

2ND EDITION

Birds *of* Missouri

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

Birds that are mostly black p. 25

Birds that are mostly black and white p. 47

Birds that are mostly blue p. 71

Birds that are mostly brown p. 85

Birds that are mostly gray p. 203

Birds that have prominent green p. 257

Birds that have prominent orange p. 269

Birds that have prominent red p. 275

Birds that are mostly white p. 287

Birds that have prominent yellow p. 301

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Stan Tekiela

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Birds of Missouri Field Guide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

What's New?	6
Why Watch Birds in Missouri?	7
Observe with a Strategy; Tips for Identifying Birds.	9
Bird Basics	12
Bird Color Variables	12
Bird Nests.	14
Who Builds the Nest?	17
Fledging.	17
Why Birds Migrate	17
How Do Birds Migrate?	19
How to Use This Guide	20
Range Maps.	21

Sample Pages	22-23
-------------------------------	-------

The Birds

Black	25
Black and White	47
Blue	71
Brown	85
Gray	203
Green	257
Orange	269
Red	275
White	287
Yellow	301

Birding on the Internet	320
--	-----

Checklist/Index by Species	321
---	-----

About the Author	324
-----------------------------------	-----

WHAT'S NEW?

It is hard to believe that it's been more than 20 years since the debut of *Birds of Missouri Field Guide*. This critically acclaimed field guide has helped countless people identify and enjoy the birds that we love. Now, in this expanded second edition, *Birds of Missouri Field Guide* has many new and exciting changes and a fresh look, while retaining the same familiar, easy-to-use format.

To help you identify even more birds in Missouri, I have added 9 new species and more than 150 new color photographs. All of the range maps have been meticulously reviewed, and many updates have been made to reflect the ever-changing movements of the birds.

Everyone's favorite section, "Stan's Notes," has been expanded to include even more natural history information. "Compare" sections have been updated to help ensure that you correctly identify your bird, and additional feeder information has been added to help with bird feeding. I hope you will enjoy this great new edition as you continue to learn about and appreciate our Missouri birds!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stan", written in a cursive, flowing style.

WHY WATCH BIRDS IN MISSOURI?

Millions of people have discovered bird feeding. It's a simple and enjoyable way to bring the beauty of birds closer to your home. Watching birds at your feeder often leads to a lifetime pursuit of bird identification. The *Birds of Missouri Field Guide* is for those who want to identify common birds of Missouri.

There are over 1,100 species of birds found in North America. In Missouri alone there have been more than 400 different kinds of birds recorded through the years. These bird sightings were diligently recorded by hundreds of bird watchers and became part of the official state record. From these valuable records, I've chosen 124 of the most common birds of Missouri to include in this field guide.

Bird watching, often called birding, is one of the most popular activities in America. Its outstanding appeal in Missouri is due, in part, to an unusually rich and abundant birdlife. Why are there so many birds? One reason is open space. Missouri is more than 69,000 square miles (179,400 sq. km), making it the twenty-first-largest state. Despite its large size, only about 6.1 million people call Missouri home. On average, that's only 88 people per square mile (34 per sq. km). Most of these people are located in and around only four major cities.

Open space is not the only reason there is such an abundance of birds. It's also the diversity of habitat. The state can be broken into three distinct regions, each of which supports a different group of birds.

The Glaciated Plains (Central Lowlands) in the northern half of Missouri is an open region with rolling hills, many streams and wooded river valleys. Although original vegetation was tallgrass prairie, it is now mainly agricultural. Many open-country birds are here, such as Horned Larks and Eastern Bluebirds, the latter being the state bird of Missouri. The northern Glaciated

Plains can be subdivided into northwest and northeast microregions. Northwest Missouri is dryer and lacks the trees of the northeast. In this area birds such as the Dickcissel and Northern Cardinal are more common. The wooded regions of the northeast attract such species as the Red-headed Woodpecker and House Wren.

Southern Missouri, called the Ozark Uplands or the Ozarks, is the most rugged area. Missouri's highest point and large tracts of forest are found here. Its oak-hickory forests are home to many birds such as Great Crested Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers.

Missouri's southeast corner is the lowest, flattest and wettest part of the state. Known as the Mississippi Lowlands, this region has been altered more than any other area in Missouri. It consisted of thick lowland forest in pre-settlement times. Now it is open, well drained and a good place to see species such as the Killdeer and Common Yellowthroat.

With several major rivers in Missouri, water also plays a large part in the state's bird populations. The Missouri River forms the border at the northwest corner. It also creates a natural division between north and south Missouri, cutting across the state from west to east. The Mississippi River forms the entire eastern border. Damming of several other major rivers in Missouri has created many of the state's largest lakes or reservoirs, such as Lake of the Ozarks, Truman Lake and Stockton Lake. These aquatic areas have created a substantial habitat for waterbirds such as the Double-crested Cormorant and Great Blue Heron.

Not only does Missouri have varying habitats, it has variations in the weather. Since the state extends over 300 miles (483 km) from north to south, the weather ranges greatly. While Missouri is considered a warm and humid state, the northern

portion is considerably colder than the southern part in the winter. It's not uncommon for the northern portion to remain below freezing for extended periods in winter. During summer the central and southern portions of Missouri are extremely warm, with average high temperatures in the nineties during July and August.

No matter where you are in Missouri, there are birds to watch in every season. Whether witnessing a migration of songbirds in fall or welcoming back hummingbirds in spring, there is variety and excitement in birding as each season turns to the next.

OBSERVE WITH A STRATEGY; TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING BIRDS

Identifying birds isn't as difficult as you might think. By simply following a few basic strategies, you can increase your chances of successfully identifying most birds that you see. One of the first and easiest things to do when you see a new bird is to note **its color**. This field guide is organized by color, so simply turn to the right color section to find it.

Next, note the **size of the bird**. A strategy to quickly estimate size is to compare different birds. Pick a small, a medium and a large bird. Select an American Robin as the medium bird. Measured from bill tip to tail tip, a robin is 10 inches (25 cm). Now select two other birds, one smaller and one larger. Good choices are a House Sparrow, at about 6 inches (15 cm), and an American Crow, around 18 inches (45 cm). When you see a species you don't know, you can now quickly ask yourself, "Is it larger than a sparrow but smaller than a robin?" When you look in your field guide to identify your bird, you would check the species that are roughly 6–10 inches (15–25 cm). This will help to narrow your choices.

Next, note the **size, shape and color of the bill**. Is it long or short, thick or thin, pointed or blunt, curved or straight? Seed-eating

birds, such as Northern Cardinals, have bills that are thick and strong enough to crack even the toughest seeds. Birds that sip nectar, such as Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, need long, thin bills to reach deep into flowers. Hawks and owls tear their prey with very sharp, curving bills. Sometimes, just noting the bill shape can help you decide whether the bird is a woodpecker, finch, grosbeak, blackbird or bird of prey.

Next, take a look around and note the **habitat** in which you see the bird. Is it wading in a saltwater marsh? Walking along a riverbank or on the beach? Soaring in the sky? Is it perched high in the trees or hopping along the forest floor? Because of diet and habitat preferences, you'll often see robins hopping on the ground but not usually eating seeds at a feeder. Or you'll see a Rose-breasted Grosbeak sitting on a tree branch but not climbing headfirst down the trunk, like a Red-breasted Nuthatch would.

Noticing **what the bird is eating** will give you another clue to help you identify the species. Feeding is a big part of any bird's life. Fully one-third of all bird activity revolves around searching for food, catching prey and eating. While birds don't always follow all the rules of their diet, you can make some general assumptions. Northern Flickers, for instance, feed on ants and other insects, so you wouldn't expect to see them visiting a seed feeder. Other birds, such as Barn and Cliff Swallows, eat flying insects and spend hours swooping and diving to catch a meal.

Sometimes you can identify a bird by **the way it perches**. Body posture can help you differentiate between an American Crow and a Red-tailed Hawk, for example. Crows lean forward over their feet on a branch, while hawks perch in a vertical position. Consider posture the next time you see an unidentified large bird in a tree.

Birds in flight are harder to identify, but noting the **wing size and shape** will help. Wing size is in direct proportion to body size, weight and type of flight. Wing shape determines whether the bird flies fast and with precision, or slowly and less precisely. Barn Swallows, for instance, have short, pointed wings that slice through the air, enabling swift, accurate flight. Turkey Vultures have long, broad wings for soaring on warm updrafts. House Finches have short, rounded wings, helping them to flit through thick tangles of branches.

