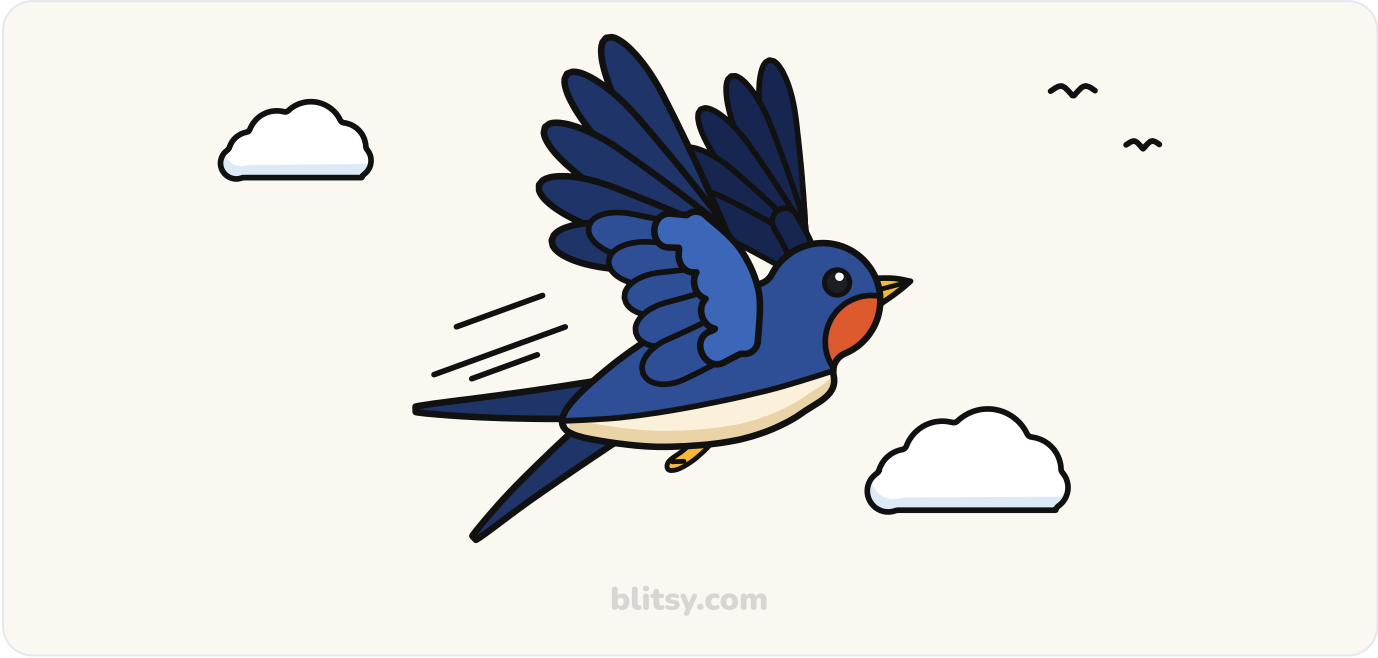
How to Draw a Flying Bird

12 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

- A pencil
- An eraser
- A black fineliner
- Colored pencils
- Plain paper

How to use this guide

New lines for each step are shown in **blue**; lines you already drew are gray. Draw lightly first, then ink and erase near the end.

Read the full tutorial online →

STEP 1 Sketch the flight line and body guides



Start with one long slanted line rising from the lower left to the upper right. That's the direction of flight. Near the right end, draw a circle for the head, then a teardrop body along the line, with its round end touching the head and its point aiming down to the left.

💡 **Tip:** Tilt the whole bird upward. A level body looks like it's gliding, while a slanted one looks like it's climbing.

