

A Practical Challenge for Atlasers: **Identifying Juvenile Birds**



Ageing sequence for birds:

After hatching, a young bird's first plumage is called "natal down".

Prejuvenal (or postnatal) molt

Juvenile (or juvenal) plumage – typically acquired while in the nest (except precocial spp).

This plumage includes body, wings and tail feathers.

Held for a short period of time – on natal/breeding grounds.

Prebasic I molt

Basic I (winter) plumage – typically held during first fall and winter.

Body feathers only – wing and tail feathers are retained (for about a year).

Prealternate I molt

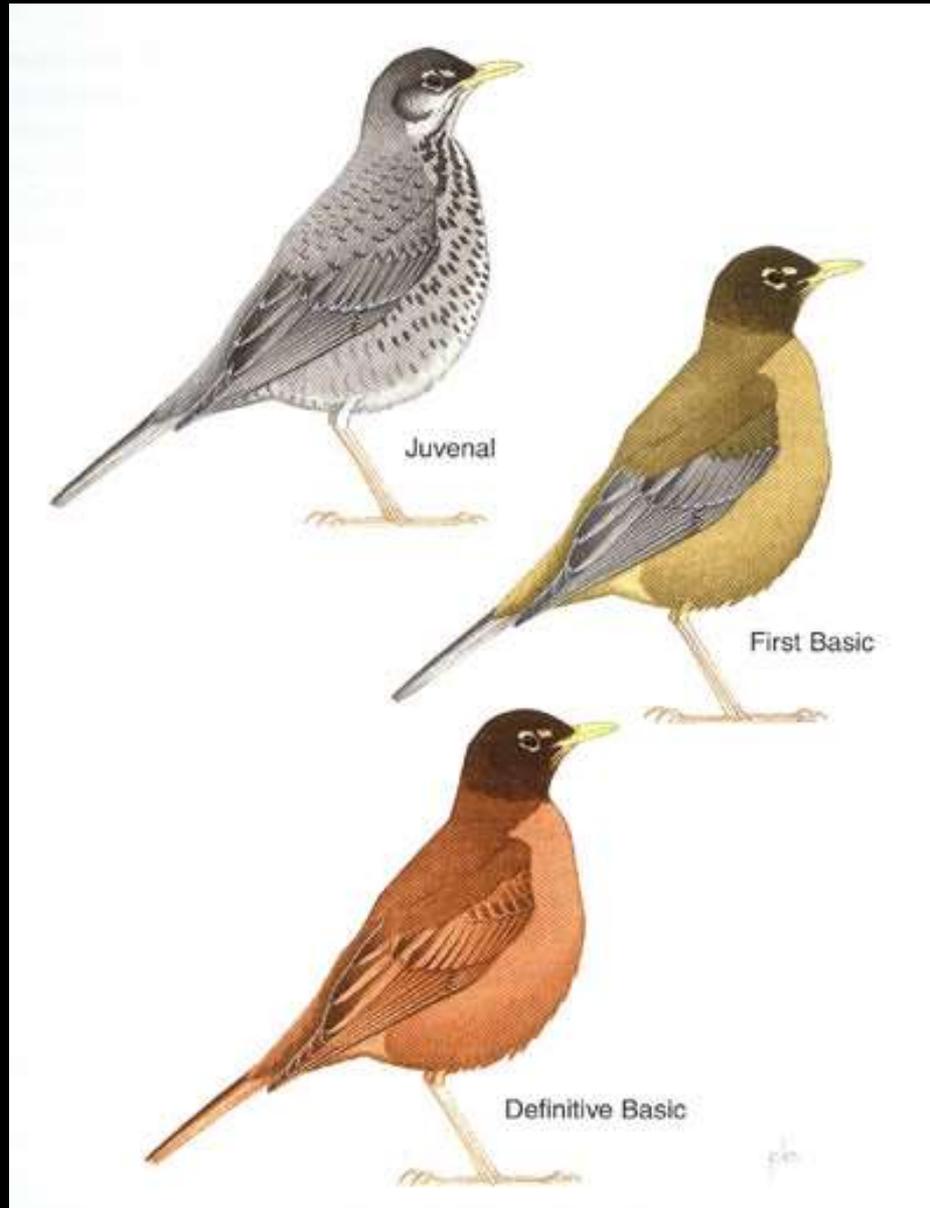
First Alternate (breeding) plumage (typically held until mid/late summer).

