Taxonomic Keys

Taxonomic keys, also called dichotomous keys are used to help scientists identify unknown specimens.

Taxonomic keys are broken down into a series of steps. Each step presents two choices based on the possible characteristics of your unidentified organism. Each step eliminates possible organisms until one remains that matches all the characteristics of the unknown specimen.

Starting at step 1, pick the choice offered that best matches your organism and proceed. After you make your choice you will be directed to another step. Continue to follow the directions given to you until you find the correct name.

Ex: Use the key provided to identify the birds shown to you:

#1. ______________________________________
#2. ______________________________________
#3. ______________________________________
#4. ______________________________________
#5. ______________________________________
#6. ______________________________________
#7. ______________________________________
#8. ______________________________________
#9. ______________________________________
#10. _____________________________________
#11. _____________________________________
#12. _____________________________________
**“Name that Bird” Taxonomic Key**

1a. Bird has long yellow and white feathers............Bird of Paradise  
1b. Bird lacks long yellow and white feathers...............go to 2

2a. Bird has mostly green or blue color ....................... go to 3  
2b. Bird lacks blue or green color...............................go to 8

3a. Bird has long neck.................................Great Blue Heron  
3b. Bird has short or normal neck............................go to 4

4a. Bird has green feathers ...................................... go to 5  
4b. Bird has no green feathers ...............................go to 6

5a. Bird is has a brown neck.................................Green Heron  
5b. Bird is blue, green and red...............................go to 7

6a. Bird is blue and black..............................Indigo Bunting  
6b. Bird is blue and white ................................Blue Jay

7a. Bird has a red belly.................................Superb Starling  
7b. Bird has a very little red on its beak................Purple Gallinule

8a. Bird is short and chubby............................. go to 9  
8b. Bird is large and long ................................. go to 11

9a. Bird has a yellow chest ......................Kookaburra  
9b. Bird has a “belted” chest...............................go to 10

10a. Bird has a brown belt across the chest......Belted Kingfisher  
10b. Bird has a black belt across the chest............Crocodile Bird

11a. Bird has a long beak ............................. go to 12  
11b. Bird has a short beak and very long legs...........Secretary Bird

12a. Bird is mostly white...............................White Ibis  
12b. Bird is not white .......................................go to 13

13a. Bird is brown...............................................Limpkin  
13b. Bird is blue-gray.........................................Great Blue Heron