

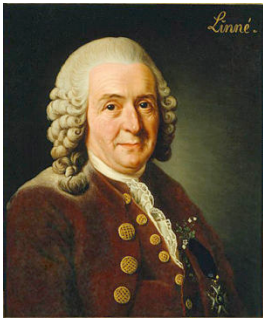
What Are Birds?

Origin of Birds

Birds are very complex animals that have descended from the reptile-like Archaeopteryx. The Archaeopteryx (which stands for ancient wing,) is the first known bird, and first appeared about 140 million years ago. This creature was about the size of a young pheasant, had a reptile like head with scales and a jaw full of sharp teeth. Its wings had claws at the tips, and its body ended with a long, heavy tail. What made it unique, and classified this creature as bird, was it has feathers and it was warm-blooded (reptiles are cold-blooded.)



Taxonomy



All animals are classified based on their similar characteristics. This is called Taxonomy, created by Carolus Linnaeus in 1751. All living things are classified in order to make studying and learning about them easier. Just like when you go to the store you can find an item by figuring out what type of group it belongs to, and it helps you locate that item in the store. The Taxonomy classification seven categories, which start with the most general and leading to more specific as you move down through the categories. They are:

Kingdom- belonging to the animal, plant, or mineral domain

Phylum- animals or plants are put into subdivisions

Class- things are grouped based on characteristics

Order- animals and plants are grouped on similarities

Family- animals and plants that are related

Genus- this is the first part of an organism's scientific name

Species- the second part of an organism's scientific name

Classification of Birds

Our birds today are ancestors of the Archaeopteryx. Birds have five main characteristics that classify them as a bird. For one, they are warm-blooded, which means their blood and body temperature remain about the same no matter what the temperature or climate is around them. Also, birds are classified as the only animals with feathers. In addition, birds are classified because they have beaks, without teeth, they lay shelled eggs, and they have hollow bones. These five characteristics are how scientists determine whether an animal is a bird, and is placed into the bird, or Aves, category.



Placing Birds into an Order

After an animal is classified as a bird, scientists begin to sort birds into groups based on similar features and place them into an **Order**. This can be difficult however, as there are over 9000 species of birds! Scientists use a bird's foot and beak structure to place a bird into a specific order. Taxonomists have agreed that there are 5 main groups of birds based on beaks and feet.

5 Non-Scientific Groups of Birds

1. Birds of Prey- such as eagles, hawks, and owls.
2. Perching Birds- such as robins, thrushes, and orioles.
3. Non-Perching Birds- such as woodpeckers, doves, and quail.
4. Wading Birds- such as blue herons, ibis, and egrets.
5. Swimming Birds- such as ducks, geese, and swans.