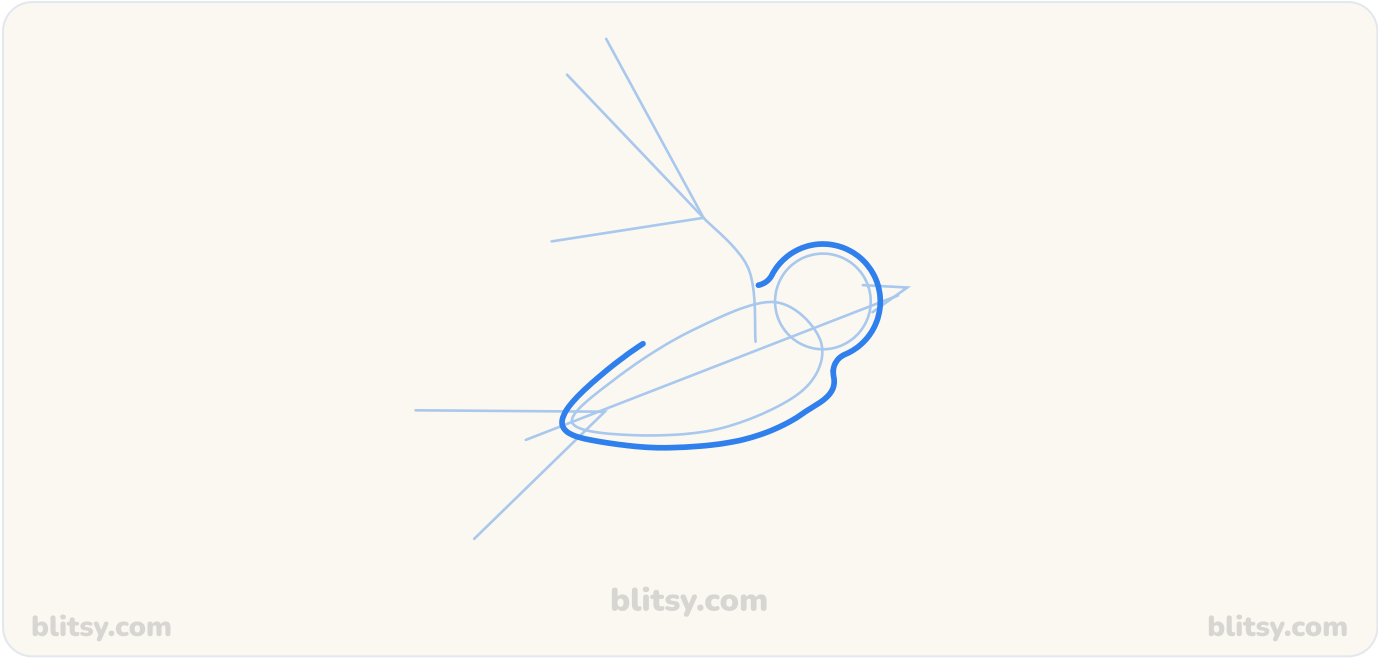
STEP 2 Add guide lines for the wing and tail



From the top of the body, just behind the head, draw a short curve going up. Where it stops is the wrist. From that point, draw three lines spreading up and back like a paper fan. Add a wide V at the tail end and a small sideways triangle for the beak.

💡 **Tip:** Put a tiny dot at the wrist so you can find it again when the feathers go in.

