

Texas Hawks in Flight

Shape Recognition Training



Travis Audubon Society-Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory

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Identifying Hawks in Flight using the **SPASMATIC** method:

SHAPE *(relative sizes and proportions of wings, tail, and head)*

PATTERN/PLUMAGE *(contrasting patterns of dark and light)*

ACTIONS *(How does the bird fly or what is it doing?)*

SIZE *(how big is the bird in comparison to other birds)*

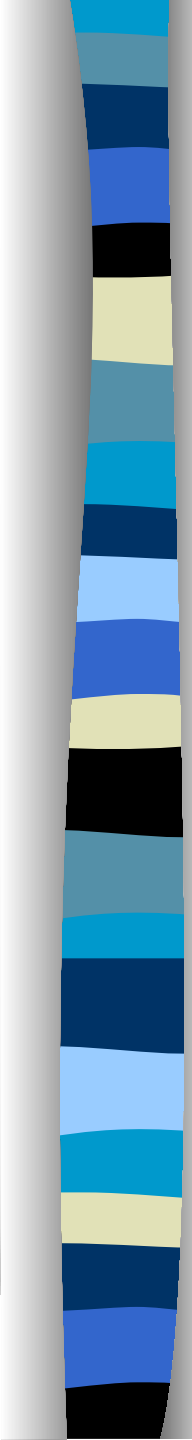
MULTIPLE

ATTIBUTES *(use as many of the above characteristics as possible)*

TRUST

IN THE

CONCEPT *(believe in your ability to judge these characteristics)*



Since 80% of hawks in flight are identified mostly by shape, this presentation concentrates on identifying subtle shape differences in the most common migratory raptors found in Texas.

Most raptors in Texas fall into
4 shape categories

KITES	Long pointed wings/ Long Tail
FALCONS	Shorter pointed wings/ Shorter tail
BUTEOS	Long rounded wings/ Wide short tail
ACCIPITERS	Short rounded wings/ Long tail

First attempt to determine which group a bird belongs to.
Then note specifics about the relative shape of the wings,
tail, and head.



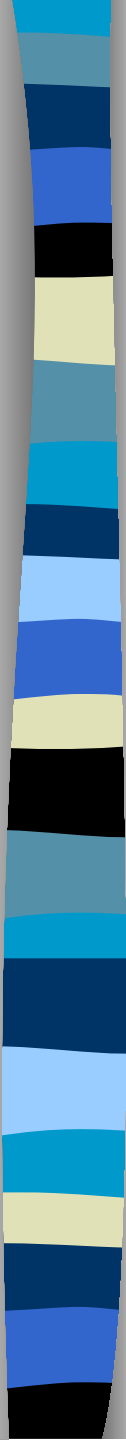
We'll start with an easy
one.

Note the long, pointed
wings and long tail of a
kite. Then note the
unique forked tail.

What is it?

(press forward key for answer)

Swallow-tailed Kite



Try this one:

Note:

- Long rounded wings.
- Wide short tail

What group does it belong to?

Buteo



Now try to identify this buteo.

Note:

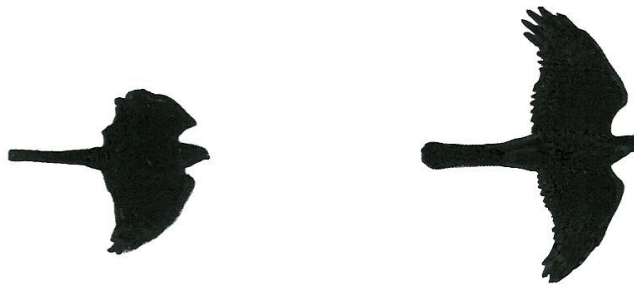
- **bulging secondaries (“biceps”)**
- **Fairly distinct primaries (“fingers”)**

What is this bird?

(press the down arrow/forward for answer)

Red-tailed Hawk

Learn this shape and use it as the basis of comparison with other Buteos



How about his one?
What group does it
belong to?

