

# Identifying Hawks in Flight using the SPASMATIC method:

**S**HAPE (*relative sizes and proportions of wings, tail, and head*)

**P**ATTERN/PLUMAGE (*contrasting patterns of dark and light*)

**A**CTIONS (*How does the bird fly or what is it doing?*)

**S**IZE (*how big is the bird in comparison to other birds*)

**M**ULTIPLE

**A**TTIBUTES (*use as many of the above characteristics as possible*)

**T**RUST

**I**N THE

**C**ONCEPT (*believe in your ability to judge these characteristics*)

Since 80% of hawks in flight are identified mostly by **shape**, this presentation concentrates on identifying subtle shape differences in the most common migratory raptors found in Texas.

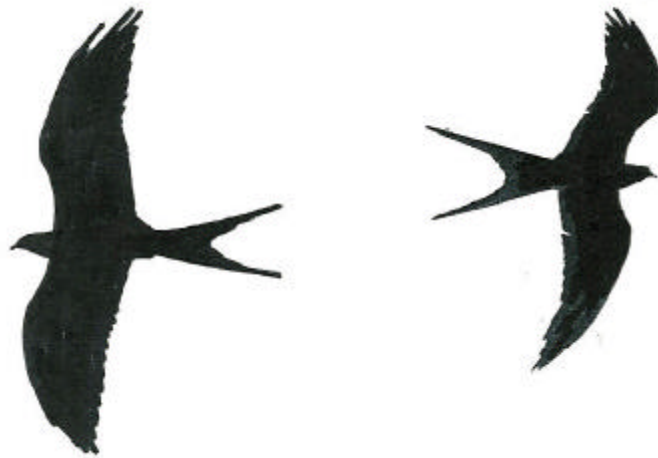
Most raptors in Texas fall into  
**4 shape categories**

<b>KITES</b>	<b>Long pointed wings/ Long Tail</b>
<b>FALCONS</b>	<b>Shorter pointed wings/ Shorter tail</b>
<b>BUTEOS</b>	<b>Long rounded wings/ Wide short tail</b>
<b>ACCIPITERS</b>	<b>Short rounded wings/ Long tail</b>

When trying to identify raptors in flight, first try to determine which group a bird belongs to. Then note specifics about relative shape and size of wings, tail, and head.

The following pages present silhouettes of raptors in flight, followed by clues as to their identity. The identification of each silhouette is provided on the last page.

### **Bird #1**



Clues:

- long, pointed wings and long tail
- unique forked tail

## Bird #2



7

### Clues:

- Long rounded wings, short wide tail.
- Bulging trailing edge of wings at secondaries (“biceps”)
- Fairly distinct “fingers”

