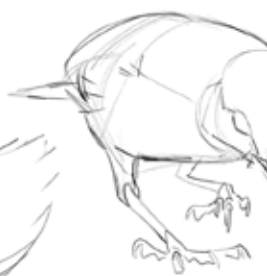
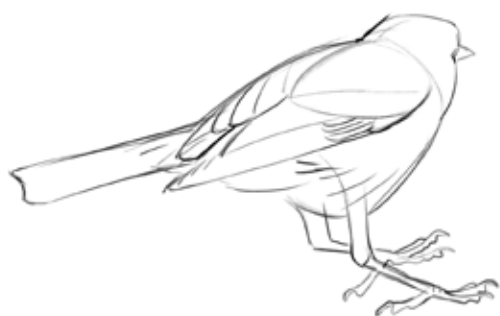




Field Sketching
FOR BEGINNERS





Field Sketching FOR BEGINNERS

By Kirsty Yeomans (Crow artist)

What is field sketching?

Field sketching, en plein air or observational drawing is the art of creating a sketch from real life. It will show the very unique view from an artists own perception and impression of the subject.

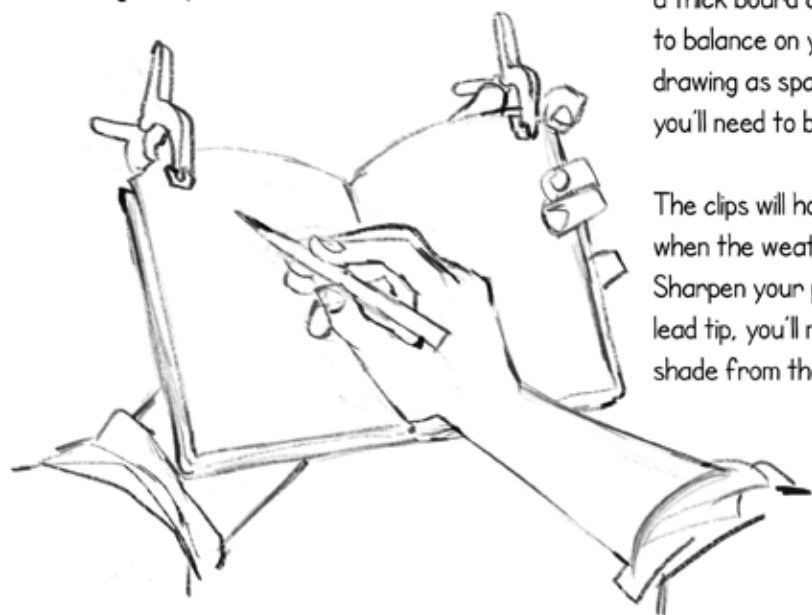
En plein air is a french expression, which is the act of drawing and painting outside to capture spirit, emotion, and the essence of the artists subject. In the 1860s en plein air became extremely popular with hobbyists and artists, and it is making a come back in modern times. It is one of the best ways to capture birds in their natural habitat and for the artist to learn the structure of the bird if they truly wish to master drawing them.

The main skill learned from observational drawing is how to gesture, which is needed in all forms of drawing. Whether you're learning wildlife painting, comic books, portraits etc. It is the foundations of drawing. If you get the gesture right the more lifelike your finished piece will be.

"When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture." - John Constable



Equipment

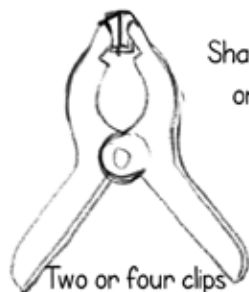


Start with a small sketchbook with a thick board cover. You'll need it to balance on your arm while drawing as space will be limited and you'll need to be on the move.

The clips will hold the pages down when the weather is windy. Sharpen your pencil with a long lead tip, you'll need it when you shade from the side.

The tools don't need to be expensive. A well sharpened 2B wooden or mechanical pencil is sufficient. An eraser is not necessary but is good to have for those big mistakes. However, refrain from erasing drawings too much as you'll need to look back to see improvements over time. It's better to start a new drawing instead of erasing it.

