



Wisconsin Waterbirds

Tim Hahn

Families of Waterbirds

- Geese
- Ducks & Mergansers
- Swans
- Grebes & Loons
- Herons & Bitterns
- Gulls
- Plovers & Sandpipers



Keys to Identification

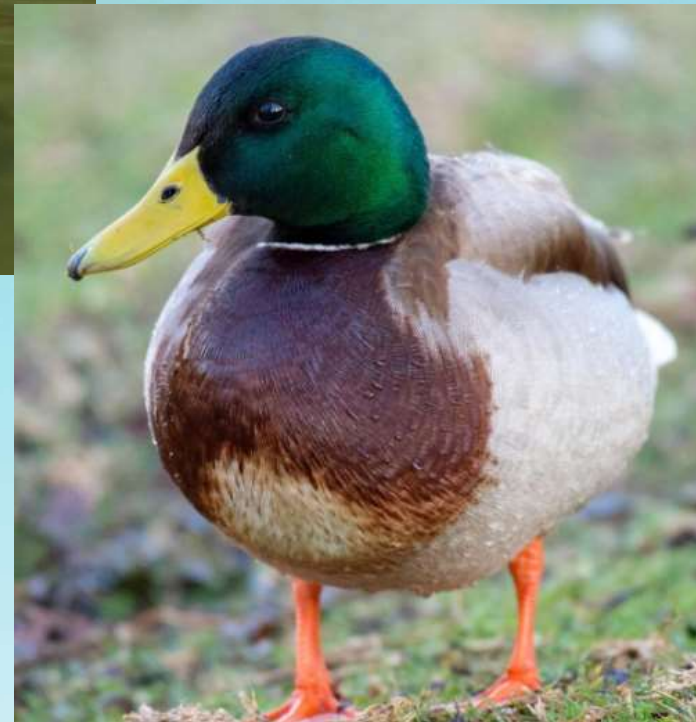
- Plumage and Patterns
- GISS
General Impression of Shape and Size
- Habitat
- Time of Year

Plumage and Pattern



Same colors, different pattern:

- Northern Shoveler – Brown on flanks, white chest
- Mallard – Brown on chest, gray flanks.



Plumage and Pattern



White on face, different shape:

- Ruddy Duck – horizontal on cheek
- Blue-winged Teal – vertical crescent in front of eye



Size Comparison



Mallards are MASSIVE.
Teal are TINY.

A misty, teal-toned landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding mountains and dense forests. The scene is hazy, with soft light filtering through the mist, creating a serene and atmospheric setting. The mountains in the background are layered, with the closest ones appearing more defined than the distant ones.

Geese

They're Bigger than Ducks
...usually



Branta canadensis maxima

- Local Breeder
- “Giant” subspecies
- L: 45” WS: 60”

- Large Migrant Flocks
- “Lesser” subspecies
- L: 38” WS: 55”

Branta canadensis occidentalis/fulva



Canada Goose

Cackling Goose



- Superficially similar to Canada Goose
- Much smaller bird, similar to a Mallard
- L: 25" WS: 43"
- ID Points
 - stubby bill
 - short neck



Canada vs Cackling Goose



LESSER



Cackling



Greater White-fronted Goose



- Medium sized L: 28" WS: 53"
- Overall brown body, neck and head
- White face patch, orange bill and legs.
- Black horizontal marking on belly
 - Nickname of *SPECKLE-BELLY*



Snow Goose

- Medium sized L: 28" WS: 53"
- White and blue phases
- Orange bill has very visible grin patch



- Superficially similar to Snow Goose
- Similar in size to Cackling Goose
- L: 25" WS: 43"
- Least common goose in Wisconsin.

Ross's Goose

Snow vs Ross's Goose



Snow Goose showing a significantly more prevalent “grin patch” and longer bill

Ross's Goose will often show a discoloration at the base of the bill.

A serene landscape photograph with a teal and blue color palette. The scene features a calm body of water in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding environment. In the middle ground, there are rolling hills and mountains, some of which are partially obscured by a light mist or fog. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall mood is peaceful and atmospheric.