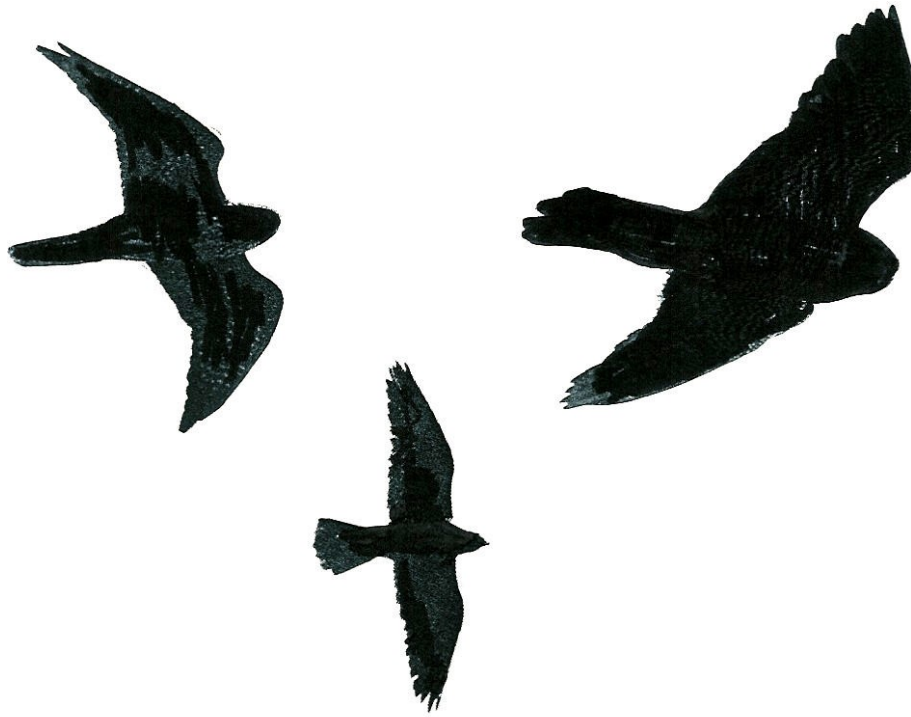
Note:

- shorter rounded wings
- long tail

What is it?

Accipiter

(we'll leave it at that for now)



Another tip on falcons: Look how far back the tail connects with the body...much farther back than on a buteo...back behind where the wings meet the body.

OK--ready to go through the raptors species by species?

Note the pointed wings and shorter tail of a falcon.

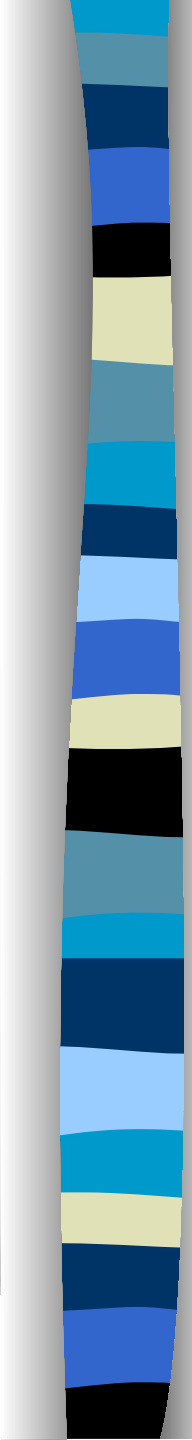
Which one is it?

Note:

- Relatively long heavy wings for a falcon.
- Long tail for a falcon.
- Heavy body

What is it?

Peregrine Falcon



Here's one of the most
common raptors on
Texas hawkwatches.

Note:

- Short tail
- Wide wings
- Small head



What is it?

Black Vulture

A tip on separating vultures: Black vultures have a large head and short tail.
Turkey Vultures have a tiny head and a long tail.



What is it?

Ferruginous Hawk

Note:

- long rounded wings and wide tail of a Buteo.
- Long wing with a wide base, narrowing at the forewing (“forearm”).
- No bulging secondaries of Red-tailed Hawk.



Note:

- rather short pointed wings, shortish tail.
- Tail attaches where wings attach to body-- but looks like tail is pinched in or might come off.

What is it?

American Kestrel



Note

- pointed wings and very short tail.
- Big head.
- Very wide wings.

What is it?

Merlin



Falcon Tips

Besides shape, size and overall pattern are very good identification marks for falcons. Falcons are either large or small, and either light or dark (overall).

	Light	Dark
Small	American Kestrel	Merlin
Large	Peregrine Falcon	Prairie Falcon



Note:

- Short rounded wings, long tail.
- Big head, rounded tail tip, straight leading edge of wing (in soar).
- Trailing edge of wing mostly rounded in one smooth curve.

