



Bird Memory Phrases

Field marks are not the only clues to use when identifying birds. Since no two kinds of bird sound exactly alike, the sounds they make are another clue to use. In fact, once you learn the songs and calls of birds in your area, you can tell what kinds of birds are around just by listening.

Memory phrases are one trick that many birders use to help them remember the songs of different species. Memory phrases are words that imitate a bird's song or call. Another way to put it is a memory phrase is a phonetic description of what a species' song or call sounds like. For instance, if you listen closely to the song of an eastern towhee, it sounds like it's saying "Drink your tea" with the end of the word tea drawn out. Once you learn this phrase and hear the bird's song a few times, the phrase sticks in your memory making it easier to identify the bird the next time you hear it. The following are commonly used memory phrases that are sometimes included in field guides. Kids enjoy learning these silly phrases, and become excited when they recognize them in the field.

Memory phrases of some common resident birds

Blue Jay	Jay! Jay! Jay!
Northern Cardinal	(loud and clear) Wacheer, pretty, pretty, pretty! or Theodore, Theodore
Eastern Towhee	drink your tea! (song) or Towhee! (call)
American Robin	cherry up, cheerio, cheery up, cheerio
American Goldfinch	Bobeee, potato chip!
Barred Owl	I cook for me, who cooks for you all?
Great-horned Owl	(muffled) Whooo's awake? (pause) me too.
Mourning Dove	CoooOOO, coo, coo, coo (mournful)
Red Winged Blackbird	Conk-er-reeeee! (ascending, louder at end)
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Churrrrrrr! Burrrrrr! (rattle)
Carolina Wren	(loud and clear) "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle!" or "cheeseburger, cheeseburger, cheeseburger!"
Song Sparrow	maids, maids, maids, please put the kettle on
Tufted Titmouse	pita, pita, pita (or Peter, Peter, Peter)
Carolina Chickadee	fee bee, fee bay (song) or chickadee-dee-dee (call)
White-breasted Nuthatch	a nasal "yank, yank, yank" (over)

White-throated Sparrow	old Sam, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody
Northern Mockingbird	All or any of the above-each repeated several times
Northern Flicker	klee-yer or a rapid wik, wik, wik call is flicka, flicka

Memory phrases of some Neotropical migrants:

Indigo Bunting	Sweet, sweet, spit, spit, chew, chew
Gray Catbird	soft, disjointed, squeaky sounds, with a cat's Mew interspersed or at the end
Wood Thrush	ee-o-lay, and ee-o-layeee (flute-like) Call is a sharp pit, pit, pit
Red-eyed Vireo	Incessant here I am, where are you?
White-eyed Vireo	Quick, give me a rain check!
Baltimore Oriole	whistling chitty, chitty, bang, bang!
Orchard Oriole	whistling notes with slurred where at end
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	robin-like warble, but sweeter
Summer Tanager	robin-like warble, but nervous Call: pit-tuk or hiccup
Scarlet Tanager	robin-like warble, but harsh, scratchy Call: chip-burr
Great-Crested Flycatcher	song: prrr-eeet! call: a loud wheep!
Eastern Wood Pewee Common Yellowthroat	pee-a-wee (mournful), or pee-o witchity, witchity, witchity, witch
Ovenbird	teacher, teacher, TEACHER! (louder)
Chestnut-sided Warbler	please, please, please to meet cha!
Black-throated Blue Warbler	beer, beer, beer, beeeee! (ascending)
Black-throated Green Warbler	zee-zee-zee, zoo-zee or zoo-zee, zoo-zoo zee
Black-and-White Warbler	weesie, weesie, weesie (accent of wee)
Northern Parula	zeeeeeee-up (ascend, then abruptly dropping)
Louisiana Waterthrush	ter-ree, ter-ree, ter-whit-a whit (first three notes slurred, then twitters)
Hooded Warbler	a weeta, weeta, wee-teo