

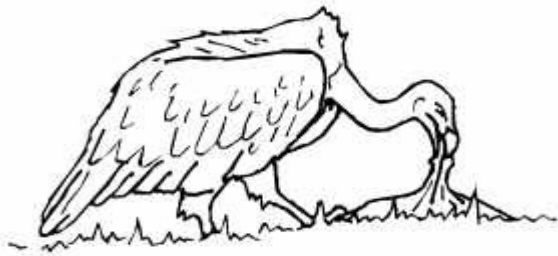
# Unclean Birds

as mentioned at Deuteronomy 14:11-20

<sup>11</sup> “Any clean bird YOU may eat. <sup>12</sup> But these are the ones of which YOU must not eat: the eagle and the osprey and the black vulture, <sup>13</sup> and the red kite and the black kite and the glede according to its kind; <sup>14</sup> and every raven according to its kind; <sup>15</sup> and the ostrich and the owl and the gull and the falcon according to its kind; <sup>16</sup> the little owl and the long-eared owl and the swan, <sup>17</sup> and the pelican and the vulture and the cormorant, <sup>18</sup> and the stork and the heron according to its kind, and the hoopoe and the bat. <sup>19</sup> And every winged swarming creature is unclean for YOU. They should not be eaten. <sup>20</sup> Any clean flying creature YOU may eat.

## VULTURE

A large carrion-eating bird that renders a very valuable service in lands of warm climate, consuming the dead carcasses and putrefying flesh that might otherwise cause disease. This bird is listed among those declared ‘unclean’ in the Mosaic Law.—Le 11:13, 18; De 14:12, 17.



## EAGLE

A large bird of prey. Some believe that the Hebrew name derives from a root word meaning “tear in pieces or lacerate.” Others view it as onomatopoeic (that is, a name whose very sound suggests the thing meant) and believe that *ne'sher* represents a “rushing sound,” or “gleaming flash,” hence a bird that dives after its prey, plummeting downward with a rushing sound and like flashing light through the air. In either case, the Hebrew term well describes the eagle, whose lightning plunge from great heights causes a whining sound as the air rushes through its widespread pinions (the outer wing feathers). A bird of prey and a drinker of blood (Job 39:27, 30), the eagle was included among those birds listed as “unclean” by the Mosaic Law.—Le 11:13; De 14:12.



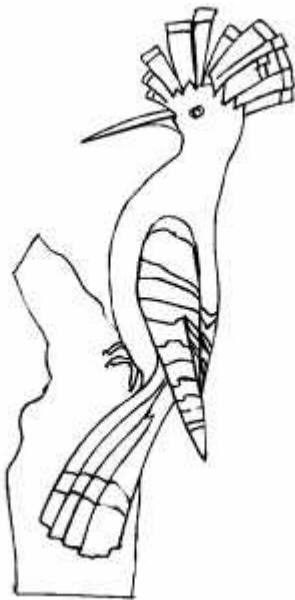
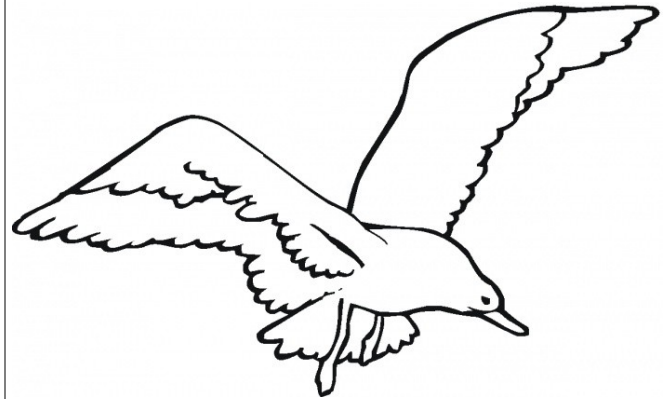
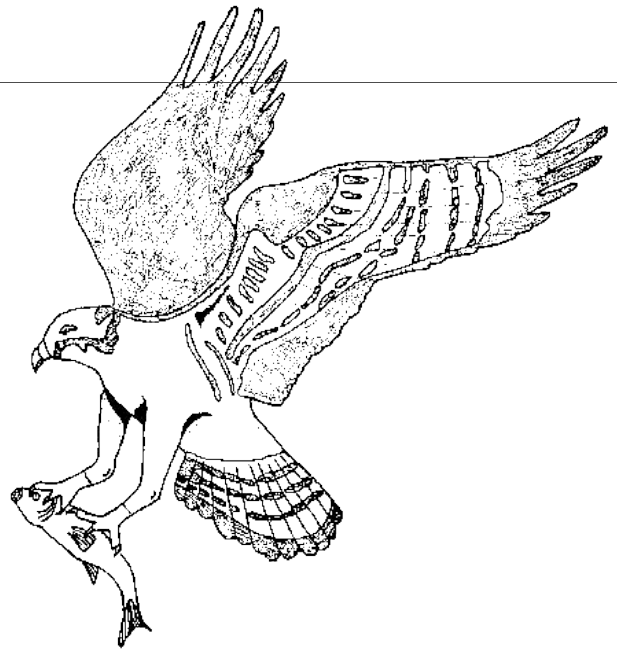
## OSPREY

One of “the flying creatures” decreed as unclean and not to be eaten, according to the Law covenant. (Le 11:13; De 14:12) Its Hebrew name (*pe’res*) literally means “the breaker.” Understanding this to refer to the breaking of bones by a bird of prey, the *King James Version* renders *pe’res* as “ossifrage,” a name derived from Latin and meaning “bone-breaker.” Others understand the Hebrew name to indicate a bird “tearing its prey” apart, and hence not necessarily denoting a breaker of bones.