What is it?

Cooper's Hawk



Note:

- Long pointed wings.
- Triangular long tail.

What is it?

Mississippi Kite



Note:

- Short, rounded wings and long tail.
- Square-tipped or notched tail.
- “crooked” front wing in soar.
- “s-shaped” hindwing.
- Small head.

What is it?

Sharp-shinned Hawk



Accipiter Tips

Flight actions are an additional helpful mark for accipiters. Since Cooper's Hawks are large and have larger wings, they don't need to flap as much or as frantically.

Cooper's Hawk

- Casual, heavier flaps
- Not as many flaps
- Smoother flaps

Sharp-shinned Hawk

- Frantic, deep flaps
- Flaps more frequently
- Snappy flaps

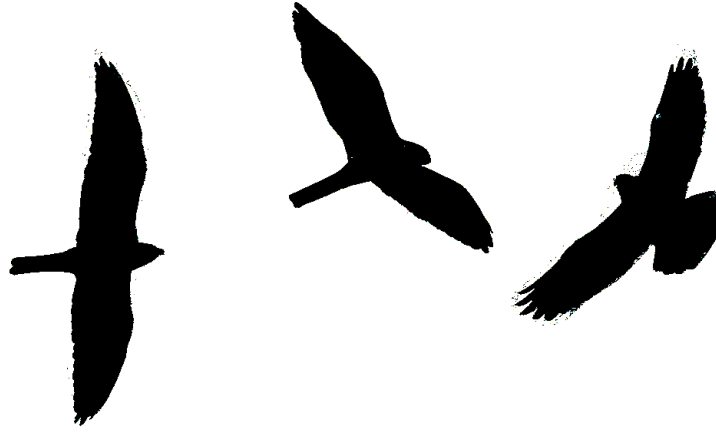


Note:

- Long, rounded wings and wide tail.
- Small “fingers” and “hand”
- Straight, even-width wings.
- Slightly pointed wings.

What is it?

Swainson’s Hawk



Note:

- Long, pointed wing and long tail.
- Skinny tail
- Wings look very wide and “heavy”

What is it?

