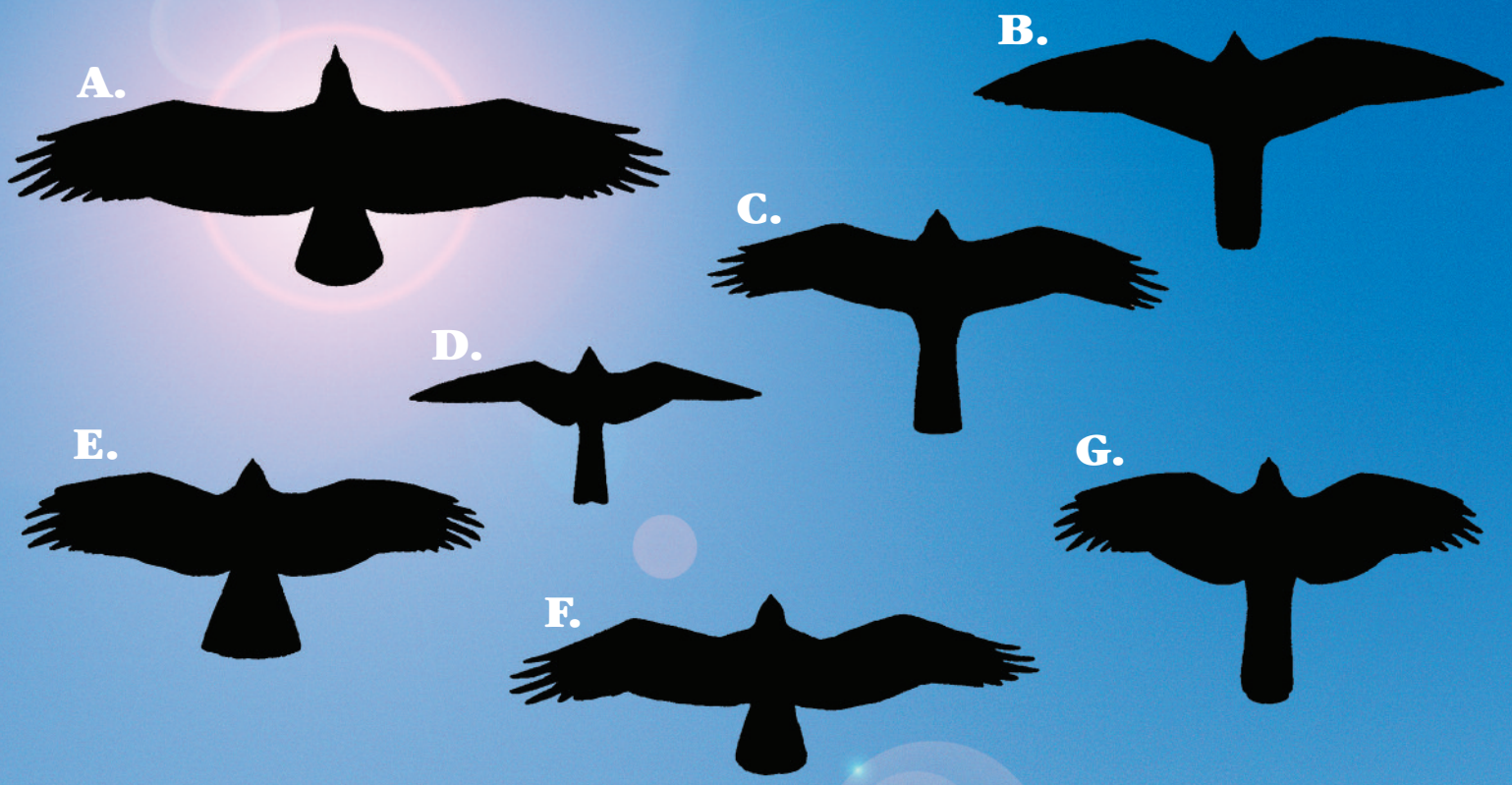
Hawks Overhead



Even without the ability to see feather color or distinctive field marks (eye rings, streaks, rump patches, etc.) you can identify the raptors you see overhead—if not to species to one of seven general categories based on the bird's size and wing and tail shapes.

_____ **1.** Typically seen flying low over marshes and grasslands, the **northern harrier** has long, narrow wings and a long tail, and they hold their wings in a dihedral shape similar to a turkey vulture. Compared with the buteos, harriers have thinner wings and a longer tail. Their wings are longer than an accipiter's.

_____ **2.** Residents of the forest, **accipiters** are small- to medium-sized raptors with short, rounded wings and a long tail, all of which allows them to make quick turns among in their wooded environment.

_____ **3.** North America's largest raptors, **eagles** have long, broad wings and a fan-shaped tail. Eagles will soar on outstretched wings with few wing beats.

_____ **4.** With a distinct, M-shaped flight shape made because of a bend at their "wrist" joint, the fish-eating **osprey** closes its wings and extends its claws when it swoops down on its prey.

_____ **5.** Long, narrow, pointed wings, a large head and a long tail are characteristics of **falcons**. These small- to medium-sized birds have rapid wing beats and dive at high speeds toward their prey.

_____ **6.** A soaring hawk, using air currents to minimize the need for flapping their wings, the medium to large-sized **buteos** have broad, rounded wings, a robust body and a fan-shaped tail.

_____ **7.** The **Mississippi kite** is swift and graceful in flight, with a falcon-like shape but narrower wings. They are often seen circling overhead, making short dives to catch a flying insect.

Answers: 1C, 2G, 3A, 4F, 5B, 6E, 7D.