

Key Features of Bird Families

Module 7 · Online Birding Enthusiast Course · curriculum by Joe Grosel (1966–2021)

Once you can place a bird in a family at 50 m, you've already cut the field guide by 80%. This module shows you the family-level shortcuts the best birders use unconsciously.

7.1 Why family-level ID is faster

Field guides organise birds by family. Your brain is more efficient finding 'family' first, then 'species' — top-down — than scanning every plate.

7.2 Hornbills (Bucerotidae)

Big bills, long tails, undulating flapping flight. Yellow-billed, Red-billed, Crowned, Trumpeter, Southern Ground-Hornbill.

7.3 Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)

Big head, short tail, dagger-like bill, sit-and-watch hunting. Brown-hooded, Woodland, Pied, Giant, Malachite, Pygmy.

7.4 Bee-eaters & rollers

Bee-eaters: slim, pointed bill, swift flight. Rollers: chunky, broad-winged, bold colours, perch-and-pounce. Both are tropical canopy hunters.

7.5 Weavers, sparrows, finches

Conical seed-eating bills. Weavers: bouncing flight, woven nests. Sparrows: brown, gregarious. Finches & waxbills: small, colourful.

7.6 Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)

Tiny, iridescent, decurved bill, hovering or perched feeding on nectar. Like Old World hummingbirds.

7.7 Swifts vs swallows

Swifts: sickle wings, never perch on ground, all aerial. Swallows: forked tail, perch on wires, build mud nests.

7.8 Larks vs pipits

Larks: thicker bill, sing in flight, hindclaw long. Pipits: thin bill, walk (not hop), tail-pump. Voice is the key.

7.9 Cisticolas

30+ species, mostly LBJs. Voice + habitat + display flight = ID. Almost impossible by sight alone.

7.10 Drongos, shrikes, bulbuls

Drongos: forked tail, aggressive, perch high. Shrikes: hook beak, impale prey. Bulbuls: dark-capped, noisy, common.

Key Terms

Jizz Overall impression — silhouette + posture + movement.

Family Taxonomic rank above genus. Most ID guides organise by family.

Conical bill Stout, triangular seed-cracker bill (finch, weaver, sparrow).

Decurved bill Bill curving downward (sunbird, ibis, woodhoopoe).

Forked tail Tail with notched centre (drongo, swallow, tern).