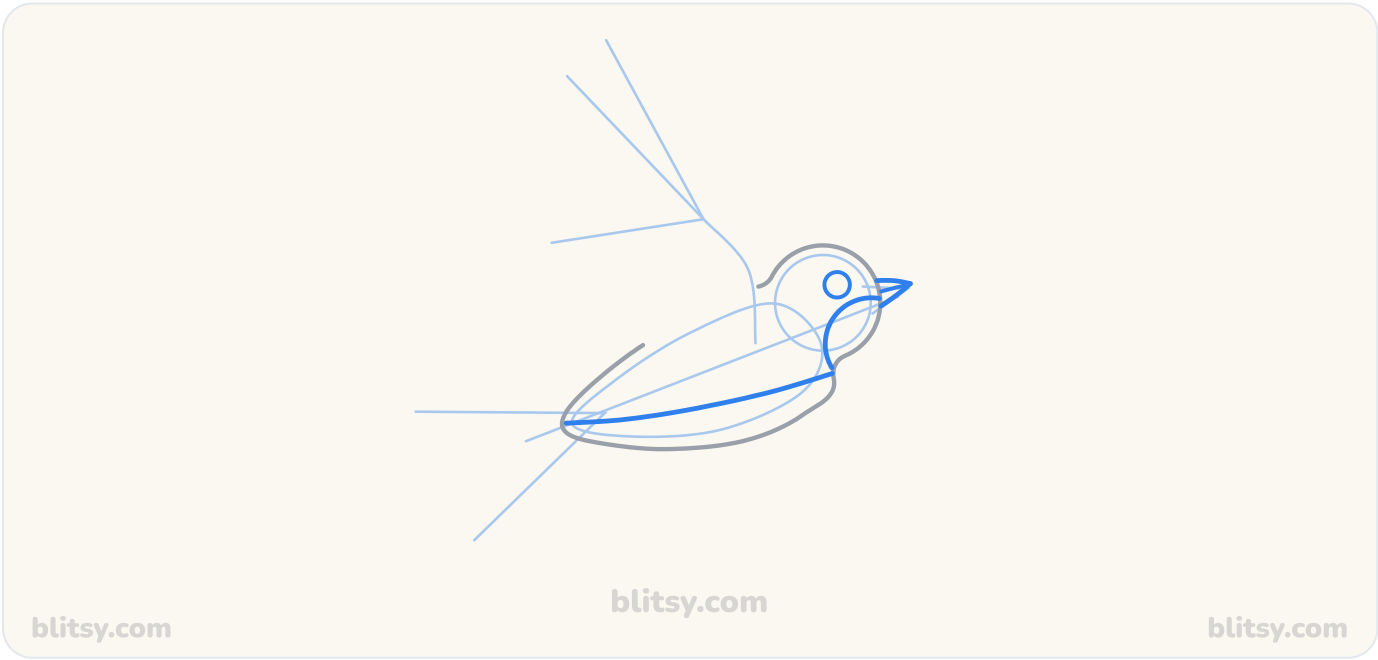
STEP 3 Draw the round head and teardrop body



Go over the head circle with a smooth line, then follow the teardrop around the chest and belly. Leave the top of the back open where the wing will cover it. I make the head much bigger than a real swallow's, because a large head is what makes a small bird look cute.

💡 **Tip:** Draw long curves in one slow stroke rather than many short scratchy ones.

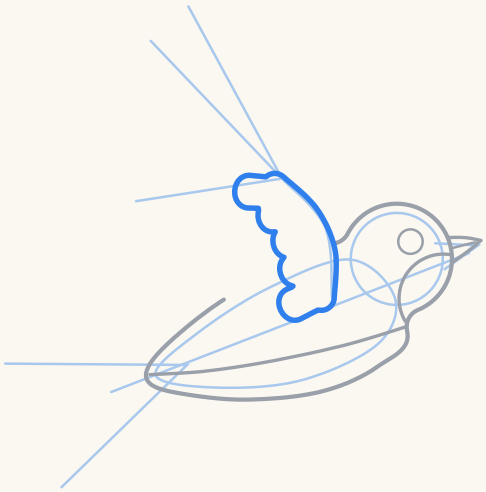
STEP 4 Add the beak, eye and throat



Draw a short pointed beak over the triangle with a thin line through the middle. Place a round eye high on the head, just behind the beak. Then draw a curve from under the beak to the chest for the orange red throat, and one long curve to the tail end that splits the dark back from the pale belly.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the beak short. A long beak quickly turns a songbird into a heron or a kingfisher.

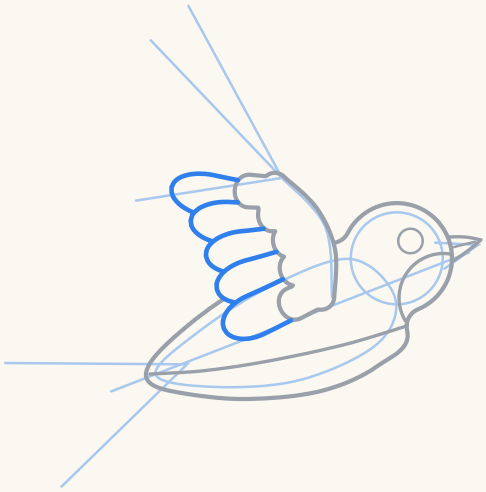
STEP 5 Shape the top of the wing



From the shoulder, draw the front edge of the wing up to the wrist dot. Come back down the other side with a row of small soft bumps. Those are the short covering feathers on top of the wing, and they make it look thick and feathery instead of flat.

