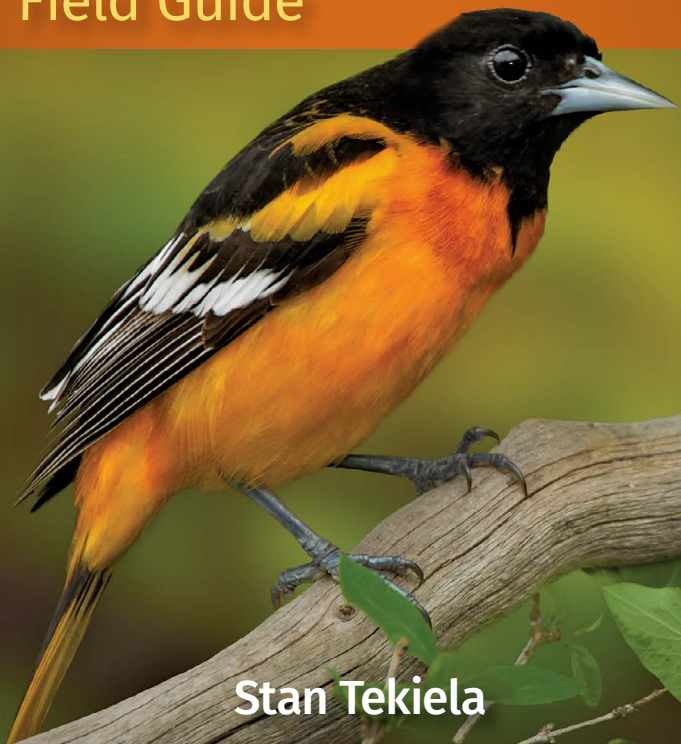


3RD EDITION

# Birds *of* New York

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

**Birds that are mostly black** p. 25

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**Birds that are mostly black and white** p. 47

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**Birds that are mostly blue** p. 81

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**Birds that are mostly brown** p. 95

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**Birds that are mostly gray** p. 205

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**Birds that have prominent green** p. 263

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**Birds that have prominent orange** p. 275

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**Birds that have prominent red** p. 281

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**Birds that are mostly white** p. 295

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**Birds that have prominent yellow** p. 305

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3RD EDITION

# Birds *of* New York

## Field Guide

Stan Tekiela

Adventure Publications  
Cambridge, Minnesota



Edited by Sandy Livoti, Brett Ortler and Kate Johnson  
Cover, book design and illustrations by Jonathan Norberg  
Range maps produced by Anthony Hertzell

**Cover photo: Baltimore Oriole by Stan Tekiela**

**All photos by Stan Tekiela** except p. 296 (juvenile) by **Rick and Nora Bowers**; p. 76 (juvenile), 206 (female), and 310 (female) by **Kevin T. Karlson**; pp. 60 (breeding) and 142 (breeding) by **Ivan Kuzmin/Shutterstock.com**; p. 68 (in flight) by **Brian Lasenby/Shutterstock.com**; pp. 46 (female) and 318 (female) by **Maslowski Wildlife Productions**; p. 144 (breeding) by **Brian E. Small**; p. 238 (displaying) by **Hartmut Walter**; pp. 42 (juvenile), 152 (both juveniles), 250 (juvenile), and 252 (in-flight juvenile) by **Brian K. Wheeler**; and pp. 186 (female), 248 (main), and 306 (female) by **Jim Zipp**

To the best of the publisher's knowledge, all photos were of live birds. Some were photographed in a controlled condition.

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## WHAT'S NEW?

It is hard to believe that it's been more than 20 years since the debut of *Birds of New York Field Guide*. This critically acclaimed field guide has helped countless people identify and enjoy the birds that we love. Now, in this expanded third edition, *Birds of New York 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 New York, I have added 6 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 New York birds!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Stan Tekiela". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Stan" and last name "Tekiela" clearly distinguishable.

