

Do You Know.....?

.....you can identify most birds' diets by the shape of their beaks? Beaks aren't just used as weapons; as many bird watchers know, they are very effective tools as well. There are many varieties of beaks and the general shape can give a hint as to what your bird friend is most likely to eat. We find it useful to pick a few easily recognizable birds whose diets you are familiar with as your guides to identifying the feeding habits of less familiar birds. Let's start with the Robin.

Almost all animal lovers, bird watchers or not, recognize the American Robin. Its red breast and dark back quickly identifies the bird as it hops through the grass in search of worms. Upon closer examination, we notice its long pointy beak, ideal for picking worms out of the ground. Birds with similar beaks include the European Starling, the Mockingbird, the Catbird, the Thrush, the Blue Jay, the Oriole and smaller birds like the Wren, Warbler, or Vireo. When you see a beak similar in shape (not size!) to the Robin, you may have found a fruit and insect eater. Birdseed should hold little to no interest for them, although fruits and berries may be attractive. Some birds, like Jays and Crows, go crazy for peanuts (if they can beat the squirrels to them)!

The beautiful red Cardinal is another familiar sight to many casual bird observers. Its wide, powerful, thick, shell cracking beak is obvious due to its bright orange coloring, and can deliver quite a bite, just ask us! There are not many birds with such obvious beaks, but you can see all finch-type birds carry a similar shaped beak. Other seed cracking beaks belong to the Grosbeak, the Indigo Bunting, the Sparrow, and the Junco. These are the birds you see most often at your feeders. Some of them will go for a taste of fruit now and then and some enjoy the occasional bug but they are mainly seed eaters. As most bird feeders know, each type of bird has their favorite seed. Finches love thistle, Cardinals love sunflower seeds.

The pigeon and dove family confuse everyone because they don't follow the rules. Their beaks are long and pointy, but bumpier than the Robins'. Most of you know they love bread, but seeds should be their main diet. The reason they don't have a seed cracking beak is that they eat their seeds whole, shell and all. Their poor little gizzard has to do all the work to get to the good parts. They will generally feed on the ground instead of perching on your feeder and they do a good clean-up job on all the seed the other birds and squirrels drop out of the feeder.



Hooked beaks show up on our meat and carrion eaters. Hawks, falcons, owls and vultures need to be able to tear pieces of meat off of their prey/roadkill, and the sharp beak helps in this. In fact, Second Chance received a hawk this year that had broken the curved tip of his beak. He was starving to death because, although he could catch and kill his prey with his powerful feet, he could not penetrate the thick hide of squirrels which were clearly his favorite food. The bird is currently being cared for by a fellow rehabber until his beak grows back.



Crows defy categorization. They have long powerful beaks, so they can eat carrion, peanuts, sunflower seeds, fruit, French fries, and almost anything you put out in your trash including the bag!



With the exception of the woodpecker beak, which requires little explanation, that covers most types of beaks you are likely to see in your own backyard. Now, even if you can't identify the bird, you should have some idea what to put out for it to eat!

NOW YOU KNOW!!!!!!



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