A5 handback sketchbook



Two or four clips



Eraser

Sharp 2B pencil
or mechanical
pencil



Sketching techniques

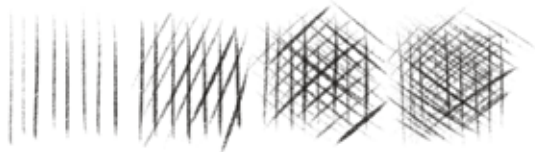
Great sketching happens when the pencil sits relaxed in the hand, driven by the middle finger. It must never be gripped.



You want to sketch with confident lines instead of hesitant little strokes.



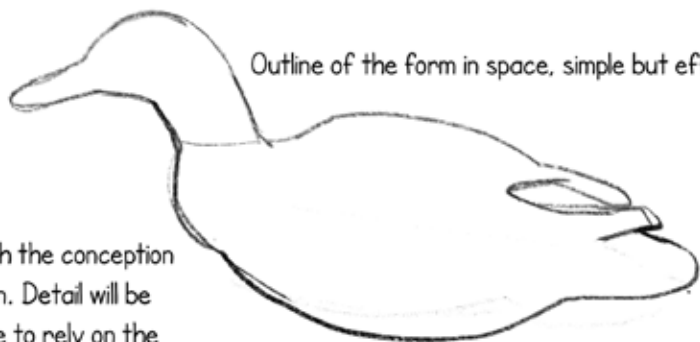
Practice sketching from light strokes to dark. Up and down, left to right. It can be straight, curved or in one stroke, depending on what style you prefer.



Crosshatching is the best way to get deeper shades quickly. Try and avoid smudging with your finger. Spend time trying out all the techniques to see which one you feel is the most enjoyable!

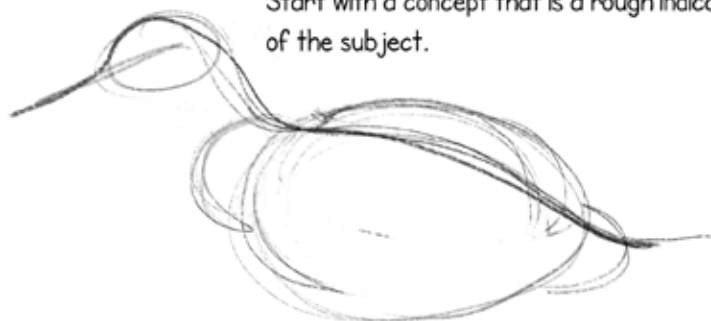


Outline of the form in space, simple but effective.

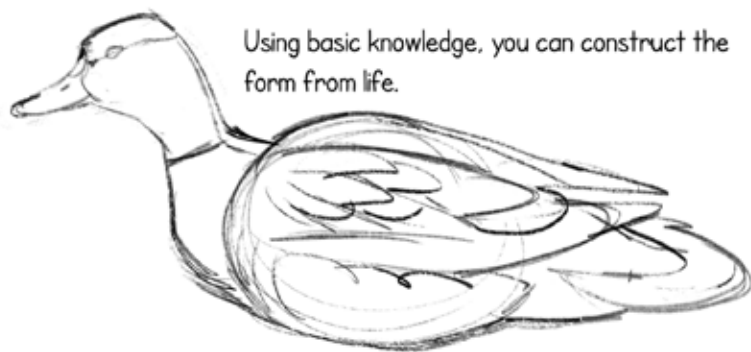


All drawings begin with the conception and then construction. Detail will be limited so you will have to rely on the suggestion of form.

Start with a concept that is a rough indication of the subject.



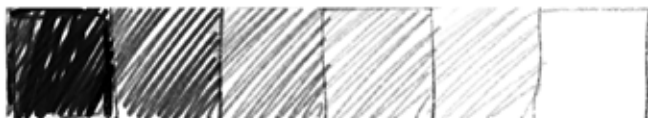
Using basic knowledge, you can construct the form from life.



