FIELD GUIDE · NO. 24

Ground-to-Air Signals

Large, simple symbols in the open help aircraft understand what you need.



FROM THE BOOK

1. If aircraft may be searching, an open area is usually easier to see from than a spot under a dense canopy. Move to more visible ground only if you can do it safely.
2. Ground-to-air signals communicate simple information quickly. Make large symbols with rocks, logs, backpacks, or other materials that contrast with the terrain, and place them where they can be seen clearly from the air.
3. The book's field reference: X means medical assistance is required; V means assistance is required; Y means yes or affirmative; N means no or negative.
4. Make the symbols as large as practical. A person standing alone is much harder to recognize from above than a large, clear shape.
5. Bright clothing, a reflective emergency blanket, or a signal mirror also helps search teams see you. Smoke can signal too, but only if a fire is safe, legal, and kept under control — a signal should not become another emergency.

PRACTICE IT

In your yard or a legal open area, lay out a large V or X with contrasting objects, walk a short distance away, and see whether the shape is still obvious. Then pick the materials back up.