

FeederWatch Birds Sketching Tutorial

Subject: Black-capped Chickadee



Why draw birds?

- Heightens your level of observation
- Helps you to appreciate the bird in a bit more intimate detail and see it from a different perspective
- Allows you to focus in on key features/ body positions
- Removes background noise
- It helps you to remember details (I used to draw different species of birds when I was trying to learn how to ID them to help me commit them to memory)

Key Components

- Everyone has a different drawing style. So if your drawing doesn't look exactly like mine that's good- every artist is going to emphasize different features.
- Start with simple shapes that aren't so overwhelming and slowly add more detail. Always think of your subject as a series of shapes.
- Make sure you're adding contrast to emphasize the differences in features of the bird, whether this is contrast in line type, value, texture etc. Contrast always makes things look more lifelike.

Did you know?

Black-capped Chickadees are reported at 90% of feeders in Canada that participate in Project FeederWatch. Their favourite feeder foods are sunflower, safflower, hulled peanuts, suet, peanut butter mixes, bird puddings, and water but they'll also eat mixed seed, millet, canary seed, cracked corn, milo, niger, peanuts in shell or hearts, oats, canola, pet food, fruit (fresh or dried), meat scraps, baked goods, and popped corn.

Basic Steps to Draw a Bird

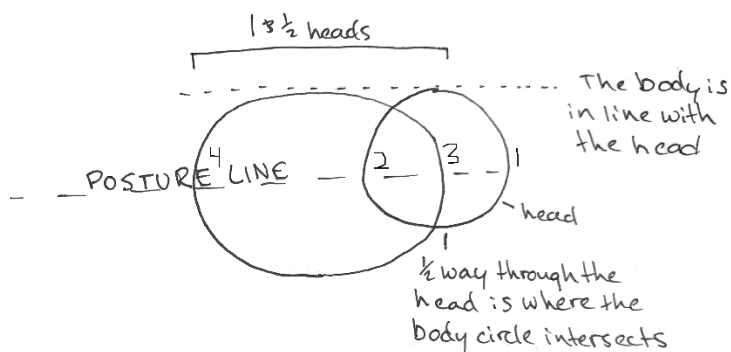
1) Basic shape and posture

- Draw the head

I like to draw the head first and then use that to proportion the rest of the bird.

- Draw the body circle
- Indicate a posture line

Birds sit at different angles. Sometimes a bird's posture is characteristic of the species, so it's important to draw a line to indicate the direction the bird is leaning to capture its species and behaviour.



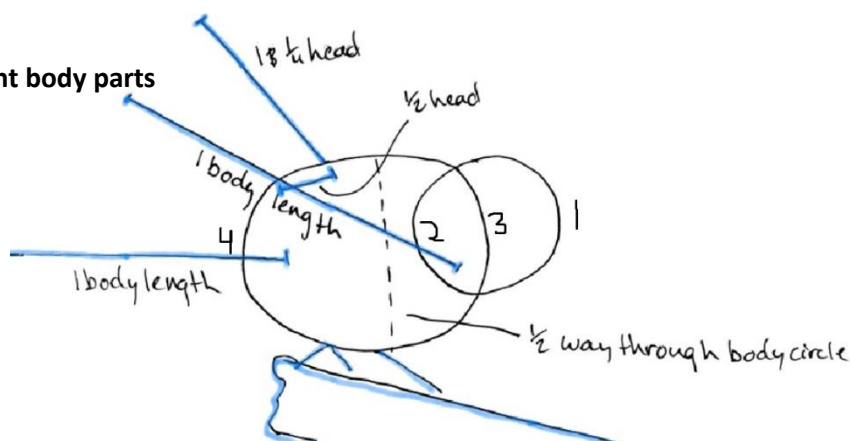
2) Using proportions to add in important body parts

- Use the head to measure other body parts against

By having a reference point, you make sure that everything is in proportion

- Use tick marks and lines to indicate the positions of things

By indicating the position of things rather than immediately drawing it in, you make it a lot easier for yourself to move things around and worry about only the proportions and angles of parts.