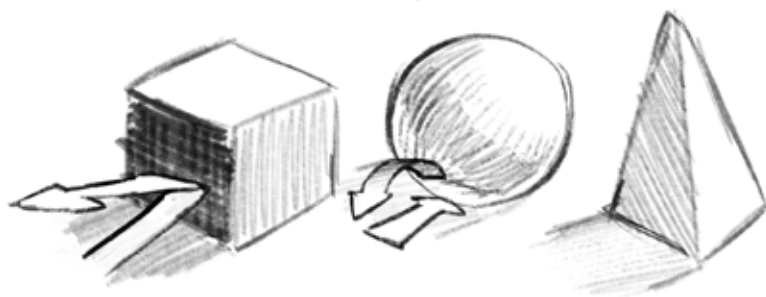
You can exaggerate or simplify form, whichever you have time for.

Shading and lighting

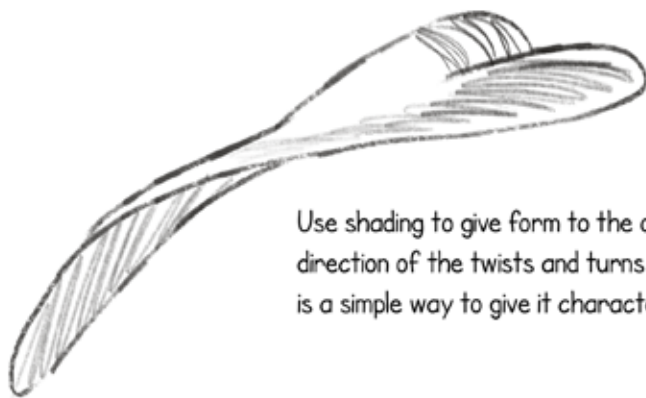
Light and shadow is important to set your bird in its environment and space. Try not to have completely smooth shading, you just need three or four tones to work with. The light, the midtone and the dark tone. The fourth tone can be reflected light but it's not needed at this stage.



Create your own tone chart so you can organize your range of values. The two primary light sources are white and the very dark shadows that are black. Everything else in between is halftones, reflected lights, and shadow accents.



Separate light and shadow first, then add the midtone and highlights. It's easier to prioritise the two primary forms and then build up the rest of the shadows gradually.



Use shading to give form to the object. Shade in the direction of the twists and turns like in this leaf, this is a simple way to give it character.

Learning tone and where to shade can take a lot of time and practice to master, so keep it simple to start with. The examples below show the position of light against a sphere. It can be above, behind or in front of the subject.



Shadow can also be cast from an object below it. Like the example below, the white of the ground reflects back on the stone.

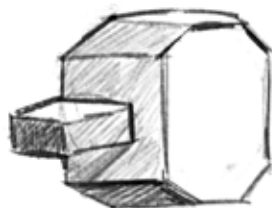


The further away the light is, the lighter the shadow becomes.

With the light above the gull, the beak casts a shadow down the neck of the bird. To bring out the white of the feathers, use shading behind the bird.

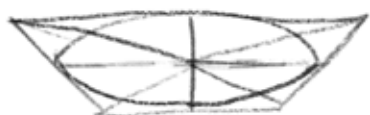


Planes and space



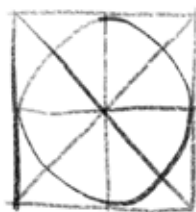
Planes are the surface of an object. Each value can be placed on a plane to create the illusion of a 3D object.

To get detailed shading, you just add more and more planes until it blends in. This can be achieved after establishing the primary light and shadow tones.

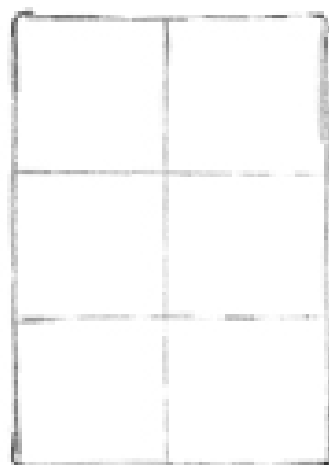


Training your eye to see the bird in 3D space on your 2D paper can be difficult at first. It can help with visualising the ground as a square and fitting the bird inside that box.

You can practice fitting objects in space by drawing the circle from all angles. Straight on, above and below.

