

## SeaBC Sea Guide to Bird Families

Most seabirds are variations of black, white, and gray. So, before turning to a field guide or app, it really helps to start by knowing the *family* of birds. Was it a tern, a jaeger, an albatross, or a storm-petrel? On a moving boat, with a fly-by bird, that may be the extent of your identification!

*Some Field Marks to Note:*

- Size (body small, medium or large? wings long or short?)
- Flight style (soaring, flapping, heavy, bouncy?)
- Wing plumage (dark or light upper and lower sides? any dark edges or marks?)
- Rump pattern (white area at upper base of tail?)
- Face pattern (pattern around eye? light or dark around eye? dark or light collar?)
- Fleshy parts (color of bill and feet?)

*Whenever possible, try to obtain a few **photos!***

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### **Gulls (and Fulmar) — *The Garbage Pickers***

Gulls come in all sizes, from the tiny Little Gull to the hefty Great Black-backed Gull. With gulls, your best bet is a photo!

If you're offshore and you see a "gull" that is stocky, big-headed, and thick-necked, it may be a Northern Fulmar (right). Look for its very un-gull-like hooked tube-on-top bill.



### **Terns (and Noddies) — *The Graceful Fliers***

Delicate, gull-like birds, with pointed wings and often, but not always, forked tails. Often dipping or diving to feed, or resting on flotsam. Look at bill, tail color and shape, and color of wing tips.



### **Alcids — *The Penguin Look-a-likes***

Small black-and-white chunky birds. Look at bill shape, face pattern, and underwing pattern.



**Phalaropes — *The Shorebirds at Sea***

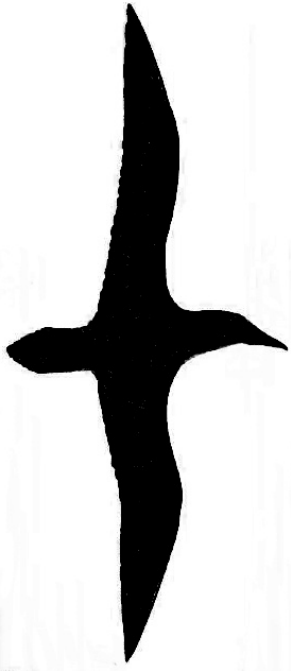
Sandpipers that float on the ocean!

Smaller than a pigeon, with thin bills. Look at bill thickness and back pattern.



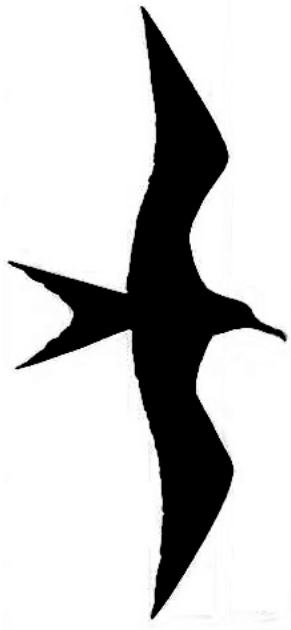
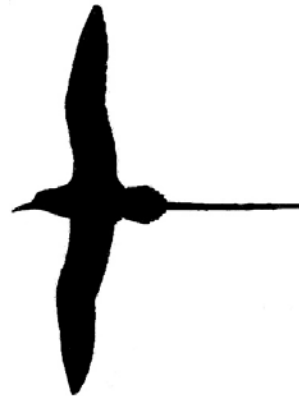
**Boobies and Gannets — *The Plunge-Divers***

Large-bodied heavy birds with big dagger-like bills. Seen resting on pilings or on the ocean, feeding by near-vertical plunge-dives. Look at their wingtip pattern and foot color.



**Tropicbirds — *The Longtails***

Glamorous white birds, adults with long streaming tails. Listen for their call and look at the pattern on the upper-wing and back.



**Frigatebirds — *The Pirate Birds***

Dark, sinister-looking birds, a “flying cross” often seen floating high overhead.

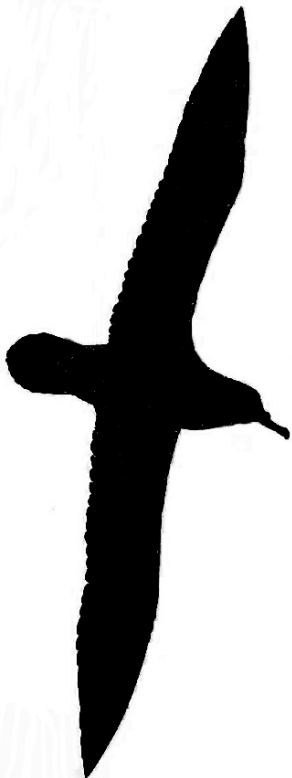
### **Skuas and Jaegers — *The Bullies***

Hefty big-bodied birds like dark gulls on steroids. Usually seen attacking other seabirds to steal their food, or powerful straight-line flying to a distant group of seabirds (to steal their food). Difficult to identify to species, so photos are best.



### **Storm-Petrels — *The Water Dancers***

Small martin-sized birds that patter, skip, or bounce along the ocean surface as they pick food. Look at flight style and face pattern.



### **Shearwaters and Petrels — *The Wave Slicers***

Straight-winged gliders that seem to fly without flapping, banking wingtip to wingtip over the waves. Look at collar, tail, and upper- and lower-wing patterns. Difficult to identify in some cases, so photos are best.

### **Albatrosses — *The Globe Trotters***

Large soaring ocean birds with incredibly long wingspans (7 feet or longer!). Look at bill and underwing patterns.

