

# CREATURE FEATURE



Cabrillo  
Marine  
Aquarium

What makes a bird so unique from any other creature on the planet?

There are more than 9,000 different kinds of birds in the world, and every type of bird has distinctive features & structures that serve special functions in their growth, survival, and reproduction.

For example, some birds are very colorful to attract mates, while others are dull in appearance to help protect them from predators. Some birds are massive & heavy, while others are slight & small.

A bird's outer physical features & adaptations can help it survive & thrive in its environment.

For example, some birds have very long wings that help them soar through the air (like the Laysan Albatross & American Bald Eagle), while others cannot fly at all (like the Ostrich, Emu & Penguin).

The differences are endless, but there is one special feature that is unique to only birds – can you guess what it is?

Let's go through the list of bird features and see what we come up with as a possible answer to this most intriguing question!

Well, how 'bout a beak? That must be unique to birds!

But turtles have beaks, squid & octopus have beaks, even some fish have beaks.

How 'bout laying eggs? That must be it!

But fish lay eggs, as well as snakes, crocodiles & alligators, and even the oddball platypus can lay eggs.

How 'bout their wings?

What other animals have wings?

Butterflies, ladybugs & dragonflies have wings.

So what could possibly be so unique to birds?

Got it! They can fly!!

But insects fly, bats fly, even some fish can fly (the flying fish kind of hang glides above the surface of the sea).

So far, we've guessed beaks, wings, laying eggs & flying.

All of these characteristics are important elements of bird anatomy, but only one creature feature sets birds apart from all other living creatures.

Hint #1:

It begins with the letter F (not feet).

Hint #2

These unique structures can be brilliantly colorful - from the brightest red to the deepest blue.

You got it!!

Only birds have feathers, which is super unique to these beautiful creatures!

Feathers are formed in special skin cells from a protein called keratin.

Feathers are used for flight, temperature control, and attracting a mate.

**AS THE SAYING GOES, BIRDS OF A FEATHER, FLOCK TOGETHER!**