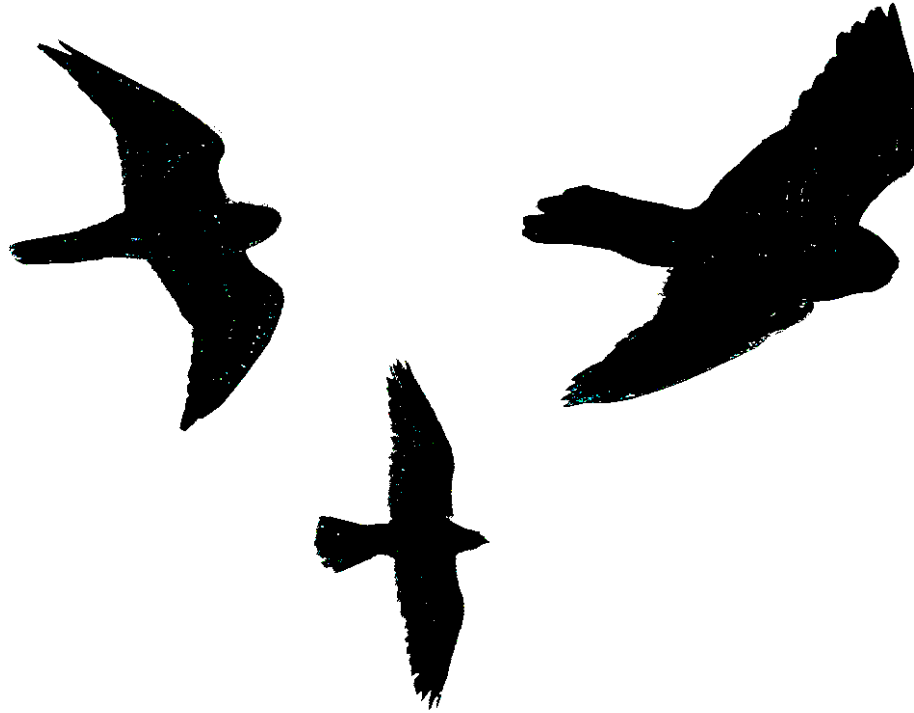
## Bird #3



### Clues:

- Short rounded wings
- Long narrow tail
- Crooked bent forwing (in soar)
- Square or notched tail.
- Trailing edge of wing curves in “s-shape”
- Small head

## Bird #4



### Clues:

- Medium-length pointed wings and relatively long tail
- Relatively heavy wings
- Large head and heavy body

## Bird #5



### Clues:

- Short tail
- Wide wings
- Relatively small head

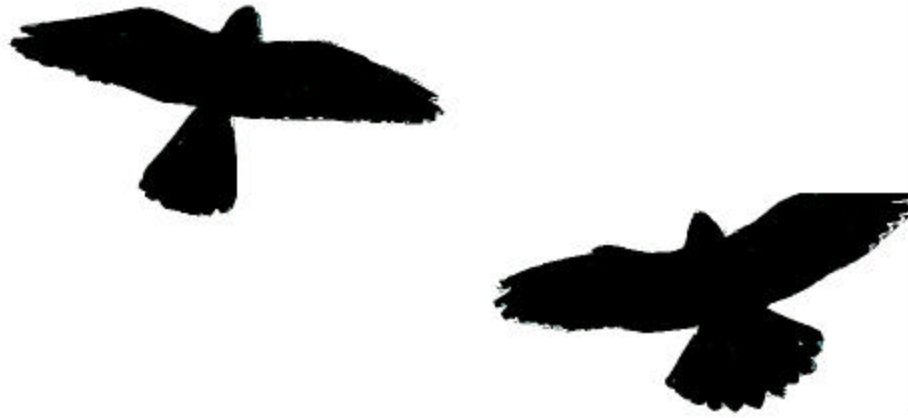
## Bird #6



### Clues:

- Long rounded wings and wide tail
- Long wing with a wide base, narrowing at the forewing (“forearm”).
- No bulging secondaries of Red-tailed Hawk.
- Heavy body

## Bird #7



### Clues:

- Rather short and broad pointed wings.
- Fairly wide tail
- Tail attaches where wings attach to body--but looks like tail is loosely attached or might come off.