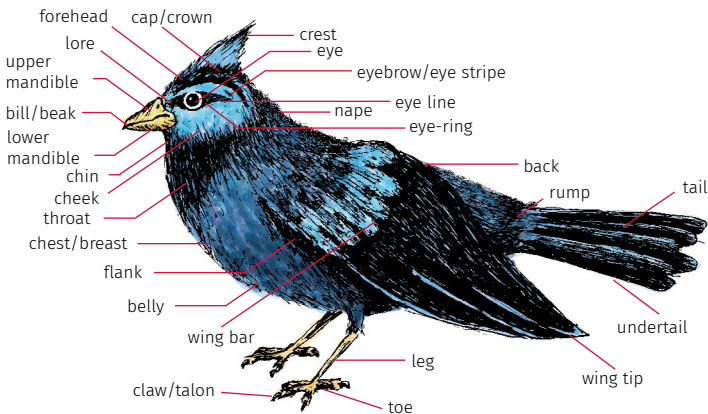
Some bird species have a unique **pattern of flight** that can help in identification. American Goldfinches fly in a distinctive undulating pattern that makes it look like they're riding a roller coaster.

While it's not easy to make all of these observations in the short time you often have to watch a "mystery" bird, practicing these identification methods will greatly expand your birding skills. To further improve your skills, seek the guidance of a more experienced birder who can answer your questions on the spot.

BIRD BASICS

It's easier to identify birds and communicate about them if you know the names of the different parts of a bird. For instance, it's more effective to use the word "crest" to indicate the set of extra-long feathers on top of a Northern Cardinal's head than to try to describe it.

The following illustration points out the basic parts of a bird. Because it is a composite of many birds, it shouldn't be confused with any actual bird.



Bird Color Variables

No other animal has a color palette like a bird's. Brilliant blues, lemon yellows, showy reds and iridescent greens are common in the bird world. In general, male birds are more colorful than their female counterparts. This helps males attract a mate, essentially saying, "Hey, look at me!" Color calls attention to a male's health as well. The better the condition of his feathers, the better his food source, territory and potential for mating.

Male and female birds that don't look like each other are called sexually dimorphic, meaning "two forms." Dimorphic females often have a nondescript dull color, as seen in Indigo Buntings. Muted tones help females hide during the weeks of motionless incubation and draw less attention to them when they're out feeding or taking a break from the rigors of raising the young.

The males of some species, such as the Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay and Bald Eagle, look nearly identical to the females. In woodpeckers, the sexes are differentiated by only a red mark, or sometimes a yellow mark. Depending on the species, the mark may be on top of the head, on the face or nape of neck, or just behind the bill.

During the first year, juvenile birds often look like their mothers. Since brightly colored feathers are used mainly for attracting a mate, young non-breeding males don't have a need for colorful plumage. It's not until the first spring molt (or several years later, depending on the species) that young males obtain their breeding colors.

Both breeding and winter plumages are the result of molting. Molting is the process of dropping old, worn feathers and replacing them with new ones. All birds molt, typically twice a year, with the spring molt usually occurring in late winter. At this time, most birds produce their brighter breeding plumage, which lasts throughout the summer.

Winter plumage is the result of the late summer molt, which serves a couple of important functions. First, it adds feathers for warmth in the coming winter season. Second, in some species it produces feathers that tend to be drab in color, which helps to camouflage the birds and hide them from predators. The winter plumage of the male American Goldfinch, for example, is olive-brown, unlike its canary-yellow breeding color during summer. Luckily for us, some birds, such as the male Northern Cardinal, retain their bright summer colors all year long.

Bird Nests

Bird nests are a true feat of engineering. Imagine constructing a home that's strong enough to weather storms, large enough to hold your entire family, insulated enough to shelter them from cold and heat, and waterproof enough to keep out rain. Think about building it without blueprints or directions and using mainly your feet. Birds do this!

Before building, birds must select an appropriate site. In some species, such as the House Wren, the male picks out several potential sites and assembles small twigs in each. The “extra” nests, called dummy nests, discourage other birds from using any nearby cavities for their nests. The male takes the female around and shows her the choices. After choosing her favorite, she finishes the construction.

In other species, such as the Baltimore Oriole, the female selects the site and builds the nest, while the male offers an occasional suggestion. Each bird species has its own nest-building routine that is strictly followed.

As you can see in these illustrations, birds build a wide variety of nest types.



**ground
nest**



**platform
nest**



**cup
nest**



**pendulous
nest**



**cavity
nest**

Nesting material often consists of natural items found in the immediate area. Most nests consist of plant fibers (such as bark from grapevines), sticks, mud, dried grass, feathers, fur, or soft,

fuzzy tufts from thistle. Some birds, including Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, use spiderwebs to glue nest materials together.

Transportation of nesting material is limited to the amount a bird can hold or carry. Birds must make many trips afield to gather enough material to complete a nest. Most nests take four days or more, and hundreds, if not thousands, of trips to build.

A **ground nest** can be a mound of vegetation on the ground or in the water. It can also be just a simple, shallow depression scraped out in earth, stones or sand. Killdeer and Horned Larks scrape out ground nests without adding any nesting material.

The **platform nest** represents a much more complex type of construction. Typically built with twigs or sticks and branches, this nest forms a platform and has a depression in the center to nestle the eggs. Platform nests can be in trees; on balconies, cliffs, bridges, or man-made platforms; and even in flowerpots. They often provide space for the adventurous young and function as a landing platform for the parents.

Mourning Doves and herons don't anchor their platform nests to trees, so these can tumble from branches during high winds and storms. Hawks, eagles, ospreys and other birds construct sturdier platform nests with large sticks and branches.

Other platform nests are constructed on the ground with mud, grass and other vegetation from the area. Many waterfowl build platform nests on the ground near or in water. A **floating platform nest** moves with the water level, preventing the nest, eggs and birds from being flooded.

Three-quarters of all songbirds construct a **cup nest**, which is a modified platform nest. The supporting platform is built first and attached firmly to a tree, shrub, or rock ledge or the ground. Next, the sides are constructed with grass, small twigs, bark or leaves, which are woven together and often glued with mud for

added strength. The inner cup can be lined with down feathers, animal fur or hair, or soft plant materials and is contoured last.

The **pendulous nest** is an unusual nest that looks like a sock hanging from a branch. Attached to the end of small branches of trees, this unique nest is inaccessible to most predators and often waves wildly in a breeze.

Woven tightly with plant fibers, the pendulous nest is strong and watertight and takes up to a week to build. A small opening at the top or on the side allows parents access to the grass-lined interior. More commonly used by tropical birds, this complex nest has also been mastered by orioles and kinglets. It must be one heck of a ride to be inside one of these nests during a windy spring thunderstorm!

The **cavity nest** is used by many species of birds, most notably woodpeckers and Eastern Bluebirds. A cavity nest is often excavated from a branch or tree trunk and offers shelter from storms, sun, cold and predators. A small entrance hole in a tree can lead to a nest chamber that is up to a safe 10 inches (25 cm) deep.

Typically made by woodpeckers, cavity nests are usually used only once by the builder. Nest cavities can be used for many subsequent years by such inhabitants as Wood Ducks, mergansers and bluebirds. Kingfishers, on the other hand, can dig a tunnel up to 4 feet (1 m) long in a riverbank. The nest chamber at the end of the tunnel is already well insulated, so it's usually only sparsely lined.

One of the most clever of all nests is the **no nest**, or daycare nest. Parasitic birds, such as Brown-headed Cowbirds, don't build their own nests. Instead, the egg-laden female searches out the nest of another bird and sneaks in to lay an egg while the host mother isn't looking.

A mother cowbird wastes no energy building a nest only to have it raided by a predator. Laying her eggs in the nests of other birds transfers the responsibility of raising her young to the host. When she lays her eggs in several nests, the chances increase that at least one of her babies will live to maturity.

Who Builds the Nest?

Generally, the female bird constructs the nest. She gathers the materials and does the building, with an occasional visit from her mate to check on progress. In some species, both parents contribute equally to nest building. The male may forage for sticks, grass or mud, but it is the female that often fashions the nest. Only rarely does a male build a nest by himself.

Fledging

Fledging is the time between hatching and flight, or leaving the nest. Some species of birds are **precocial**, meaning they leave the nest within hours of hatching, though it may be weeks before they can fly. This is common in waterfowl and shorebirds.

Baby birds that hatch naked and blind need to stay in the nest for a few weeks (these birds are **altricial**). Baby birds that are still in the nest are **nestlings**. Until birds start to fly, they are called **fledglings**.

Why Birds Migrate

Why do so many species of birds migrate? The short answer is simple: food. Birds migrate to locations with abundant food, as it is easier to breed where there is food than where food is scarce. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, for instance, are **complete migrators** that fly from the tropics of Central and South America to nest in the forests of North America, where billions of newly hatched insects are available to feed to their young.

Other migrators, such as some birds of prey, migrate back to northern regions in spring. In these locations, they hunt mice, voles and other small rodents that are beginning to breed.

