

So How Do You Know What These Are?



This picture is a perfect example of what baffles most people when they try to identify birds they see in the wild, or at their feeders: All they see are LBJ's (Little Brown Jobs).

But wait, there are many clues here, and with a little coaching you too can quickly learn to identify a surprising number of bird species that were previously indistinguishable to you.

Looking at the picture above, I see many clues. First, the birds are in a tight flock. This rules out lots of birds. Second, they are feeding on the ground. This also narrows down the choices quite a bit. Third, they are feeding out in the open. Fourth, they are small (see the size of the seeds). Fifth, they are eating seeds. Finally, I can see lots of streaks on their bodies and light colored bars on their wings. All these things narrow down the choices to just a few bird species, including the winner in this case: Pine Siskins.

Did you notice that the clue that most people look at, the appearance of the bird, was only last fact I mentioned? Actually, by the time I was done with the rest of the clues an experienced bird watcher would have narrowed the choices down to a small number of species, and Pine Siskin would have been one of their first guesses without knowing anything about the actual appearance of the birds.

And in case you're wondering, Pine Siskins are pretty easy to find in winter around Corvallis.

So what do you look for when identifying birds? Read on and find out!