Ducks

Dabblers vs Divers

DABBLERS

Mallard (B)
Wood Duck (B)
Blue-winged Teal (B)
Green-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Northern Pintail

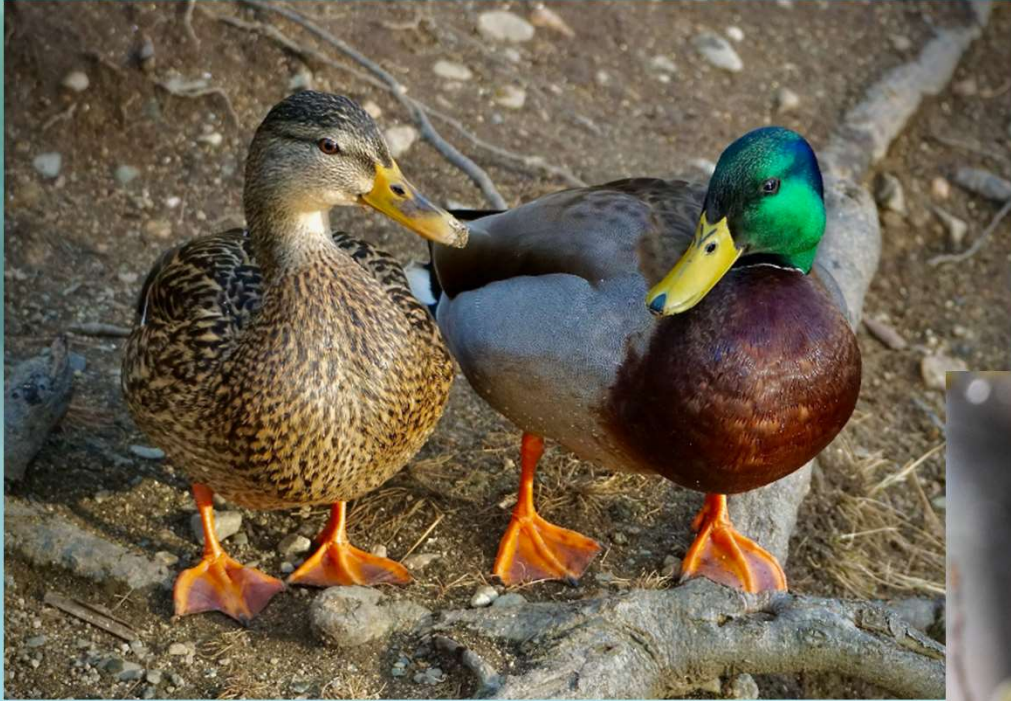
DIVERS

Canvasback	Long-tailed Duck (GL)
Redhead	Bufflehead
Ring-necked Duck	Common Goldeneye
Greater Scaup (GL)	Hooded Merganser (B)
Lesser Scaup	Common Merganser
Surf Scoter (GL)	Red-breasted Merganser
White-winged Scoter (GL)	Ruddy Duck
Black Scoter (GL)	