## GULL

One of the birds hunting prey or eating carrion that were prohibited as food according to God’s law given to the Israelites.—Le 11:13, 16; De 14:12, 15.

Although the *King James Version* renders the Hebrew name of this bird as “cuckow” (cuckoo), this translation has generally been abandoned in favor of sea gull (sometimes called sea mew). (See CUCKOO.) Some lexicographers understand the name to be derived from a root meaning “be thin, slender, or lean,” which might describe the gull from the standpoint of its trim appearance and the relative narrowness of the body as compared with the long, pointed wings. Others believe the Hebrew name *sha’chaph* is in imitation of the shrill cry made by this generally noisy bird. The older versions (*LXX*, *Vg*) also understood it to refer to the seagoing gull. The Hebrew term *sha’chaph* may be understood to be a generic term for a web-footed seabird resembling a gull. This group includes the true gulls, terns, skimmers, and skuas.

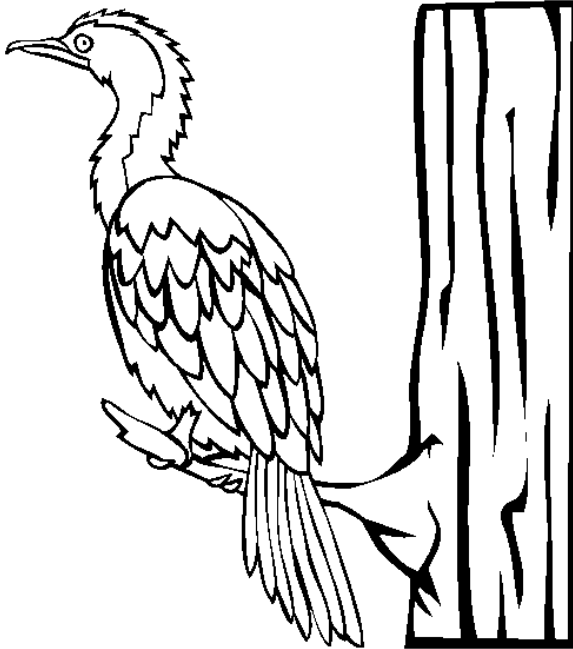


## HOOPOE

About the size of a slender pigeon, the hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) is a somewhat cinnamon-colored bird, distinctively marked with alternate broad bars of white and black along its wings and back. Its most conspicuous feature is a crest of plumes, each feather ending in a white border tipped with black, the crest running from the base of the long, slender curved bill all the way to the back of the bird’s head. Though colorfully and conspicuously dressed, the hoopoe is notably unclean in home and habits. Its diet of insects is obtained by probing with its sharp bill not only into the ground but also into dunghills and other filth. The nest gives off a disagreeable odor produced by secretions of the bird’s oil glands, and it also becomes foul smelling due to the bird’s failure to clean the nest of excrement. Thus, while not a bird of prey nor an eater of carrion, the hoopoe was included among the birds listed as unclean for food in the Mosaic Law.—Le 11:13, 19; De 14:12, 18.

## CORMORANT

A large web-footed water bird that catches fish by diving. This bird appears only in the list of unclean birds under the Mosaic Law, a list that prohibits the eating of birds most of which basically are birds of prey and carrion eaters. (Le 11:17; De 14:17) The translators of the Greek *Septuagint* understood the bird to be the *ka-tar-ra'ktes*, the Greek name for cormorant, while the Latin *Vulgate* uses *mergulus* (the "diver") to indicate the bird. The cormorant (*Phalacrocorax*) is quite common in Palestine, particularly along the Mediterranean Coast and also in certain inland waters such as the Sea of Galilee. The cormorant is related to birds of the pelican family. Usually long bodied and dark colored, the cormorant is swift and agile in the water, swimming under water mainly by use of its webbed feet. Its sharp, hooked beak makes it a good fisher, and from ancient times cormorants have been trained by fishermen in the Orient and parts of India to catch fish for their owners, a band being placed fairly loosely around the bird's throat to prevent it from swallowing anything but very small fish.

