

# BIRD BEAKS

Here are the main bird beak, or bill, types:

- Short, thick, curved, pointed beaks of hawks, falcons, and owls, adapted for ripping flesh. A nestling Barred Owl's beak is shown at the right
- Long, very slender beaks of hummingbirds, shown below, used for inserting into narrow-throated blossoms



- Short, wide beaks, sometimes with hooked tips, like that of the Vermilion Flycatcher shown at the right, are good for catching and holding onto flying insects. The amazing picture by Dan Sudia at



the left is that of a Lesser Nighthawk. Notice the bumps inside this bird's wide, short-beaked mouth. Those bumps are actually backward-pointing in such a way that they help the bird hold onto its food, and keep the food moving in the right direction. Actually most bird mouths are equipped with similar protuberances.



- Short, slender beaks adapted for probing into tight places such as bark fissures on tree trunks where small insects, spiders, and other creatures might be wedged; found among warblers, vireos, kinglets, gnatcatchers, and others such as the Tufted Titmouse shown at the left..

- Short, stubby, but powerful



beaks adapted for grinding small seeds, found among sparrows, finches, juncos, and others, such as the Evening Grosbeak shown at the right.



- Fairly long, thick, chisel-like beaks of woodpecker adapted for drilling wood and chipping away tree bark and even for drilling into the tree's inner bark, as shown on the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker shown at the left

- Plus, there are all kinds of specialized beaks such as the one shown on the White Pelican at the right. The pelican will crash into the water and come up with a fish in its beak. It may flip the fish in the air and catch in again, with a more secure hold, and then swallow it. As the fish goes down you might see that the beak's bottom part is somewhat baggy. It's sort of like a leather bag that can expand if there's a big fish in it. You've seen in cartoons how pelicans have incredibly big pouches in which they can place their suitcases. In real life the pouches aren't as big, but they certainly can expand to hold a big fish.



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