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Local Breeders

Our Neighbor Ducks



Mallard

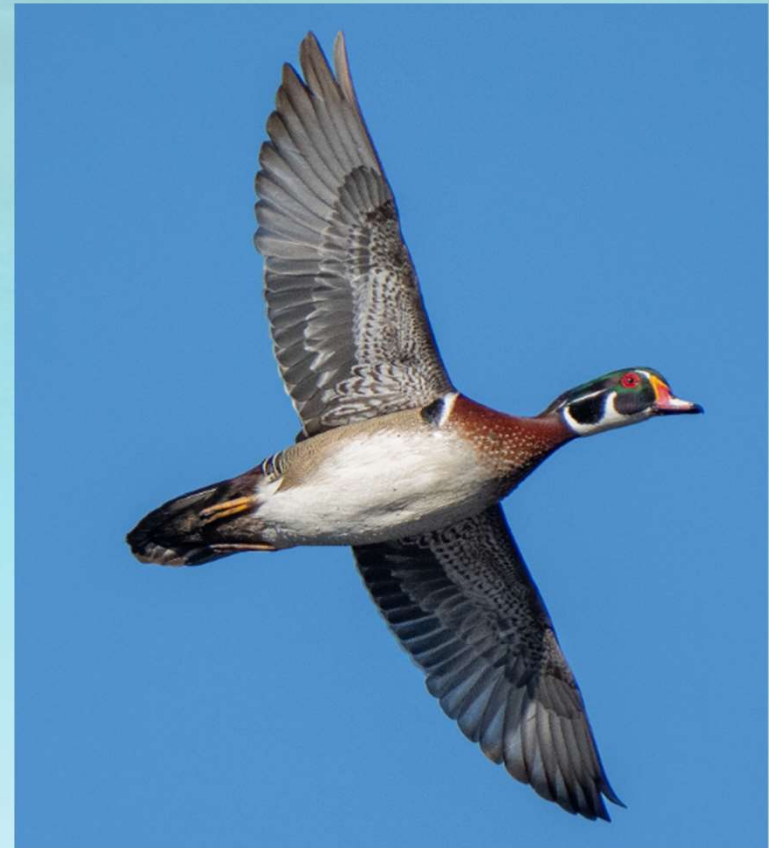
Wood Duck



Mallard



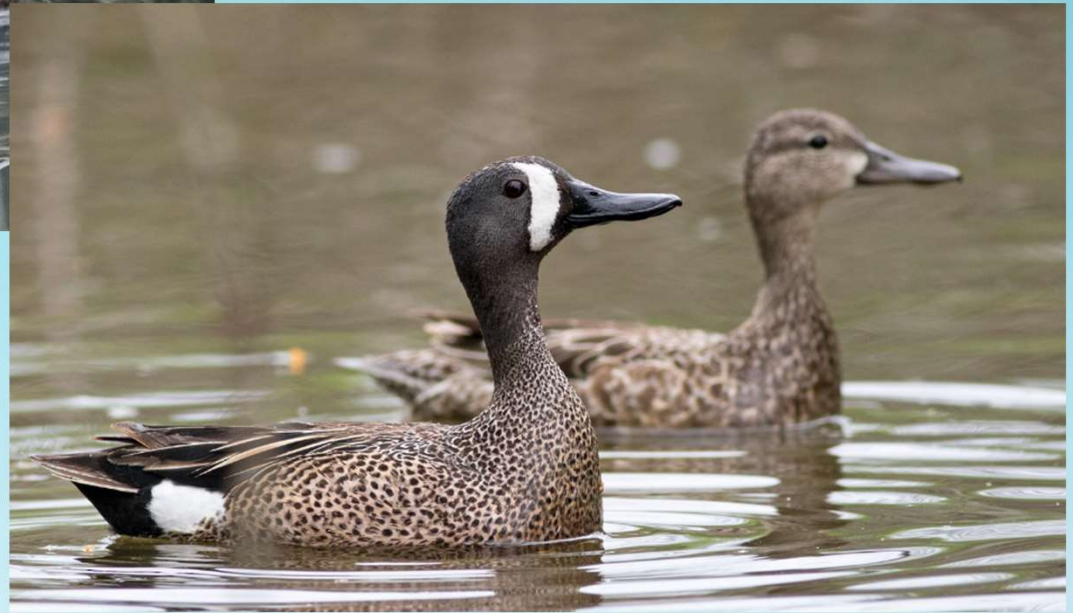
Wood Duck



Hooded Merganser



Blue-winged Teal





BW Teal in flight

Mallards & BW Teal



The background of the slide is a soft, teal-colored landscape. It features a calm body of water in the foreground, which reflects the surrounding environment. In the middle ground, there are dark, silhouetted mountains and a dense forest of trees. The background is filled with more distant, hazy mountain ranges, creating a sense of depth and tranquility. The overall color palette is monochromatic, consisting of various shades of blue and green.