💡 **Tip:** Make the bumps a little uneven in size so they look like real feathers, not a scalloped border.

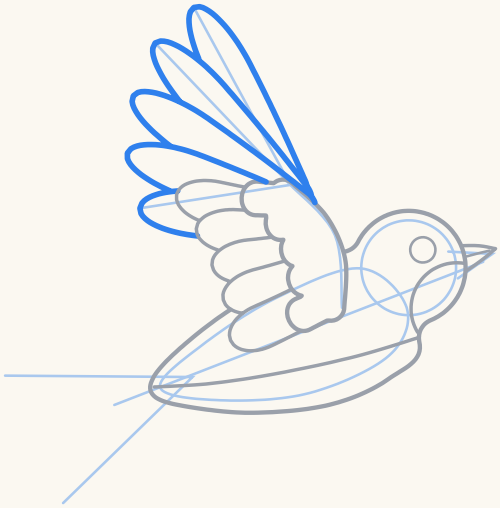
STEP 6 Draw the inner wing feathers



Under the bumpy row, add five rounded feathers in a stack, working from the body up toward the wrist. Each one points back toward the tail. These grow along the forearm, so I keep them fairly short.

💡 **Tip:** Overlap each feather slightly with its neighbour. Gaps between them make the wing look broken.

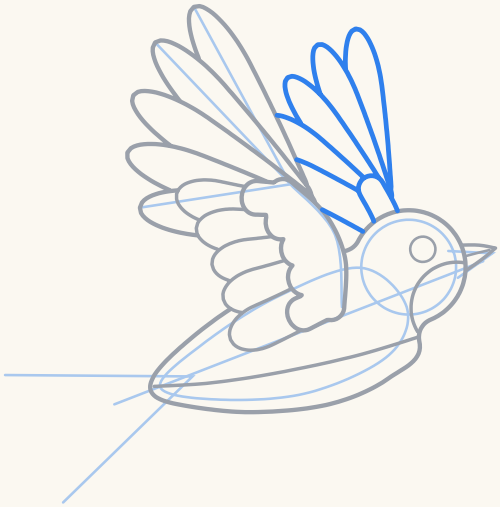
STEP 7 Fan the long feathers out from the wrist



This is the step that makes the bird fly. Draw five long feathers with rounded tips, all starting near the wrist and following your fan guides. The front one is the tallest; each one behind it tilts further back and gets a little shorter. Beginners often draw them parallel like fingers, which makes the wing look stiff.

💡 **Tip:** Check that the feathers spread apart at the tips and squeeze together at the wrist.

