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Bird features

All birds have feathers, and most can fly. Flight enables birds to travel swiftly over land or water. They can nest and feed in places that other animals cannot reach.

Birds have sharp eyes for hunting food and watching out for predators. Their skeletons are very strong and light.

Like dinosaurs, birds reproduce by laying eggs. The chicks are protected by a hard shell until they are ready to hatch.

Hummingbirds and swifts

Order: Apodiformes

This order includes the swifts and the hummingbirds. Both can perch but have legs that are too weak for walking. However, their manoeuvrability on the wing compensates for this weakness.

1 - White-chested emerald

Family: Trochilidae

Amazilia brevirostris

Brazil

2 - Andean emerald

Family: Trochilidae

Amazilia franciae

Colombia

3 - White-bellied woodstar

Family: Trochilidae

Chaetocercus mulsanti

Ecuador

4 - White-chinned sapphire

Family: Trochilidae

Hylocharis cyanus

Brazil

5 - Golden-tailed sapphire

Family: Trochilidae

Chrysuronia oenone longirostris

Colombia

6 - Bee hummingbird

Family: Trochilidae

Mellisuga helenae

Cuba

7 - Tufted coquette

Family: Trochilidae

Lophornis ornatus

West Indies

8 - Frilled coquette

Family: Trochilidae

Lophornis magnificus

Brazil

9 - Speckled hummingbird

Family: Trochilidae

Adelomyia melanogenys

Colombia

10 - White-vented violetear

Family: Trochilidae

Colibri serrirostris

Brazil

11 - Green-tailed trainbearer

Family: Trochilidae

Lesbia nuna gouldii

Colombia

12 - Horned sunbeam

Family: Trochilidae

Heliactin bilophus

Brazil

13 - Black-eared fairy

Family: Trochilidae

Heliothryx auritus

Ecuador

14 - Common swift

Family: Apodidae

Apus apus

England

Cranes and rails

Order: Gruiformes

Cranes and rails feed and nest on the ground. Almost all have three forward pointing toes. Due to their ground-dwelling habits, the hind toe may be reduced or absent as they do not need to grip branches and perch. Those that live near water, such as the coot, have lobed feet which make it possible for them to walk across the floating leaves of aquatic vegetation.

15 - Corncrake

Family: Rallidae

Crex crex

Exeter, Devon

16 - East African crowned-crane

Family: Gruidae

Balearica regulorum gibbericeps

The Uplands, Kenya

17 - Stanley crane

Family: Gruidae

Anthropoides paradisea

Former resident of Kew Botanic Gardens, London

18 - Great bustard

Family: Otididae

Otis tarda

Andalucia, Spain

19 - Macqueen's bustard

Family: Otididae

Chlamydotis macqueenii

India

20 - Purple swamphen

Family: Rallidae

Porphyrio porphyrio

Africa

Banana-eaters

Order: Musophagiformes

The banana-eaters, such as the turaco, may be distantly related to the cuckoo and hoatzin. They have a similar toe arrangement to the Cuculiformes, but the fourth toe is able to swivel and point forward or backwards.

Banana-eaters are poor fliers but are agile when climbing trees.

21 - Great blue turaco

Family: Musophagidae

Corythaeola cristata

Ivory Coast

Owls and nightjars

Order: Strigiformes

Owls are mostly nocturnal, solitary birds. Their large forward-facing eyes give them the ability to judge distances well, even in dark conditions. They have excellent hearing which is aided by a facial disc of feathers that directs sound towards their ears. Most owls require stealth when hunting. They rely on their colouring for camouflage and their specially adapted feathers to be almost silent in flight. Owls are equipped with hooked beaks and strong talons for capturing prey.

Nightjars are believed by some to be closely related to owls. Like owls, they hunt small prey by night and they are excellently camouflaged.

22 - Asian barred owlet

Family: Strigidae

Glaucidium cuculoides

Sri Lanka

23 - Eurasian eagle-owl

Family: Strigidae

Bubo bubo

Morchart Bishop, Devon

24 - Long-eared owl

Family: Strigidae

Asio otus

Hastings, East Sussex

25 - Barn owl

Family: Tytonidae

Tyto alba

Tiverton, Devon

26 - European nightjar

Family: Caprimulgidae

Caprimulgus europaeus

Near Torquay, Devon

Hoatzins

Order: Opisthocomiformes

Hoatzins, the only species within this order, are extremely unusual birds. Unfledged birds have two finger claws on each wing which help them scramble around in the mangrove trees where the birds nest. Hoatzins are also able to swim.