Migrants & Uncommon Breeders

Northern Pintail

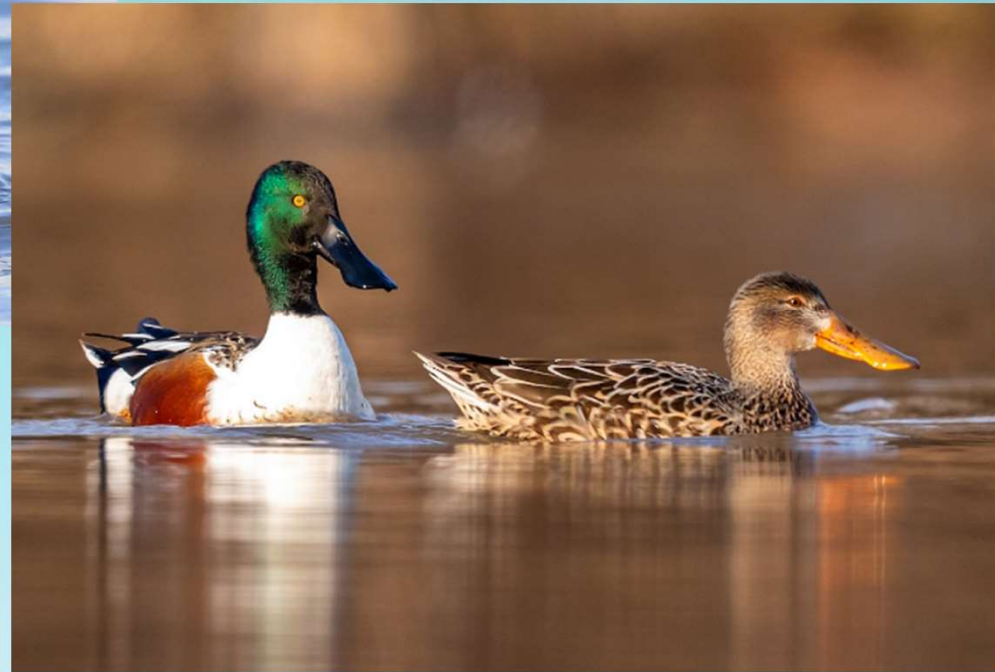






Green-winged
Teal

Northern
Shoveler





Ruddy Duck

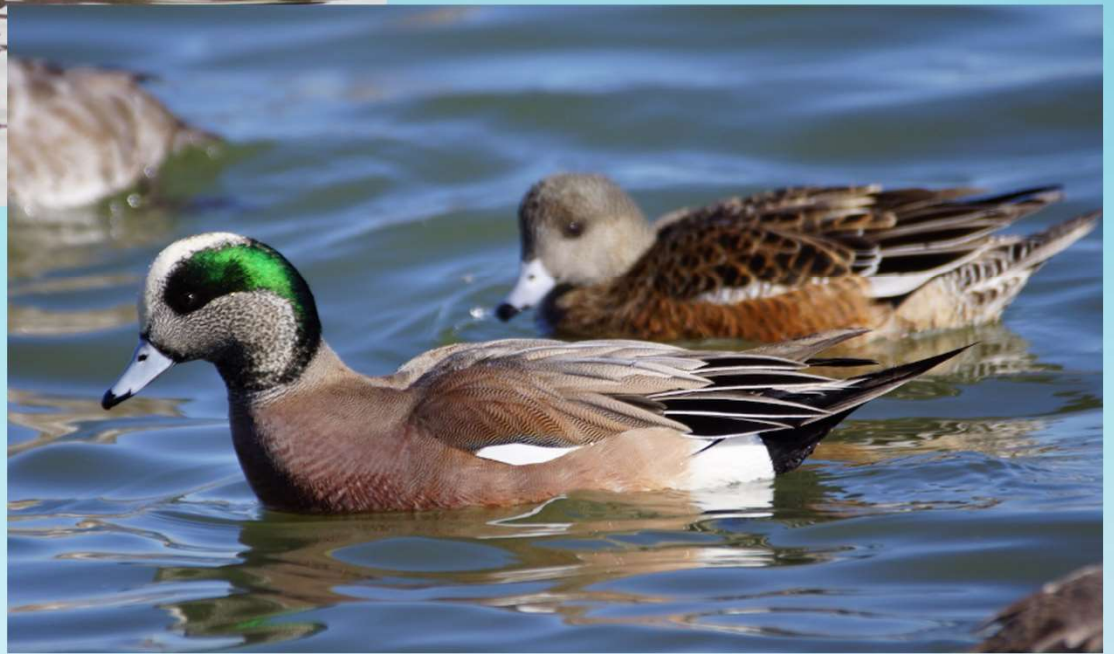
American
Black Duck





American
Wigeon

Gadwall



Genus Aythya – Diving Ducks

12 species in genus AYTHYA.

Five found in Wisconsin in good numbers.

Red/Chestnut Head

Canvasback

Redhead

Dark Blue/Purple Head

Ring-necked Duck

Greater Scaup

Lesser Scaup

The Tufted Duck, a Eurasian species,
has also been documented in Wisconsin.