Complete migrators have a set time and pattern of migration. Every year at nearly the same time, they head to a specific wintering ground. Complete migrators may travel great distances, sometimes 15,000 miles (24,100 km) or more in one year.

Complete migration doesn't necessarily imply flying from the cold, frozen northland to a tropical destination. The Dark-eyed Junco, for example, is a complete migrator that flies from the far reaches of Canada to spend the winter right here in Missouri. This trip is still considered complete migration.

Complete migrators have many interesting aspects. In spring, males often leave a few weeks before the females, arriving early to scope out possibilities for nesting sites and food sources, and to begin to defend territories. The females arrive several weeks later. In many species, the females and their young leave earlier in the fall, often up to four weeks before the adult males.

Other species, such as the American Goldfinch, are **partial migrators**. These birds usually wait until their food supplies dwindle before flying south. Unlike complete migrators, partial migrators move only far enough south, or sometimes east and west, to find abundant food. In some years it might be only a few hundred miles, while in other years it can be as much as a thousand. This kind of migration, dependent on weather and the availability of food, is sometimes called seasonal movement.

Unlike the predictable complete migrators or partial migrators, **irruptive migrators** can move every third to fifth year or, in some cases, in consecutive years. These migrations are triggered when times are tough and food is scarce. Red-breasted Nuthatches are irruptive migrators. They leave their normal northern range in search of more food or in response to overpopulation.

Many other birds don't migrate at all. Carolina Chickadees, for example, are **non-migrators** that remain in their habitat all year long and just move around as necessary to find food.

How Do Birds Migrate?

One of the many secrets of migration is fat. While most people are fighting the ongoing battle of the bulge, birds intentionally gorge themselves to gain as much fat as possible without losing the ability to fly. Fat provides the greatest amount of energy per unit of weight. In the same way that your car needs gas, birds are propelled by fat and stall without it.

During long migratory flights, fat deposits are used up quickly, and birds need to stop to refuel. This is when backyard bird feeding stations and undeveloped, natural spaces around our towns and cities are especially important. Some birds require up to 2–3 days of constant feeding to build their fat reserves before continuing their seasonal trip.

Many birds, such as most eagles, hawks, ospreys, falcons and vultures, migrate during the day. Larger birds can hold more body fat, go longer without eating and take longer to migrate. These birds glide along on rising columns of warm air, called thermals, that hold them aloft while they slowly make their way north or south. They generally rest at night and hunt early in the morning before the sun has a chance to warm the land and create good soaring conditions. Daytime migrators use a combination of landforms, rivers, and the rising and setting sun to guide them in the right direction.

The majority of small birds, called **passerines**, migrate at night. Studies show that some use the stars to navigate. Others use the setting sun, and still others, such as pigeons, use Earth's magnetic field to guide them north or south.

While flying at night may not seem like a good idea, it's actually safer. First, there are fewer avian predators hunting for birds at night. Second, night travel allows time during the day to find food in unfamiliar surroundings. Third, wind patterns at night tend to be flat, or laminar. Flat winds don't have the turbulence of daytime winds and can help push the smaller birds along.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

To help you quickly and easily identify birds, this field guide is organized by color. Refer to the color key on the first page, note the color of the bird, and turn to that section. For example, the Red-headed Woodpecker is black and white with a red head. Because the bird is mostly black-and-white, it will be found in the black-and-white section.

Each color section is also arranged by size, generally with the smaller birds first. Sections may also incorporate the average size in a range, which in some cases reflects size differences between male and female birds. Flip through the pages in the color section to find the bird. If you already know the name of the bird, check the index for the page number.

In some species, the male and female are very different in color. In others, the breeding and winter plumage colors differ. These species will have an inset photograph with a page reference and will be found in two color sections.

You will find a variety of information in the bird description sections. To learn more, turn to the sample on pp. 22–23.

Range Maps

Range maps are included for each bird. Colored areas indicate where the bird is frequently found. The colors represent the presence of a species during a specific season, not the density, or amount, of birds in the area. Green is used for summer, blue for winter, red for year-round and yellow for migration.

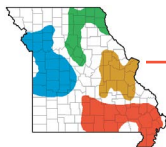
While every effort has been made to depict accurate ranges, these are constantly in flux due to a variety of factors. Changing weather, habitat, species abundance and availability of vital resources, such as food and water, can affect the migration and movement of local populations, causing birds to be found in areas that are atypical for the species. So please use the maps as intended—as general guides only.

male

female
p. 99



Common Name



Range Map

Scientific name

Color Indicator

YEAR-ROUND
SUMMER
MIGRATION
WINTER

Size: measurement is from head to tip of tail; wingspan may be listed as well

Male: brief description of the male bird; may include breeding, winter or other plumages

Female: brief description of the female bird, which is sometimes different from the male

Juvenile: brief description of the juvenile bird, which often looks like the adult female

Nest: kind of nest the bird builds to raise its young; who builds it; number of broods per year

Eggs: number of eggs you might expect to see in a nest; color and marking

Incubation: average days the parents spend incubating the eggs; who does the incubation

Fledging: average days the young spend in the nest after hatching but before they leave the nest; who does the most “childcare” and feeding

Migration: type of migrator: complete (seasonal, consistent), partial (seasonal, destination varies), irruptive (unpredictable, depends on the food supply) or non-migrator

Food: what the bird eats most of the time (e.g., seeds, insects, fruit, nectar, small mammals, fish) and whether it typically comes to a bird feeder

Compare: notes about other birds that look similar and the pages on which they can be found; may include extra information to aid in identification

Stan's Notes: Interesting natural history information. This could be something to look or listen for or something to help positively identify the bird. Also includes remarkable features.





YEAR-ROUND
SUMMER

Eastern Towhee

Pipilo erythrophthalmus

Size: 7–8" (18–20 cm)

Male: Mostly black with rusty-brown sides and a white belly. Long, black tail with a white tip. Short, stout, pointed bill and rich, red eyes. White wing patches flash in flight.

Female: similar to male but brown instead of black

Juvenile: light brown, a heavily streaked head, chest and belly, long dark tail with white tip

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–4; creamy white with brown markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 10–12 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: complete to non-migrator, to southern states, South America; non-migrator in much of Missouri

Food: insects, seeds, fruit; visits ground feeders

Compare: American Robin (p. 231) is slightly larger. The Gray Catbird (p. 227) lacks a black “hood” and rusty sides. Common Grackle (p. 35) lacks a white belly and has a long thin bill. Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (p. 49) has a rosy patch in center of chest.

Stan’s Notes: Named for its distinctive “tow-hee” call (given by both sexes) but known mostly for its other characteristic call, which sounds like “drink-your-tea!” Will hop backward with both feet (bilateral scratching), raking up leaf litter to locate insects and seeds. The female broods, but male does the most feeding of young. In southern coastal states, some have red eyes; others have white eyes.



female
p. 131



male



YEAR-ROUND

Brown-headed Cowbird

Molothrus ater

Size: 7½" (19 cm)

Male: Glossy black with a chocolate-brown head. Dark eyes. Pointed, sharp gray bill.

Female: dull brown with a pointed, sharp, gray bill

Juvenile: similar to female but with dull-gray plumage and a streaked chest

Nest: no nest; lays eggs in nests of other birds

Eggs: 5–7; white with brown markings

Incubation: 10–13 days; host bird incubates eggs

Fledging: 10–11 days; host birds feed the young

Migration: non-migrator in Missouri; moves around to find food in winter

Food: insects, seeds; will come to seed feeders

Compare: The male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) is slightly larger with red-and-yellow patches on upper wings. Common Grackle (p. 35) has a long tail and lacks the brown head. European Starling (p. 29) has a shorter tail.

Stan's Notes: Cowbirds are members of the blackbird family. Of approximately 750 species of parasitic birds worldwide, this is the only parasitic bird in Missouri. Brood parasites lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, leaving the host birds to raise their young. Cowbirds are known to have laid their eggs in the nests of over 200 species of birds. While some birds reject cowbird eggs, most incubate them and raise the young, even to the exclusion of their own. Look for warblers and other birds feeding young birds twice their own size. Named "Cowbird" for its habit of following bison and cattle herds to feed on insects flushed up by the animals.



breeding



winter



YEAR-ROUND

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Size: 7½" (19 cm)

Male: Glittering, iridescent purplish black in spring and summer; duller and speckled with white in fall and winter. Long, pointed, yellow bill in spring; gray in fall. Pointed wings. Short tail.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adults, with grayish-brown plumage and a streaked chest

Nest: cavity; male and female line cavity;
2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–6; bluish with brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 18–20 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator; some will move to southern states

Food: insects, seeds, fruit; visits seed or suet feeders

Compare: The Common Grackle (p. 35) has a long tail. The male Brown-headed Cowbird (p. 27) has a brown head. Look for the shiny, dark feathers to help identify the European Starling.