## WHY WATCH BIRDS IN NEW YORK?

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 and listening to them often leads to a lifetime pursuit of bird identification. The *Birds of New York Field Guide* is for those who want to identify the common birds of New York.

There are over 1,100 species of birds found in North America. In New York alone there have been more than 450 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 records, I've chosen 126 of the most common and easily seen birds of New York to include in this field guide.

Bird watching, often called birding, is one of the most popular activities in America. Its outstanding appeal in New York is due, in part, to an unusually rich and abundant birdlife. Why are there so many birds? One reason is open space. New York is over 54,500 square miles (141,000 sq. km), making it the twenty-seventh-largest state. Despite its large size, only a little over 19.4 million people call New York home. On average, that is 356 people per square mile (136 per sq. km), half of whom live in and around New York City.

Open space is not the only reason there is such an abundance of birds—it's also the diversity of habitat. From the windswept shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the top of the Adirondack and Catskill Mountains and on to the shores of Lake Ontario, New York is rich in natural habitat that is perfect for birds.

The state can be broken into many distinctly different habitats, each of which supports a different group of birds. Long-legged shorebirds such as Sanderlings gravitate to beaches along the Atlantic, while tiny, brightly colored warblers such as American Redstarts flit from tree to tree in New York's northern forests.

Another great feature in northern New York is the Adirondack Mountains. A beautiful range of hills and rounded peaks, the Adirondacks are covered with coniferous forests with Balsam Firs and White Pines. This is an area where you can find birds such as Brown Creepers and Purple Finches.

In southern and central parts of New York, oaks and maples in deciduous forests are home to birds such as Scarlet Tanagers and Great Crested Flycatchers.

A low area in the northwestern portion of New York known as the Great Lakes Plain is essentially a flat region with little to no relief. This flat open space is mostly agricultural, but it still provides good habitat for birds in large flocks such as Horned Larks.

Western New York borders two of the Great Lakes—Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. These large freshwater lakes are home to many species of birds, such as Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

Besides its varying habitats, New York is known for its weather extremes. From the snowy winters in the northwestern part of the state to the steamy summers in the south, seasonal changes accompany a changing array of birds.

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

## OBSERVATION STRATEGIES: 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 marsh? Walking along a riverbank? 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 Blue Jay sitting on a tree branch but not climbing headfirst down the trunk, like a White-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 Tree 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 distinc-

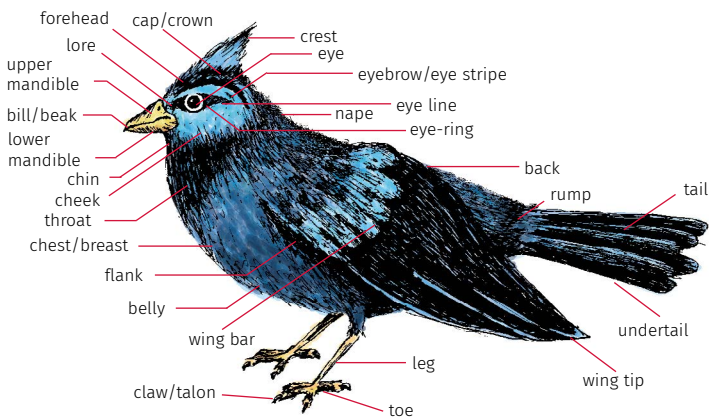
tive undulating pattern that makes it look like they're riding a roller coaster.

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.

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

The males and females of some species, such as the Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay and Bald Eagle, look nearly identical. In woodpeckers, they are differentiated by only a red (sometimes yellow or black) mark; this mark may be on top of the head, on the face or nape, 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 Tree Swallows, 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 food is plentiful than where food is scarce. Scarlet Tanagers, for instance, are **complete migrators** that fly from the tropics of 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 mean flying from New York to a tropical destination. Dark-eyed Juncos, for example, are complete migrators that move from the far reaches of Canada to spend the winter here in cold and snowy New York. 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. Purple Finches 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. Black-capped Chickadees, for example, are **non-migrators** that remain in their habitat all year long and just move around as necessary to find food.

