

# FORMAK Bird Identification Guideline

## Take steps to learn your birds first

It is important that people undertaking bird counts are at a stage where they can recognise all the main bird species on the site by sight and sound before they begin undertaking bird counts. If you are not already at this stage, there are a number of steps you can take.

### Learning yourself

Initially studying field guides and listening to recorded bird calls is useful to begin familiarising yourself with bird species. However, this needs to be done in conjunction with spending time in the field looking for birds.

Probably the most useful thing you can do to learn birds – is spend time out in the forest looking for birds, identifying them by sight and listening to their calls. To do this:

- Take a pair of binoculars (something around 8x40 or 7x35 is best) and a good field guide (see examples at end of this outline) and set off.
- When you see a bird, use the binoculars and field guide to conclusively identify it by sight. Watch and follow it to see if it is calling – so you can also get used to the different types of call it makes.
- If you hear a bird calling that you don't know, try to find it and identify it by sight with the binoculars.
- Some key characteristics to think about when identifying birds are:
  - Visual size and markings / plumage
  - Vocalisations – many birds have both a variety of song and shorter alarm calls.
  - Pattern of flight: how does it move when flying – straight and direct with fast wing beats, slow and soaring, rising and falling in flight etc
  - Sound of flight: sound and speed of wingbeats can be very distinctive, for example with kereru (wood pigeon)

### Get help from others

Spending time with someone who has good bird identification knowledge can rapidly increase your skills. Some organisations who may be able to help you are listed at the end of this guideline. If possible, get someone to come to your site and help you identify different bird species. Spend time on your site with them identifying different bird species. They can point out the distinctive visual features of different birds, any distinctive flight patterns, features of their calls.

## When doing a count

- If you are doing a count and hear or see a bird you are still not sure of – use a descriptive name that describes its call or look e.g. “red wings”, “multi cheep” etc. You can also relate the size of the bird to species you know. For example is it bigger than a sparrow but smaller than a blackbird, as big as a pigeon etc.
- When you have finished the count try to track the bird down and identify it with binoculars and a field guide.
- If you still can't identify it – keep using the same descriptive name until you can get help to identify the correct name.
- You must correctly identify the bird species, and go back through bird count forms and replace the interim name with the correct name – before you enter data onto the FORMAK website.

## Useful guides for bird identification.

An online bird identification resource that includes images and calls of the main bird species you are likely to see is under development and will be available in the future from [www.formak.co.nz](http://www.formak.co.nz).

The following are some references selected as useful for novice bird watchers.

Title	Author(s)	Publisher	Comments
Hand Guide to the Birds of New Zealand	Hugh Robertson and Barry Heather	Penguin Books NZ Ltd 1999	A thorough and excellently illustrated guide. Officially endorsed by the Ornithological Society of NZ
Birds of New Zealand	R.A Falla, R.B Sibson, & E.G. Turbott	Harper Collins	Thorough illustrated field guide to native and exotic NZ birds
Nature Guide to the New Zealand Forest	John Dawson & Rob Lucas	Random House NZ Ltd	Has photos and description of a limited number of native bird species.

## Organisations that may provide assistance with bird identification.

**NZ Ornithological Society:** This organisation includes many very skilled and helpful amateur and professional ornithologists who may be able to help. Local branches of the Society run regular field trips – these can be very useful to attend if you wish to improve your bird identification.

**Regional Councils:** a number of Regional Councils have ecologists and are sometimes able to provide support to groups undertaking monitoring and with identification of bird species.

**Department of Conservation:** Some staff at area offices and conservancies have good bird identification knowledge and may be able to help.

**QE2 Trust – Field Officers:** The trust has a network of field officers that deal with covenant and potential covenant areas. If you already have dealings with QE2 these officers are potentially a useful source of knowledge.

**Private Ecological Consultants:** A wide range of ecological consultants are present throughout the country and many have very good bird identification knowledge.