Complete molt

Basic II or Definitive Basic (winter) plumage

American Robin plumages

(examples – not true colors)



“Immature” plumages

- Term is very broad/inclusive
- Basically can include every plumage from fledgling up until they become full adult
- In some cases the term “immature” might just apply for the first year (or months):



- In other birds like gulls or eagles the “immature” term might apply for several years:



First plumage - natal down



Indigo Bunting – new nestlings

Eastern Phoebe – nestlings



“nestling” (either in downy or juvenile plumage)



Juvenile plumage



“fledgling” (typically juvenile plumage)





Eastern Phoebe – nestlings





Eastern Phoebe – juvenile







Eastern Phoebe – juvenile



Eastern Phoebe – first basic (fall/winter)



Chipping Sparrow



Chipping Sparrow – juvenile

Chipping Sparrow – first basic (fall/winter) plumage





Song Sparrow – juvenile and adult



Song Sparrow – juvenile





Swamp Sparrow

Swamp Sparrow – juvenile



Grasshopper Sparrow juvenile



Henslow's Sparrow
juvenile





Henslow's Sparrow
juvenile



Nick Anich

Vesper Sparrow – juvenile

Jenny Wenzel

Yellow-rumped Warbler - juvenile





Yellow-rumped Warbler - juvenile



Yellow-rumped Warbler - juvenile

Yellow-rumped Warbler - first basic (fall/winter)





Common Yellowthroat – juvenile



Common Yellowthroat – juvenile



Common Yellowthroat – molting
from juvenile to first basic





Common Yellowthroat – molting
juvenile to first basic (fall/winter)