White-tailed Kite

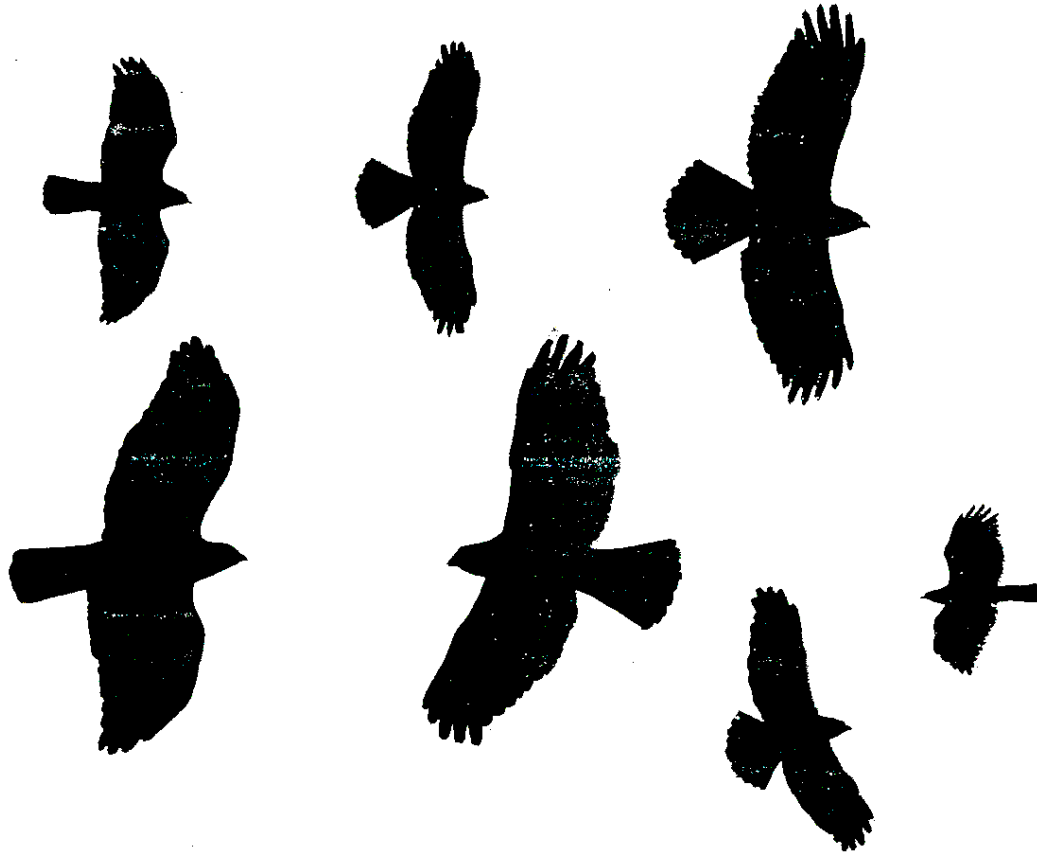


Note:

- Long rounded wings, wide tail.
- Wings on the short side, and very wide.
- Relatively short tail.
- Slightly pointed wingtip “middle finger”

What is it?

Broad-winged Hawk

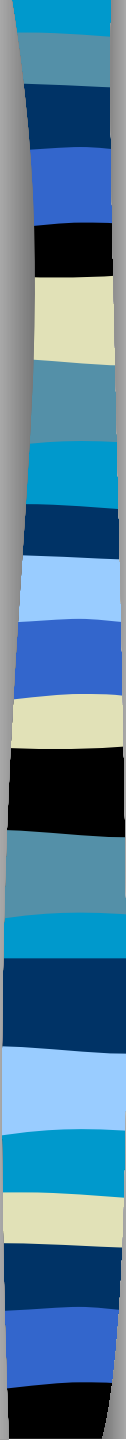


What is it?

Red-shouldered Hawk

Note:

- Long, rounded wings and wide tail.
- Relatively short wings, pinched in at body.
- Wing tips lack point or “middle finger”
- Wings held slightly forward.

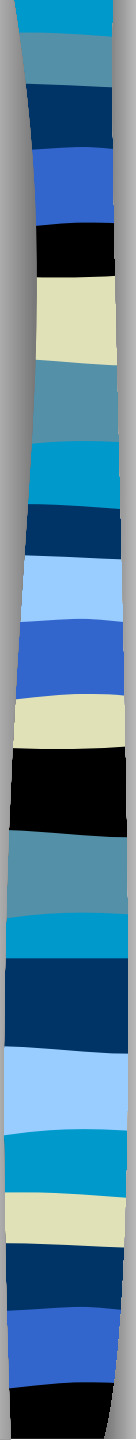


Note:

- Long rounded wings, long narrow tail.
- Fairly pronounced fingers with wide “hand”
- Soars with wings upheld in dihedral.

What is it?

Northern Harrier

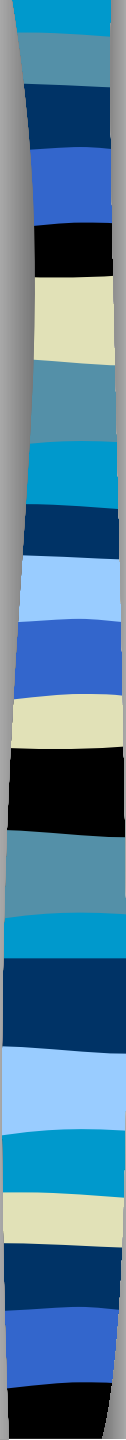


Note:

- Wide, even-width wings with large fingers and heavy “hands”
- Longish tail.
- Tiny head.

What is it?

Turkey Vulture



Note:

- Long rounded wings, wide tail.
- No bulging secondaries.
- Large bodied with shortish tail.

What is it?

Rough-legged Hawk

Looks like a heavy red-tailed hawk without bulging secondaries.