27 - Hoatzin

Family: Opisthocomidae

Opisthocomus hoazin

Brazil

Parrots and cockatoos

Order: Psittaciformes

The beaks of parrots and cockatoos are one of their most recognisable features. They use them for crushing seeds and nuts, and also for gripping when moving through the trees. Unlike other birds, both parts of the beak articulate with the skull, meaning that they can both move up and down. The feet of parrots and cockatoos have two toes pointing forwards, and two backwards.

28 - Kakapo

Family: Strigopidae

Strigops habroptila

South Island, New Zealand

29 - Eclectus parrot

Family: Psittacidae

Eclectus roratus polychloros

New Guinea

30 - Rose-ringed parakeet

Family: Psittacidae

Psittacula krameri

India

31 - Blue-and-yellow macaw

Family: Psittacidae

Ara ararauna

South America

32 - Coconut lorikeet

Family: Psittacidae

Trichoglossus haematodus

Australia

33 - Sulphur-crested cockatoo

Family: Psittacidae

Cacatua galerita

Australia

34 - Superb parrot

Family: Psittacidae

Polytelis swainsonii

Australia

35 - Red-headed lovebird

Family: Psittacidae

Agapornis pullarius

West Africa

36 - Dusky lory

Family: Psittacidae

Pseudeos fuscata

New Guinea

37 - Violet lorikeet

Family: Psittacidae

Vini peruviana

Society Islands, Pacific Ocean

Trogons

Order: Trogoniformes

Trogons are found in the tropical forests of America, Africa and Asia. The arrangement of a trogon's toes is seen in no other order of birds: the first and second toes face backwards and the third and fourth toes face forwards. Yet their feet and legs are so weak that they can only shuffle.

38 - Resplendent quetzal

Family: Trogonidae

Pharomacrus mocinno

Central America

Woodpeckers and relatives

Order: Piciformes

Most birds in the order Piciformes have two toes pointing forwards (the second and third) and two pointing backwards (the first and fourth). This is known as zygodactyl and helps them cling to tree trunks and branches.

39 - Magellanic woodpecker

Family: Picidae

Campephilus magellanicus

Argentina

40 - Channel-billed toucan

Family: Ramphastidae

Ramphastos vitellinus

Brazil

41 - Curl-crested aracari

Family: Ramphastidae

Pteroglossus beauharnaesii

South America

42 - Bearded barbet

Family: Ramphastidae

Lybius dubius

Chad

43 - Rufous-tailed jacamar

Family: Galbulidae

Galbula ruficauda

South America

Kingfishers and relatives

Order: Coraciiformes

Kingfishers and their relatives have three forward facing toes, and one that faces backwards. The forward pointing toes are partially fused together. Many kingfishers make cavity nests in trees or muddy banks.

44 - Blue-crowned motmot

Family: Momotidae

Momotus momota

South America

45 - Oriental dollarbird

Family: Coraciidae

Eurystomus orientalis

Myanmar (Burma)

46 - Indian roller

Family: Coraciidae

Coracias benghalensis affinis

India

47 - Black bee-eater

Family: Meropidae

Merops gularis australis

Ghana

48 - African pygmy-kingfisher

Family: Alcedinidae

Ceyx pictus natalensis

South Africa

49 - Lesser pied kingfisher

Family: Alcedinidae

Ceryle rudis

South Africa

50 - Laughing kookaburra

Family: Alcedinidae

Dacelo novaeguineae

Australia

Hoopoes

Order: Upupiformes

Hoopoes have curved bills which are used for probing the ground and tree bark for small invertebrates.

51 - Green wood-hoopoe

Family: Phoeniculidae

Phoeniculus purpureus

South Africa

Mousebirds

Order: Coliiformes

These birds are mouse-like in many respects, including their soft, hair-like body feathers, gregarious roosts and the way they scurry along tree branches searching for fruit and buds.

52 - Speckled mousebird

Family: Coliidae

Colius striatus

South Africa

Hornbills

Order: Bucerotiformes

Hornbills are named for the hollow horn, or ‘casque’, on their beaks which helps to resonate their calls.