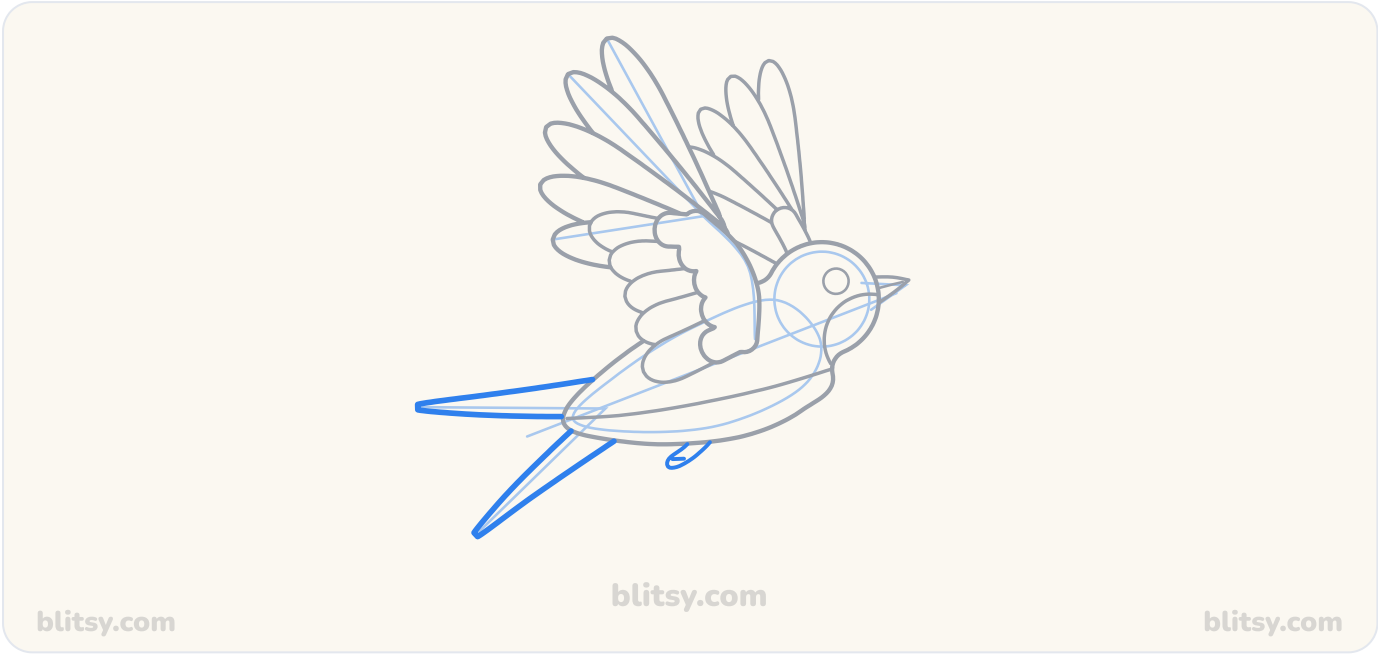
STEP 8 Show the far wing behind the back



The other wing is raised too, but it's further away, so only part of it shows between the near wing and the head. Draw a smaller fan of long feathers there. Stop every line where it meets the near wing or the head, because those are in front.

💡 **Tip:** Smaller and partly hidden reads as further away, so resist drawing the far wing full size.

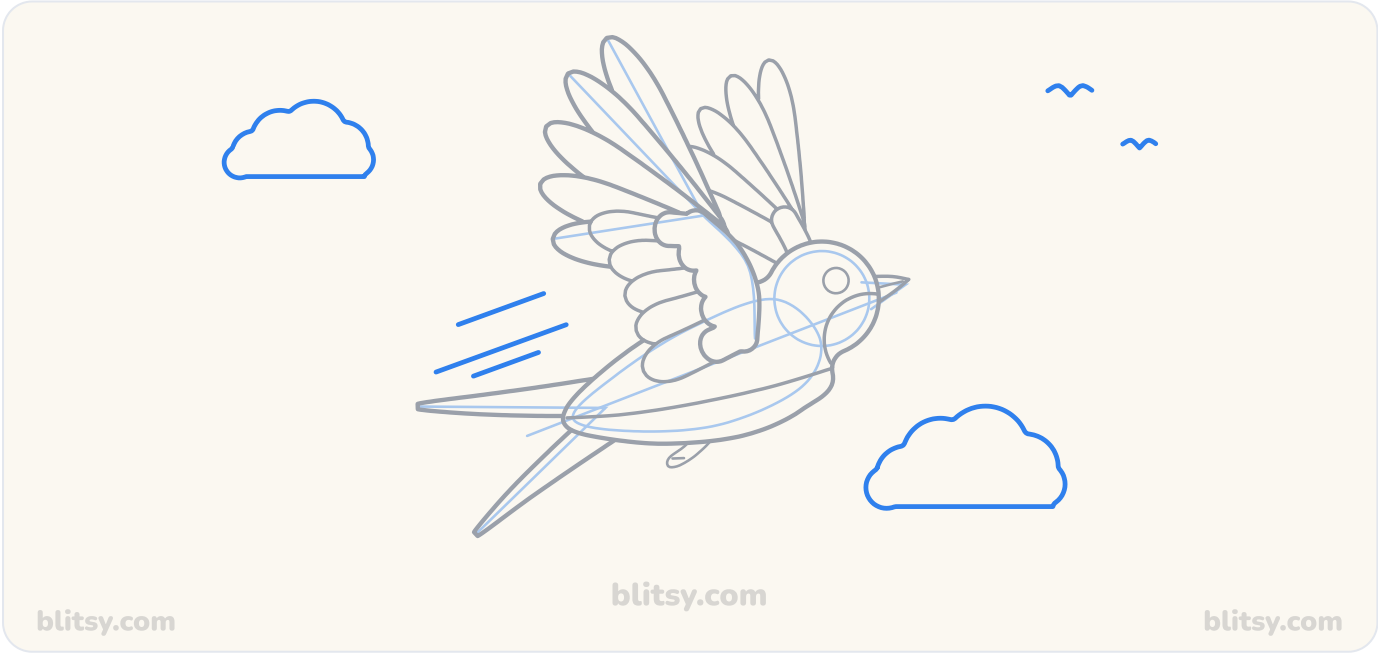
STEP 9 Add the forked tail and tucked feet