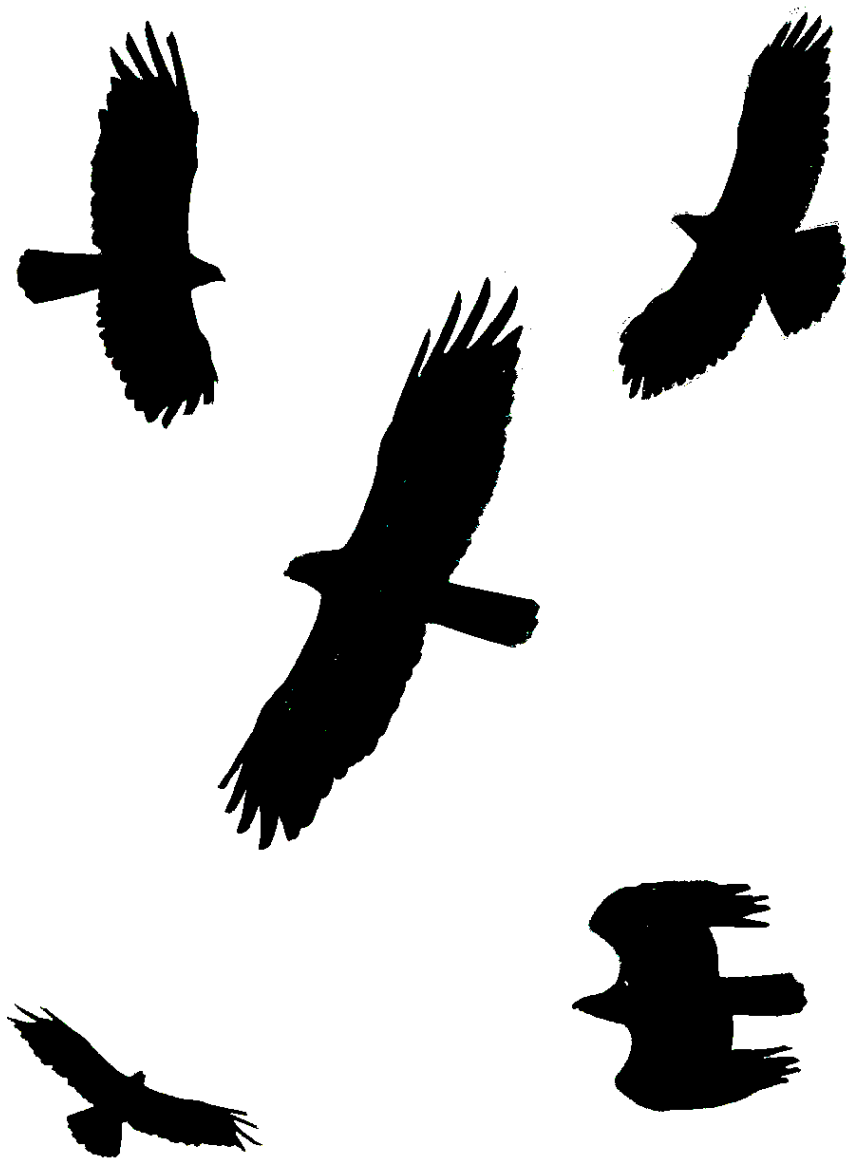
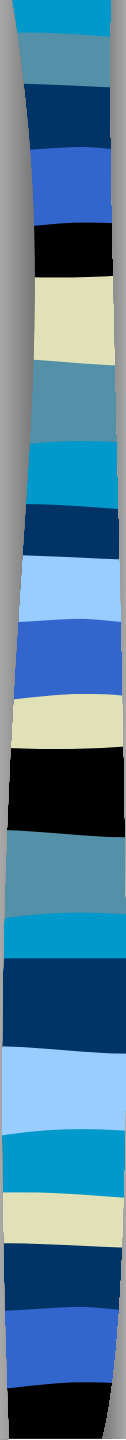
Note:

- Very wide long wings.
- Very wide short tail.
- Large body and large head.
- Pronounced “fingers”

What is it?

White-tailed Hawk

basically a very heavy winged, short-tailed, big-headed Red-tail without bulging secondaries.



Note:

- Long rounded wings and wide tail.
- Tail and wings on the long side.
- Very long fingers.

What is it?

Zone-tailed Hawk



Note:



- Long crooked “M” shaped wings
- Wing tips rounded with strong “middle finger”
- Fairly wide, short tail.

What is it?

