

Look-alike Winter Bird Identification

This guide compares five pairs of look-alike birds found in Arkansas. The species in the left column is a common permanent resident in Arkansas. The species in the right column is found in the state only in the winter and is less common than the other species. Note that Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks come in light and dark morphs; consult a field guide.

Cooper's Hawk - Adult

- crow-sized, 14-20" long
- red eye
- dense orange barring on breast and belly
- black crown and gray nape give capped appearance, sometimes looks crested
- legs thicker
- tail tip rounded, broader terminal band
- when soaring, head projects beyond wings, giving cross-like appearance
- slower wing beats

Sharp-shinned Hawk - Adult

- jay-sized, 10-14" long
- red eye
- dense orange barring on breast and belly
- black crown and nape give hooded appearance, never crested
- legs thinner, pencil-like
- tail tip squared, thinner white band
- when soaring, wings pushed forward at wrists so head looks pushed in
- faster, more erratic wing beats

Cooper's Hawk - Juvenile

- brown back
- yellow eye, no stripe above eye
- brown streaks on breast and belly

Sharp-shinned Hawk - Juvenile

- brown back
- yellow eye, pale stripe above eye
- reddish streaks on breast, bars on belly

Red-tailed Hawk

- adult tail red above, juvenile tail with brown bands
- streaked belly band
- underside of wing with dark bar on leading edge, thin dark crescent at wrist
- indistinct, speckled white V on back
- dark face

Rough-legged Hawk

- tail white with wide black terminal or sub-terminal band
- belly with dark "vest"
- underside of wing with dark patch at wrist, primaries with clean white bases
- plain brown back
- usually pale face

House Finch

- male with brown streaked sides and belly beyond red breast; grayish ears
- female with plain head pattern
- top edge of bill (culmen) curved
- flight call a soft, husky *vweet*

Purple Finch

- male without brown streaks, red streaks down sides instead; redder ears
- female with bold brown and white head
- culmen straight
- flight call a light, hard *pik*

American Goldfinch - Winter

- male with yellow on face, neck, coverts; unstreaked underparts
- female gray-brown with less yellow than male; unstreaked underparts
- round, conical bill
- song a high musical warble
- flight call soft whistled "potato-chip"

Pine Siskin

- male with yellow wing bars and wing stripe; streaked underparts
- female with less yellow than male, white wing bar, yellow wing stripe; streaked
- thin, pointed bill
- song a husky warble with rising buzz
- flight call high sharp *kdeew*, dull *bid bid*