A deeply forked tail with two long streamers is the detail people recognise first on a barn swallow. Draw two long, thin points along your V guide, wide at the body and narrow at the tips. Under the belly, add a tiny foot pointing backward, since a flying bird folds its feet up close.

💡 **Tip:** Let the lower streamer be a touch longer and steeper than the upper one for a sense of depth.

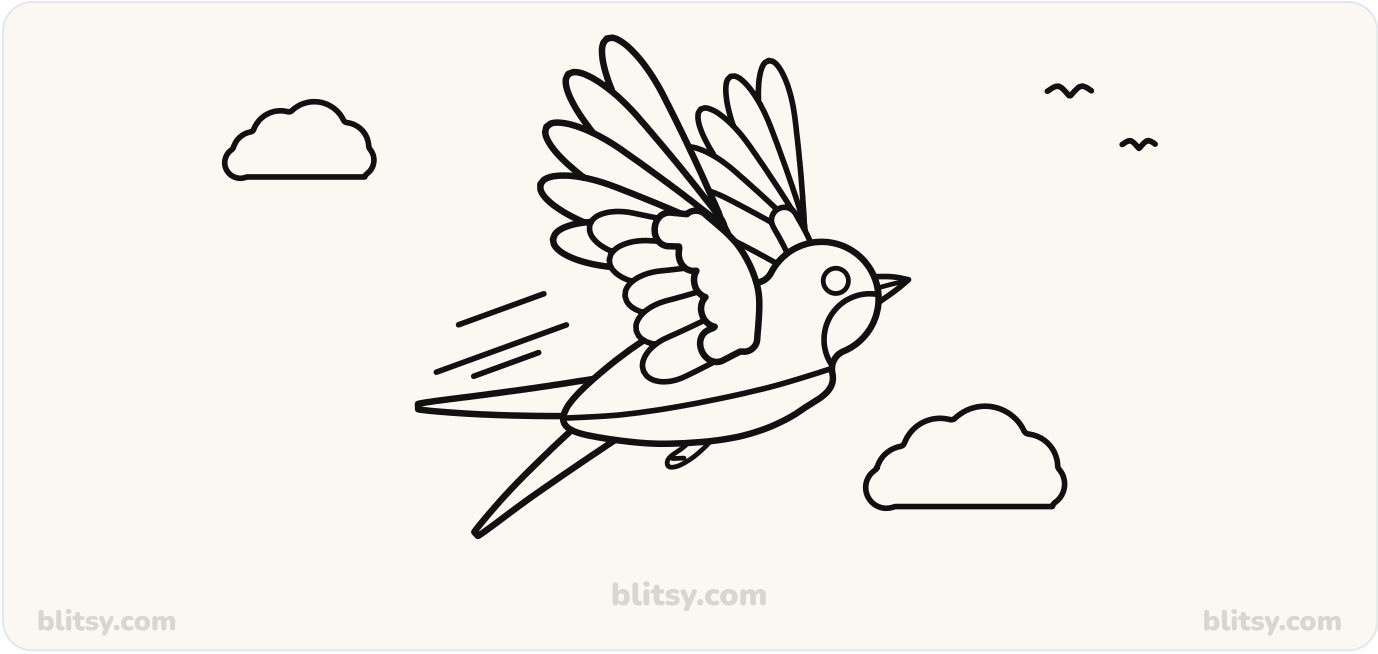
STEP 10 Draw clouds and motion lines



Behind the bird, add three short lines that follow the slant of the flight line. Then draw two puffy clouds with bumpy tops and flat bottoms, one on each side of the bird, and a pair of tiny curved V shapes far off for distant birds.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the motion lines away from the bird's outline so they don't look like part of the tail.