53 - Rhinoceros hornbill

Family: Bucerotidae

Buceros rhinoceros

Borneo

Doves and pigeons

Order: Columbiformes

Doves and pigeons have small beaks which have evolved for feeding on seeds and grain. They are unusual among birds in that they can drink without needing to tilt their head back. They are able to suck up water, rather than relying on gravity to move the liquid from one part of the mouth to another. This means that they can drink continuously. Both male and female pigeons feed their young by producing a substance called 'crop milk'.

54 - Common crowned-pigeon

Family: Columbidae

Goura cristata

New Guinea

55 - Little cuckoo-dove

Family: Columbidae

Macropygia ruficeps sumatrana

Sumatra

56 - Torresian imperial pigeon

Family: Columbidae

Ducula spilorrhoa

Australia

57 - Topknot pigeon

Family: Columbidae

Lopholaimus antarcticus

Queensland, Australia

Cuckoos and relatives

Order: Cuculiformes

All birds in this order have feet with two toes pointing forward (the second and third), and two backward (the first and fourth). Whilst cuckoos have a reputation for laying their eggs in the nests of other birds, relatively few of the other species in this order are brood parasites.

58 - Black-and-white cuckoo

Family: Cuculidae

Clamator jacobinus serratus

South Africa

59 - Common cuckoo

Family: Cuculidae

Cuculus canorus

Cornwall

60 - Channel-billed cuckoo

Family: Cuculidae

Scythrops novaehollandiae

Australia

Storks, ibises and herons

Order: Ciconiiformes

Most birds in this order have long legs for wading through shallow water and long grasses. They are all hunters and their bill shape largely determines what they feed on. Many have straight beaks with sharp tips for capturing small fish, amphibians and reptiles. Others such as the spoonbill and ibis have special beak modifications.

61 - Black-necked stork

Family: Ciconiidae

Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus

India

62 - Scarlet ibis

Family: Threskiornithidae

Eudocimus ruber

South America

63 - Grey heron

Family: Ardeidae

Ardea cinerea

Dartmouth, Devon

64 - Boat-billed heron

Family: Ardeidae

Cochlearius cochlearius

Guyana

65 - Black-crowned night-heron

Family: Ardeidae

Nycticorax nycticorax

Newton St Cyres, Devon

66 - Spoonbill

Family: Threskiornithidae

Platalea leucorodia

Salthouse, Norfolk

Cormorants and shags

Order: Phalacrocoraciformes

Usually only those species with crests of feathers on their heads are called shags, but the names cormorant and shag are used somewhat interchangeably for birds in this order. All are fish eaters. Cormorants with their wings outstretched to dry after fishing are a common sight in coastal areas. Many have bare patches of coloured skin on their faces.

67 - Little pied cormorant

Family: Phalacrocoracidae

Phalacrocorax melanoleucus

New Zealand

Penguins

Order: Sphenisciformes

Penguins are flightless birds that are supremely adapted for life in cold waters. Their webbed feet, and wings that resemble the flippers of seals, make them agile divers. A layer of fat under the skin and dense waterproofed feathers help to keep penguins warm in icy waters. All penguins have dark feathers on their backs and white ones on their fronts. This provides good camouflage against predators whilst they are in the water.

68 - King penguin

Family: Spheniscidae

Aptenodytes patagonicus

Falkland Islands

Pelicans and relatives

Order: Pelecaniformes

Pelicans and their relatives have webbing between all four of their forward-facing toes to help propel them through the water. They capture prey by skimming the water using their large flexible throat pouch. Birds in this order have reduced nostrils which is particularly important for those that are excellent divers.

69 - Northern gannet

Family: Sulidae

Morus bassanus

Torquay, Devon

70 - Australian pelican

Family: Pelicanidae

Pelecanus conspicillatus

Shellharbour, Australia

Flamingos

Order: Phoenicopteriformes

Like doves and pigeons, flamingos are able to produce ‘crop milk’, which they feed to their chicks. Flamingos have a unique way of feeding. Holding their beak upside down they use their piston-like tongue to pump water through a sieve of plates, or lamellae, which line the insides of the mandibles. Aquatic invertebrates, diatoms and algae are filtered out. The carotenoid proteins found in this food gives them their pink plumage.