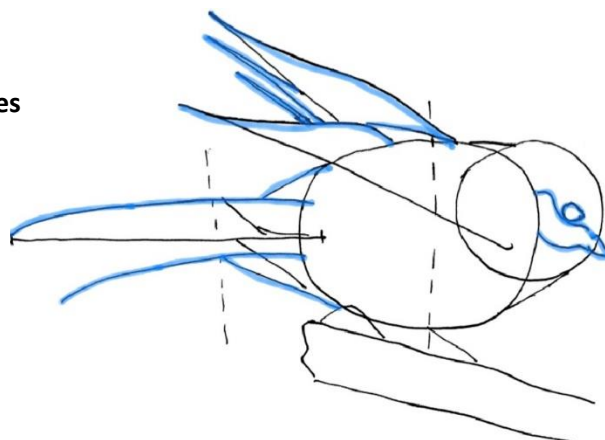


3) Carve in angles and some key features

- Carve in angles to make the bird look less round

As we all know, birds aren't a series of circles and lines. Carving angles helps give the bird shape.

- Outline the rest of the key features



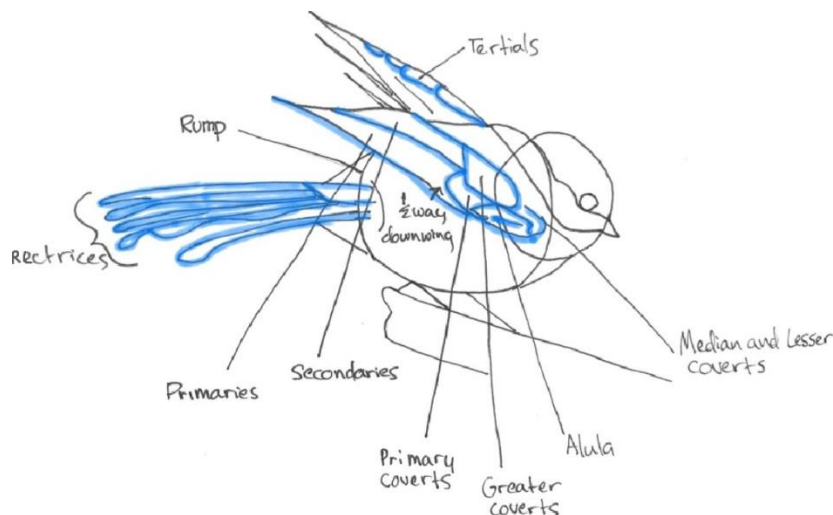
Did you know?

Chickadees like to hide seeds and other food items to eat later. They can remember thousands of hiding spots, which is pretty impressive for such a tiny bird, and the reason why a chickadee will fly back and forth to your feeder all day long.

4) Indicate feather groups

- Draw feather groups and suggest feathers rather than drawing each individually

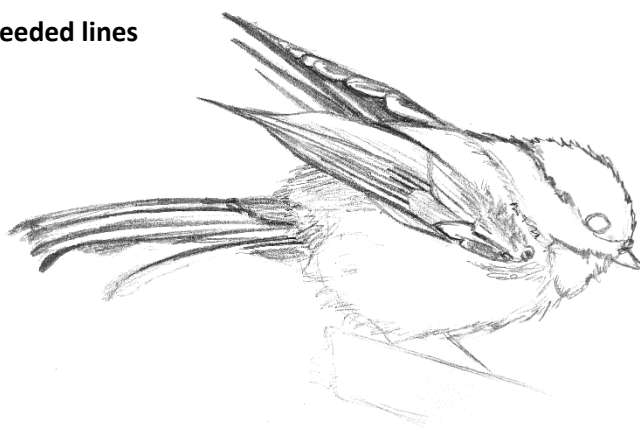
You want to try to draw feather groups and suggest feathers rather than drawing each individual feather, which can make your bird look scaly. Refer to the diagram on the back of your handout to help you understand the feather groups. You do not by any means need to know the names of the different groups, just know that the feathers are in groups.



5) Adding in basic details and removing unneeded lines

- Erase all unneeded lines
- Lightly shade in the dark areas
- Start adding in feathers around the outlines

Again, suggest rather than draw. I generally just scribble to indicate where feathers should be and colour in dark spots.



6) Adding in contrast and details

- Continue building upon the areas you've shaded in
- Always start light and go darker - it's easier to darken than lighten
- This is where you add in all your details

For this part I like to switch up my drawing utensils. Up until this point I've just been using a regular HB pencil (same as a mechanical pencil or any other normal pencil you'd have at home). I switch to a softer lead pencil (4B) to shade in darker areas and give my lines a more feathery look and I'll use a harder lead pencil (e.g., 2H) for areas that I want to be shaded very lightly or to have crisp lines. For parts of the bird in motion, I like to smudge it a bit (e.g., for the tail) so I'll take either my finger or a smudger (essentially a rolled up piece of paper) and gently rub the area that I want to be blurry. At the very end, I like to use a pen for the eye to make the eye pop and look more alive, especially if the colour around the eye is rather dark.