Stan's Notes: One of our most numerous songbirds. Mimics the songs of up to 20 bird species and imitates sounds, including the human voice. Jaws are more powerful when opening than when closing, enabling the bird to pry open crevices to find insects. Often displaces woodpeckers, chickadees and other cavity-nesting birds. Large families gather with blackbirds in the fall. Not a native bird; 100 starlings were introduced to New York City in 1890–91 from Europe. Bill changes color in spring and fall.



male



female
p. 143



YEAR-ROUND

Red-winged Blackbird

Agelaius phoeniceus

Size: 8½" (22 cm)

Male: Jet black with red-and-yellow patches (epaulets) on upper wings. Pointed black bill.

Female: heavily streaked brown with a pointed brown bill and white eyebrows

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2–3 broods per year

Eggs: 3–4; bluish green with brown markings

Incubation: 10–12 days; female incubates

Fledging: 11–14 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator

Food: seeds, insects; visits seed and suet feeders

Compare: The male Brown-headed Cowbird (p. 27) is smaller and glossier and has a brown head. The bold red-and-yellow epaulets distinguish the male Red-winged from other blackbirds.

Stan's Notes: One of the most widespread and numerous birds in the state. Found around marshes, wetlands, lakes and rivers. Flocks with as many as 10,000 birds have been reported. Males arrive before the females and sing to defend their territory. The male repeats his call from the top of a cattail while showing off his red-and-yellow shoulder patches. The female chooses a mate and often builds her nest over shallow water in a thick stand of cattails. The male can be aggressive when defending the nest. Red-winged Blackbirds feed mostly on seeds in spring and fall, and insects throughout the summer.



female
p. 149

male





SUMMER
MIGRATION

Yellow-headed Blackbird

Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus

Size: 9–11" (23–28 cm)

Male: Large black bird with a lemon-yellow head, breast and nape of neck. Black mask and gray bill. White wing patches.

Female: similar to male but slightly smaller with a brown body and dull-yellow head and chest

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–5; greenish white with brown markings

Incubation: 11–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 9–12 days; female feeds the young

Migration: complete, to southern states and Mexico

Food: insects, seeds; will come to ground feeders

Compare: The male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) is smaller and has red-and-yellow patches on its wings. Look for the bright-yellow head to identify the male Yellow-headed.

Stan's Notes: Found around marshes, wetlands, and lakes. Nests in deep water, unlike its cousin, the Red-winged Blackbird, which prefers shallow water. Usually heard before seen. Gives a raspy, low, metallic-sounding call. The male is the only large black bird with a bright-yellow head. He gives an impressive mating display, flying with his head drooped and feet and tail pointing down while steadily beating his wings. Young keep low and out of sight for up to three weeks before they start to fly. Migrates in large flocks of as many as 200 birds, often with Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Flocks of mainly males return in early April; females return later. Most colonies consist of 20–100 nests.





YEAR-ROUND

Common Grackle

Quiscalus quiscula

Size: 11–13" (28–33 cm)

Male: Large, iridescent blackbird with bluish-black head and purplish-brown body. Long, black tail. Long, thin bill and bright-golden eyes.

Female: similar to male but smaller and duller

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–5; greenish white with brown markings

Incubation: 13–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 16–20 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial in Missouri; will move around to find food

Food: fruit, seeds, insects; will come to seed and suet feeders

Compare: Male Great-tailed Grackle (p. 39) is larger and has a much longer tail. The European Starling (p. 29) is much smaller with a speckled appearance, and a yellow bill during breeding season. Male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) has red-and-yellow wing markings (epaulets).

Stan's Notes: Usually nests in small colonies of up to 75 pairs but travels with other blackbird species in large flocks. Known to feed in farm fields. The common name is derived from the Latin word *gracula*, meaning “jackdaw,” another species of bird and a term that can refer to any bird in the *Quiscalus* genus. The male holds his tail in a deep V shape during flight. The flight pattern is usually level, as opposed to an undulating movement. Unlike most birds, it has larger muscles for opening its mouth than for closing it, enabling it to pry crevices apart to find hidden insects.





SUMMER
MIGRATION
WINTER

American Coot

Fulica americana

Size: 13–16" (33–40 cm)

Male: Gray-to-black waterbird. Duck-like white bill with a dark band near the tip and a small red patch near the eyes. Small white patch near base of tail. Green legs and feet. Red eyes.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: much paler than adults, with a gray bill

Nest: floating platform; female and male construct; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 9–12; pinkish buff with brown markings

Incubation: 21–25 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 49–52 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico, Central America; winters in southern Missouri

Food: insects, aquatic plants

Compare: Smaller than most waterfowl, it is the only black, duck-like bird with a white bill.

Stan's Notes: Usually seen in large flocks on open water. Not a duck, as it has large lobed toes instead of webbed feet. An excellent diver and swimmer, bobbing its head as it swims. A favorite food of Bald Eagles. It is not often seen in flight, unless it's trying to escape from an eagle. To take off, it scrambles across the surface of the water, flapping its wings. Gives a unique series of creaks, groans and clicks. Anchors its floating platform nest to vegetation. Huge flocks with as many as 1,000 birds gather for migration. Migrates at night. The common name "Coot" comes from the Middle English word *coote*, which was used to describe various waterfowl. Also called Mud Hen.



male



female
p. 169



Great-tailed Grackle

Quiscalus mexicanus

YEAR-ROUND

Size: 18" (45 cm), male
15" (38 cm), female

Male: Large, all-black bird with iridescent purple sheen on the head and back. Exceptionally long tail. Bright-yellow eyes.

Female: considerably smaller than the male, overall brown bird with gray-to-brown belly, light-brown-to-white eyes, eyebrows, throat and upper chest

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 1-2 broods per year

Eggs: 3-5; greenish blue with brown markings

Incubation: 12-14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 21-23 days; female feeds young

Migration: non-migrator to partial in Missouri; will move around to find food

Food: insects, fruit, seeds; comes to seed feeders

Compare: Common Grackle (p. 35) is smaller, with a much shorter tail. Male Brown-headed Cowbird (p. 27) lacks the long tail and has a brown head.

Stan's Notes: This is our largest grackle. It was once considered a subspecies of the Boat-tailed Grackle, which occurs along the East Coast and Florida. A colony nester. Males do not participate in nest building, incubation or raising young. Males rarely fight; females squabble over nest sites and materials. Several females mate with one male. The species is expanding northward, moving into northern states. Western populations tend to be larger than eastern. Song varies from population to population.

in flight





YEAR-ROUND

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Size: 18" (45 cm)

Male: All-black bird with black bill, legs and feet. Can have a purple sheen in direct sunlight.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult

Nest: platform; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–6; bluish- to olive-green with brown marks

Incubation: 18 days; female incubates

Fledging: 28–35 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator; moves around in winter to find food

Food: fruit, insects, mammals, fish, carrion; will come to seed and suet feeders

Compare: A common and familiar bird that is hard to confuse with any other. Much smaller than Turkey Vulture (p. 43), which has a naked red head.

Stan's Notes: One of the most recognizable birds in Missouri, found in most habitats. Imitates other birds and human voices. One of the smartest of all birds and very social, often entertaining itself by provoking chases with other birds. Eats roadkill but is rarely hit by vehicles. Can live as long as 20 years. Often reuses its nest every year if it's not taken over by a Great Horned Owl. Unmated birds, known as helpers, help to raise the young. Extended families roost together at night, dispersing daily to hunt. Cannot soar on thermals; flaps constantly and glides downward. Gathers in huge communal flocks of up to 10,000 birds in winter.



soaring



juvenile



drying





YEAR-ROUND
SUMMER

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura

Size: 26–32" (66–80 cm); up to 6' wingspan

Male: Large and black with a naked red head and legs. In flight, wings are two-toned with a black leading edge and a gray trailing edge. Wing tips end in finger-like projections. Tail is long and squared. Ivory bill.

Female: same as male but slightly smaller

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a gray-to-blackish head and bill

Nest: no nest or minimal nest, on a cliff or in a cave, sometimes in a hollow tree; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 1–3; white with brown markings

Incubation: 38–41 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 66–88 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, southern states, Mexico, Central America, South America, non-migrator in southern half of Missouri

Food: carrion; parents regurgitate to feed the young

Compare: Bald Eagle (p. 69) is larger and lacks two-toned wings. Look for the obvious naked red head to identify the Turkey Vulture.

