



Killdeer

Coloring instructions:

Black - the bill and all the bands labeled BLACK

Brown - the wings and back

Orange - the eye ring, the upper tail, and the rump

Pinkish brown - the legs

White - the rest of the bird, including the wingtips

Killdeer

Length: 8"

Habitat: Common resident in fields and pastures

Field marks: Two black neck marks and white underside. Brownish orange rump and upper tail which show when bird flies.

A Killdeer runs across the gravelly ground. The prominent black and white neck bands make the bird easy to see. Suddenly the Killdeer stops and...you can't see it. The bird has disappeared.

The Killdeer illustrates two important principles of camouflage. One is **countershading**, the underside being lighter than the top. The second principle is **disruptive coloration**. The black and white neck bands break up the image of the bird so that you, or a predator, do not notice the outline of the bird. Instead of seeing "bird," the eye sees unrelated patches of blacks, whites, and grays. When the bird moves, the eye can see the moving patches and connect them into the shape of a bird. But the moment the bird stops, the eye loses the bird outline, and the Killdeer seems to vanish into the gravel.

The Killdeer must have excellent camouflage because it nests on the open ground. The nest is usually a shallow scoop in dry, rocky ground.

The four eggs are covered with splotches so that they look like four rocks lying among all the other small rocks. It is extremely challenging to find a Killdeer nest. What makes it even more challenging is that the parent will make itself quite visible when you are getting near the nest. You will hear the distinctive shrill call and see the parent running on the ground. The bird might make itself even more prominent by spreading its bright, eye-catching cinnamon tail. What you had not noticed before was that the Killdeer had scurried far from its nest before catching your attention.

The parent might even be fluttering or dragging its wing or tail as if it was injured. This broken wing act makes a predator think the injured bird is an easily caught meal. The bird lures the predator far from its nest, and then flies away and waits for the predator to leave the area before returning to the nest.

We often think of birds as sitting on their eggs to keep them warm. Killdeer often face the task of cooling their eggs. Bare, rocky ground becomes quite hot on sunny days. Killdeer fly to water, soak their bellies, return to the nest, dampen the eggs, and then stand and shade them.

Killdeer Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a Killdeer. The males and females look the same.
- See how invisible a Killdeer becomes when it stands still.
- Hear a male give its shrill "Kill-dee" call repeatedly as it advertises its territory. The male may do this from a high spot or while flying in circles with a distinctive deeper, slower wingbeat.
- See a Killdeer do its broken wing act.

Find more educational materials at www.wintuaudbon.org/education