## How 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 male Rose-breasted Grosbeak is black-and-white with a red patch on his chest. 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. 20–21.

## 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.

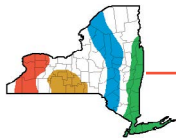
While every effort has been made to depict accurate ranges, these are constantly in flux due to a variety of factors. Changing weather, habitat, species abundance and availability of vital resources, such as food and water, can affect the migration and movement of local populations, causing birds to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

male

female  
p. 113



# Common Name



YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER  
MIGRATION  
WINTER

Range Map Scientific name Color Indicator

**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.



male





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 with a heavily streaked head, chest and belly; long, dark tail with a white tip

**Nest:** cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

**Eggs:** 3–4; cream-white with brown markings

**Incubation:** 12–13 days; female incubates

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

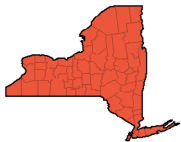
**Migration:** partial to non-migrator; moves around in winter

**Food:** insects, seeds, fruit; visits ground feeders

**Compare:** The American Robin (p. 237) lacks the white belly. The Gray Catbird (p. 235) lacks the black head and rusty sides. The Common Grackle (p. 33) lacks a white belly and has a long, thin bill. The male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (p. 51) has a rosy patch on its 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. Male feeds the young most of the time. In southern coastal states, some have red eyes; others have white eyes.





## Brown-headed Cowbird

*Molothrus ater*

YEAR-ROUND

**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 the nests of other birds

**Eggs:** 5–7; white with brown markings

**Incubation:** 10–13 days; host birds incubate the eggs

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

**Migration:** non-migrator to partial in New York; moves around to find food

**Food:** insects, seeds; will come to seed feeders

**Compare:** The male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) is slightly larger and has red-and-yellow patches on its upper wings. The Common Grackle (p. 33) has a long tail and lacks the brown head. The European Starling (p. 29) has a shorter tail.

**Stan's Notes:** Cowbirds are members of the blackbird family. Known as brood parasites, Brown-headed Cowbirds are the only parasitic birds in New York. 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.

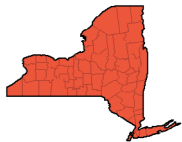




breeding



winter



# European Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*

YEAR-ROUND

**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 the 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; will move around to find food

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

**Compare:** The Common Grackle (p. 33) 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.

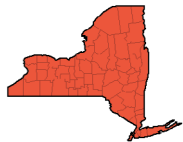
**Stan's Notes:** A great songster, this bird mimics the songs of up to 20 bird species and imitates sounds, including the human voice. Jaws are more powerful when opening than when closing, enabling the bird to pry open crevices to find insects. Often displaces woodpeckers, chickadees and other cavity-nesting birds. Large families gather with blackbirds in the fall. Not a native bird; 100 starlings were introduced to New York City in 1891 from Europe. Bill changes color with the seasons in spring and fall.



male



female  
p. 149



## Red-winged Blackbird

*Agelaius phoeniceus*

YEAR-ROUND

**Size:** 8½" (21.5 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

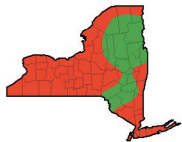
**Migration:** partial to non-migrator in New York; moves around to find food in winter

**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. It is a sure sign of spring when these birds return home. 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 on insects throughout the summer.





YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER

## 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:** complete, to southern states; non-migrator in parts of New York

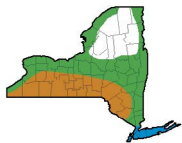
**Food:** fruit, seeds, insects; will come to seed and suet feeders

**Compare:** The European Starling (p. 29) is much smaller with a speckled appearance and a yellow bill during the breeding season. The male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) has bright red-and-yellow shoulder patches (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

## Common Gallinule

*Gallinula galeata*

**Size:** 13–15" (33–38 cm)

**Male:** Nearly black overall with yellow-tipped red bill. Red forehead. Thin line of white along sides. Yellowish-green legs.