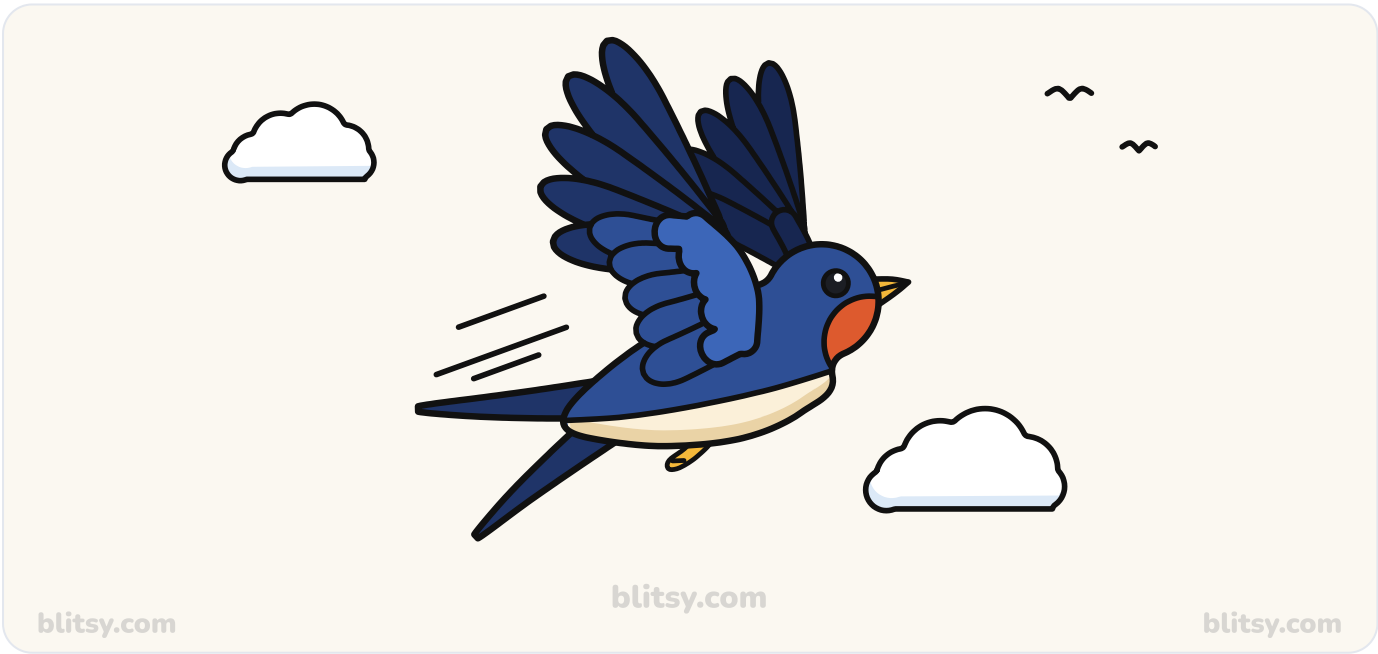
STEP 11 Ink the lines and erase the guides



Trace every keeper line with your black pen, from the beak to the tail tips, plus the clouds and motion lines. Wait until the ink is dry, then erase all the light guides, including the flight line and the fan lines. What's left should look like a clean coloring page.

💡 **Tip:** Ink the wing feathers from the wrist outward so your hand doesn't drag across wet lines.

STEP 12 Color the swallow



I color the long flight feathers and tail dark blue, the back and inner feathers medium blue, and the bumpy top row light blue. The throat gets orange red and the belly cream with a tan band along the bottom. Use yellow for the beak and foot and black for the eye, leaving the clouds white with a pale blue shadow.

💡 **Tip:** Leave a small white dot in the eye uncolored. That tiny highlight makes the bird look alive.