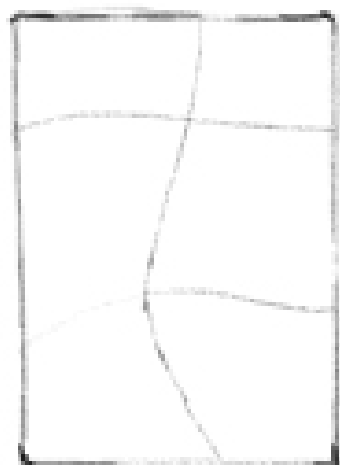


Sketchbook preparation



Divide your sketchbook into six sections, it will train your hand into making sure you draw the whole bird without taking up all of the page.

With this kind of restriction you can fill all of the pages with as many birds as possible. It will be easier to start small and then go bigger rather than the other way.



You can divide the pages into less refined areas to draw some birds bigger and some smaller.

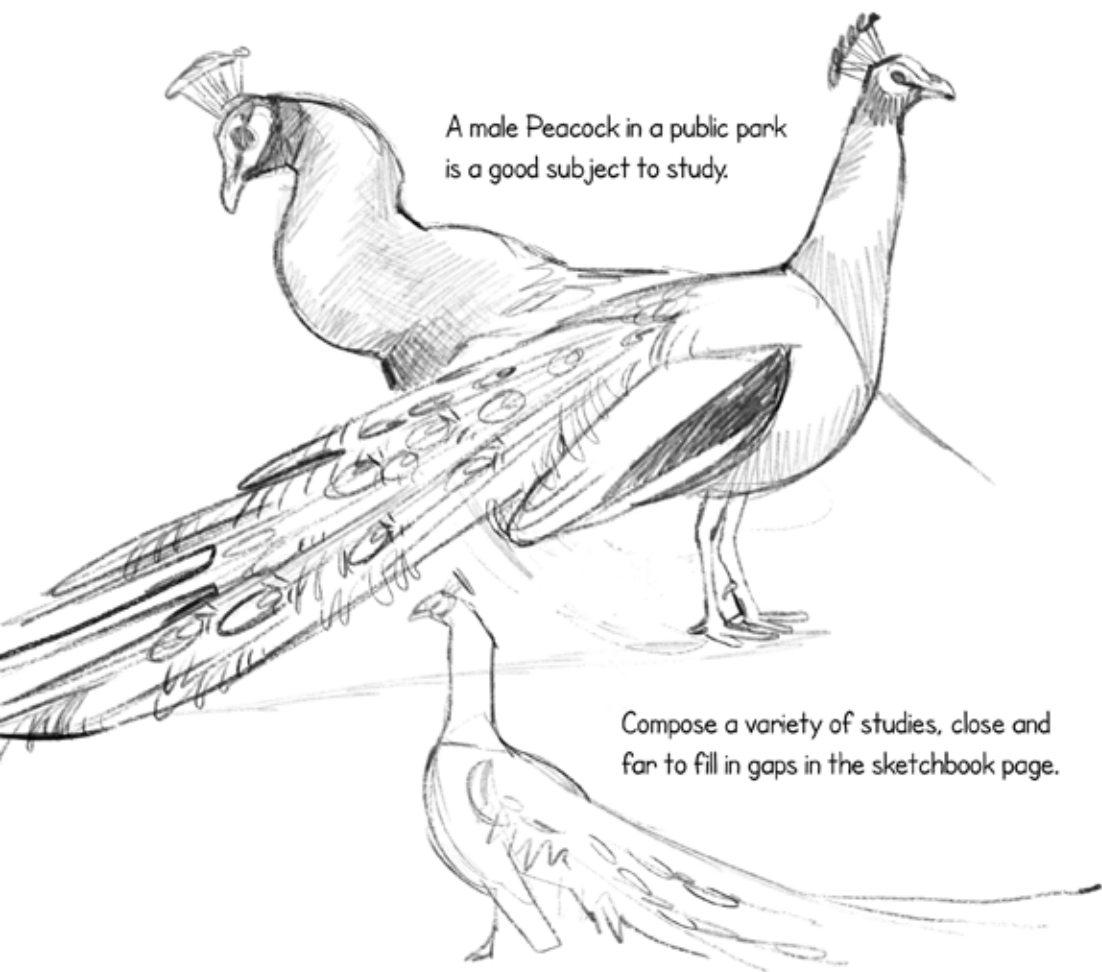
Once this is mastered you won't need to draw the guides as you will naturally stick to drawing six birds per page.

