

# Chimney Swift Sketching Tutorial- Seeing things in a different perspective



Reference photo copyright George Armistead; source: Birds of the World, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

## Why is it helpful to sketch birds?

- Heightens your level of observation.
- Helps you to appreciate the bird in more intimate detail and see it from a different perspective.
- Allows you to focus in on key features and body positions.
- Helps you to learn bird identification; drawing different species helps you to commit them to memory.

## Key Components

- Everyone has a different drawing style. So if your drawing does not look exactly like mine, then that is good - every artist will emphasize different features.
- Start with simple shapes that are not too overwhelming and slowly add more detail. Always think of your subject as a series of shapes.
- Make sure you are 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?

Before European colonization in North America Chimney Swifts were known as American Swifts and nested and roosted in hollow trees. Now Chimney Swifts nest almost exclusively in old masonry chimneys.

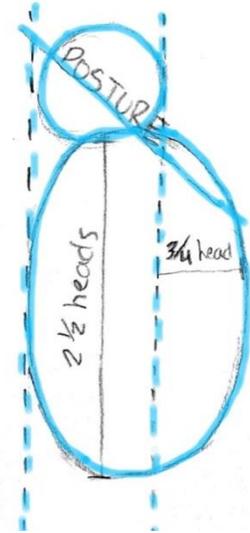
## 1) Basic shape and posture

- 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.



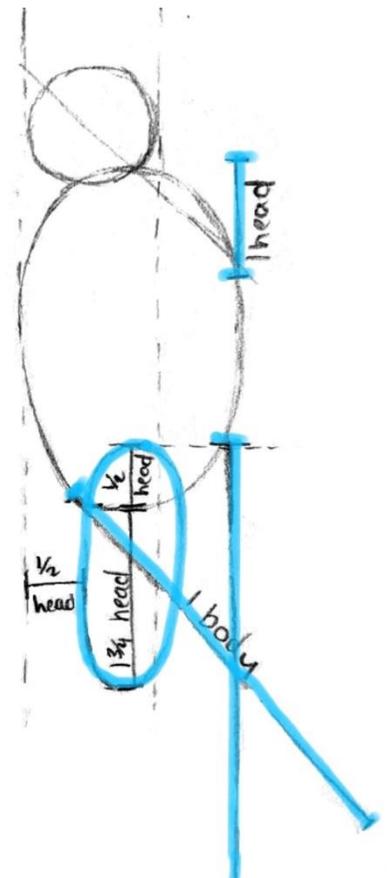
## 2) Using proportions to add in important body parts

- 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.



### Did you know?

Chimney Swifts do everything in flight. They eat flying insects, bathe, collect nest material and even mate in flight.

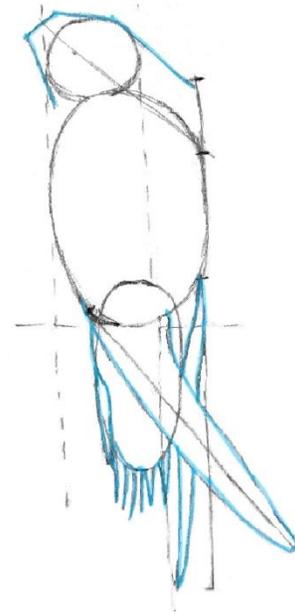
### 3) Carve in angles and some key features

- Carve in angles to make the bird look less round

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

- Outline the rest of the key features

Did you notice that the Chimney Swift's tail feathers end in spines? They use these spines to help them grip to whatever surface they are clinging to.



### 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.



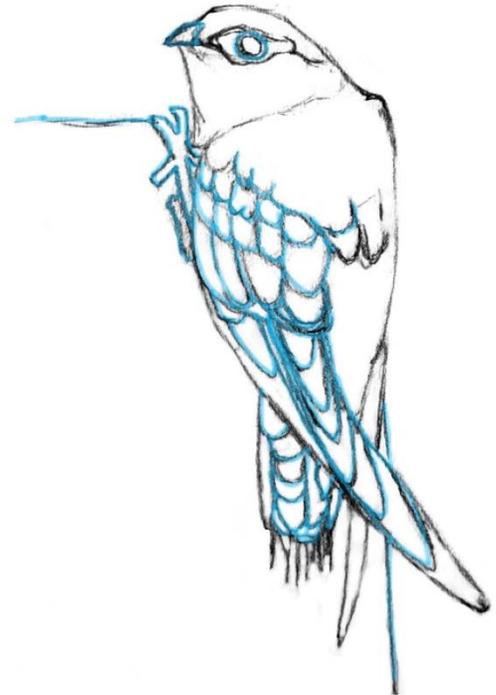
### Did you know?

Chimney Swift's toes are oriented in such a way that they cannot sit or stand like a typical bird you would think of such as a robin. Instead Chimney Swifts have to cling to a vertical surface, such as the inside of a chimney.

## 5) Adding in basic details and removing unneeded lines

- Erase all unneeded lines
- Start adding in feathers

Following the groupings that you marked out, add in the feathers that stand out. You do not need to add in every single feather, just the important ones. You can blend together all the other feathers in the next step.



## 6) Adding in contrast and details

- Start by shading in the darker parts
- Always start light and go darker; it is easier to darken than lighten
- Make sure that you leave light or white parts alone until the very end, especially the outlines of feathers
- 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 have 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 (ex. 4B) to shade in darker areas and give my lines a more feathery look and I will 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 will 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?