Stan's Notes: The naked head reduces the risk of feather fouling (picking up diseases) from contact with carcasses. It has a strong bill for tearing apart flesh. Unlike hawks and eagles, it has weak feet more suited for walking than grasping. One of the few birds with a developed sense of smell. Mostly mute, making only grunts and groans. Holds its wings in an upright V shape in flight. Teeters from wing tip to wing tip as it soars and hovers. Seen in trees with wings outstretched, sunning itself and drying after a rain.

in flight



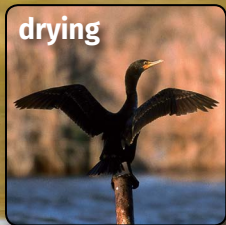
juvenile



crests



drying





MIGRATION
WINTER

Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus

Size: 31–35" (79–89 cm); up to 41⅓' wingspan

Male: Large black waterbird with unusual blue eyes and a long, snake-like neck. Large gray bill, with yellow at the base and a hooked tip.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: lighter brown with a grayish chest and neck

Nest: platform; male and female construct;
1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–4; bluish white without markings

Incubation: 25–29 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 37–42 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico, Central America; winters in southern Missouri

Food: small fish, aquatic insects

Compare: The Turkey Vulture (p. 43) is similar in size and also perches on branches with wings open to dry in sun, but it has a naked red head. Twice the size of American Coot (p. 37), which lacks the Cormorant's long neck and pointed bill.

Stan's Notes: Flocks fly in a large V or a line. Swims underwater to catch fish, holding its wings at its sides. This bird's outer feathers soak up water, but its body feathers don't. To dry off, it strikes an upright pose with wings outstretched, facing the sun. Gives grunts, pops and groans. Named "Double-crested" for the crests on its head, which are not often seen. "Cormorant" is a contraction from *corvus marinus*, meaning "crow" or "raven," and "of the sea."

male

female





YEAR-ROUND

Downy Woodpecker

Dryobates pubescens

Size: 6½" (15 cm)

Male: Small woodpecker with a white belly and black-and-white spotted wings. Red mark on the back of the head and a white stripe down the back. Short, black bill.

Female: same as male but lacks the red mark

Juvenile: same as female, some with a red mark near the forehead

Nest: cavity with a round entrance hole; male and female excavate; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–5; white without markings

Incubation: 11–12 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

Fledging: 20–25 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: non-migrator

Food: insects, seeds; visits seed and suet feeders

Compare: The Hairy Woodpecker (p. 53) is larger. Look for the Downy's shorter, thinner bill.

Stan's Notes: Abundant and widespread where trees are present. This is perhaps the most common woodpecker in the U.S. Stiff tail feathers help to brace it like a tripod as it clings to a tree. Like other woodpeckers, it has a long, barbed tongue to pull insects from tiny places. Mates drum on branches or hollow logs to announce territory, which is rarely larger than 5 acres (2 ha). Repeats a high-pitched "peek-peek" call. Nest cavity is wider at the bottom than at the top and is lined with fallen wood chips. Male performs most of the brooding. During winter, it will roost in a cavity. Doesn't breed in high elevations but often moves there in winter for food. Undulates in flight.



female
p. 125



male



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Pheucticus ludovicianus

Size: 7–8" (18–20 cm)

Male: Plump black-and-white bird with a large triangular, rose-colored patch on the breast. Wing linings are rose-red. Large ivory bill.

Female: heavily streaked with obvious white eyebrows and orange-to-yellow wing linings

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female and male construct; 1–2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–5; blue-green with brown markings

Incubation: 13–14 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 9–12 days; female and male feed the young

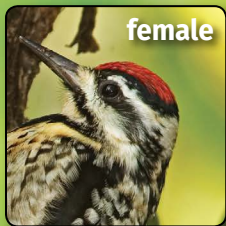
Migration: complete, to Mexico, Central America and South America

Food: insects, seeds, fruit; comes to seed feeders

Compare: Male is very distinctive, with no look-alikes. Look for the rose breast patch to identify.

Stan's Notes: Most common in hardwood forests in the northern half of Missouri. Late to arrive in spring, early to leave in fall. Males arrive first in small groups, females join them several days later. Several males will visit feeders at the same time in spring. When females arrive, males become territorial and reduce visits to feeders. Young grosbeaks visit feeders with the adults after fledging. Both sexes sing a rich, robin-like song with a chip note in the tune, but male is much louder and clearer than female. The rose breast patch varies in size and shape in each male. "Grosbeak" refers to its thick, strong bill, used to crush seeds.

male



female





MIGRATION
WINTER

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus varius

Size: 8–9" (20–23 cm)

Male: Checkered back with a red forehead, crown and chin. Yellow to tan on the chest and belly. White wing patches are seen flashing in flight.

Female: similar to male but with a white chin

Juvenile: similar to female, dull brown and lacks any red marking

Nest: cavity; female and male excavate, often in a live tree; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 5–6; white without markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

Fledging: 25–29 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete migrator, to southern states, Mexico and Central America; many winter in Missouri

Food: insects, tree sap; comes to suet feeders

Compare: Similar to other woodpeckers, but the male is the only Missouri woodpecker with a red chin patch. Look for the red chin and crown to identify the male Sapsucker, and the white chin and red crown to identify the female.

Stan's Notes: Found in small woods, forests, and suburban and rural areas. Drills rows of holes in trees to bleed the sap. Oozing sap attracts bugs, which it also eats. Defends its sapping sites from other birds that try to drink from the taps. Does not suck sap; rather, it laps the sticky liquid with its long, bristly tongue. A quiet bird, it makes few vocalizations but will meow like a cat. Drums on hollow branches, but unlike other woodpeckers, its rhythm is irregular. Makes short, undulating flights with rapid wingbeats.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Hairy Woodpecker

Dryobates villosus

Size: 9" (23 cm)

Male: Black-and-white woodpecker with a white belly. Black wings with rows of white spots. White stripe down the back. Long, black bill. Red mark on the back of the head.

Female: same as male but lacks the red mark

Juvenile: grayer version of the female

Nest: cavity with an oval entrance hole; female and male excavate; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–6; white without markings

Incubation: 11–15 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

Fledging: 28–30 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: non-migrator

Food: insects, nuts, seeds; comes to seed and suet feeders

Compare: Downy Woodpecker (p. 47) is much smaller and has a much shorter bill. Look for Hairy Woodpecker's long bill.

Stan's Notes: A common bird in wooded backyards. Announces its arrival with a sharp chirp before landing on feeders. Responsible for eating many destructive forest insects. Uses its barbed tongue to extract insects from trees. Tiny, bristle-like feathers at the base of the bill protect the nostrils from wood dust. Drums on hollow logs, branches or stovepipes in spring to announce territory. Prefers to excavate nest cavities in live trees. Excavates a larger, more oval-shaped entrance than the round entrance hole of the Downy Woodpecker. Makes short flights from tree to tree.



juvenile



YEAR-ROUND

Red-headed Woodpecker

Melanerpes erythrocephalus

Size: 9" (22.5 cm)

Male: All-red head with a solid black back. White chest, belly and rump. Black wings with large white wing patches seen flashing in flight. Black tail. Gray legs and bill.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: gray brown with white chest, lacks any red

Nest: cavity; male builds with help from female; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; white without markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 27–30 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: partial migrator to non-migrator; will move to areas with an abundant supply of nuts

Food: insects, nuts, fruit; visits suet and seed feeders

Compare: No other woodpecker in Missouri has an all-red head. The Pileated Woodpecker (p. 63) is the only other woodpecker with a solid black back, but it has a partial red head.

Stan's Notes: One of the few non-dimorphic woodpeckers, with males and females that look alike. Bill is strong enough to excavate a nest cavity only in soft, dead trees. Prefers open woodlands or woodland edges with many dead or rotting branches. Nests later than its close relative, the Red-bellied Woodpecker (p. 57), and will often take its cavity, if vacant. Unlike other woodpeckers, which use nest cavities just once briefly, it may use the same cavity for several years in a row. Often perches on top of dead snags. Stores acorns and other nuts. Gives a shrill, hoarse “churr” call.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

Size: 9–9½" (23–24 cm)

Male: Black-and-white “zebra-backed” woodpecker with a white rump. Red crown extends down the nape of the neck. Tan chest. Pale-red tinge on the belly, often hard to see.

Female: same as male but with a light-gray crown and a red nape

Juvenile: gray version of adults; lacks a red crown and red nape

Nest: cavity; female and male excavate; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; white without markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

Fledging: 24–27 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator; moves around to find food

Food: insects, nuts, fruit; visits suet and seed feeders

Compare: Northern Flicker (p. 159) has a black bib on its belly, not a reddish wash. The Red-headed Woodpecker (p. 55) has an all-red head.