Over time you will begin to fill every gap in a page and you can choose which pose you like to fill in the detail more later.

Location

As a beginner, you want to draw birds that are used to human presence so you can get close enough to draw them without a scope. This can be public parks, ponds or zoo's where birds are used to high traffic of people.

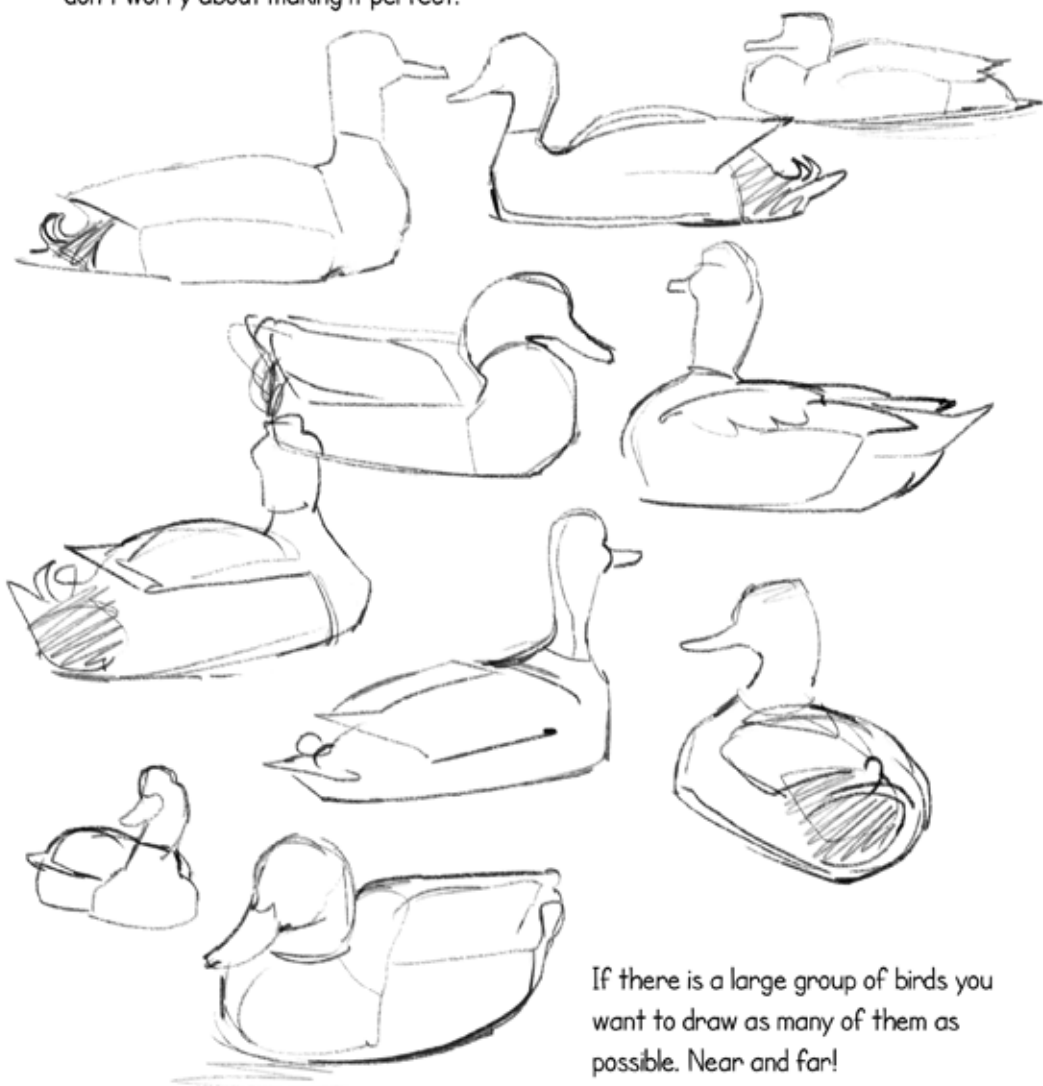
This way you can practice on birds like Ducks, Pigeons, Gulls, Crows and anything else that is in your area. Practicing with these birds first will help train your eye in what features to look so when you upgrade to using binoculars or a spotting scope, you will be prepared for the change.