Redhead



Canvasback







Lesser
Scaup

Greater
Scaup





Ring-necked Duck





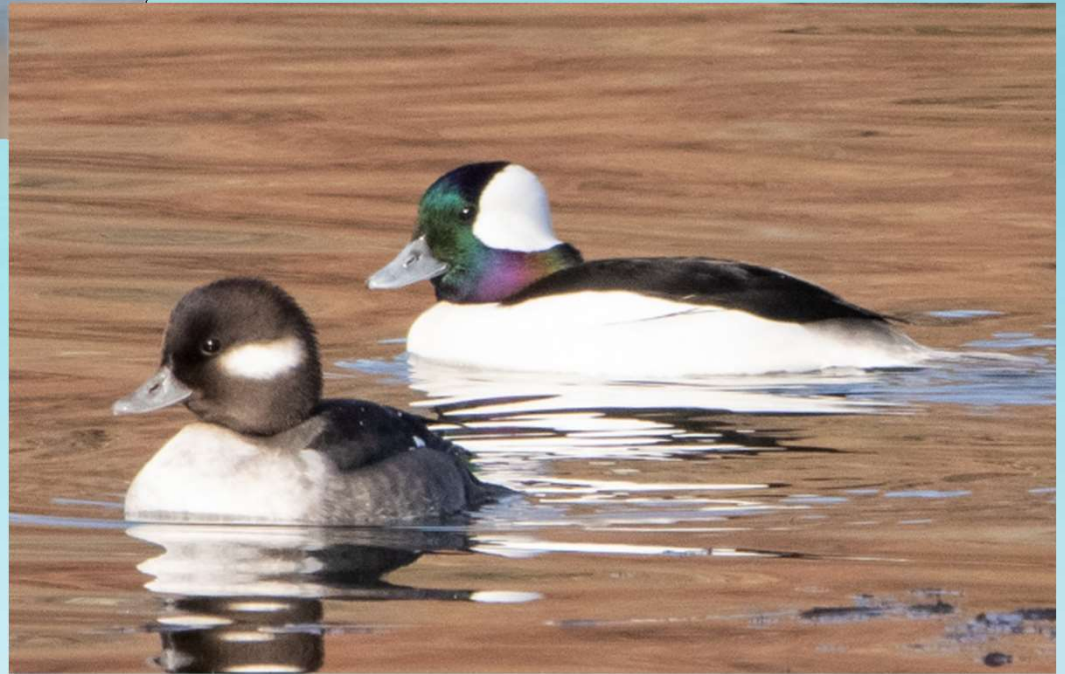
Long-tailed
Duck





Common
Goldeneye

Bufflehead





Red-breasted
Merganser

Common
Merganser



Red-breasted Merganser



Common Mergansers

White-winged Scoter



Surf Scoter

White-winged vs. Surf Scoters



- Spot behind bill can indicate which species
- Surf Scoters - vertical spot
- White-winged Scoter - more horizontal.
- Feathering meets the bill farther down on the White-winged than the Surf Scoter.



Black Scoter



A misty, teal-toned landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding mountains and dense evergreen forests. The scene is hazy, with soft light filtering through the mist, creating a serene and ethereal atmosphere. The mountains in the background are layered, with the closest ones appearing more defined than the distant ones.

Swans

Big White Birds that are
Hard to Tell Apart

Trumpeter Swan



- Reintroduction program resulted in delisting from endangered status
- Only native breeding swan in Wisconsin.
- Largest swan, and heaviest bird in North America.



Tundra Swan



- Smaller than Trumpeter Swan
- Seen in larger flocks.
- Top mandible of bill is often decurved
- Can show yellow on lores in breeding season. Can often be heard, and maybe even seen, migrating at night.

Trumpeter vs. Tundra Swan



- Focus on bill shape.
- Trumpeter: straighter, wedge-shaped upper mandible
- Tundra: more concaved mandible.
- Yellow lores = Tundra
- No Yellow Lores = $\setminus_(\text{ツ})_/_$

How many swans do you see?

- ≥ 5 indicates Trumpeter - move as families locally.
- < 10 indicates Tundra - migrate long distances in flocks.



Photo by Beth McGrath
Paradise Valley – BFGoss Field Trip, March 16, 2024



Mute Swan

- Non-native residents imported from the Old World
- Their orange bill and black knob is unique
- Aggressive to other swans and other intruders, and have been known to evict local Trumpeters.
- Efforts to remove them from the landscape, have been mostly successful, but some neighborhood associations have made it known they would like to keep their resident Mute Swans.



A misty, teal-toned landscape featuring a calm lake in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding mountains and dense forests. The scene is hazy, with soft light filtering through the mist, creating a serene and atmospheric environment. The mountains in the background are layered, with the closest ones appearing more defined and the further ones fading into the mist. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of teal, blue, and green, giving the image a cool and tranquil feel.