71 - Chilean flamingo

Family: Phoenicopteridae

Phoenicopterus chilensis

Chile

Albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters

Order: Procellariiformes

These birds spend almost all of their lives in the air, though they must return to land in order to breed. Their long wings enable them to soar over the surface of the water in search of food, aided by a very keen sense of smell.

72 - Yellow-nosed albatross

Family: Diomedeidae

Thalassarche chlororhynchos

Australia

Waders, gulls and auks

Order: Charadriiformes

Many of the birds in this order are coastal or wetland birds, though some such as the lapwings prefer drier habitats. They often have long bills which are used for probing wet mud and sand in search of invertebrate prey.

73 - Black-tailed godwit

Family: Scolopacidae

Limosa limosa

Rye, East Sussex

74 - Wattled jacana

Family: Jacanidae

Jacana jacana

Southern America

75 - Painted snipe

Family: Rostratulidae

Rostratula benghalensis

South Africa

76 - Lapwing

Family: Charadriidae

Vanellus vanellus

Exmouth, Devon

77–78 - Ruff (male and female)

Family: Scolopacidae

Philomachus pugnax

Europe

79 - Spur-winged lapwing

Family: Charadriidae

Vanellus spinosus

Egypt

80 - Black-winged stilt

Family: Recurvirostridae

Himantopus himantopus

Europe

81 - European golden plover

Family: Charadriidae

Pluvialis apricaria

Europe

82 - Common gull

Family: Laridae

Larus canus

Exmouth, Devon

83 - Great black-backed gull

Family: Laridae

Larus marinus

Kingsbridge, Devon

84 - Whiskered auklet

Family: Alcidae

Aethia pygmaea

Aleutian Islands

85 - Little auk

Family: Alcidae

Alle alle

Exmouth, Devon

86 - Eurasian stone-curlew

Family: Burhinidae

Burhinus oedicnemus

Southern England

87 - Common tern

Family: Laridae

Sterna hirundo

Rye, East Sussex

88 - Purple sandpiper

Family: Scolopacidae

Calidris maritima

Torquay, Devon

Birds of prey

Order: Falconiformes

Birds of prey have short, strong, hooked beaks. The upper part of the beak has a fleshy area called the cere, which houses the nostrils. Their feet are generally short and powerful with sharp, curved talons which are used when hunting and feeding.

89 - Andean condor

Family: Cathartidae

Vultur gryphus

Andes, Chile

90 - Hen harrier

Family: Accipitridae

Circus cyaneus

Morchard Bishop, Devon

91 - Sparrowhawk

Family: Accipitridae

Accipiter nisus

Exeter, Devon

92 - Peregrine falcon

Family: Falconidae

Falco peregrinus

Scotland

93 - Lanner falcon

Family: Falconidae

Falco biarmicus

South Africa

Perching birds

Order: Passeriformes

This order includes over half of all bird species. Perching birds have three toes pointing forwards and one backwards, allowing them to grip onto branches. Thanks to specially adapted musculature the toes continue to grip even while the bird is asleep. Some families in this order are known as songbirds.

