

For Creative Minds

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What is a Bird?

Just like you might sort candy or cereal by color or shape, plants and animals can be sorted or classified into groups. Parrots are animals in the "Aves" class, which means they are birds.

Birds come in all different shapes and sizes but all birds have feathers. In fact, they are the only animals that have feathers.



Birds don't have teeth; they have bills or beaks. The shape of the beaks depends on the type of food they eat.



Birds are warm blooded, just like us. That means that they make their own body heat.



All birds hatch from eggs.



Like us, birds have a backbone. Some of their bones are hollow, and lighter, to help them fly.

The feathers help them to fly (although not all birds can fly) and to stay warm. Feathers are made out of keratin, just like our hair or fingernails.

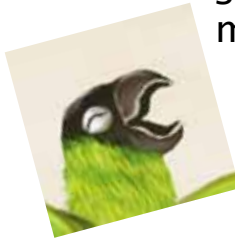
Parrot Adaptations



Parrots have four toes—two toes face forward while two point backwards. This helps them to hold onto tree branches and their food. They can use their back toes like we use our thumbs.

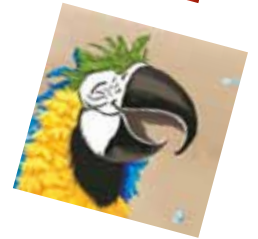


Parrots' necks are very flexible so they can get their heads into just about anything!



Parrots have beaks that are strong enough to break through hard seeds or nuts. Could you open a nut (walnut, pecan, or Brazil nut) with your teeth?

The bottom part of the top beak has little ridges to help hold the nuts or seeds while they break into them. This is similar to the ridges in a nut-cracker that we might use to open a nut.






Parrots also use their beaks to find food hiding under the bark of trees or in rotting logs or plants.

Where in the World?



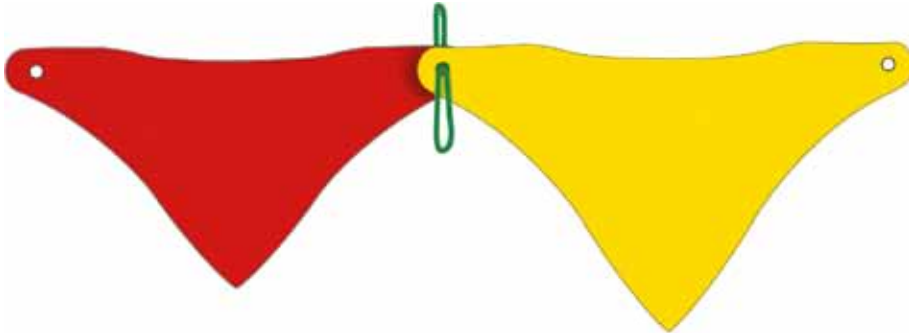
There are over 300 different types, or species, of parrots. Four of the different types of parrots are shown in this book. See if you can find where these parrots come from on the map.

-  Nanday conures (green) are from South America, south of the Amazon region.
-  Scarlet Macaws and Blue and Gold Macaws are both from Central and South American rainforests.
-  African Grey Parrots are from equatorial Africa.

Make-a-Beak Craft

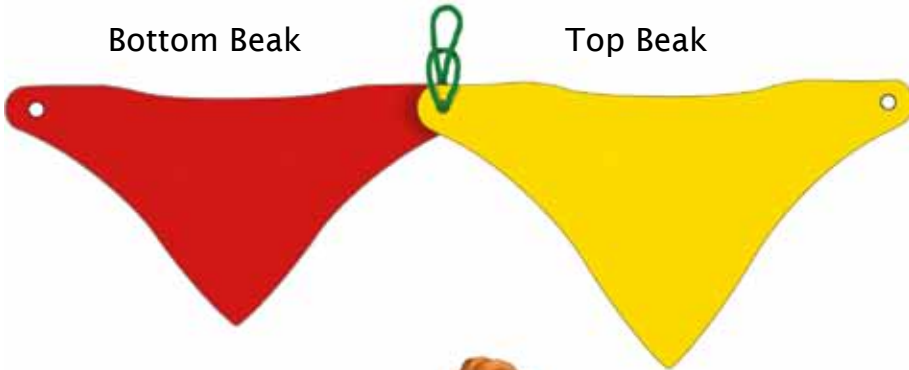
Bottom Beak

Top Beak



Bottom Beak

Top Beak



You will need:

- Scissors (with adult supervision if necessary)
- Construction or heavyweight paper
- 2 thin rubber bands (2½ inches)
- Optional: a paper punch

Directions:

Copy or trace the two beak shapes on the next page onto heavy weight paper and cut them out with the scissors.

Punch holes where shown.

Line up the two pieces as shown at top left. Put a rubber band in the hole as shown.

Slip one end of the rubber band through the other end. Pull to tighten but not so tight as to bend the paper.