Grebes & Loons



Spring & Summer Plumage

Common Loon

Fall & Winter Plumage



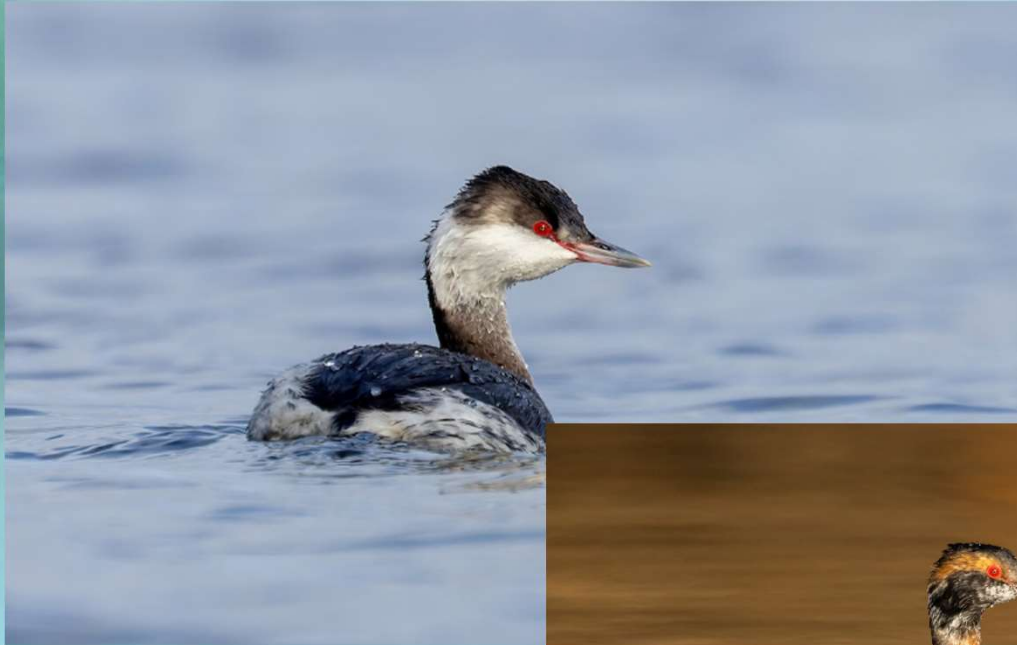
Pacific
Loon



Fall & Winter Plumage

Common Loon





Non-breeding Plumage

Transition Plumage



Breeding Plumage



Horned Grebe

Eared Grebe



Horned Grebe



Pied-billed Grebe





Pied-billed Grebe



Western Grebe



Red-necked Grebe



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Hérons, Egrets, & Bitterns

Great Blue Heron



Green Heron



Great Egret



Great Egret & Snowy Egret



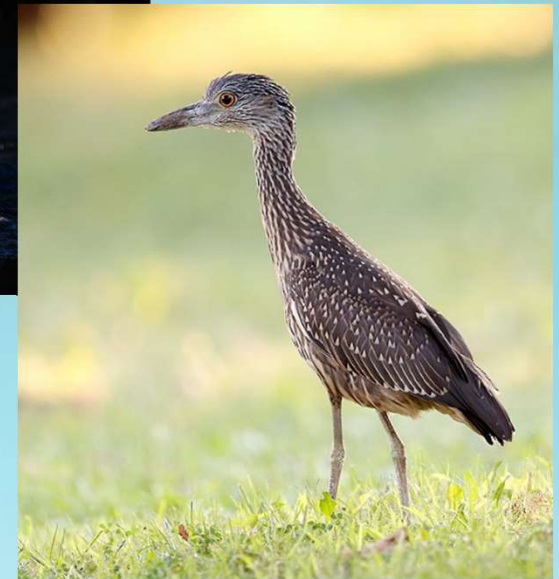
Cattle Egret

Great Egret & Cattle Egret





Black-crowned Night Heron



Black-crowned vs Yellow-crowned Night Heron



American Bittern



Black-crowned Night Heron & American Bittern



Black-crowned Night Heron
& American Bittern

Least Bittern



Least Bittern



A serene landscape photograph with a teal and blue color palette. It depicts a calm lake reflecting the surrounding misty mountains and dense evergreen forests. The scene is hazy, creating a dreamlike atmosphere. The word "Gulls" is overlaid in the center-left area.