American Redstart – juvenile

David Franzen





American Redstart – juvenile

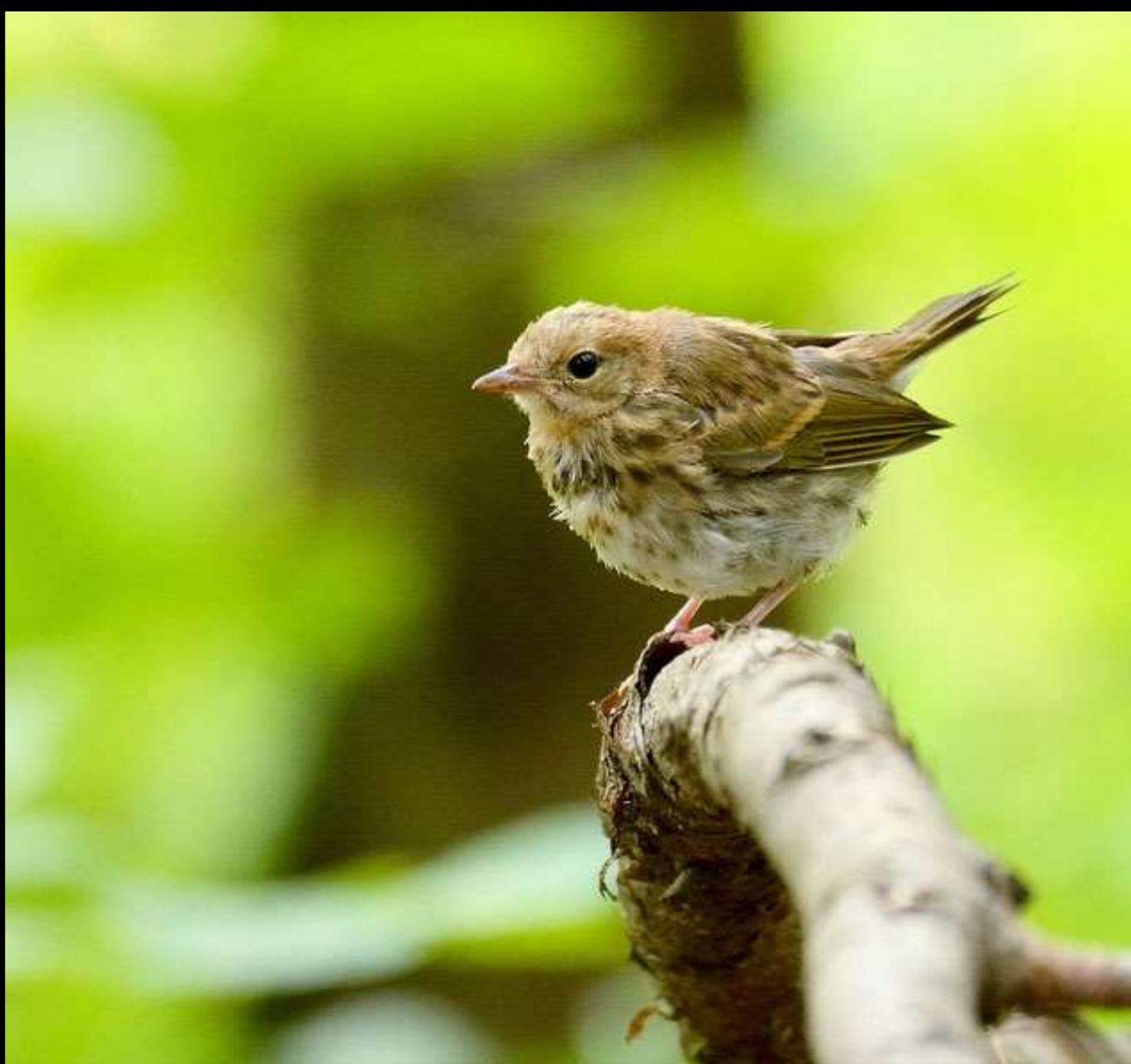


American Redstart – first basic (fall/winter)



Ovenbird - juvenile

Ovenbird -
juvenile





Ovenbird – juvenile

Ovenbird –
juvenile





Only one warbler with white tail spots across
center of tail – Magnolia



Magnolia Warbler – first basic (fall/winter)



Canada Warbler – juvenile



Canada Warbler (female)-- 28 August 2001
Barr Lake Banding Station, Adams County, Colorado
Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (photos Chris Wood)
www.rmbo.org



Palm Warbler – juvenile





Palm Warbler – first basic (fall/winter)



Only one warbler
has extensive
yellow tail spots –
Yellow Warbler





Yellow Warbler – juvenile



Yellow Warbler – juvenile



Yellow Warbler – first basic (fall/winter)



Rose-breasted
Grosbeak – juvenile





Rose-breasted Grosbeak – first basic (fall/winter)

Rose-breasted Grosbeak –
immature male (left) &
female (right)



Pine Siskin – juvenile



Ryan Brady



Barn Swallow – juvenile



Horned Lark – juvenile



Some juveniles are fairly straightforward – color patterns are very much like adults