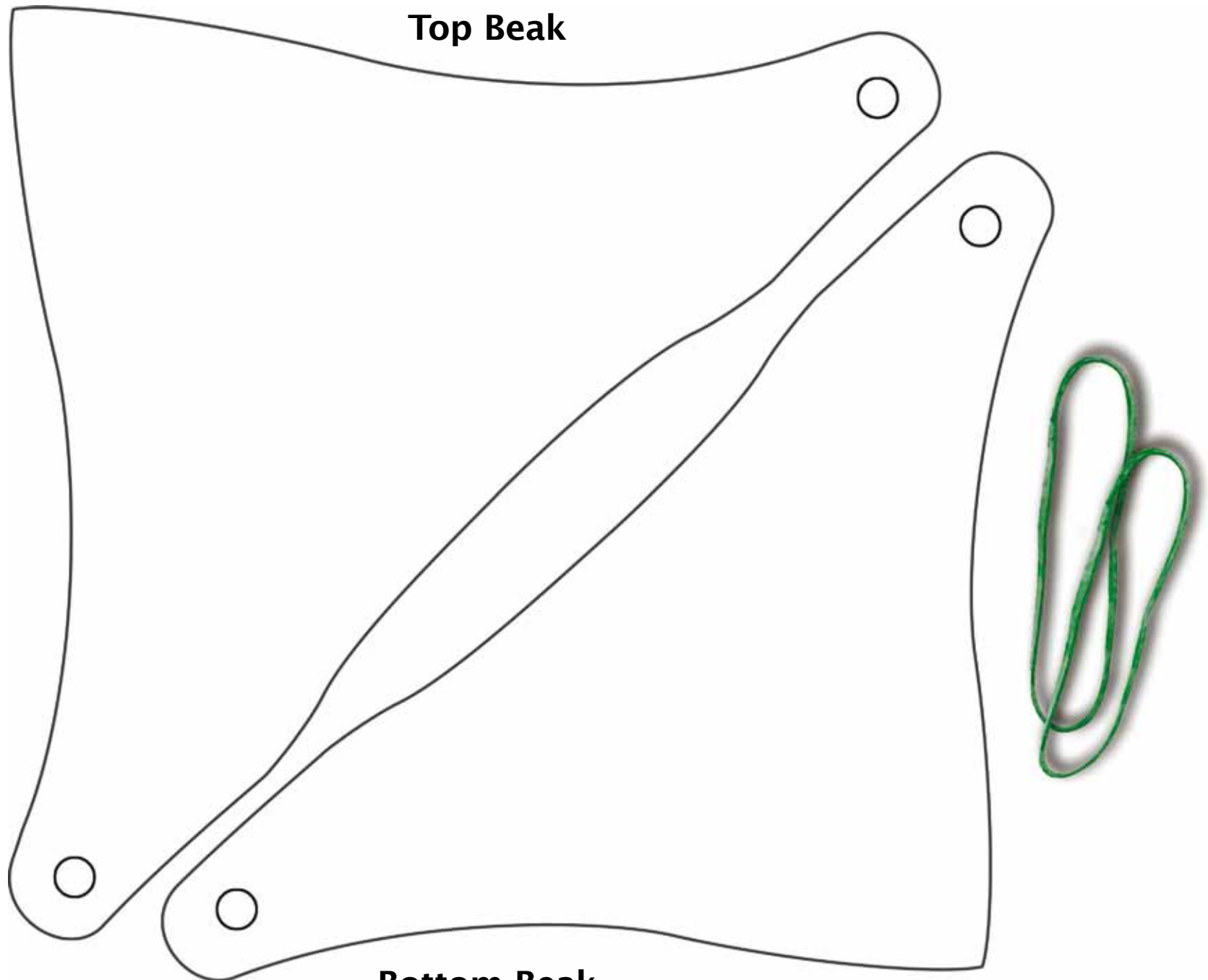
Match the two remaining holes together and repeat the process.

Wrap the rubber bands around each ear.

Now start squawking and flapping those wings!



Top Beak



Bottom Beak



Are you ready for a pet parrot?

Parrots make wonderful pets, but they are not for everyone. If you would like to share your home with a pet parrot, make sure you are ready to give it everything it needs. And keep in mind that this may be a lifetime commitment, as some parrots grow to be older than humans! Most parrots are intelligent and affectionate and some like to be with people, but they can be very noisy and very demanding. Most of all they need your love and dedication to be healthy and happy. Make sure you get your parrot from a bird breeder with a good reputation. Often parrots are smuggled in from the wild and sold as pets. That hurts wild parrot populations and has made some species endangered. You could also get a pet parrot from one of the many parrot rescue and adoption agencies. There are lots of pet parrots that need good homes.

Cleanliness

Parrots love to make a mess. They throw their food around while they eat. Often the food lands outside the cage. This is natural behavior for a parrot, but it means extra cleaning work for you.

A Cage

Your parrot needs a nice cage, even though it won't want to spend all its time there. The parrot's cage is its place to rest, eat, sleep, and feel safe. The cage needs to be big enough for the parrot to open its wings, and tall enough for the parrot to climb around. It needs to be sturdy enough to resist the parrot's chewing, (parrots chew everything). And, the bars on the cage need to be close enough together so a parrot's head can't get stuck in them.

Food

Most parrots love to eat seeds, but they can't live on seeds alone. They need a variety of food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables. Wash these carefully before you feed them to your pet. Pellets are also important because they offer balanced nutrition for the bird. You can buy them at a pet store. Never feed your parrot chocolate, tomato, or avocado.

Noise

Parrots have loud voices, and they love to use them. It is natural behavior for them. They need to have owners (and neighbors) who don't mind hearing a bit of squawking everyday.

Toys

Parrots love to play and chew. You can buy parrot toys at the pet store. You can also find things around your house that your parrot will like to play with. Scraps of paper, phone books, magazines, untreated wood blocks, empty paper towel rolls, and wooden spoons are good examples. Make sure these things are clean and don't contain any plastic, toxic paint or other harmful material.

Veterinarians

There are avian veterinarians that are specially trained to care for birds. Ask your vet if he/she is so trained or look in the yellow pages or on the internet to find one. As with any type of pet, it is important to take your parrot to a vet on a regular basis for checkups.

Time

Parrots don't like being alone, so your parrot will want to spend a lot of time with you.