Gulls



Ring-billed Gull



Herring Gull



Herring vs Ring-billed Gull

25" long, 58" wingspan

17.5" long, 48" wingspan



Great Black-backed Gull



RBGU - 17.5" long, 48" wingspan

GBBG - 30" long, 65" wingspan



Great Black-backed Gull



LBBG - 21" long, 54" wingspan

GBBG - 30" long, 65" wingspan



Lesser Black-backed Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull



Herring Gull

Glaucous Gull



27" long, 60" wingspan



Iceland Gull

22" long, 54" wingspan



Bonaparte's Gull

13.5" long, 33" wingspan



Bonaparte's Gull



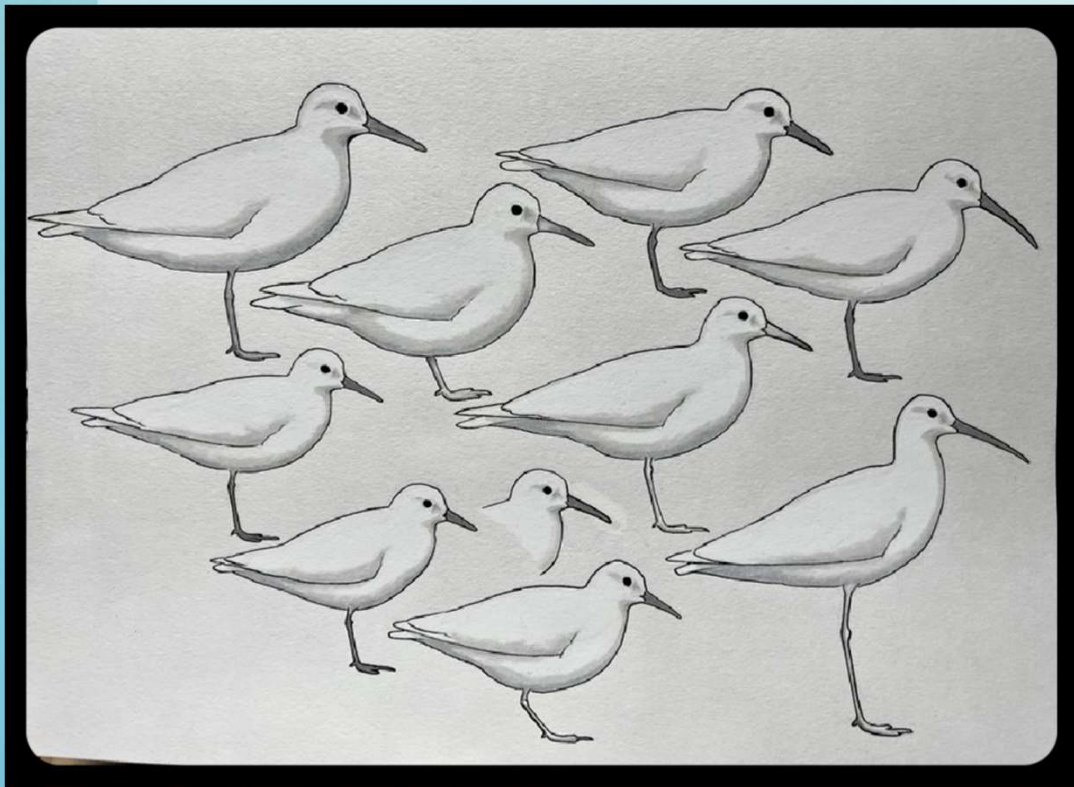
A serene landscape photograph with a teal and blue color palette. The scene features a calm body of water in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding environment. In the middle ground, there are forested hills and mountains. The background is dominated by large, misty mountain peaks that fade into the sky. The overall atmosphere is quiet and ethereal.


Shorebirds

General Impression of Shape and Size

- Size of bird's bill or legs in relation to itself
- Shape of bird – plump vs elongated
- Shape of bill – long & decurved vs. short & straight
- Tall vs. Short

General Impression of Shape and Size

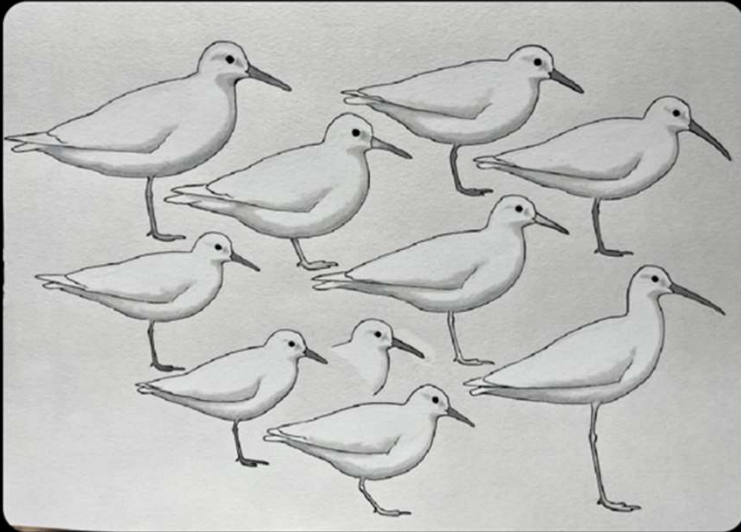


 **Andrew Guttenberg**
@guttenbirder22 Follow

How well can you identify sandpipers by shape alone??

A little something I cooked up this weekend.