94 - Blue rock-thrush

Family: Turdidae

Monticola solitarius

Nagasaki, Japan

95 - Magnificent riflebird

Family: Paradisaeidae

Ptiloris magnificus

New Guinea

96 - Winter wren

Family: Troglodytidae

Troglodytes troglodytes

Devon

97 - Gouldian finch

Family: Estrildidae

Chloebia gouldiae

Australia

98 - Hose's broadbill

Family: Eurylaimidae

Calyptomena hosii

Sarawak, Borneo

99 - Sickle-billed vanga

Family: Vangidae

Falculea palliata

Madagascar

100 - Goldie's bird-of-paradise

Family: Paradisaeidae

Paradisaea decora

Papua New Guinea

101 - Bassian thrush

Family: Turdidae

Zoothera lunulata

Australia

102 - Burchell's glossy starling

Family: Sturnidae

Lamprotornis australis

South Africa

103 - Greater racquet-tailed drongo

Family: Dicruridae

Dicrurus paradiseus

Phu Qui, Vietnam

104 - Seven-coloured tanager

Family: Thraupidae

Tangara fastuosa

Brazil

105 - Long-tailed broadbill

Family: Eurylaimidae

Psarisomus dalhousiae

Bac Kan Province, Vietnam

106 - King of Saxony bird-of-paradise

Family: Paradisaeidae

Pteridophora alberti

New Guinea

107 - Yellow bishop

Family: Ploceidae

Euplectes capensis

South Africa

108 - Buff-streaked chat

Family: Muscicapidae

Campicoloides bifasciatus

South Africa

109 - Grey butcherbird

Family: Artamidae

Cracticus torquatus leucopterus

Australia

110 - Yellow-billed blue magpie

Family: Corvidae

Urocissa flavirostris

India

111 - Superb lyrebird

Family: Menuridae

Menura novaehollandiae

New South Wales, Australia

112 - Blue tit

Family: Paridae

Cyanistes caeruleus

Devon

113 - Eastern striped manikin

Family: Pipridae

Machaeropterus regulus

South America

114 - House sparrow

Family: Passeridae

Passer domesticus

Bloxworth, Dorset

115 - Red-billed chough

Family: Corvidae

Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax

County Mayo, Ireland

Game birds

Order: Galliformes

Most game birds feed and nest on the ground. It is common for male game birds to have bright plumage which they use in courtship rituals to attract females. The females often have drab or mottled colouring so that they are well camouflaged when nesting. Due to the ease with which these birds can be kept in captivity, many have been domesticated.

116 - Grey partridge

Family: Phasianidae

Perdix perdix

Exeter, Devon

117 - Red junglefowl

Family: Phasianidae

Gallus gallus jabouillei

Vietnam

118 - West African crested guineafowl

Family: Numididae

Guttera pucherani verreauxii

Ghana

119 - Greater prairie-chicken

Family: Phasianidae

Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus

Mississippi, U.S.A.

120 - Maleo fowl

Family: Megapodiidae

Macrocephalon maleo

Sulawesi

121 - Himalayan monal

Family: Phasianidae

Lophophorus impejanus

India

122 - Blue-billed or Prince Albert's Colombian currasow

Family: Cracidae

Crax alberti

Colombia

Ratites

Order: Struthioniformes

Ratites are unable to fly because they all lack a keel bone. The keel is a bony ridge on the breastbone to which flight muscles would normally attach. Ratites often have a reduced number of toes. The ostrich, for example, has only two on each foot.

123 - Southern cassowary

Family: Casuariidae

Casuarius casuarius

Australia

124 - Greater rhea

Family: Rheidae

Rhea americana

Argentina

125 - Brown kiwi

Family: Apterygidae

Apteryx australis

South Island, New Zealand

Tinamous

Order: Tinamiformes

The tinamous are related to the flightless ratites. Unlike the ratites they have a keeled sternum and are able to fly.

126 - Elegant crested tinamou

Family: Tinamidae

Eudromia elegans

Argentina

Bustard quails

Order: Turniciformes

Despite looking very much like true quails, they do not seem to be closely related to these members of the pheasant family. They differ in having only three forward facing toes, similar to bustards.

127 - Barred buttonquail

Family: Turnicidae

Turnix suscitator taigoor

Telok, Sumatra

Waterfowl

Order: Anseriformes

Members of this web-footed order of birds are adapted for life on the water and in the marshy areas surrounding it. They use their webbed feet to propel themselves through the water, while their characteristic beak shape is adapted for sifting out food particles from the liquid.

All waterfowl keep their feathers waterproof by using oil from a gland near the base of their tail.

128–129 - Pochard (female and male)

Family: Anatidae

Aythya ferina

Europe

130 - Hawaiian goose

Family: Anatidae

Branta sandvicensis

Europe (Captive bred)

131 - Goldeneye

Family: Anatidae

Bucephala clangula

Exeter, Devon

132 - Black swan

Family: Anatidae

Cygnus atratus

Bow, Devon (Captive bred)

133 - Dark-bellied brent goose

Family: Anatidae

Branta bernicla bernicla

Devon

134 - Long-tailed duck

Family: Anatidae

Clangula hyemalis

Stromness, Orkney Islands

135 - Egyptian goose

Family: Anatidae

Alopochen aegyptiacus

England

136 - Red-breasted merganser

Family: Anatidae

Mergus serrator

Europe

137 - Muscovy duck

Family: Anatidae

Cairina moschata

Brazil