

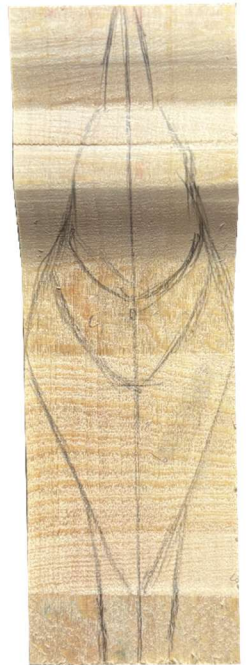
Nuthatch on a Stick

Pattern by Becky Barnes, 2026



Branches from our Birch tree fell in the yard, which got me thinking about projects. One of my favorite tiny birds is the Nuthatch – often I hear them long before I can see them. This pattern is part carved, part found – after cutting out a blank, add a hole in the bottom for a dowel rod to attach it to a stick or a small piece of bark. I used a 1.5” basswood stick for the blank.

Add a midline to your blank to ensure your sides are approximately even when carving. The top-down doodle is most important at this stage, since the side-view is cut out. At far right you can see the beak (top), head, shoulders, folded wings, and tail (bottom). The image above in the middle has the side of the folded wing, eye, and cheek.



At bottom left, I have begun trimming down the sides. Because the beak is so thin and delicate, I will tackle that last – leaving extra wood around it for support. The tail is wider and more sturdy, so it is safe to trim next to.



Below, I begin the process of rounding the corners – no one wants a square bird. As you work around the chest, rump and shoulders, beware grain direction! It might be helpful to pencil in the direction of the grain on your bird, as a reminder of when to carve towards you, or away. The beak, at left on the image below, you might notice the grain isn't 100% parallel with the project. I want to be very mindful of each cut made when I finally get to that area.





At left I've continued to round the edges across the chest, tail, rump, and head.



This project was done only with a knife – but gouges might make adding a recess along the underside of the wings easier. What I did here was use very shallow V-cuts – slicing rather than pushing, for added control. The V-cuts all along the underside of the wing, even though shallow, help add shadows to your carving. Shadows = Contrast, and Contrast = interesting to look at! Thanks Mom.

At top-right more shallow V-cuts are added to the end of the tail, coming in from the side of the wings. This is to mimic the wing-tips folded over the back. You can also see cuts across where the shoulder feathers cover the tops of the wings – sketched in on the first page.



At bottom-right, the shallow V-cuts come in on the underside of the tail to represent the rump feathers.



At bottom right is another view showing the different body sections. Beak at left, then head, shoulders, wings, and tail. Even very subtle cuts help add shadows – so if you're worried about taking away too much, start with little chips and then move the carving around to see how the shadows are cast.



Time to paint! This is essentially a flat-plane carved bird, so you can add as much or as little painting detail as you want. At right I've added a watered down wash of white acrylic, taking care to add more to where the end grain sucks it in.



For the gray feathers, I've used a mixture of Payne's Gray and White, because the feathers have a slight blue-gray cast to them. A mix of just black-and-white would be a more neutral gray tone.



Here I've blocked in the gray feathers, and the dark / black feathers with the mixture.

Next I used straight Payne's Gray for the "black" feathers, since they still have a little blue-cast to them. I did not count out feathers... I just added a selection of Primary (flight, closest to the tail) feathers and Covert (below the shoulders). Looking at photos of Nuthatches, I chose a size that looked about right and tried to mimic that. If you want to get suuuuper detailed, they have 9 Primary feathers – however when folded the spacing isn't perfect, and many are hidden by other feathers... which is why I used a heavy dose of guesstimation.





With a small brush, I put streaks of white on the outside edge of each dark gray feather.

I used actual black paint for the eye, and a tiny dot of white for a highlight.

Even though once attached to the stick most of the underside will be hidden, I mixed up a little rusty-colored paint, and used my most beat up brush to add a smattering of color to the bird britches.