House Wren – juvenile



House Wren – juvenile



Black-capped Chickadee – juvenile



Gray Catbird – juvenile



Cedar Waxwing – juvenile



Cedar Waxwing – juvenile



Eastern Kingbird – juvenile



Brown Thrasher – juvenile



Eastern Bluebird – juvenile



Jeff Galligan



Wood Thrush – juvenile



Blue Jay – juvenile





Ryan Brady

American Crow – juvenile



Red-winged Blackbird – juvenile



Northern Cardinal – juvenile





Great Crested Flycatcher – juvenile



Baltimore Oriole – juvenile





Downy Woodpecker – juvenile male



Downy Woodpecker – juvenile female

Mourning Dove – juvenile



Great Horned Owl – juvenile



Precocial birds – attain downy plumage while in egg



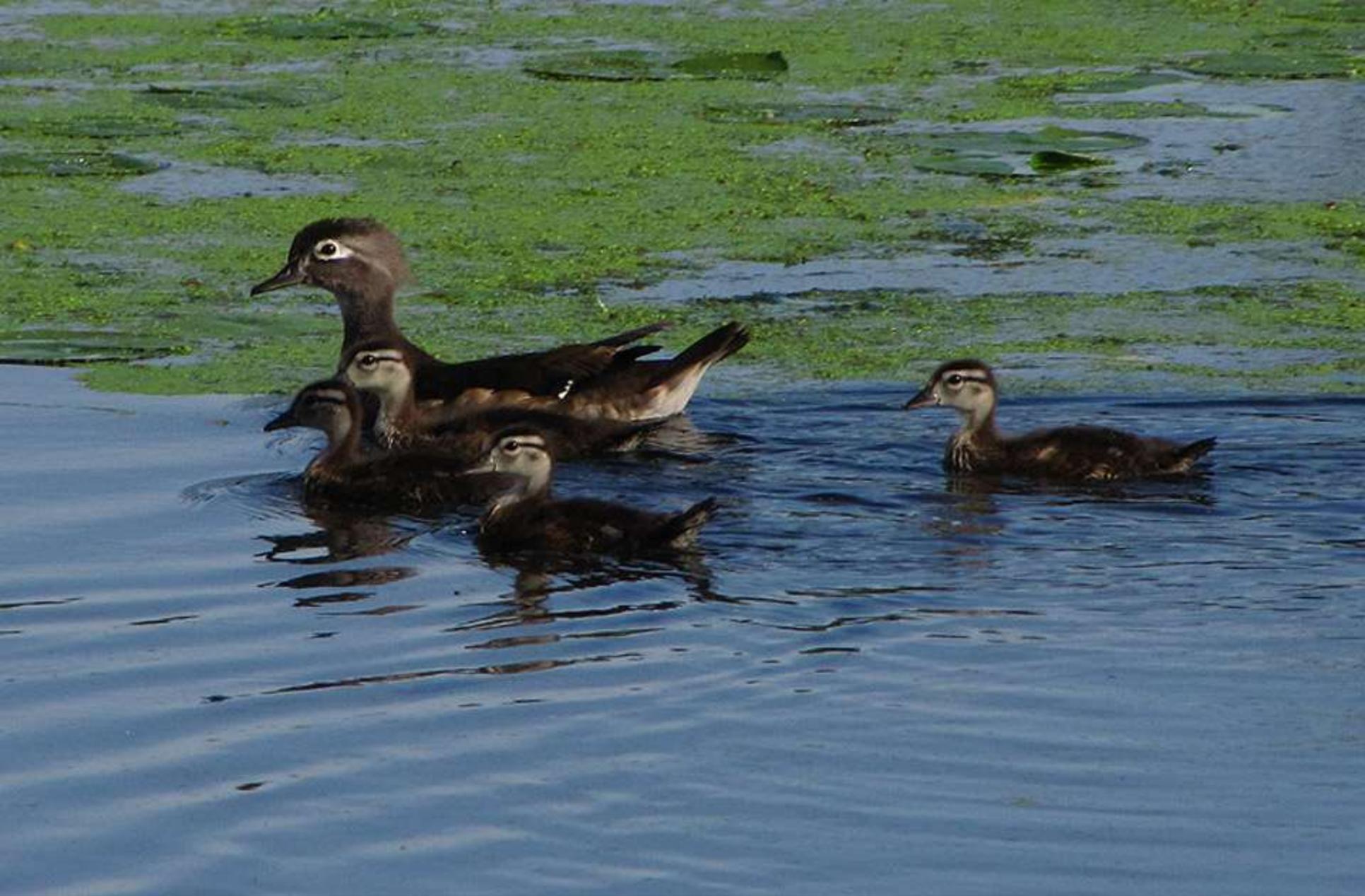
Killdeer hatchling – downy young, attains juvenile plumage by about 17 days



Wild Turkey – hatchlings



Wild Turkey – fledgling (young roost in trees by 2 weeks)



Wood Duck brood with female



Sandhill Crane baby with parents

Chipping Sparrow – juvenile







Dark-eyed Junco



Ryan Brady

Nashville Warbler



Ryan Brady

American Redstart



Brown-headed Cowbird – juvenile



Brown-headed Cowbird with foster parent Yellow Warbler



Brown-headed Cowbird with foster parent Chipping Sparrow



David Franzen

Black-billed
Cuckoo –
juvenile
with adult



David Franzen



Black-billed Cuckoo – juvenile



Black-billed Cuckoo – immature



Yellow-billed Cuckoo - juvenile



Yellow-billed Cuckoo – immature



So, the bottom line is...
if you see a juvenile bird that you don't recognize,
be very patient and wait and watch it for a while.
**One of its parents will likely come to feed it
before long!**



Applicable codes from the WBBA II handbook:

FL **Recently Fledged Young:** Recently fledged young or downy young. This includes dependent young only. Be cautious of species that range widely soon after fledgling. One of the best features to look for is the length of the tail feathers – if shorter than the adults, the young probably originated locally. Young cowbirds begging for food confirm both the cowbird and the host species.

FY **Feeding Young:** Adult bird feeding recently fledged young that are not yet independent. This code should not be used for species that may move many miles from the nest site, such as raptors and terns.

Obviously, the use of these codes is a judgment call.

Look for clues of immaturity such as:

- Tufts of down anywhere on the body.
- Short tail feathers – not yet fully grown.
- Not yet capable of strong flight.
- Appearance of loose or fluffy plumage.
- Streaks on underparts that may not be present later = juvenile.



Questions or comments?