A single Chimney Swift can eat 1000 insects in a single day.

## Anatomy Tricks

### Bills

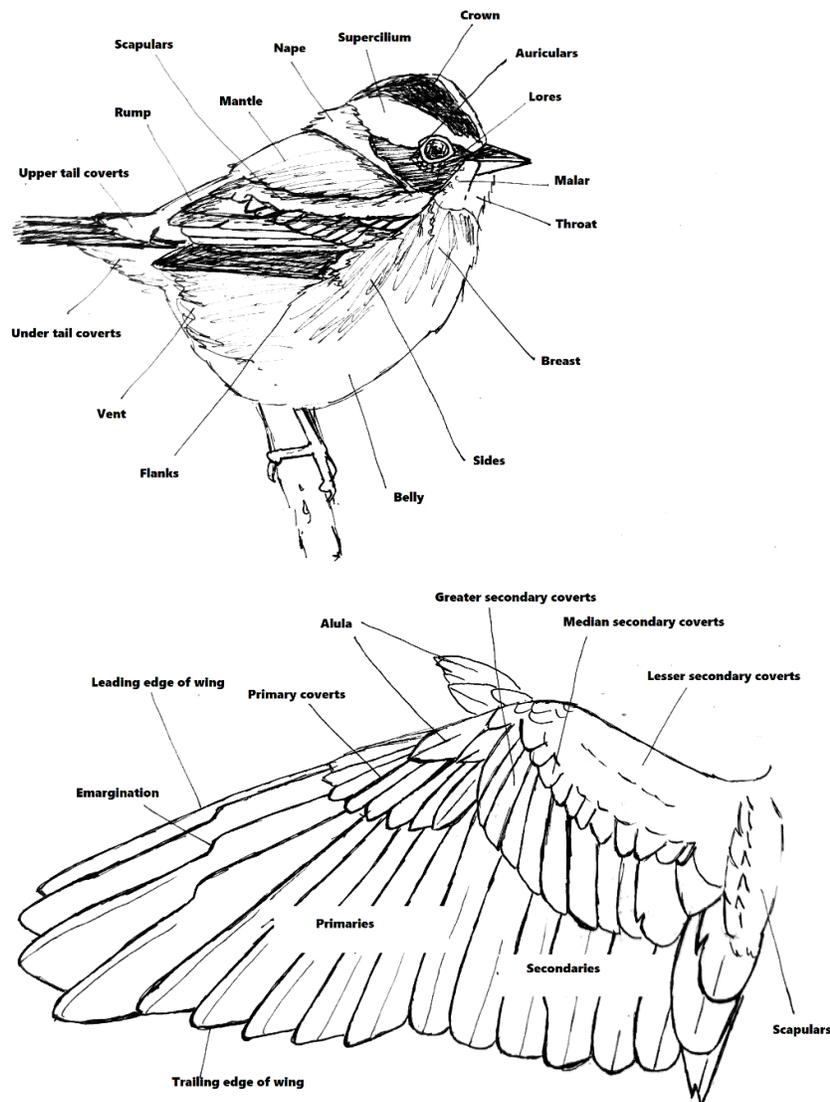
Keep in mind:

- 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 feather 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.

## A Swift's-Eye View

Have you ever wondered what things look like from a bird's-eye view? When most of us think of looking at things from a bird's-eye view, we think of what a bird sees while it is flying. But, have you ever thought about the other parts of bird's life? What does a bird see as the best food or place to sleep? If we all take a moment to think like a bird, maybe we can figure out how to help protect some of our local Species at Risk.

The Chimney Swift is a Species at Risk that might be one of your closest neighbours - it may even be living in your school's chimney! From a swift's-eye view, a masonry chimney is the perfect place to nest and rest overnight. Unlike most birds, Chimney Swifts cannot perch or hop. Instead they have to cling to a vertical surface like the inside of a chimney. When they are not clinging, they are flying through the air catching insects. No wonder they need a safe place to take a rest!

Chimney Swifts are aerial insectivores, meaning they catch and eat insects while flying. Talk about amazing acrobatics! From a swift's-eye view, mosquitos, biting flies, and other tiny insects look like a gourmet buffet. A single swift can eat 1000 insects a day, making them nature's perfect pest controllers.

Before pioneers started to colonize North America, Chimney Swifts lived in hollow trees. As the pioneers cleared huge tracts of old growth forests, swifts had to find a new home: chimneys. However, Chimney Swifts are now losing this new habitat, too, as chimneys are capped and torn down, and these birds will soon be homeless if we don't start protecting their chimneys.

Although thousands of swifts might roost in a single chimney, when it comes to nesting, Chimney Swifts need an entire chimney to themselves. This almost seems silly considering their nests are only 10 cm wide and take up almost no room in the chimney. But when it comes to nesting, Chimney Swifts really like their own personal space. These nests are made from sticks plucked from the tips of tree branches (remember a Chimney Swift does everything while flying) and glued together using swift spit! From a swift's-eye view, sticks and spit are the perfect building materials and the best bed they could ever want.

Unfortunately, Chimney Swifts are disappearing and are considered a Species at Risk. Their population has decreased in Canada by 90% over the past 40 years, which is a pretty scary trend for this little bird. We don't really know why this is happening - it might be because of habitat loss, climate change, a decrease in their food supply, or a combination of all sorts of factors.

Think like a bird. What could you do to help Chimney Swifts and other types of birds in trouble?