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** same as adult, but brown with white throat and dirty-yellow legs

**Nest:** ground; female and male build; 1–2 broods per year

**Eggs:** 2–10; brown with dark markings

**Incubation:** 19–22 days; female and male incubate

**Fledging:** 40–50 days; female and male feed the young

**Migration:** complete, to southern states; some winter on Long Island

**Food:** insects, snails, seeds, green leaves, fruit

**Compare:** American Coot (p. 37) is similar in size but lacks the distinctive yellow-tipped bill and red forehead of Common Gallinule.

**Stan's Notes:** Also known as Mud Hen or Pond Chicken. A nearly all-black duck-like bird often seen in freshwater marshes and lakes. Walks on floating vegetation or swims while hunting for insects. Females known to lay eggs in other gallinule nests in addition to their own. Builds its nest with cattails and bulrushes and sometimes takes an old nest in a low shrub. A cooperative breeder, having young of first brood help raise young of second. Young leave nest usually within a few hours after hatching but stay with the family for a couple months. Young ride on backs of adults.







YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER  
MIGRATION

# American Coot

*Fulica americana*

**Size:** 13–16" (33–41 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 the young

**Migration:** complete, to southern states, Mexico and Central America; some winter in New York

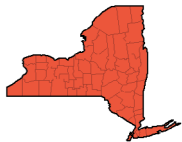
**Food:** insects, aquatic plants

**Compare:** Smaller than most waterfowl. This 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.

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 adults

**Nest:** platform; female builds; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 4–6; bluish to olive with brown markings

**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, often into city interiors

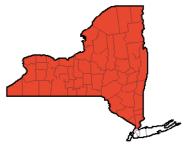
**Food:** fruit, insects, mammals, fish, carrion; comes to seed and suet feeders

**Compare:** The Common Raven (p. 41) has a larger bill; shaggy throat feathers; a deep, raspy call; and a wedged tail, as seen in flight. Look for the glossy black plumage and squared tail to help identify the American Crow.

**Stan's Notes:** A familiar bird, found in all 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. Collects and stores bright, shiny objects in the nest. 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.

in flight





YEAR-ROUND

## Common Raven

*Corvus corax*

**Size:** 22–27" (56–69 cm)

**Male:** Large all-black bird with a shaggy beard of feathers on the throat and a large black bill. Large wedge-shaped tail, best seen in flight.

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** same as adults

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

**Eggs:** 4–6; pale green with brown markings

**Incubation:** 18–21 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 38–44 days; female and male feed the young

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

**Food:** insects, fruit, small animals, carrion

**Compare:** The American Crow (p. 39) is smaller and lacks the shaggy throat feathers. The Raven glides on flat, outstretched wings, unlike the slight V-shaped wing pattern of the Crow. Listen for the Raven's deep, raspy call to distinguish it from the Crow's higher-pitched call.

**Stan's Notes:** This bird is a symbol of New York's northern woods. Considered by some to be the smartest of all birds. Known for its aerial acrobatics and long, swooping dives. Sometimes scavenges with crows and gulls. A cooperative hunter that often communicates the location of a food source to other ravens. Most start to breed at 3–4 years. Complex courtship includes grabbing bills, preening each other and cooing. Long-term pair bond. Uses the same nest site for many years.



soaring

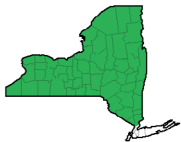


juvenile



drying





SUMMER

# Turkey Vulture

*Cathartes aura*

**Size:** 26–32" (66–81 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, to southern states, Mexico, and Central and South America

**Food:** carrion; parents regurgitate to feed the young

**Compare:** The Bald Eagle (p. 79) is much 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





## Double-crested Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax auritus*

**Size:** 31–35" (79–89 cm); up to 4½' wingspan

**Male:** Large black waterbird with unusual blue eyes and a long, snakelike 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 and Central America

**Food:** small fish, aquatic insects

**Compare:** The Turkey Vulture (p. 43) also spreads out its wings to dry in the sun, but it has a naked red head. The American Coot (p. 37) has a duck-like white bill. Look for the long, snakelike neck and large, hooked bill to help identify the Cormorant.