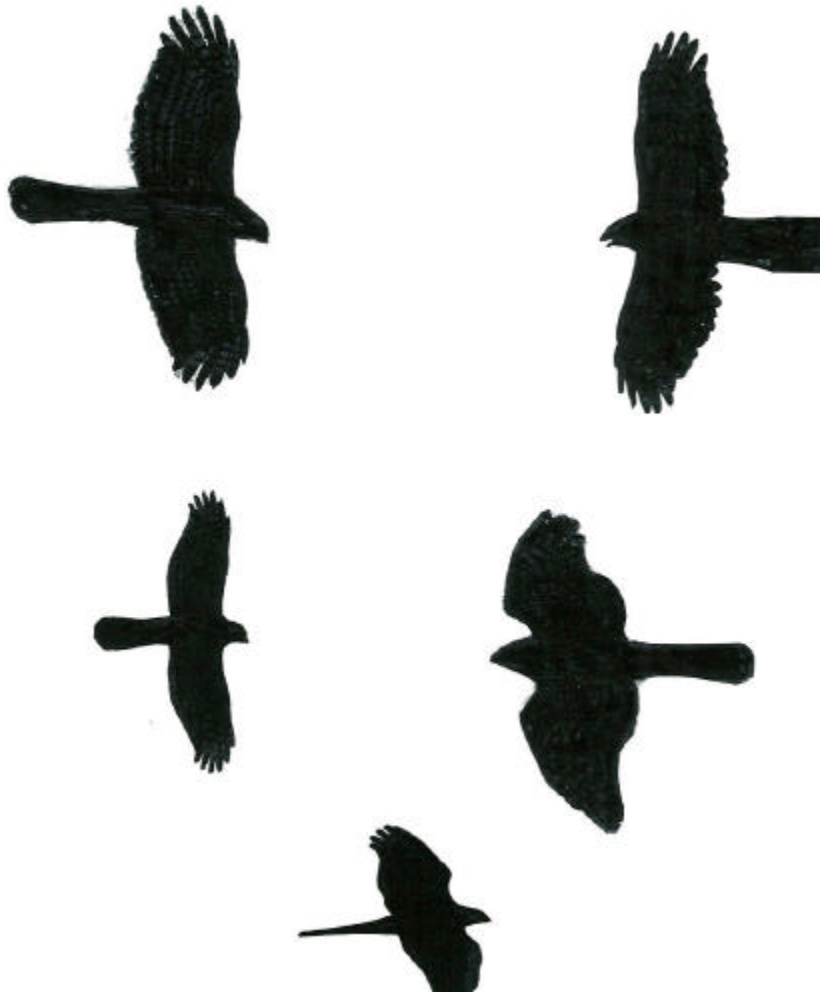
## Bird #8



Clues:

- Pointed wings and relatively short tail.
- Big head.
- Very wide wings.

## Bird #9



### Clues:

- Short rounded wings, long tail.
- Big head, rounded tail tip, straight leading edge of wing (in soar).
- Trailing edge of wing mostly rounded in one smooth curve.

## Bird #10



Clues:

- Long pointed wings.
- Triangular long tail.

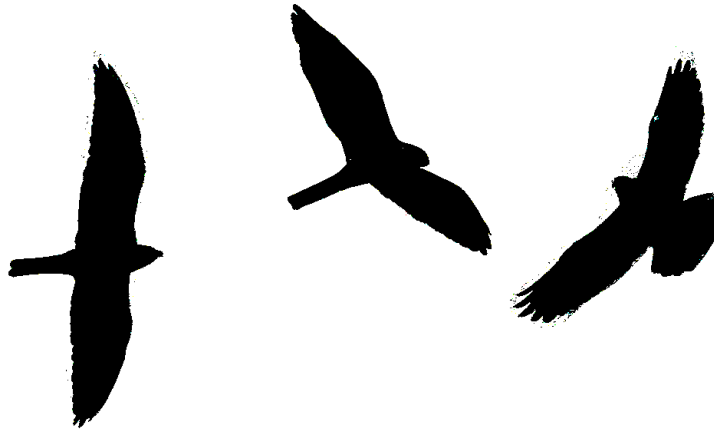
## Bird #11



Clues:

- Long, rounded wings and wide tail.
- Small “fingers” and “hands”
- Straight, even-width wings.
- Slightly pointed wings.

