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## How Do You Say That?

### *A pronunciation guide for birders (bur'durz)*

By Mary Taylor Gray

There's a bird you may know that looks like a gray cardinal with red trim. It inhabits arid shrub lands of the Southwest. When I first saw this bird, I was very excited. I had wanted to see this species (in large measure, I will admit, because of its peculiar name), and now I had fulfilled that desire. But having seen the bird, I had a new problem. I couldn't proclaim my triumph to others, because I didn't know how to pronounce Pyrrhuloxia!

Have you ever been bamboozled by the proper pronunciation of the common names of some birds? Do you ever mumble bird names to hide your lack of linguistic aplomb (it's a Pro-thmm-hmm-rrr Warbler)? Have you been reticent about sharing sightings, because you were embarrassed at you enunciatory uncertainty? You're not alone!

It's my personal observation, based upon informal research (i.e., talking to other birders), that many birders don't know how to pronounce the names of some of the birds they see. They read the names in the field guide, which shows proper spelling, but gives no clues to pronunciation. The *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* offers phonetic pronunciation for Latin names, but not for many of the common names. The CD-ROM guides I have seen offer an audio of bird calls, but not common names. Even a now publication called *The Birder's Dictionary* is sorely lacking in pronunciation guides.

So what do you do? You could ask another birder, but that assumes two things: 1) you are willing to reveal your lack of knowledge and look inexperienced (no birder wants that!), and 2) the person you ask knows the answer (don't bet on it).

Now, here I am to help you out of this dilemma. The following quiz will test your knowledge of bird names and give you the correct pronunciation. Answers are [following the questions] Good luck!

1. Let's start with Pyrrhuloxia—is it *PIE-roo-LOX-ee-uh* or *PEER-oo-LO-sha* or what?
2. Is Bewick's Wren pronounced *Buick's* or *Bee-wick's*?
3. How do you say Common Murre—*Murie*, *Murr*, *Moo-ree*? Or *Murray*, like the person's name?
4. How about something simple like egret—is it *EE-gret* or *ee-GRET*?
5. Here's another wader: *DOO-witcher*, *DOW-witcher*, or *DOE-witcher*?
6. If you were raised to pronounce the J in German words as a Y, you may be confused by a Parasitic Jaeger—*jayger* or *yayger*?
7. Here's another southwestern native, a neighbor of the bird in Question 1. Can you say Phainopepla?
8. How about that chicken-footed wader, the jacana? Do you say *ja-CANE-ah*, *ja-KAHN-ah*, *JACK-a-nah*, or something else?
9. Let's talk woodpeckers—is it *PIE-lee-ated* or *PILL-ee-ated*?
10. Then, there's that handsome Arctic raptor, the Gyrfalcon. Do I hear *JEER-falcon*, *JURR-falcon*, or *GIRE-falcon*?
11. How about the Ferruginous Hawk—is it *fur-ROOG-ah-nuss* or *fur-ROOJ-ah-nuss*?

12. Despite its name, the Pigeon Guillemot is not very pigeon-like. How do you say guillemot?
13. How about that South Texas specialty, the Pauraque?
14. Or how about a parula? Is it *pa-ROO-lah*, *PAR-you-lah*, or *PAIR-you-lah*?
15. How about those tea-drinking towhees—do I hear *TOO-hee*, *TOE-hee*, *TOE-whoee*, or *TOW-hee* (as in “how”)?
16. Have you ever gone hunting with a Lazuli Bunting?
17. *Prononcez, s’il vous plait*, LeConte’s Sparrow—*Le-KAUNT’s*, *Le-KAUN-tay’s*, or *Le-kaun-TAY’s*?
18. When it comes to plovers, do they sound like lovers or rovers?
19. The Pro-something Warbler—is it *pro-THAH-no-tary* or *pro-tho-NOTARY* (as in “notary public”)?
20. Do you prefer *FAWL-con* or *FAL-con* (as in “pal”)?
21. What about Ani—is it *Annie* or *AH-nee*, as in “Johnny”?
22. Would you dance around the name Chachalaca?
23. Gosh, is it *GOSH-awk* or *GAHS-hawk*?
24. How do you say Osprey? *AH-spray* or *AH-spree*?

Here are the answers: (For some of these species, there isn’t just one right way to say the name. There may be regional differences in pronunciation, the old “you say *toe-MAH-toe*” routine.)

1. That gray “cardinal” is pronounced *Purr-uh LOX-ee-ah*.
2. That’s a *Buick’s* Wren.
3. It’s Common *Murr*, as in fur.
4. Actually, either *EE-gret* or *ee-GRET* is okay.
5. *DOW-witcher* is how.
6. Since Jaeger is a German word, it’s pronounced as *Yaeger*.
7. Can you say *FAY-no-PEP-lah*?
8. Take your pick—*ja-KAHN-ah* and *ja-CAN-ah* are both used, as well as *JAH-sah-NAH*. In this last choice, the *j* is pronounced “zh” and the *c* is soft, because of the Portuguese origin of the word.
9. *PILL-ee-ated* is what most people say, though purists will tell you it’s a *PIE-lee-ated*, named for the top of the woodpecker’s head, called a pileum (*PIE-lee-um*).
10. Let’s hear it for the *JURR-falcon*.
11. It’s *fur-ROOJ-uh-nuss*.
12. Say *GILL-la-mott*.
13. Take a walk with a *pow-ROCK-ay*.
14. Pardon me, it’s *PAR-you-lah*.
15. Oh, no, it’s a *TOE-hee*.
16. *LA-zhu-lee* is fine with me.
17. Monsieur LeConte pronounces his name, and his bird, *Le-KONT* (as in “don’t”, but do it anyway).
18. *PLUV-er* (as in lover) is preferred over *PLOH-ver*.
19. *Pro-THAH-no-tary* is proper.
20. It’s your pleasure—both *FAWL-con* and *FAL-con* are in favor.
21. *AH-nee* is the answer.
22. *CHAH-chah-LAH-kah*, describes the vocalization of the species.
23. Go with *GAHS-hawk*, from the Old English *goshafoc*, meaning “goose hawk”.
24. Ah-ha! Either *AH-spray* or *AH-spree* is correct.

Hopefully, this exercise will give you a better handle on bird names. Saying a bird’s name correctly is another small step toward sharpening your overall birding skills. Best of all, it’s just plain fun to say it right. Oh, excuse me—is that *SKEW-ah* or *SKOO-ah*?

[According to an anecdote from Bob Boekelheide, the Vaux family pronunciation for its own name was *Vox* and not *Voh*. Therefore, we shall pronounce the name for that little “flying cigar” as *Vox’s Swift*.]