

A Tale of Two Birds

PANEL ONE OF THE NATIONAL TAPESTRY

by Judy Jeroy

When the call went out for someone to stitch the Carolina Wren for panel one of the national tapestry, my hand went up. This was my kind of project! For years I have been stitching birds as accurately as possible using crewel wools on linen twill fabric. In my enthusiasm, I told Dale Sokolow that I would also embroider the Blue Jay needed for the panel.

One reason I was so enthusiastic was that I had already stitched both birds for other projects. Many years ago, for a seminar competition, I placed the Blue Jay on a sycamore branch and used Russian punch needle to depict the background. The new Blue Jay is a bit more dramatic and slightly plumper. Another big difference is the background. Because the new pieces will be applied to a painted canvas, I painted the linen twill fabric in shades of green, feeling this would make it easier to blend.

Referring frequently to magazine photographs, I begin working from the head of the bird, finishing with the tail and feet.

Blue Jay

Eye: Begin with the eye and beak, establishing the countenance of the bird. The eye could be worked in padded satin stitch, using black stranded cotton ensuring that the circle of the eye is round. Backstitch all around the eye with white thread, joining the stitches and pulling tightly to cause the eye to protrude. With white sewing thread, place a stitch in the eye as a light reflection that will bring the eye to life.

Beak: Stitch the beak in rows of outline stitch, shading from darker gray at the edge to lighter gray so that it looks as though the beak is curved. Show the line of separation

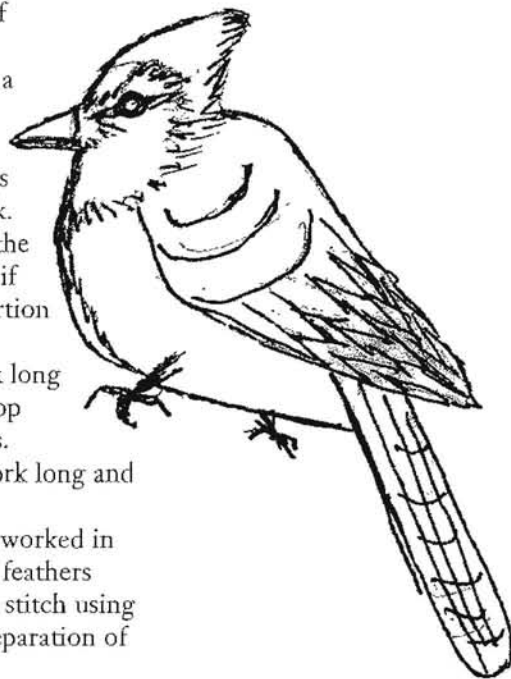
between the top and bottom half by a row of dark gray.

Face mask: The Blue Jay has a black mask that surrounds the beak. Stitch this area with thin black wool, radiating the stitches upward from the top of the beak. Continue this stitching around the edge of the eye and extend it as if applying mascara to the rear portion of the eye.

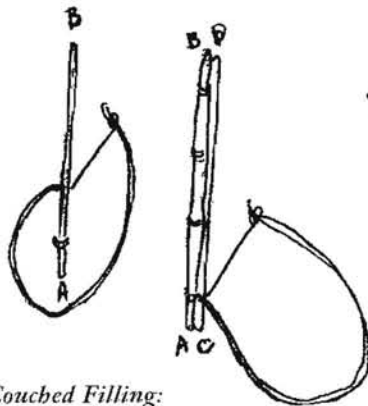
Crest: Using blue wool, work long and short shading, leaving the top edge ragged to simulate feathers.

Breast: Using white wool, work long and short down over breast.

Wings: The scapulars can be worked in buttonhole stitch. The primary feathers should be in light-blue fishbone stitch using darker blue gray to define the separation of the feathers.



MARIE CAMPBELL

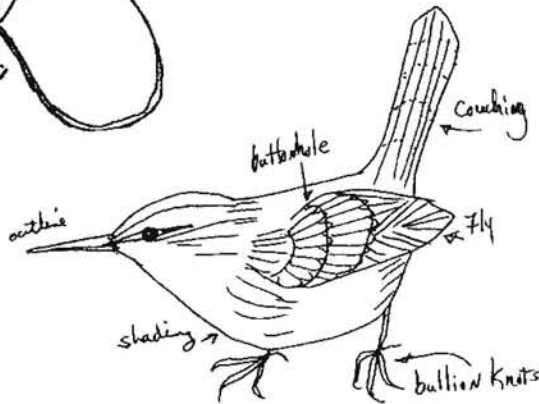


Couched Filling: Lay base thread (lighter color) up at A and down at B—along line to be covered. With contrasting (darker) thread, bring needle up alongside the lighter thread to be couched. Take a stitch over the thread to be couched down right beside it. A pattern can be formed by spacing the darker couching threads.

The drawing of the wren is 45 percent smaller than the embroidery. The Blue Jay drawing (p. 35) is full size.



Eye: Split stitch or satin with tiny dot of white outlined with backstitch.



Body: With dark-blue thread work an outline around the body in outline stitch. Then with the appropriate blue threads fill the area with long and short, stitching up to and almost covering the gray.

Tail: You may use fishbone stitch, satin, or rows of stem or outline stitch, making sure that the length of each tail feather is emphasized. Use dark gray thread to show lines between each feather. You can extend long blue lines couched with dark charcoal.

Feet: After the branch is worked, stitch the legs with stem stitch and work bullion knots in dark charcoal gray for the toes. Use straight stitch for claws.

Carolina Wren

I had taught a class in South Carolina with a design of yellow jasmine and two Carolina Wrens. Portions of that piece were painted, such as the leaves and most of the flowers. I placed the new wren on a lighter green painted background, but I kept her little tail cocked up as it is in real life.

Eye: The eye could be worked in padded satin stitch, using black stranded cotton ensuring that the circle of the eye is round. Backstitch all around the eye with white thread, joining the stitches and pulling tightly to cause the eye to protrude. With white sewing thread, place a stitch in the eye to act as a light reflection to bring the eye to life.

Beak: Stitch the beak in rows of outline stitch, with stem stitch on the bottom beak to make it appear curved. Show the line of separation between the top and bottom half by a row of dark gray thread.

Face mask: The wren has a black mask that surrounds the eye. Stitch this area with thin black wool, radiating the stitches backward from the beak, surrounding the eye, and ending toward the back of the head. The throat under the beak is in white long and short stitches radiating toward the back. The remainder of the face is a very light beige-gray in long and short.

Breast: Work the breast in creamy white in long and short stitch. The base of the belly leading to the tail is in beige.

Wings: The scapulars can be worked in buttonhole stitch. The primary feathers should be in light-grey fishbone stitch using darker beige gray to show feather separation.

Tail: You may use fishbone stitch, satin, or rows of stem/outline stitch, making sure that the length of each tail feather is emphasized. Use dark grey thread to show lines between each feather. You may instead lay long stitches and couch them in a pattern.

Feet: After branch is worked, work bullion knots in either dark grey or tan, using individual stitches for the toes. Use straight stitch for claws.

Judy Jeroy is an author and teacher of crewel embroidery and designer of the panels for the national tapestry project. She resides in Virginia Beach, is a member of Tidewater Virginia Chapter, and Dean of Faculty for Seminar 2006.