Are birds dinosaurs? Yes, and here is how to see it

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Are birds dinosaurs? Yes: birds are the dinosaurs still alive. See twelve birds beside their theropod cousins, an ostrich and Gallimimus, drawn to scale.

Yes, birds are dinosaurs. They are the only dinosaurs still alive, which means the robin on your fence is a very small dinosaur. Peabody's page for birds says it in one line, and the dinosaur pages agree: the Velociraptor page calls that animal "a close cousin of the dinosaurs that became birds".

It sounds like a joke the first time a child hears it. It isn't, and you can check it with your own eyes. Here is how I explain it, with the animals from Peabody's Animals section that make it easy.

What it does and doesn't mean

Not every dinosaur turned into a bird. Birds came from one branch of two-legged dinosaurs, the theropods. Peabody files eight of the twenty animals in its dinosaur wing there: T. rex, Velociraptor, Gallimimus, Dilophosaurus, Allosaurus, Carnotaurus, Spinosaurus and Therizinosaurus. Dinosaurs with long necks, armour or horns, like Brontosaurus or Triceratops, belong to other branches.

And not everything that flew near the dinosaurs was a bird, or a dinosaur. The flying reptiles are a different story, and I wrote it up in was Pteranodon a dinosaur. Peabody's Pteranodon page says birds came from dinosaurs, not from pterosaurs.

Clues you can see

- Feathers. Peabody's Velociraptor page says fossils show bumps on the arm bones where feathers attached, so scientists know it had feathers, though it could not fly. Therizinosaurus probably had them too.
- Two legs. Velociraptor ran fast on two legs. So did the ostrich, and so does a robin when it hops.
- Eggs. Every bird hatches from an egg. Peabody's Argentinosaurus page notes its eggs were small for such a giant, and that the babies grew very fast.
- Light, hollow bones. Peabody says this about Gallimimus, one of the ostrich-mimic dinosaurs, which were built for speed.

Match-ups: a bird and a dinosaur cousin

- Bird: Ostrich · How big: 2.7 m (about 9 ft) tall including the neck, runs 69 km/h (43 mph); the Smithsonian's National Zoo · Dinosaur: Gallimimus · How big: about 6 m (20 ft) long; Wikidata, citing the Natural History Museum's Dino Directory
- Bird: Wild turkey · How big: up to 1.22 m (4 ft), beak to tail, males; National Park Service, Bluestone · Dinosaur: Velociraptor · How big: 1.8 m (about 6 ft); the same Wikidata source

You can put each pair on the stage at true size beside a child: ostrich vs Gallimimus, turkey vs Velociraptor, ostrich vs Velociraptor and ostrich vs T. rex. Peabody's Velociraptor page notes it was about the size of a big dog, much smaller than in films.

Notice there is no race between the ostrich and Gallimimus. The Smithsonian's National Zoo gives a speed for the ostrich, but nobody can time a dinosaur, so Peabody says "no race" and moves on. The race page is for living animals, by speed only.

The smallest dinosaur on Peabody

The hummingbird is a bird, so it is a dinosaur too. The US Fish and Wildlife Service gives it a length of 7.5 to 9 centimetres (3 to 3.5 inches). That is the other end of the family from a T. rex at 12.2 to 13.1 metres (40 to 43 feet), from the Forest Service.

Twelve birds on Peabody

All of these are dinosaurs: the bald eagle, emperor penguin, hummingbird, ostrich, peregrine falcon, great horned owl, scarlet macaw, American flamingo, American robin, mallard, wild turkey and greater roadrunner. The whole shelf is at birds.

Try tonight

Go outside, or to a window, and watch one bird for a few minutes. Count its legs, look for the beak, and look for feathers. Then say it out loud: "That's a dinosaur." The who lives in your backyard guide and the backyard page suggest who to look for, and the fish, bird or mammal quiz is a quick game for the evening. Peabody also has its own guide to this question.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is a chicken a dinosaur?

Yes, because every bird is. Peabody doesn't have a chicken page yet, so the nearest one is the wild turkey.

Is a penguin a dinosaur?

Yes. A penguin can't fly, but it has feathers, wings and a beak, and it hatches from an egg, so it is a bird. See the emperor penguin.

Is a bat a dinosaur?

No. A bat is a mammal, with fur, and it feeds its babies milk. Peabody's little brown bat page shows one.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026 and has no ads. The library has stories to read next, and the dinosaur facts page has more on the wing.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/are-birds-dinosaurs