

Aves

Birds are currently considered a subset of reptiles, although most still count them in their own class of animals. Birds are warm-blooded, have hollow bones, feathers, and lay eggs. There are about 10,000 species of birds throughout the world. We will only be looking at selected categories.

Birds developed along with the dinosaurs, and are considered to be a sister-clade. They are most closely related to the crocodylian reptiles. The living group of birds is called neornithes, and there are the ancient-jawed birds, and modern-jawed birds. Here is the breakdown:

Neornithes – modern birds

Paleognathae – ancient jaws

Struthioniformes - Ostriches, kiwi, emu, rhea

Tinamiformes - Tinamou

Neognathae – modern jaws

Galloanserae

Anseriformes – ducks, geese, swans

Galliformes – poultry such as pheasants, quail, turkeys, chickens, pea fowl, etc.

Neoaves – everything else

Struthioniformes – Ostriches etc.

These birds are also called ratites – named after the word for raft. All are flightless, with the ostrich as the largest living ratite, and the smallest being a kiwi – about the size of a chicken. All come from the southern hemisphere and ancient Gondwanaland. Ratites have no keel, meaning they don't have a sternum that would allow for flight.



Tinamiformes – the tinamou

The tinamou family lives in Central and South America. They can fly short distances, but do not have strong enough muscles for long flight. They live near the ground.

Galloanserae – birds people eat

The anseriformes are ducks, geese, swans, and many duck-like birds such as eiders and mergansers. All are water-loving and have webbed feet. Some label these as water fowl, or game fowl. The galliformes, or pangalliformes, are poultry, pheasants, and similar birds. These are considered land fowl. All of these birds can begin to look after themselves soon after hatching.



Neoaves

All other birds are neoaves, or “new birds.” A list of these is extensive, but here is a partial:

Birds of prey – hawks, eagles, vultures, plus falcons like the kestrel, and separately - owls

Water birds – waders, gulls, auks, skuas, snipe, puffins, plovers, avocets, stilts, sandpipers, phalaropes, flamingos, grebes

Non-perching birds: Cranes, rails, cuckoos – and several relatives, cormorants, loons, storks, penguins, pelicans, frigates, anhingas

Pigeons and Doves – they don't really fit into anything else

Near-perching – Kingfishers and hornbills, woodpeckers and toucans

Parrots – their own group

Perching birds – wrens, flycatchers, songbirds, crows, jays, orioles, swallows, dippers, finches, sparrows, cardinals, and many others.

