

# Flight: Bird Wings

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify the wing type for each of these birds using the information on the reverse side of this page along with the photos and wingspans below.



## Wing Types

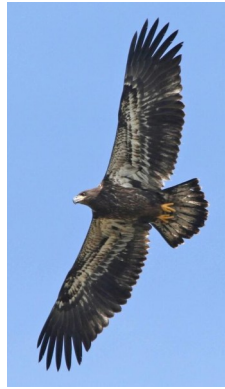
Active soaring

Passive soaring

Elliptical

Hovering

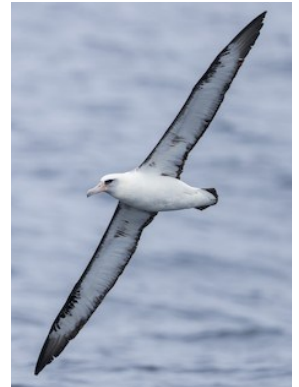
High-speed



Bald Eagle  
Wingspan: 80 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



Forster's Tern  
Wingspan: 30 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



Laysan Albatross  
Wingspan: 78 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



Downy Woodpecker  
Wingspan: 10 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Wingspan: 4 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



American Robin  
Wingspan: 14 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_



Peregrine Falcon  
Wingspan: 40 inches  
Type: \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus!** Pteranodons are flying reptiles—not birds!—that lived during the Cretaceous Period. Based on this photo and wingspan, what bird wing type do you think it most closely resembles?

\_\_\_\_\_

What type of flying would you expect from Pteranodons?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*Pteranodon*, The Natural History Museum, London  
Wingspan: 20 feet

## Types of Bird Wings

Bird wings come in a variety of shapes and sizes, depending on the type of flight for which a particular species is adapted. Ornithologists have grouped wing shapes into these basic types:

**Active soaring wings** are very long and narrow. They are especially common among seabirds. This shape lets birds glide on air currents with little effort, traveling long distances while rarely needing to flap their wings.

**Passive soaring wings** are large and have long primary feathers that spread out, creating "slots" that allow the bird to catch vertical columns of hot air called thermals and rise higher in the air. Examples of birds with this wing type include big inland-flying birds such as vultures and hawks.

**Elliptical wings** give their owners the ability to maneuver in tight spaces and fly quickly in short bursts, but not to stay airborne for long periods of time. This type of wing is common in birds that live in forests. Examples of birds that have this wing type are crows and ravens.

**High-speed wings** are long—but not as long as soaring wings—and pointed. By beating their wings quickly, birds with high-speed wings can fly incredibly fast and maintain their speed. Examples of birds with high-speed wings are swifts, ducks, and sandpipers.

**Hovering wings** are small and quick. In addition to the wing size and shape, the bird's muscles are specially adapted for incredibly fast movement.

Information and photos courtesy of:

The **Cornell** Lab  
of Ornithology 

 **American Bird  
Conservancy**





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