify a bird. For example, the [chickadee's call](#) sounds like its name – "chick a dee dee dee", while its song sounds like "Hi Sweetie" or "Cheeseburger." A worried [robin](#) often says "tuk, tuk tuk". A robin claiming a territory says "cheerily, cheer up, cheer up, cheerily"

Making a sound map of just the sounds of your bird will help you learn to filter out the bird sounds that are different from your chosen bird's. Mornings and evenings are best for listening to birds.

Over time, with experience and practice, a birdwatcher learns to identify birds just by sound. Once you've mastered a few different bird calls, play "name that bird" while out on a hike or hanging out at the park.

Remember, not all birds sing. Hummingbirds chatter but also use their feathers to make sounds. Their wing feathers create a 'humming' sound and sometimes their tails feathers are used to make clicks and rattles. Woodpeckers do not sing songs. They use their beaks to drum loudly on wood or metal. This drumming is their "song" and is used to attract a mate or defend a territory. When a woodpecker is feeding, it makes very little noise, even when it's really digging into a tree.

Being aware of bird sounds can be useful. Their alarm calls warning of predators alert us to look for a hawk, a fox or perhaps they are talking about us. The mobbing calls of crows or jays may indicate an owl is hiding nearby.



Most importantly, get out and have fun listening to birds and learning their language.



And just for fun! [Bird Song Opera](#)