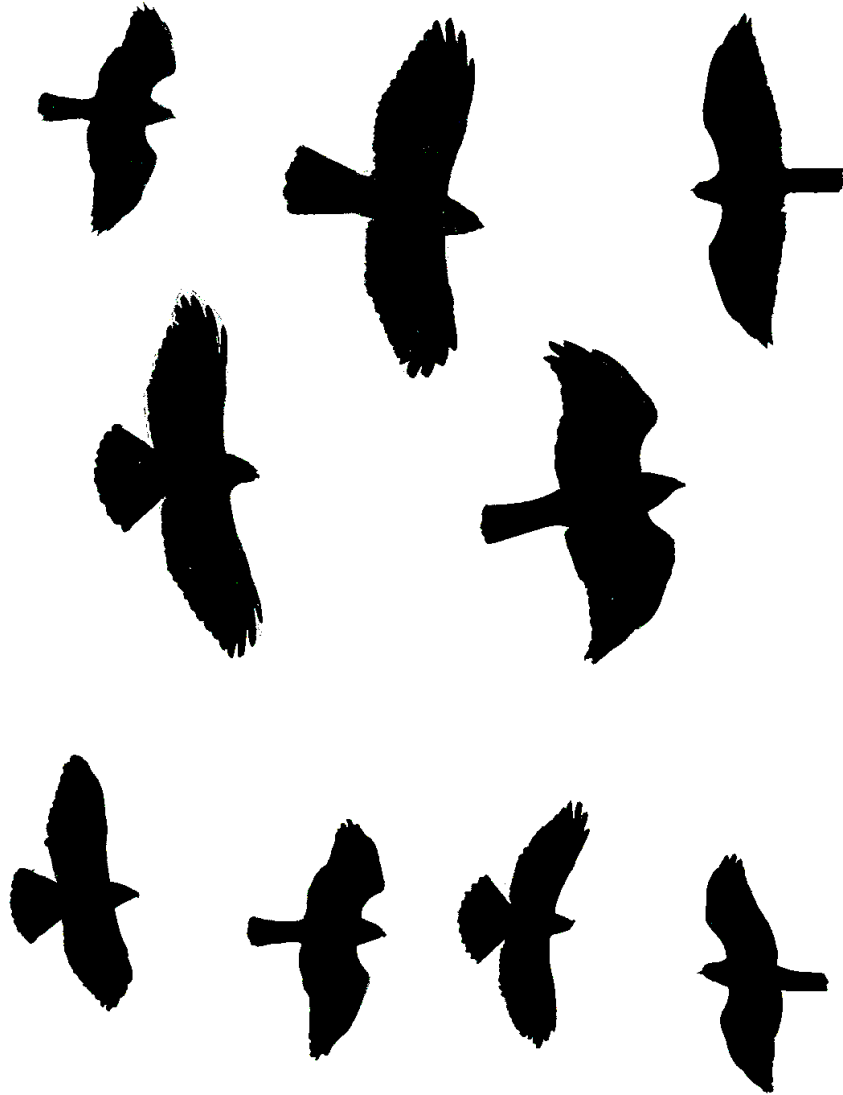
## Bird #12



### Clues:

- Long, pointed wing and long tail.
- Skinny tail
- Wings look very wide and “heavy”