You want to start with drawing as many birds as possible with very simple lines, over and over again. You will learn and observe something new each time you draw the bird.

Your first drawings will start off basic, but after a few months of practice you will notice that you will add more and more detail each time you draw that same bird.

Looking back on your older drawings will help see your improvements over time. So don't worry about making it perfect!



If there is a large group of birds you want to draw as many of them as possible. Near and far!

Studies and research

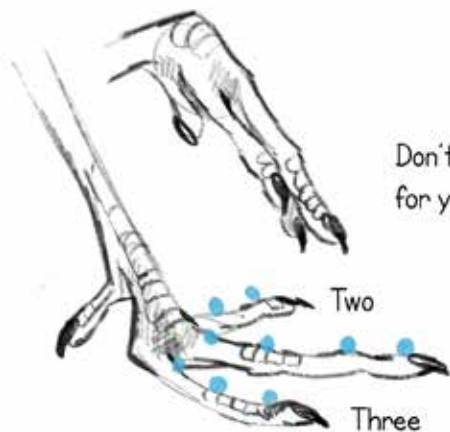
It's important to spend some time studying your subjects. To improve you can make small studies with detail like the beak, feet or wings. This will help in simplifying it in the future when you make your observations.



Practice using shapes for the features of the face. Since you will only have limited time to sketch the bird, you can fill it in after:



Spare a little time to do studies of birds that you will encounter often, practice their head, feet and wings from birds that are sitting and standing still or from your own photos.



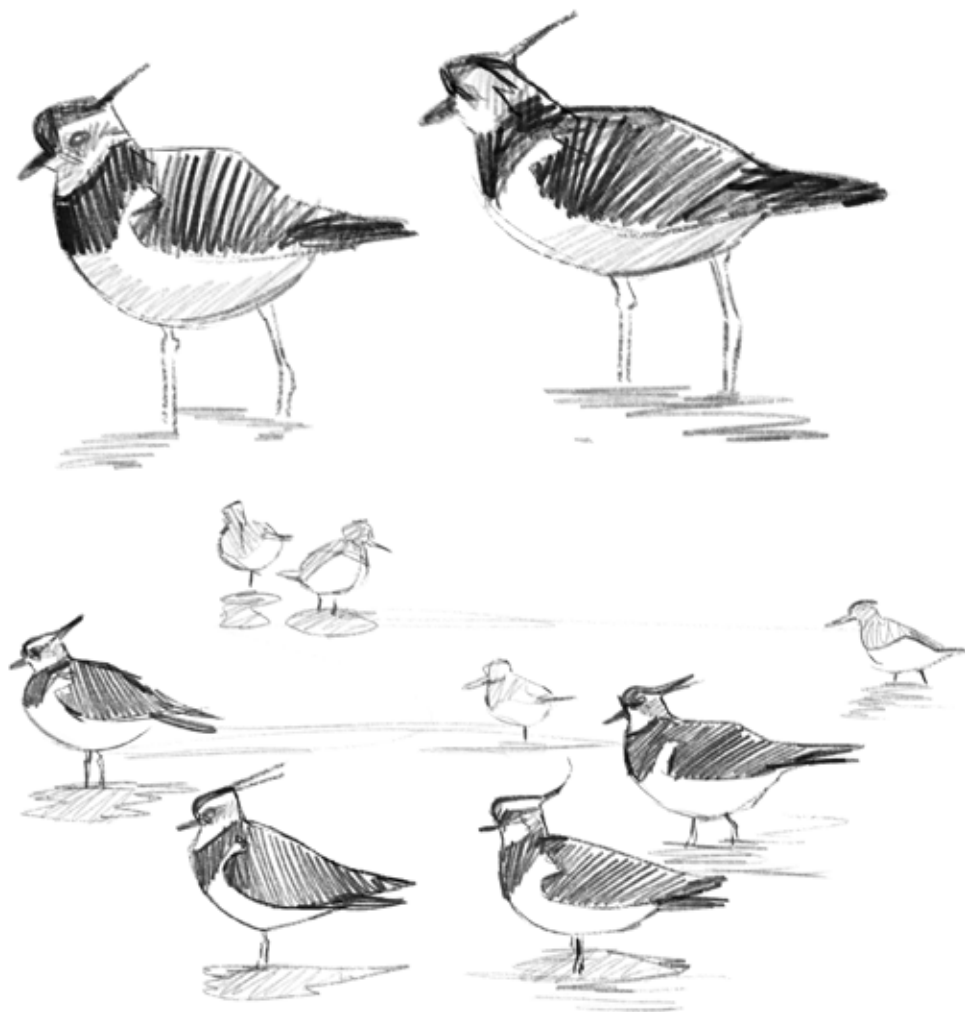
Don't forget to label everything for your own future reference.