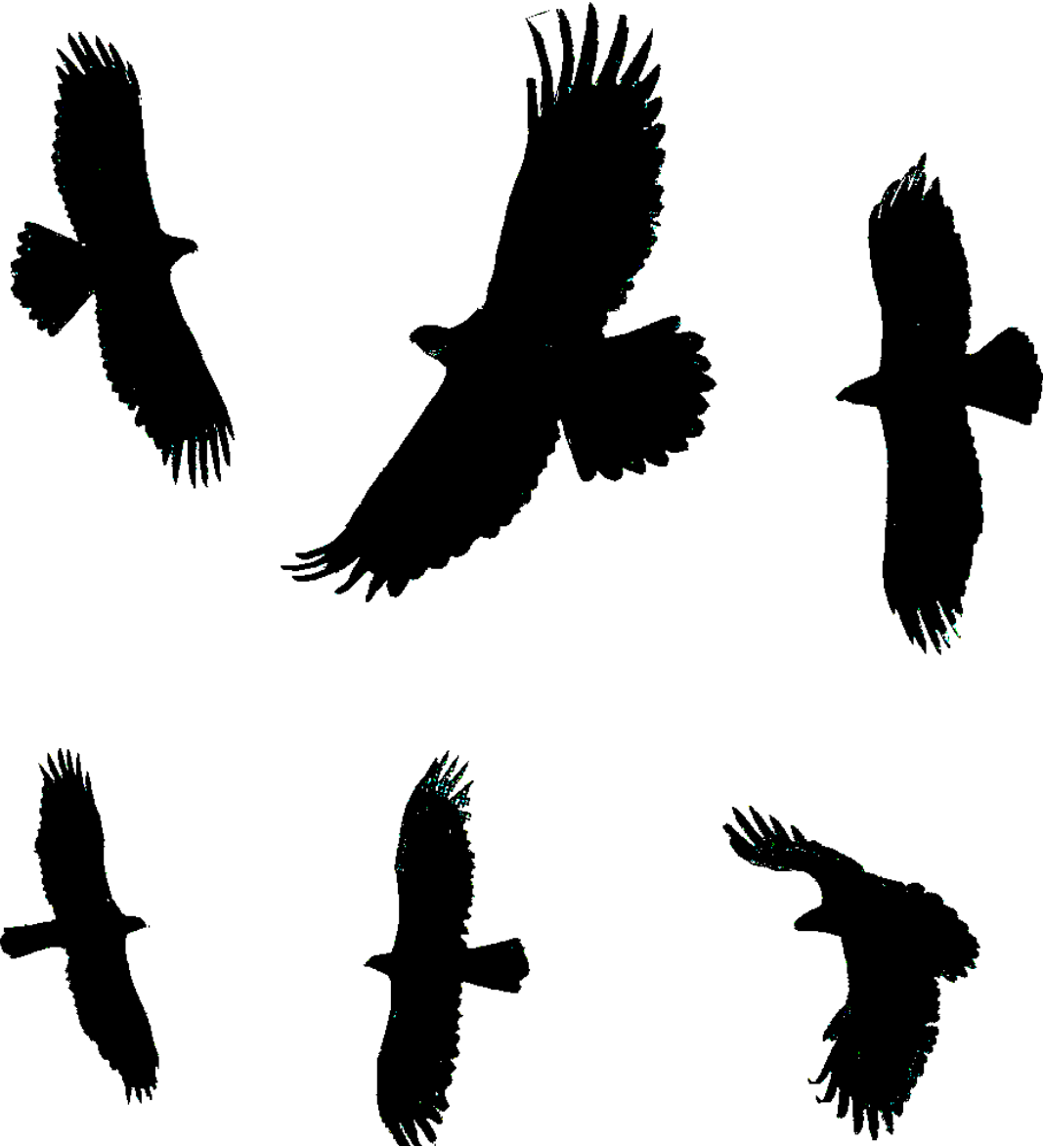
Osprey

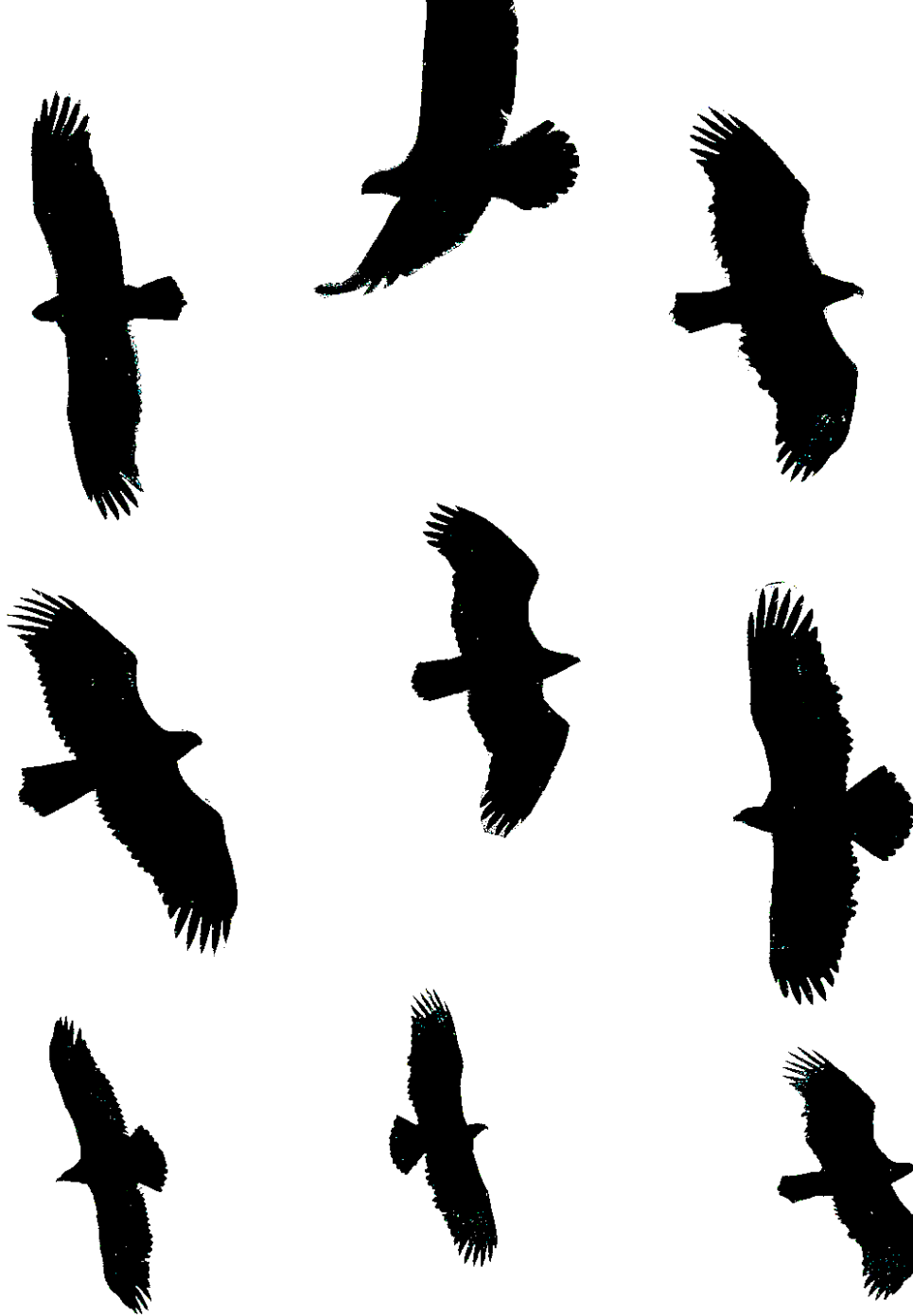
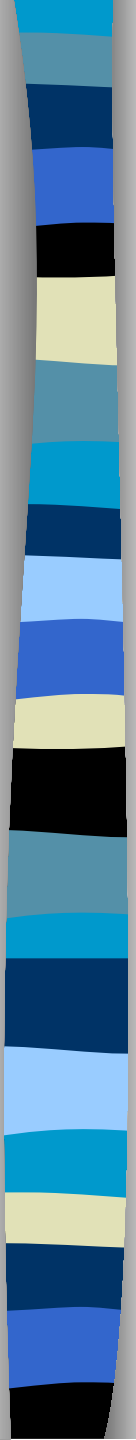
Note:

- Comparatively huge wide wings and huge wide tail.
- Huge “fingers”
- Small head

What is it?