Hint 1: all are in the genus *Calidris*.
Hint 2: all are found in the eastern US
Hint 3: one of them represents two species because they are virtually identical in shape

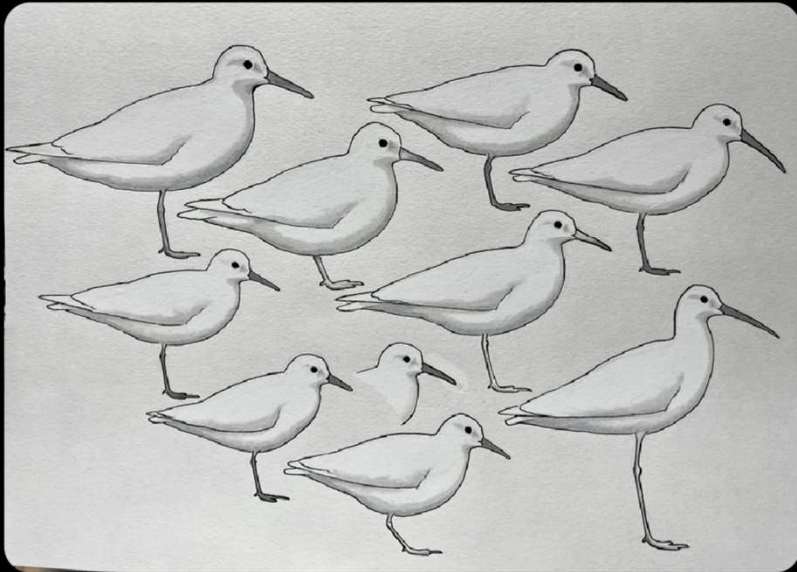


General Im of Shape a



Kevin Bennett @KevinFPBennett · 25m

Replying to @guttenbirder22





Semipalmated
Plover

Killdeer



Black-bellied Plover



American Golden Plover





Wilson's
Snipe

American
Woodcock





Greater
Yellowlegs

Lesser
Yellowlegs



Greater Yellowlegs



Lesser Yellowlegs



Semipalmated
Sandpiper

Least
Sandpiper





Semipalmated

Least



Sanderling

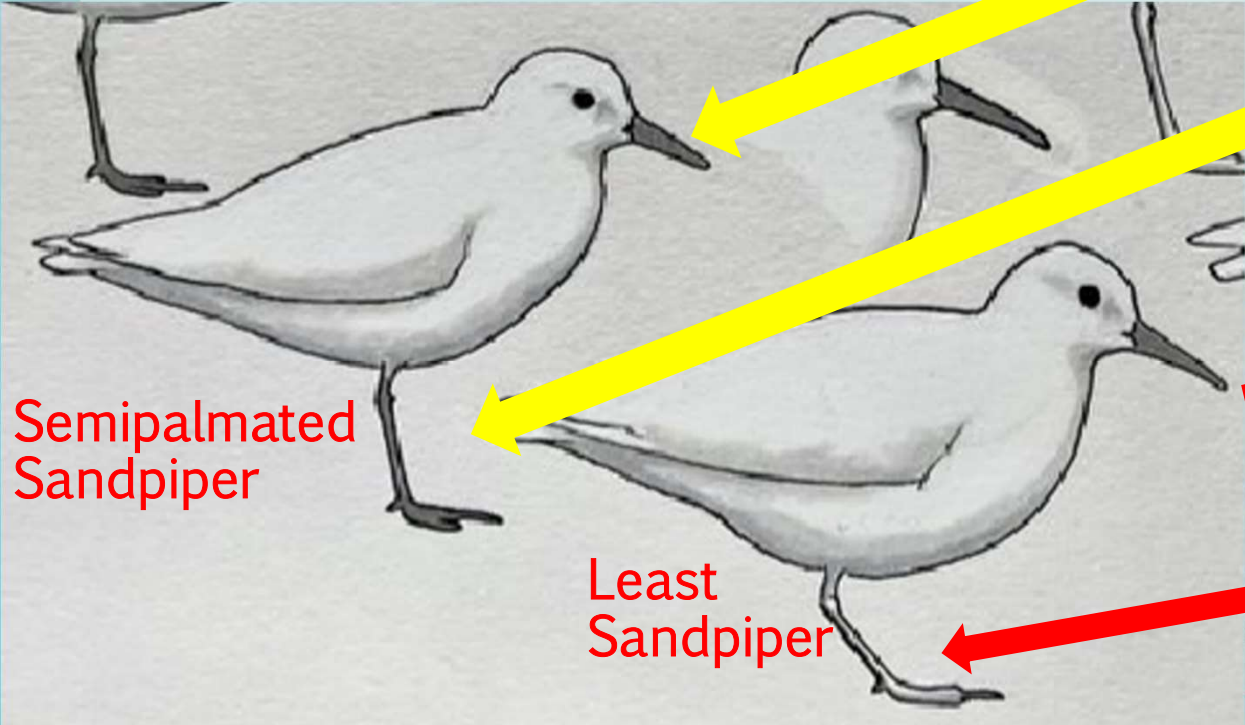




Spotted Sandpiper



General Impression of Shape and Size



Semipalmated Sandpiper

Least Sandpiper