Stan's Notes: Likes shady woodlands, forest edges and backyards. Digs holes in rotten wood to find spiders, centipedes and beetles. Hammers acorns and berries into crevices of trees for winter food. Returns to the same tree to excavate a new nest below that of the previous year. Undulating flight with rapid wingbeats. Gives a loud “querrr” call and a low “chug-chug-chug.” Named for the pale red tinge on its belly. Often kicked out of nest hole by European Starlings. Expanding its range all over the country.



male



female



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

Tyrannus forficatus

Size: 10" (24 cm)

Male: White-to-gray head, neck, breast and back. Black wings with bright-pink wing linings, seen in flight. Faint-pink coloring on flanks and belly. An extremely long, black tail with patches of white.

Female: similar to male, with a much shorter tail

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a shorter tail, lacking pink underwings and sides

Nest: cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–5; white with brown-and-red markings

Incubation: 14–17 days; female incubates

Fledging: 14–16 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, to Central and South America

Food: insects

Compare: This flycatcher's extremely long tail and the distinctive black-and-white pattern with its pink wing linings make it hard to confuse with any other bird.

Stan's Notes: A wonderful summer resident. Like most flycatchers, it hunts for insects by waiting on a post or low tree and flying out to capture them as they pass by. Drops to the ground to hunt for insects much more than other flycatchers. Male performs an up-down and zigzag courtship flight, showing off his long tail. Sometimes will end the flight with a reverse somersault. When not breeding, often seen in large flocks. Roosts communally, with up to 200 individuals. Closely related to kingbirds.

female p. 175



male





WINTER

Lesser Scaup

Aythya affinis

Size: 16–17" (40–43 cm)

Male: Appears mostly black with bold white sides and a gray back. Chest and head look nearly black, but head appears purple with green highlights in direct sun. Bright-yellow eyes.

Female: overall brown with a dull-white patch at the base of a light-gray bill; yellow eyes

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: ground; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 8–14; olive-buff without markings

Incubation: 22–28 days; female incubates

Fledging: 45–50 days; female teaches the young to feed

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico, Central America and northern South America; winters in Missouri

Food: aquatic plants and insects

Compare: Larger than American Coot (p. 37), which lacks male Scaup's white sides. Look for the distinctive white sides of the male Scaup to help identify. The male Blue-winged Teal (p. 173) is smaller and has a bright-white, crescent-shaped patch near base of bill.

Stan's Notes: A common wintering duck in Missouri. Often seen in large flocks on lakes and ponds. Submerges completely to feed on the bottom (unlike dabbling ducks, which tip forward to reach the bottom). The male leaves the female when she starts incubating eggs. Egg quantity (clutch size) increases with the female's age. Has an interesting babysitting arrangement: groups of young (crèches) are tended by one to three adult females.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

Size: 19" (48 cm)

Male: Crow-size woodpecker with a black back and bright-red forehead, crest and mustache. Long, gray bill. White leading edge of wings flashes brightly during flight.

Female: same as male but with a black forehead; lacks a red mustache

Juvenile: similar to adults but duller and browner

Nest: cavity; male and female excavate; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–5; white without markings

Incubation: 15–18 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

Fledging: 26–28 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator

Food: insects; will come to suet and peanut feeders

Compare: The Red-headed Woodpecker (p. 55) is about half the size and has an all-red head. Look for the bright-red crest and exceptionally large size to identify the Pileated Woodpecker.

Stan's Notes: Our largest woodpecker. The common name comes from the Latin *pileatus*, which means “wearing a cap.” A relatively shy bird that prefers large tracts of woodland. Drums on hollow branches, stovepipes and so forth to announce its territory. Excavates oval holes up to several feet long in tree trunks, looking for insects to eat. Large wood chips lie on the ground by excavated trees. Favorite food is carpenter ants. Feeds regurgitated insects to its young. Young emerge from the nest looking just like the adults.

soaring





SUMMER
MIGRATION

Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

Size: 21–24" (53–61 cm); up to 5½' wingspan

Male: Large eagle-like bird with a white chest, belly and head. Dark eye line. Nearly black back. Black “wrist” marks on the wings. Dark bill.

Female: same as male but slightly larger and with a necklace of brown streaks

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a light-tan breast

Nest: platform on a raised wooden platform, man-made tower or tall dead tree; female and male build; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 2–4; white with brown markings

Incubation: 32–42 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 48–58 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico, Central America and South America

Food: fish

Compare: The juvenile Bald Eagle (p. 69) is brown with white speckles. The adult Bald Eagle has an all-white head and tail. Look for the white belly and dark eye line to identify the Osprey.

Stan's Notes: The only species in its family, and the only raptor that plunges into water feetfirst to catch fish. Always near water. Can hover for a few seconds before diving. Carries fish in a head-first position for better aerodynamics. Wings angle back in flight. Often harassed by Bald Eagles for its catch. Gives a high-pitched, whistle-like call, often calling in flight as a warning. Mates have a long-term pair bond. May not migrate to the same wintering grounds. Was nearly extinct but is now doing well.



in flight



juvenile



SUMMER

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Size: 22–27" (56–69 cm); up to 3½' wingspan

Male: A stocky, hunched, and inactive heron with black back and crown, white belly and gray wings. Long, dark bill and bright-red eyes. Short, dull-yellow legs. Breeding adult has 2 long, white plumes on crown.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: golden-brown head and back with white spots, streaked breast, yellow-orange eyes, brown bill

Nest: platform; female and male build; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–5; light blue without markings

Incubation: 24–26 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 42–48 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico and Central America

Food: fish, aquatic insects

Compare: A perching Great Blue Heron (p. 253) looks twice the size of a Black-crowned. Look for a short-necked heron with a black back and crown.

Stan's Notes: A very secretive bird, this heron is most active near dawn and dusk (crepuscular). It hunts alone, but it nests in small colonies. Roosts in trees during the day. Often squawks if disturbed from the daytime roost. Often seen being harassed by other herons during days. Stalks quiet backwaters in search of small fish and crabs.



soaring



juvenile



soaring
juvenile





YEAR-ROUND

Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Size: 31–37" (79–94 cm); up to 7½' wingspan

Male: White head and tail contrast sharply with the dark-brown-to-black body and wings. Large, curved yellow bill and yellow feet.

Female: same as male but larger

Juvenile: dark brown with white speckles and spots on the body and wings; gray bill

Nest: massive platform, usually in a tree; female and male build; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 2–3; off-white without markings

Incubation: 34–36 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 75–90 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: partial migrator, to southeastern states; winters along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers

Food: fish, carrion, birds (mainly ducks)

Compare: The Turkey Vulture (p. 43) lacks the white head and white tail of adult Bald Eagle. Turkey Vulture has two-toned wings and flies with its wings in a V shape, unlike the straight-out wing position of the Eagle.

Stan's Notes: Nearly became extinct due to DDT poisoning and illegal killing. Returns to the same nest each year, adding more sticks and enlarging it to huge proportions, at times up to 1,000 pounds (450 kg). In their midair mating ritual, one eagle flips upside down and locks talons with another. Both tumble, then break apart to continue flight. Not uncommon for juveniles to perform this mating ritual even though they have not reached breeding age. Long-term pair bond but will switch mates when not successful at reproducing. Juveniles attain the white head and tail at 4–5 years of age.

male



female
p. 99





SUMMER

Indigo Bunting

Passerina cyanea

Size: 5½" (14 cm)

Male: Vibrant-blue finch-like bird. Dark markings scattered on wings and tail.

Female: light-brown with faint markings

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–4; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 10–11 days; female feeds the young

Migration: complete, to Mexico, Central America and South America

Food: insects, seeds, fruit; will visit seed feeders

Compare: The male Blue Grosbeak (p. 73) is larger and has a large bill and chestnut-colored wing bars. The male Eastern Bluebird (p. 75) is larger and has a rusty-red breast.

Stan's Notes: Seen along woodland edges and in parks and yards, feeding on insects. Comes to seed feeders early in spring, before insects are plentiful. Usually only the males are noticed. The male often sings from treetops to attract a mate. The female is quiet. Actually a gray bird, without blue pigment in its feathers: like Blue Jays and other blue birds, sunlight is refracted within the structure of the feathers, making them appear blue. Plumage is iridescent in direct sun, duller in shade. Molts in spring to acquire body feathers with gray tips, which quickly wear off, revealing the bright-blue plumage. Molts in fall and appears like the female during winter. Migrates at night in flocks of 5–10 birds. Males return before the females and juveniles, often to the nest site of the preceding year. Juveniles move to within a mile of their birth site.



female
p. 123



male



SUMMER

Blue Grosbeak

Passerina caerulea

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Overall blue bird with 2 chestnut wing bars. Large gray-to-silver bill. Black around base of bill.