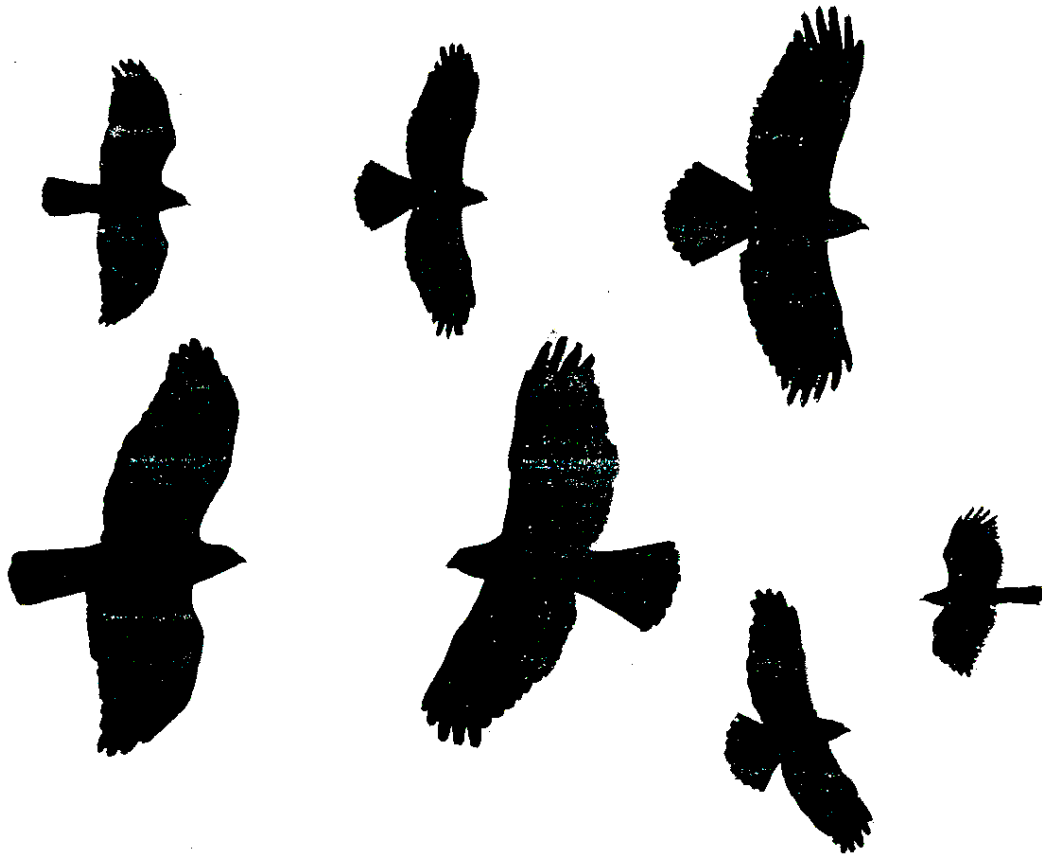
## Bird #13



### Clues:

- Long rounded wings, wide tail.
- Wings on the short side, and very wide.
- Relatively short tail.
- Slightly pointed wingtip “middle finger”

## Bird #14



### Clues:

- Long, rounded wings and wide tail.
- Relatively short wings, pinched in at body.
- Wing tips lack point or “middle finger”
- Wings held slightly forward.

## Bird #15

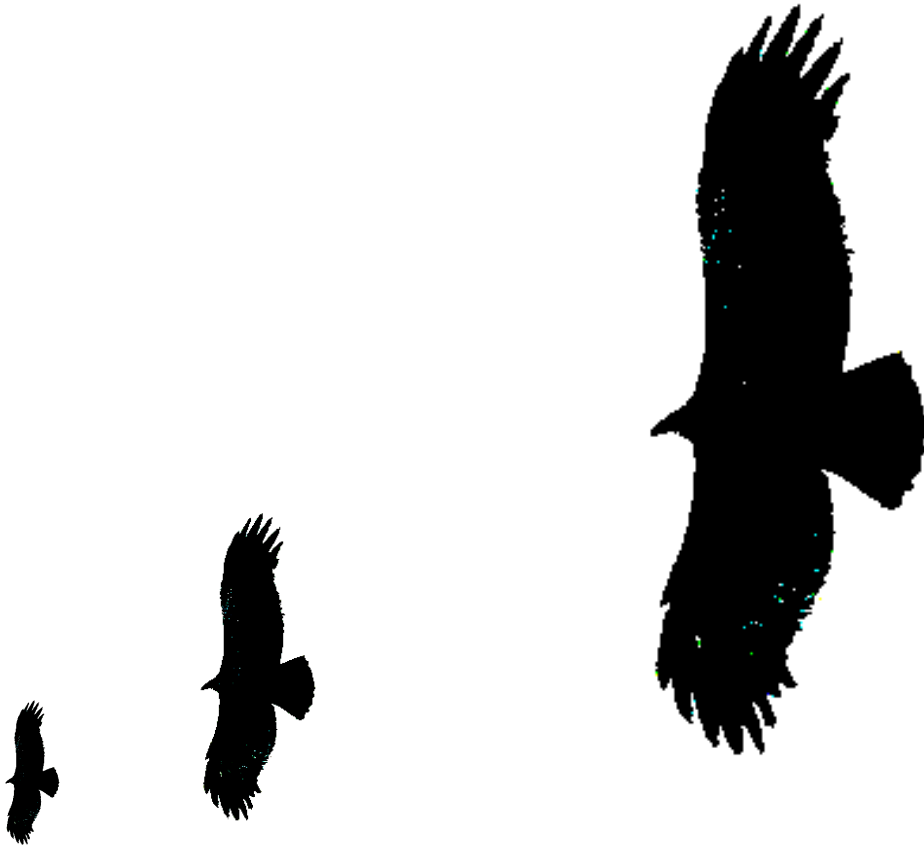


### Clues:

- Long rounded wings, long narrow tail.
- Fairly pronounced fingers with wide “hand”
- Soars with wings upheld in dihedral.



## Bird #16



Clues:

- Wide, even-width wings with large fingers and heavy “hands”
- Longish tail.
- Tiny head.

## Bird #17



10

Clues:

- Long rounded wings, wide tail.
- No bulging secondaries.
- Large bodied with shortish tail.

