

Bird Journal Entry: A Simple 3-Step Guide



Introduction: The Joy of Bird Journaling

Welcome to the wonderful world of bird journaling! There's a special kind of magic in not just seeing or hearing a new bird, but in taking a moment to connect with it and create a lasting record of that encounter. This guide will walk you through a simple, three-step process to identify, verify, and sketch a new bird using just a few smartphone apps and basic supplies. By the end, you'll have a personal and meaningful journal entry that serves as a beautiful reminder of your discovery. We'll use the magnificent **Bohemian Waxwing** as our example throughout this guide.

1. Gathering Your Digital and Physical Tools

Before you head out, it's helpful to have a few tools ready. This simple kit combines the power of digital apps with the hands-on satisfaction of a physical journal.

- **The Merlin App:** This is my favorite app for *listening* to and identifying birds by their songs. It's an incredible tool for figuring out who is singing in the trees around you. It is currently available for free.

- **The iBird App:** Think of this as your digital field guide. I use it to *verify* the bird's identity, check its geographical range, and gather clear visual details for my sketch.
- **The Projector App:** This clever app turns your phone into a "light table," allowing you to easily trace an image. It's a fantastic tool for the *sketching* part of my process.
- **Your Journal:** This can be any notebook you love! I personally decided to keep all my interests—from nature and knitting to tracking moon phases—in one journal. It's your personal logbook of curiosity, so feel free to make it your own. The most important thing is that it works for you.
- **Basic Supplies:** You'll just need **tissue paper** for tracing, **a pencil**, and **tape or a glue stick** to attach your sketch to the page. Having some pencil crayons handy is also great for adding quick color notes.

With your tools gathered, you're ready for the most exciting part: tuning in to the world around you. Let's start the adventure by capturing a bird's song.

2. The 3-Step Process: From Sound to Sketch

This is the core of the method. Follow these three steps to go from hearing an unfamiliar birdsong to creating a beautiful journal entry.

Step 1: Listen and Identify with Merlin

The first step begins with your ears. When you hear a bird you don't recognize, it's time to capture its song.

1. **Open Merlin:** As soon as you hear a bird you want to identify, open the app on your phone.
2. **Start Recording Immediately:** Hit the green button to begin recording. This is the most important tip for this step: try to do it sooner than later.
3. **Review the Identification:** The app will display an audiogram of the sound and list the birds it identifies from the song. Your recording will be automatically saved with the date, so you can always go back and reference it later.

Now that Merlin has given you a potential identification, it's time to confirm that you've got the right bird.

Step 2: Verify and Research with iBird

Getting a name from Merlin is exciting, but a good naturalist always double-checks. This next step is critical for verifying the identification and gathering visual details.

1. **Search for the Species:** Open the iBird app and type in the bird's name that Merlin suggested (e.g., "Bohemian waxwing").
2. **Confirm the Location:** Use the "Range" feature to check the bird's distribution map. This is a crucial step to make sure the identification is *compatible* with your location.

3. **Find a Reference Image:** Look through the app's collection of photos and artist renditions. Sometimes an artist's drawing is easier to trace because it has clearer, simpler lines. Choose an image you like and take a screenshot of it.

Now that you've confirmed your bird's identity and have a clear reference image, it's time to bring your discovery to life on the page. Let's move on to the creative and rewarding process of sketching.

Step 3: Sketch Your Bird with Projector

This final step brings the bird to your journal page. My goal isn't a perfect piece of art, but a personal sketch that captures the essence of the bird and your memory of it.

1. **Open the Projector App:** Load the screenshot of the bird you saved from iBird.
2. **Use the "Light Table" Feature:** Select this option, which will display your image on the screen, ready for tracing. You can pinch and zoom to resize the image to your liking.
3. **Lock the Image:** Tap the icon with two rectangles in the corner. This locks the image in place so it won't move while you work. Pro-Tip: Use a small piece of scotch tape on the edges of your phone to hold the tissue paper steady while you trace.
4. **Trace the Basic Shape:** Place your tissue paper over the phone screen and gently trace the main outline of the bird with your pencil.
5. **Add Key Details:** Once you have the basic shape, unlock the image. You can resize it to get a closer look at important features. Roughly fill in the key details and make notes right on your drawing. For our Bohemian Waxwing, you might note:
 - The "red spot" on the wing.
 - The "rusty, red" color under the tail.
 - The area of "yellow" on the tail feathers.
 - The white markings near the eye.

Your sketch is now complete! All that's left is to bring all the pieces together into a finished journal entry.

3. Assembling Your Journal Entry

The final step is to combine your sketch and your notes on a journal page to create a complete memory of the day.

Creating the Page

Follow these simple best practices to create a clear and informative entry.

- **Attach Your Sketch:** Use a bit of scotch tape or a glue stick to place your tissue paper sketch onto the journal page.
- **Add Essential Information:** Next to your sketch, write down the two most important pieces of context: the **date** and the **location** where you saw the bird.

- **Include Your Notes:** Transfer the color notes you made (e.g., "red," "yellow") to your drawing or write them on the page. This will help you remember the bird's distinct appearance.

A Final Thought on Journaling

As you create your entry, remember the ultimate purpose of your journal. It's a personal record of your experiences and discoveries in the natural world.

Your journal entry doesn't have to be perfect. The goal is to create a reminder of that day. It's your personal log book, so feel free to include whatever interests you.

...until next time from my journal to yours,

stay curious, keep exploring and happy adventuring.