Female: overall brown with darker wings and tail, 2 tan wing bars, large gray-to-silver bill

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 1–2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–6; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 11–12 days; female incubates

Fledging: 9–10 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, seeds; will come to seed feeders

Compare: The more common male Indigo Bunting (p. 71) is very similar, but it is smaller and lacks wing bars. Look for two chestnut wing bars and a large heavy bill to distinguish it from the male Bunting.

Stan's Notes: Found throughout Missouri. A bird of semi-open habitats, such as overgrown fields, riversides, woodland edges and fencerows. Visits seed feeders, where it is often confused with male Indigo Buntings. Frequently seen twitching and spreading its tail. The first-year males show only some blue, obtaining the full complement of blue feathers in the second winter. It has expanded northward, and its overall populations have increased over the past 30–40 years.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Sky-blue head, back and tail. Rust-red breast and white belly.

Female: grayer than male, with a faint rusty breast and faint blue wings and tail

Juvenile: similar to female but with spots on the breast and blue wing markings

Nest: cavity, vacant woodpecker cavity or nest box; female adds a soft lining; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–5; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 15–18 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: partial migrator to non-migrator in Missouri

Food: insects, fruit; comes to shallow dishes with live or dead mealworms, and to suet feeders

Compare: Male Indigo Bunting (p. 71) is nearly all blue, lacking the rusty-red chest. Blue Jay (p. 81) is much larger and has a crest. Look for the rusty breast to help identify the Eastern Bluebird.

Stan's Notes: The state bird of Missouri and a year-round resident, bluebird populations occasionally drop due to unseasonably cold winters or cold, wet weather in spring. Although it is a permanent resident, many migrate each spring and autumn. Prefers open habitats, such as farm fields, pastures and roadsides, but also likes forest edges, parks and yards. Song is a distinctive “churlee chur chur-lee.” A year-round resident that is joined by many northern migrants in winter. The rust-red breast is like that of the American Robin, its cousin.





SUMMER

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Sleek swallow. Blue-black back, cinnamon belly and reddish-brown chin. White spots on a long, deeply forked tail.

Female: same as male but with a whitish belly

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a tan belly and chin, and shorter tail

Nest: cup; female and male build; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–5; white with brown markings

Incubation: 13–17 days; female incubates

Fledging: 18–23 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to South America

Food: insects (prefers beetles, wasps, flies)

Compare: The Cliff Swallow (p. 101) is smaller and lacks a distinctive, deeply forked tail. The Purple Martin (p. 79) is larger and has a dark-purple belly. The Chimney Swift (p. 85) has a narrow, pointed tail. Look for the deeply forked tail to identify the Barn Swallow.

Stan's Notes: Seen in wetlands, farms, suburban yards and parks. Of the six swallow species regularly found in Missouri, this is the only one with a deeply forked tail. Unlike other swallows, it rarely glides in flight. Usually flies low over land or water. Drinks as it flies, skimming water, or will sip water droplets on wet leaves. Bathes while flying through rain or sprinklers. Gives a twittering warble, followed by a mechanical sound. Builds a mud nest with up to 1,000 beak-loads of mud. Nests on barns and houses, under bridges and in other sheltered places. Often nests in colonies of 4–6 birds; sometimes nests alone.

male



female





SUMMER

Purple Martin

Progne subis

Size: 8½" (22 cm)

Male: Iridescent with a purple-to-black head, back and belly. Black wings and a notched black tail.

Female: grayish-purple head and back, darker wings and tail, whitish belly

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: cavity; female and male line the cavity of the house; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; white without markings

Incubation: 15–18 days; female incubates

Fledging: 26–30 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: complete, to South America

Food: insects

Compare: Usually seen only in groups. The male Purple Martin is the only swallow with a very dark-purplish belly.

Stan's Notes: The largest swallow species in North America. Once nested in tree cavities; now nests almost exclusively in man-made, apartment-style houses. The most successful colonies often nest in multiunit nest boxes within 100 feet (30 m) of a human dwelling near a lake. Main diet consists of dragonflies, not mosquitoes, as once thought. Gives a continuous stream of chirps, creaks and rattles, along with a shout-like “churr” and chortle. Often drinks in flight, skimming water, and bathes in flight, flying through rain. Returns to the same nest site each year; the males arrive before the females and yearlings. The young leave to form new colonies. Large colonies gather in fall before migrating to South America.





YEAR-ROUND

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Size: 12" (30 cm)

Male: Bright light-blue-and-white bird with a black necklace and gray belly. Large crest moves up and down at will. White face, wing bars and tip of tail. Black tail bands.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult but duller

Nest: cup; female and male construct; 1-2 broods per year

Eggs: 4-5; green to blue with brown markings

Incubation: 16-18 days; female incubates

Fledging: 17-21 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator; will move around to find an abundant food source

Food: insects, fruit, carrion, seeds, nuts; visits seed feeders, ground feeders with corn or peanuts

Compare: The Belted Kingfisher (p. 83) has a larger, more ragged crest. The Eastern Bluebird (p. 75) is much smaller and has a rust-red breast. Look for the large crest to help identify the Blue Jay.

Stan's Notes: Highly intelligent, solving problems, gathering food and communicating more than other birds. Loud and noisy; mimics other birds. Known as the alarm of the forest, screaming at intruders. Imitates hawk calls around feeders to scare off other birds. One of the few birds to cache food; can remember where it hid thousands of nuts. Carries food in a pouch under its tongue (sublingually). Eats eggs and young from other nests. Feathers lack blue pigment; refracted sunlight causes the blue appearance.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Belted Kingfisher

Megasceryle alcyon

Size: 12–14" (30–36 cm)

Male: Blue with white belly, blue-gray chest band, and black wing tips. Ragged crest moves up and down at will. Large head. Long, thick, black bill. White spot by eyes. Red-brown eyes.

Female: same as male but with rusty flanks and a rusty chest band below the blue-gray band

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cavity; female and male excavate in a bank of a river, lake or cliff; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 6–7; white without markings

Incubation: 23–24 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 23–24 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico, Central and South America, winters in Missouri

Food: small fish

Compare: The Blue Jay (p. 81) is lighter blue and has a plain gray chest and belly. The Belted Kingfisher is rarely found away from water.

Stan's Notes: Usually found at the bank of a river, lake or large stream. Perches on a branch near water, dives in headfirst to catch a small fish, then returns to the branch to feed. Parents drop dead fish into the water to teach their young to dive. Can't pass bones through its digestive tract; regurgitates bone pellets after meals. Gives a loud call that sounds like a machine gun. Mates know each other by their calls. Digs a tunnel up to 4 feet (1 m) long to a nest chamber. Small white patches on dark wing tips flash during flight.





SUMMER

Chimney Swift

Chaetura pelagica

Size: 5" (13 cm)

Male: Nondescript, cigar-shaped bird, usually seen in flight. Long, thin, brown body. Pointed tail and head. Long, backswept wings, longer than the body.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult

Nest: half cup; female and male build; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; white without markings

Incubation: 19–21 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 28–30 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to South America

Food: insects caught in midair

Compare: The Purple Martin (p. 79) is much larger and darker. The Barn Swallow (p. 77) has a deeply forked tail. Look for the cigar shape to identify the Chimney Swift in flight.

Stan's Notes: One of the fastest fliers in the bird world. Spends all day flying, rarely perching. Flies in groups, feeding on insects flying 100 feet (30 m) or higher up in the air. Often called a Flying Cigar due to its body shape, which is pointed at both ends. Drinks and bathes during flight, skimming water. Gives a unique in-flight twittering call, often heard before the bird is seen. Hundreds roost in large chimneys, giving it the common name. Builds its nest with tiny twigs, cementing it with saliva and attaching it to the inside of a chimney or a hollow tree. Usually only one nest per chimney.





SUMMER

Chipping Sparrow

Spizella passerina

Size: 5" (13 cm)

Male: Small gray-brown sparrow with clear-gray chest. Rusty crown. White eyebrows and thin, black eye line. Thin, gray-black bill. Two faint wing bars.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adults, with streaking on the chest; lacks a rusty crown

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–5; blue-green with brown markings

Incubation: 11–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 10–12 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to southern states, Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, seeds; will come to ground feeders

Compare: Similar to American Tree Sparrow (p. 109), which shares a rusty crown, but lacks dark eye line. The Lark Sparrow (p. 113) is larger and has a white chest and central spot. Song Sparrow (p. 103) and female House Finch (p. 91) have heavily streaked chests. Look for the rusty crown and black eye line to help identify the Chipping Sparrow.

Stan's Notes: A common garden or yard bird, often seen feeding on dropped seeds beneath feeders. Gathers in large family groups to feed in preparation for migration. Migrates at night in flocks of 20–30 birds. The common name comes from the male's fast "chip" call. Often is just called Chippy. Builds nest low in dense shrubs and almost always lines it with animal hair.