Golden Eagle



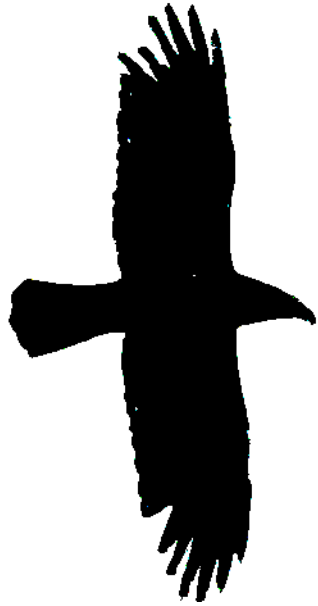


Note:

- Huge wide wings and large wide tail.
- Huge “fingers”
- Large head

What is it?

American Bald Eagle

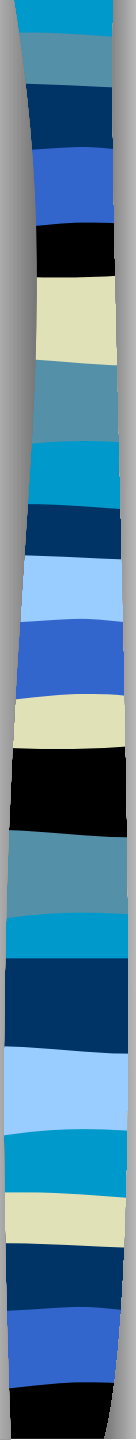


Note:

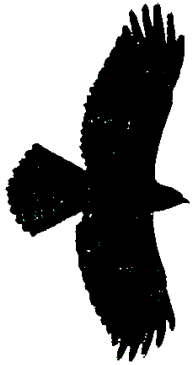
- Huge head and neck
- Long tail
- Short even width rounded wings

What is it?

Crested Caracara



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11



Quiz

1 Red-shouldered Hawk

2 White-tailed Hawk

3 White-tailed Kite

4 Swallow-tailed Kite

5 Osprey

6 Black Vulture

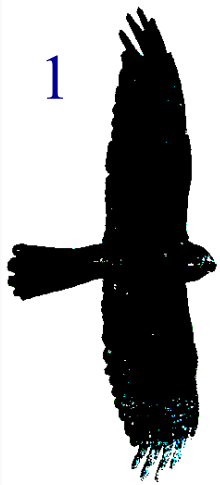
7 Turkey Vulture

8 Mississippi Kite

9 Zone-tailed Hawk

10 Swainson's Hawk

11 Red-tailed Hawk



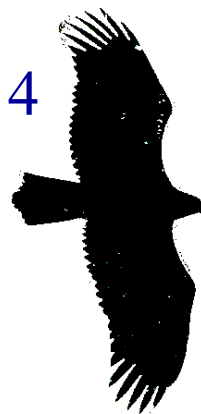
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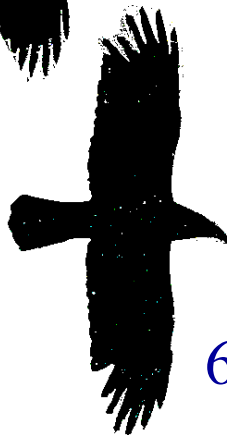
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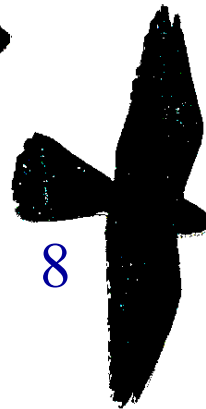
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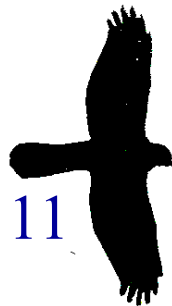
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9



10



11



12

Quiz

- 1 Northern Harrier
- 2 Ferruginous Hawk
- 3 Rough-legged Hawk
- 4 Bald Eagle
- 5 Golden Eagle
- 6 Crested Caracara
- 7 Peregrine Falcon
- 8 American Kestrel
- 9 Merlin
- 10 Sharp-shinned Hawk
- 11 Cooper's Hawk
- 12 Broad-winged Hawk



Remember

- Always use multiple attributes
- Trust your ability (over time and with practice) to discern the important shape, pattern, actions, and size differences that make possible the SPASMATIC method of raptor identification.
- Don't stress out, hawkwatching is fun!

This raptor identification presentation is brought to you courtesy of the **Travis Audubon Society**. If you have any comments about this presentation, direct them to info@travisaudubon.org.

Good luck and have fun at your local hawkwatch!