Stick to essentials

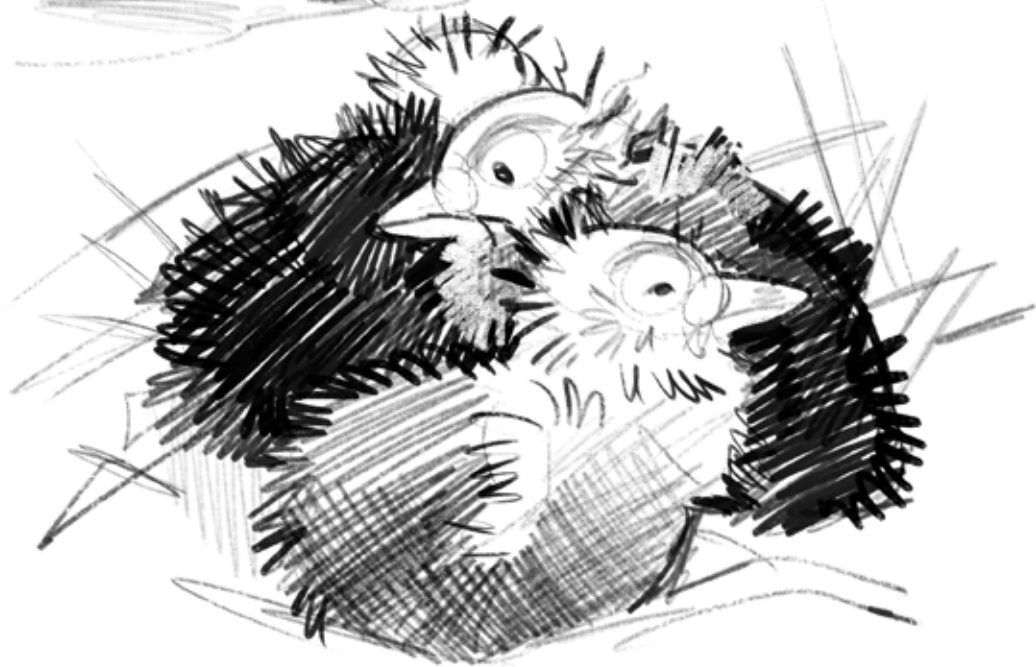
Birds will be moving all the time, so you have to stick to the essential pose and composition before the bird moves. You can start on several birds at once, and then come back to another drawing when they resume a similar pose.

To master this it will require hundreds and hundreds of drawings, but over time you will naturally pick out what you need in a few seconds.