WINTER

Pine Siskin

Spinus pinus

Size: 5" (13 cm)

Male: Small brown finch with heavy streaking on the back, breast and belly. Yellow wing bars. Yellow at the base of tail. Thin bill.

Female: similar to male, with less yellow

Juvenile: similar to adult, with a light-yellow tinge over the breast and chin

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods

Eggs: 3–4; greenish blue with brown markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 14–15 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: irruptive; moves around the United States in search of food

Food: seeds, insects; will come to seed feeders

Compare: Female House Finch (p. 91) lacks any yellow. Female Purple Finch (p. 111) has bold white eyebrows. The female American Goldfinch (p. 301) has white wing bars. Look for the yellow wing bars to identify the Pine Siskin.

Stan's Notes: Usually considered a winter finch, seen in flocks of up to 20 birds, often with other finch species. While it can be found throughout Missouri in heavy invasion years, it is absent in many winters. Will come to thistle feeders. Gives a series of high-pitched, wheezy calls. Also gives a wheezing twitter. Nests irregularly in Missouri, with nests often only a few feet apart. Breeds in small groups. Builds nest toward the end of coniferous branches, where needles are dense, helping to conceal. Male feeds the female during incubation. Juveniles lose the yellow tint by late summer of their first year.



male
p. 275

female



BIRDING ON THE INTERNET

Birding online is a great way to discover additional information and learn more about birds. These websites will assist you in your pursuit of birds. Web addresses sometimes change a bit, so if one no longer works, just enter the name of the group into a search engine to track down the new address.

Site	Address
Author Stan Tekiela's homepage	naturesmart.com
American Birding Association	aba.org
Audubon Missouri	mo.audubon.org
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology	birds.cornell.edu
eBird	ebird.org
Greater Ozarks Audubon	greaterozarksaudubon.org
Missouri Birding Society	mobirds.org
St. Louis Audubon Society	stlouisaudubon.org
University of Missouri- Raptor Rehabilitation Project	raptorrehab.missouri.edu
World Bird Sanctuary	worldbirdsanctuary.org

CHECKLIST/INDEX BY SPECIES

Use the boxes to check the birds you've seen.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blackbird,
Red-winged 31, 143 | <input type="checkbox"/> Eagle, Bald 69 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blackbird,
Yellow-headed 33, 149 | <input type="checkbox"/> Egret, Cattle 289 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bluebird, Eastern 75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Egret, Great 295 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bobwhite, Northern. 151 | <input type="checkbox"/> Egret, Snowy. 291 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bunting, Indigo 71, 99 | <input type="checkbox"/> Falcon, Peregrine 245 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cardinal, Northern . . . 141, 283 | <input type="checkbox"/> Finch, House. 91, 275 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catbird, Gray. 227 | <input type="checkbox"/> Finch, Purple 111, 277 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chickadee, Black-capped . . 207 | <input type="checkbox"/> Flicker, Northern 159 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chickadee, Carolina. 209 | <input type="checkbox"/> Flycatcher, Great Crested. . . 221 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken, Greater Prairie-. . . 177 | <input type="checkbox"/> Flycatcher, Scissor-tailed. . . 59 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coot, American 37 | <input type="checkbox"/> Gadwall 181, 249 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cormorant,
Double-crested 45 | <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfinch, American 301 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cowbird,
Brown-headed 27, 131 | <input type="checkbox"/> Goose, Canada 251 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crane, Sandhill 255 | <input type="checkbox"/> Goose, Snow. 293 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crow, American 41 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grackle, Common 35 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cuckoo, Yellow-billed. 161 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grackle, Great-tailed . . . 39, 169 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dickcissel 309 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grebe, Pied-billed 167 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dove, Eurasian Collared-. . . 239 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grosbeak, Blue 73, 123 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dove, Mourning. 163 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grosbeak,
Rose-breasted. 49, 125 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Duck, Wood 179, 261 | <input type="checkbox"/> Gull, Ring-billed. 287 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Harrier, Northern 189, 247 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Hawk, Cooper's 243 |

- ☐ Hawk, Red-tailed 191
- ☐ Hawk, Sharp-shinned 235
- ☐ Heron,
Black-crowned Night- 67
- ☐ Heron, Great Blue. 253
- ☐ Heron, Green 259
- ☐ Hummingbird,
Ruby-throated. 257
- ☐ Ibis, White-faced 197
- ☐ Jay, Blue 81
- ☐ Junco, Dark-eyed 97, 215
- ☐ Kestrel, American 147
- ☐ Killdeer. 155
- ☐ Kingbird, Eastern 223
- ☐ Kingfisher, Belted 83
- ☐ Kinglet, Ruby-crowned 203
- ☐ Kite, Mississippi. 237
- ☐ Lark, Horned. 129
- ☐ Mallard. 185, 263
- ☐ Martin, Purple 79
- ☐ Meadowlark, Eastern 319
- ☐ Merganser,
Common 267, 285
- ☐ Mockingbird, Northern 233
- ☐ Night-Heron,
Black-crowned 67
- ☐ Nighthawk, Common 145
- ☐ Nuthatch, Red-breasted 205
- ☐ Nuthatch,
White-breasted 211
- ☐ Oriole, Baltimore 271, 313
- ☐ Oriole, Orchard 273, 315
- ☐ Osprey 65
- ☐ Owl, Barred 193
- ☐ Owl, Eastern Screech- 225
- ☐ Owl, Great Horned 195
- ☐ Pelican, American White 299
- ☐ Pheasant, Ring-necked. 199
- ☐ Phoebe, Eastern. 219
- ☐ Pigeon, Rock. 241
- ☐ Pintail, Northern 187
- ☐ Prairie-Chicken, Greater 177
- ☐ Redstart, American 269, 307
- ☐ Robin, American 231
- ☐ Sandpiper, Spotted 139
- ☐ Sandpiper, Upland 165
- ☐ Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied 51
- ☐ Scaup, Lesser 61, 175
- ☐ Screech-Owl, Eastern. 225
- ☐ Shoveler, Northern 183, 265
- ☐ Shrike, Loggerhead 229
- ☐ Siskin, Pine 89

<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, American Tree . . .	109	<input type="checkbox"/> Vulture, Turkey	43
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Chipping	87	<input type="checkbox"/> Warbler, Yellow	305
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Eurasian Tree . . .	105	<input type="checkbox"/> Warbler, Yellow-rumped . . .	213
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Fox.	119	<input type="checkbox"/> Waxwing, Bohemian	133
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Harris's	135	<input type="checkbox"/> Waxwing, Cedar	133
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, House	107	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodpecker, Downy	47
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Lark	113	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodpecker, Hairy	53
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, Song.	103	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodpecker, Pileated	63
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, White-crowned. . .	117	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodpecker, Red-bellied	57
<input type="checkbox"/> Sparrow, White-throated. . .	115	<input type="checkbox"/> Woodpecker, Red-headed	55
<input type="checkbox"/> Starling, European	29	<input type="checkbox"/> Wren, Carolina.	95
<input type="checkbox"/> Swallow, Barn	77	<input type="checkbox"/> Wren, House.	93
<input type="checkbox"/> Swallow, Cliff	101	<input type="checkbox"/> Yellowlegs, Lesser.	153
<input type="checkbox"/> Swan, Trumpeter	297	<input type="checkbox"/> Yellowthroat, Common	303
<input type="checkbox"/> Swift, Chimney	85		
<input type="checkbox"/> Tanager, Scarlet	279, 311		
<input type="checkbox"/> Tanager, Summer	281, 317		
<input type="checkbox"/> Teal, Blue-winged.	173		
<input type="checkbox"/> Teal, Green-winged	171		
<input type="checkbox"/> Thrasher, Brown.	157		
<input type="checkbox"/> Thrush, Swainson's	121		
<input type="checkbox"/> Thrush, Wood	137		
<input type="checkbox"/> Titmouse, Tufted	217		
<input type="checkbox"/> Towhee, Eastern.	25, 127		
<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey, Wild	201		

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naturalist, wildlife photographer and writer Stan Tekiela is the originator of the popular state-specific field guide series that includes the *Trees of Missouri Field Guide*. Stan has authored more than 190 educational books, including field guides, quick guides, nature books, children's books, and more, presenting many species of animals and plants.

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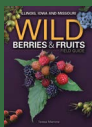
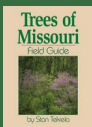
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About the Author

Naturalist Stan Tekiela is an award-winning wildlife photographer and the author of many popular state-specific field guides. He has written educational books about wildlife, including children's books, quick guides and more, presenting birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, trees, wildflowers and cacti.

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