

Charley Harper's Birds

Charley Harper had a unique style that he called minimal realism. He created his artwork from real life, but simplified the scene. Harper identified the key characteristics of the subjects in his art. Instead of trying to replicate every detail of the birds, for example, he chose to focus on their shape, coloration, and behavior.

- Can you identify the key characteristics in the birds that Harper created below?
- What animal behavior is evident in the artwork? Look at how the bird is portrayed as flying, perched, or eating.
- Does Harper use similar shapes to create the different birds? What shapes are different?
- Is there a visible difference between the male and female?



Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis cardinalis

The Northern Cardinal is the state bird of Ohio. It is found throughout Ohio and can be seen here year round.

Male cardinals are bright red with black markings on their faces. Females are gray-brown with some red markings.

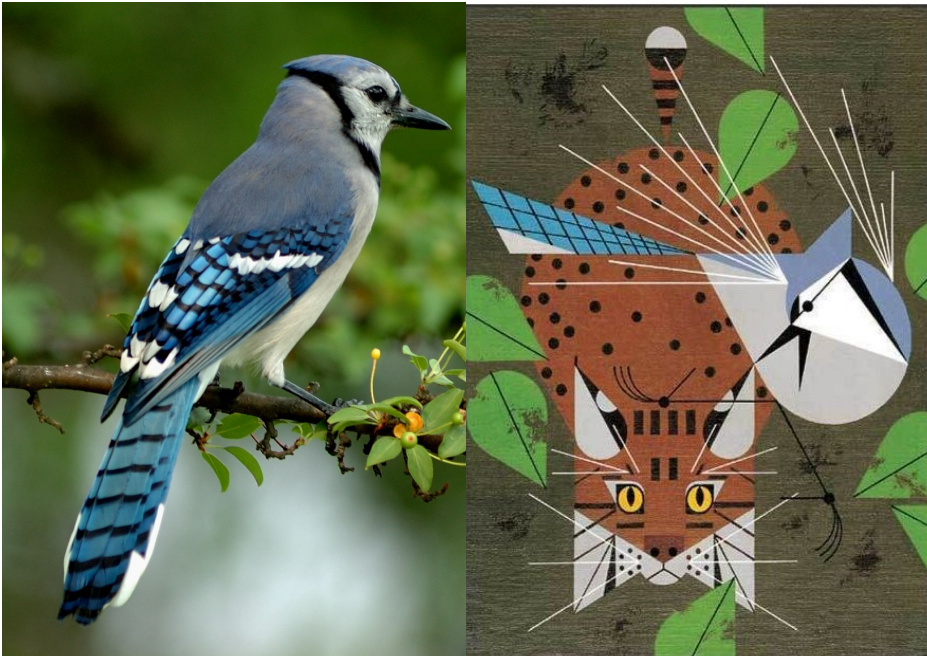
American Robin

Turdus migratorius

Robins are very common here, especially in the spring and summer. You've probably heard them singing very early in the morning.

Male robins have a gray head and wings, with a brick red breast. Female robins are similar but their heads are lighter gray.





Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Blue jays are easily recognizable because of their bright colors. They are omnivorous and eat seeds, nuts, mice, insects, and even smaller birds and bird eggs.

Both males and females are vivid blue with white and black markings

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Archilochus colubris

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are the most common hummingbirds in the area. They are able to not only fly forward, but backwards and can hover in mid-air.

Males have an iridescent ruby red patch on its throat. A female's throat is white.



Great Horned Owl

Bubo virginianus

Great horned owls are active at night and rest during the day. Their primary diet is rodents and small mammals, such as rabbits and mice.

Both males and females are colored for camouflage. They are lighter underneath with complex brown and darker markings along their sides

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

You'll probably hear that a woodpecker is in the area before you see it. They make a distinctive drumming noise with their beaks as they drill into bark looking for insects and larvae.

Red-bellied woodpeckers have black and white backs with pale red bellies. Males have a red crown and females are red just on the back of their head.



Wood Thrush

Hylocichla mustelina

While the female wood thrush is not known to sing, the male has a unique three part song. Males can even sing two notes at once.

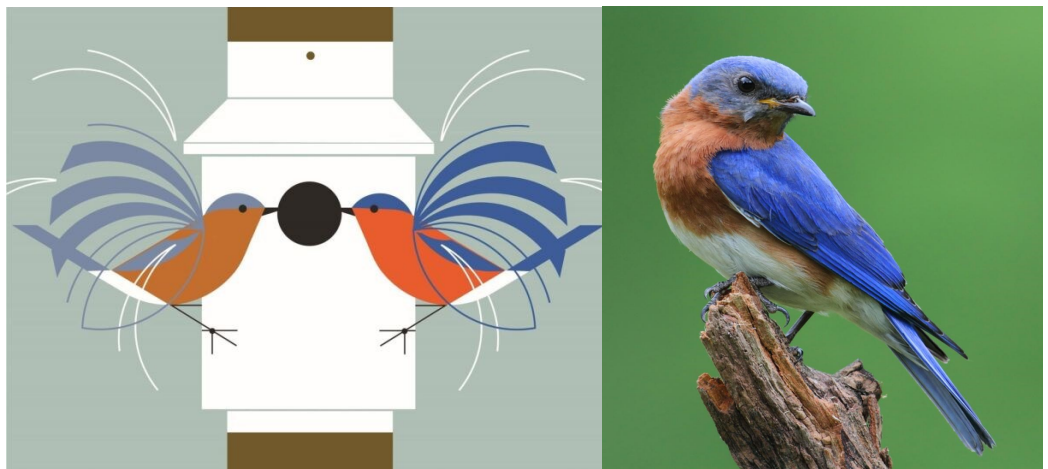
Both males and females have brown upper parts with mottled brown and white underparts.

Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

The eastern bluebird is common here year-round. Their diet is mostly insects and berries.

Males are a vibrant blue on top with a rusty throat and chest. Females are grayish on top with bluish wings and a dull orange-brown chest.



Next time you're playing in your backyard, walking down the street, or visiting a park see if you can find any of these birds! Using Harper's method of selecting the key characteristics of each animal, what are some features of other birds that you see around? If you search for those features online, can you find out what kind of bird it is?