Did you know?

The Black-capped Chickadee will shiver all night to keep warm during the cold winter months. No wonder they need to store up so much food.

Anatomy Tricks

Bills

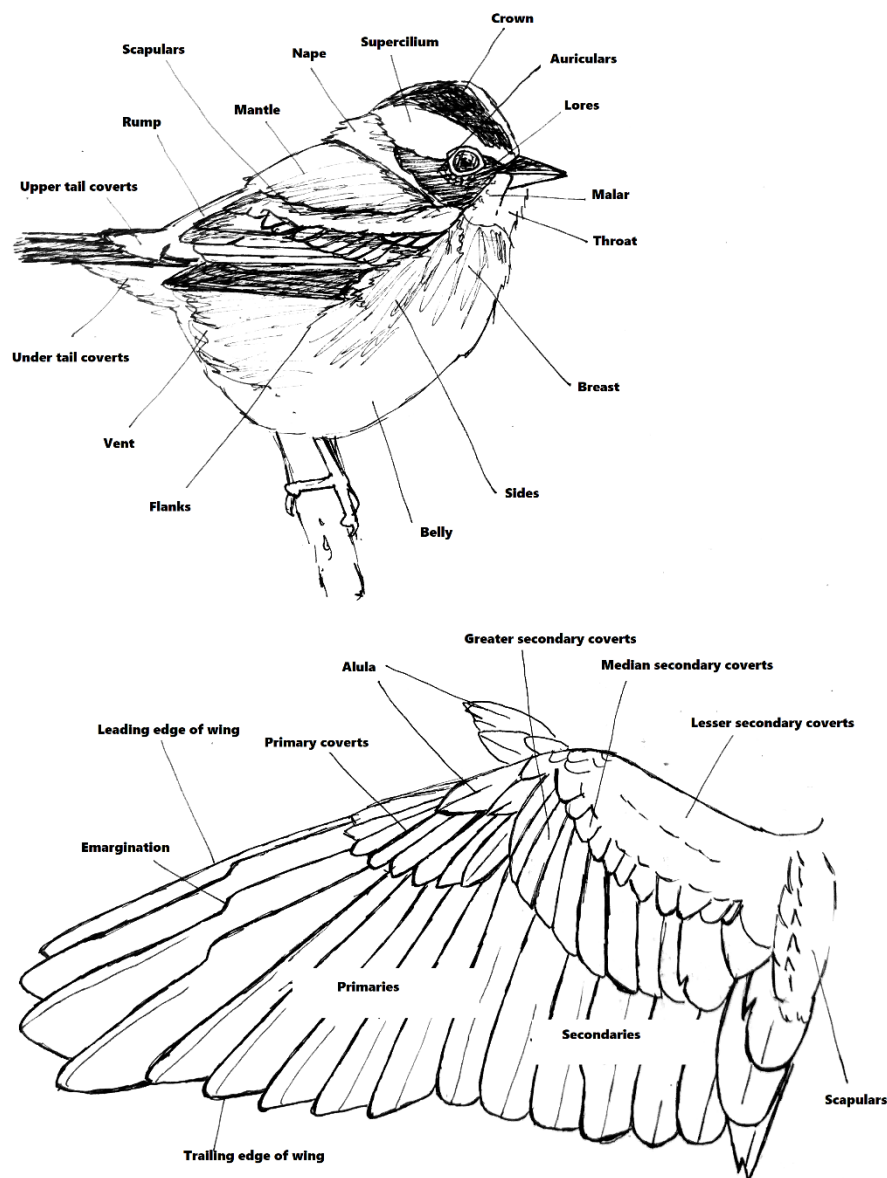
Keep in mind:

- The placement of the bill in reference to the eye;
- Its size compared to the rest of the head;
- Whether the bill is hooked, curved, or straight (this relates to their feeding habits).

Feathers

Keep in mind:

- The anatomy of the bird, so you can draw groups of feathers rather than each individually;
- Look for patterns of shape and markings among different birds, so that you can pick out key differences that are distinctive to each species.



References:

Laws, J.M. (2012). The Laws guide to drawing birds. Berkley, CA: Heyday.