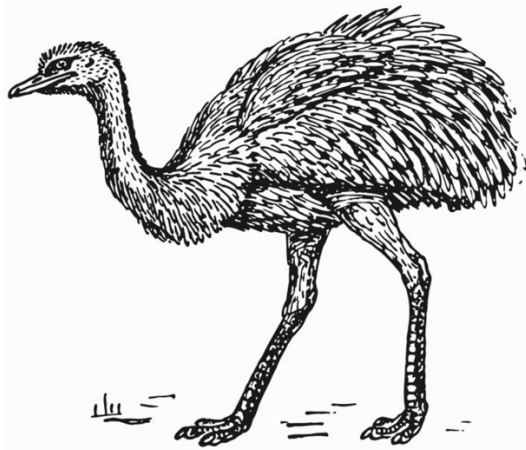


## RAVEN

The first bird specifically named in the Bible. (Ge 8:7) The largest of the crowlike birds, the raven measures about 0.6 m (2 ft) in length and may have a wingspan of some 0.9 m (3 ft). Its glossy plumage is notable for its jet-black color (Ca 5:11) with iridescent steel-blue and purple hues, the underparts at times having a touch of green. It has an extremely wide range of diet, eating anything from nuts, berries, and grains to rodents, reptiles, fish, and young birds. Though it will attack the young and weak among small animals, it is primarily a scavenger. When eating carrion it has the habit of eating the eyes and other soft parts of the victim before tearing at the abdomen with its sturdy beak. (Pr 30:17) It is a powerful flier, flapping its wings in strong, steady beats, or soaring effortlessly in wide circles while it scans the area below for food. Its continuous search for food takes it over an unusually large area.



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## OSTRICH

While the ostrich feeds mainly on vegetation, it is also carnivorous, including snakes, lizards, and even small birds in its indiscriminate diet. It is found among the list of 'unclean' birds prohibited by the Mosaic Law. (Le 11:13, 16; De 14:12, 15) Anciently known as the camel bird, the ostrich is able to endure for long periods without water and hence thrives in solitary wastelands. It is used in the Bible, along with jackals and similar creatures, as representative of desert life (Isa 43:20) and to depict the ruinous desolation that became the fate of Edom and Babylon. (Isa 13:21; 34:13; Jer 50:39) Job, rejected and detested, sitting among ashes, and mournfully crying out, considered himself like "a brother to jackals" and "a companion to the daughters of the ostrich."—Job 30:29.

## OWL

The Hebrew *tach-mas'* denotes a species of owl and is included in the list of 'unclean' birds. (Le 11:13, 16; De 14:15) This Hebrew word, being related to a verb meaning "do violence," is appropriate to the owl, which lives by preying on small rodents and birds. This kind of owl has been identified with the striated scops owl (*Otus brucei*).

Also included among the 'unclean' birds is the Hebrew *kohs*, rendered by some as the "little owl" and designated as *Athene noctua*. (De 14:16, *KJ, NW, RS*; see also *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, by L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, Leiden, 1958, p. 428) The little owl, about 25 cm (10 in.) in length, is one of the most widely distributed owls in Palestine, found in thickets, olive groves, and desolate ruins. The psalmist in his lonely affliction felt like "a little owl of desolated places." (Ps 102:6) Appropriately, the Arabic name for this variety of owl means the "mother of ruins."

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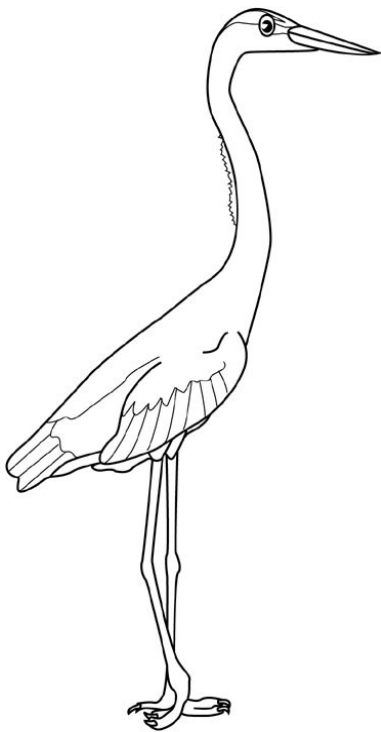


## FALCON

Modern lexicographers believe the Hebrew term *nets* applies to falcons, though some consider it to embrace also hawks, which are very similar to the falcons though classified by ornithologists as in a separate “family” grouping. (The Greek *Septuagint* and the Latin *Vulgate* render *nets* as “hawk.”) As a predator, eating snakes, lizards, small mammals, and other birds, “the falcon according to its kind” (“the hawk in its several species,” *AT*) was among those birds decreed “unclean” in the Mosaic Law.—Le 11:16; De 14:15.



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## HERON

A bird that, according to the Mosaic Law, was not to be eaten. (Le 11:13, 19; De 14:12, 18) The Hebrew name is considered by some to have been derived from a root word meaning “breathe hard,” or possibly, “snort,” likely in anger. Others suggest a closer connection of the name with the Hebrew word for “nose” (*'aph*), perhaps as descriptive of the bird’s beak. Since the Bible says “the heron according to its kind” (“in its several species,” *AT*), the Hebrew name may well include the different varieties to be found within the heron family (scientifically designated *Ardeidae*), such as the true heron, the egret, and the bittern. All these birds have long sharp bills, or beaks, and some are noted for the unusual raucous sound they make when disturbed or excited.