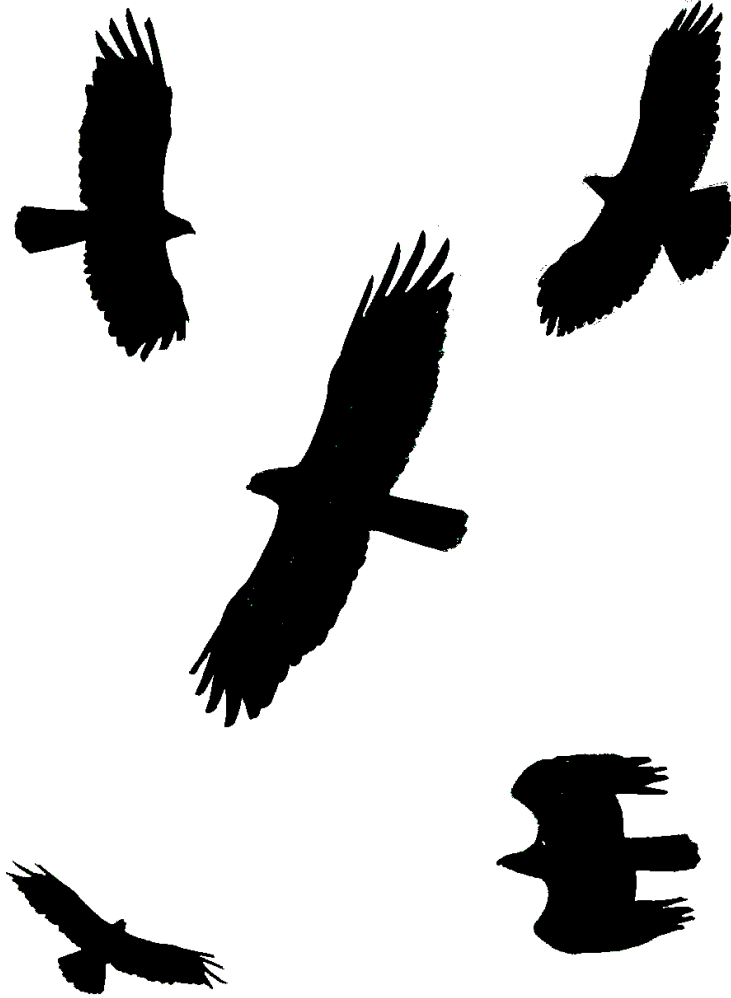
## Bird #18



### Clues:

- Very wide long wings.
- Very wide short tail.
- Large body and large head.
- Pronounced “fingers”

## Bird #19



Clues:

- Long rounded wings and wide tail.
- Tail and wings on the long side.
- Very long fingers.

## Bird #20



### Clues:

- Long crooked “M” shaped wings
- Wing tips rounded with strong “middle finger”
- Fairly wide, short tail.