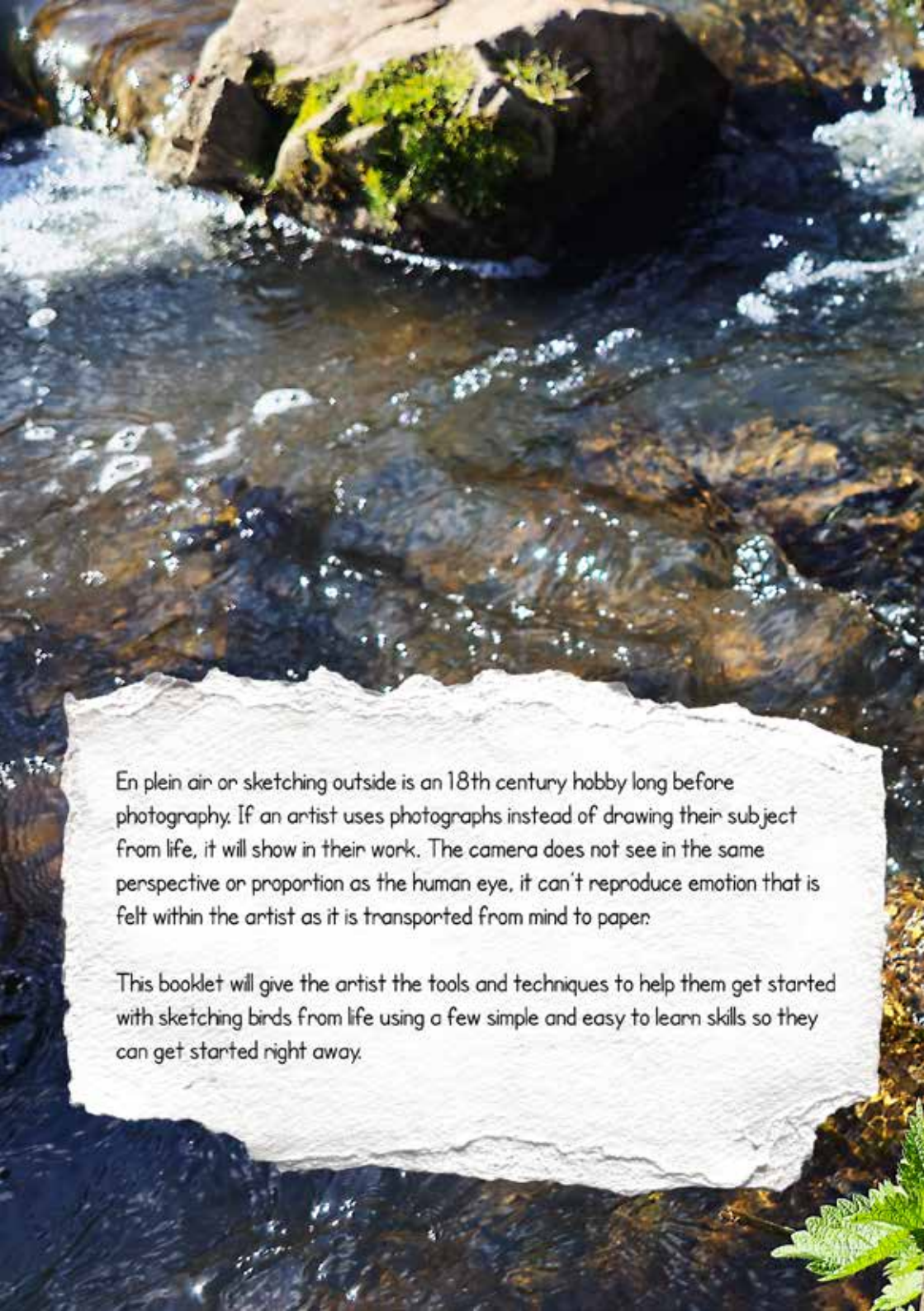
Don't forget to add a few pieces of the background to show the bird in its habitat. This will give an impression of the size of the bird.



You can use two tone shading to bring out the lighter colours in the bird at the front. Background litter can also be used to form the light of the bird in front.



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En plein air or sketching outside is an 18th century hobby long before photography. If an artist uses photographs instead of drawing their subject from life, it will show in their work. The camera does not see in the same perspective or proportion as the human eye, it can't reproduce emotion that is felt within the artist as it is transported from mind to paper.

This booklet will give the artist the tools and techniques to help them get started with sketching birds from life using a few simple and easy to learn skills so they can get started right away.