## Bird #21

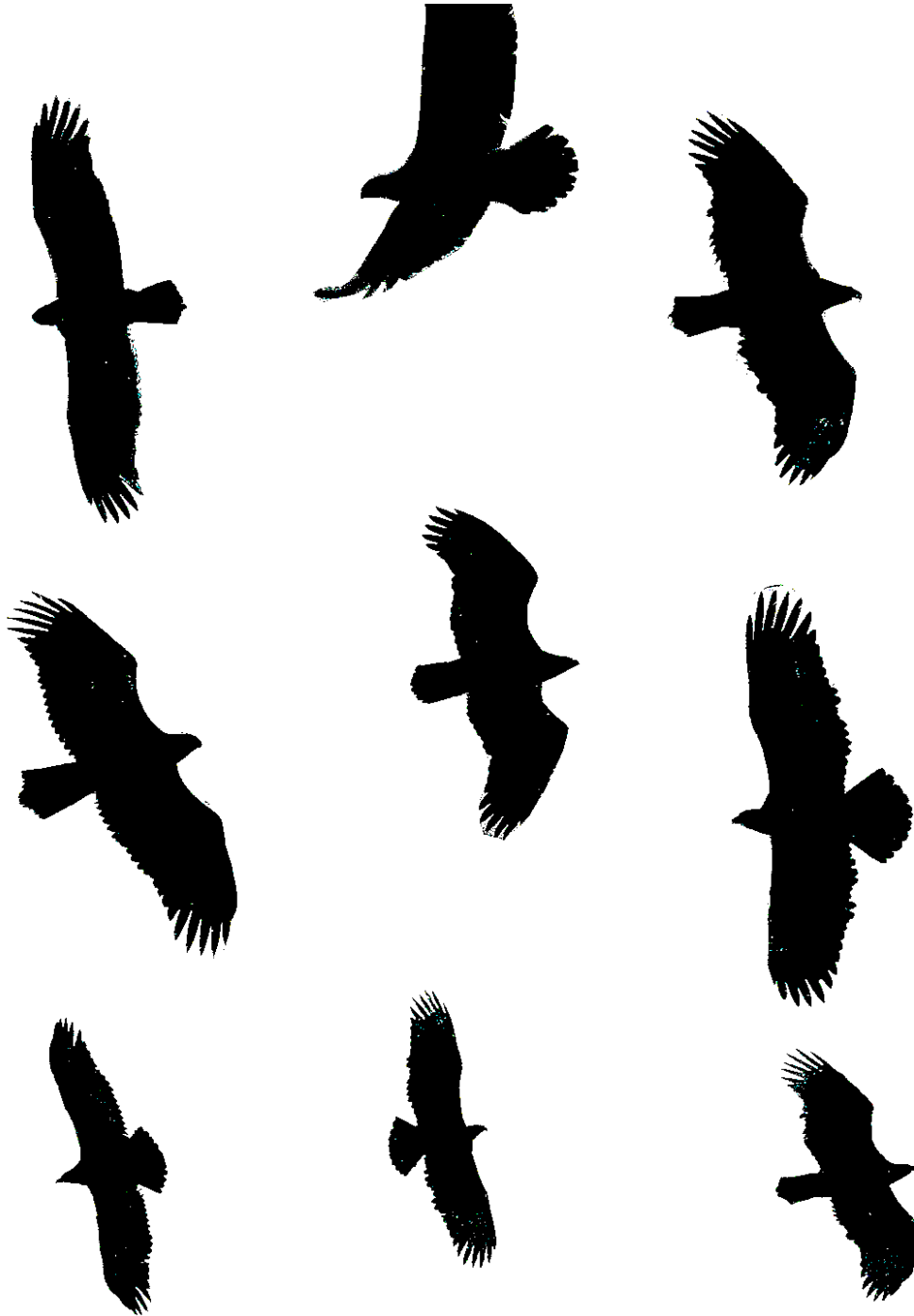
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Clues:

- Comparatively huge wide wings and huge wide tail.
- Huge “fingers”
- Small head

## Bird #22



### Clues:

- Huge wide wings and large wide tail.
- Huge “fingers”
- Large head

## Bird #23



Clues:

- Huge head and neck
- Long tail
- Short even width rounded wings



## Identifications:

Bird #1	Swallow-tailed Kite
Bird #2	Red-tailed Hawk
Bird #3	Sharp-shinned Hawk
Bird #4	Peregrine Falcon
Bird #5	Black Vulture
Bird #6	Ferruginous Hawk
Bird #7	American Kestrel
Bird #8	Merlin
Bird #9	Cooper's Hawk
Bird #10	Mississippi Kite
Bird #11	Swainson's Hawk
Bird #12	White-tailed Kite
Bird #13	Broad-winged Hawk
Bird #14	Red-shouldered Hawk
Bird #15	Northern Harrier
Bird #16	Turkey Vulture
Bird #17	Rough-legged Hawk
Bird #18	White-tailed Hawk
Bird #19	Zone-tailed Hawk
Bird #20	Osprey
Bird #21	Golden Eagle
Bird #22	Bald Eagle
Bird #23	Crested Caracara

# Additional Tips

## Vultures

**Black:** large head, short tail (almost disappears)

**Turkey:** Tiny head, long tail (almost disappears)

## Accipiters

Flight characteristics helpful.

**Cooper's:** Larger bird with smoother, casual, heavier, less frequent flapping.

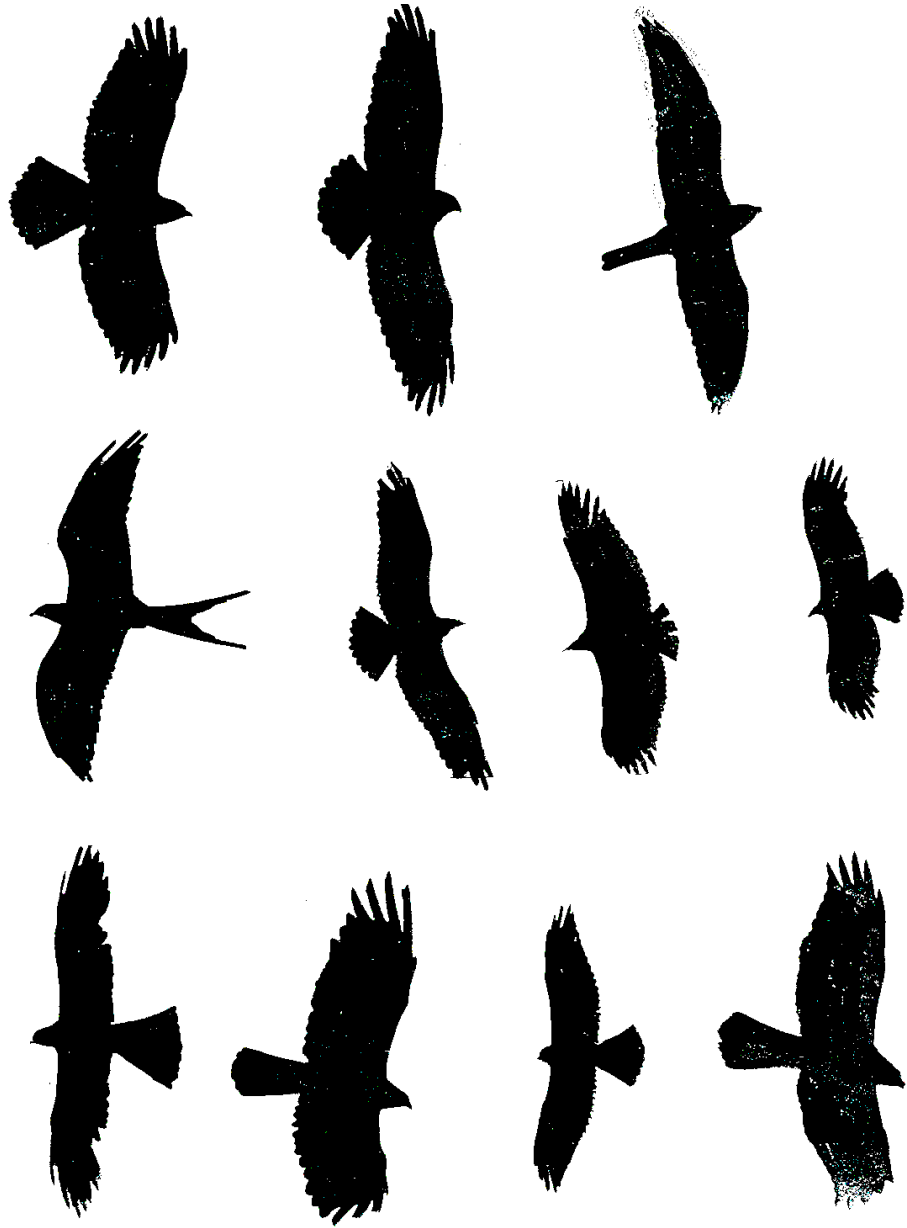
**Sharp-shinned:** Smaller bird, struggles to stay aloft, quicker, more frequent, snappier, deeper flapping.

## Falcons

Can be classified by size and overall darkness.

	<b>Light</b>	<b>Dark</b>
<b>Large</b>	Prairie Falcon	Peregrine Falcon
<b>Small</b>	American Kestrel	Merlin

# Quiz



## Answers

Red-shouldered Hawk    White-tailed Hawk    White-tailed Kite

Swallow-tailed Kite    Osprey    Black Vulture    Turkey Vulture

Mississippi Kite    Zone-tailed Hawk    Swainson's Hawk    Red-tailed Hawk

# Quiz



## Answers

Northern Harrier   Ferruginous Hawk   Rough-legged Hawk   Bald Eagle

Golden Eagle   Crested Caracara   Peregrine Falcon   American Kestrel

Merlin   Sharp-shinned Hawk   Cooper's Hawk   Broad-winged Hawk