**Stan's Notes:** Flies in a large V or a line. Usually roosts in large colonies in trees close to water. 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



SUMMER

## Black-and-white Warbler

*Mniotilta varia*

**Size:** 5" (13 cm)

**Male:** Small with zebra-like striping and a black-and-white striped crown. Black cheek patch and chin. White belly.

**Female:** duller than male and lacks a black cheek patch and chin

**Juvenile:** similar to female

**Nest:** cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 4–5; white with brown markings

**Incubation:** 10–11 days; female incubates

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

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

**Food:** insects

**Compare:** Climbs down tree trunks headfirst, like the White-breasted Nuthatch (p. 213) and Red-breasted Nuthatch (p. 209). Look for a small black-and-white bird climbing down trees to identify the Black-and-white Warbler.

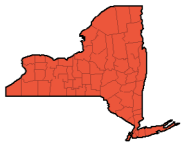
**Stan's Notes:** This is the only warbler species that moves down tree trunks headfirst. Look for it searching for insect eggs in the bark of large trees. Its song sounds like a slowly turning, squeaky wheel going around and around. Female performs a distraction dance to draw predators away from the nest. Constructs its nest on the ground, concealing it under dead leaves or at the base of a tree. Found in a variety of habitats. Common summer resident in the state, although more conspicuous during migration. Most arrive in April and May and leave by September.

male



female





## Downy Woodpecker

*Dryobates pubescens*

YEAR-ROUND

**Size:** 6" (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 suet and seed feeders

**Compare:** The Hairy Woodpecker (p. 55) 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. Undulates in flight.

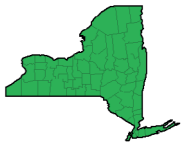




female  
p. 135



male



## Rose-breasted Grosbeak

*Phoeucticus ludovicianus*



SUMMER

**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

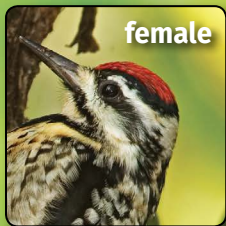
**Food:** insects, seeds, fruit; comes to seed feeders

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

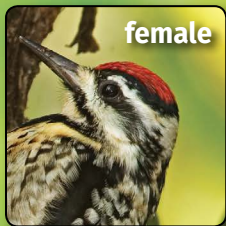
**Stan's Notes:** Seen in small groups. Prefers a mature deciduous forest for nesting. Both sexes sing, but the male sings much louder and clearer. Sings a rich, robin-like song with a chip note in the tune. "Grosbeak" refers to the thick, strong bill, which is used to crush seeds. The rose patch varies in size and shape in each male. Males have white wing patches that flash during flight. Males arrive at the breeding grounds a few days before the females. Several males will come to seed feeders together in spring. When the females arrive, males become territorial and reduce their feeder visits. After fledging, young grosbeaks visit feeders with the adults. Makes short flights from tree to tree with rapid wingbeats.

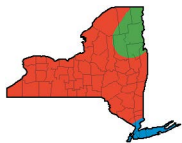


male



female





YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER  
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 but dull brown and lacks red markings

**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:** partial to non-migrator, to southern states, Mexico and Central America

**Food:** insects, tree sap; comes to suet feeders

**Compare:** The Red-headed Woodpecker (p. 57) has an all-red head. Look for the red chin and crown to identify the male Sapsucker, and the white chin and red crown to identify the female.

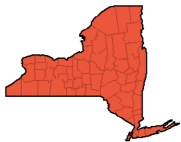
**Stan's Notes:** Found in small woods, forests, and suburban and rural areas. Drills rows of holes in trees to bleed the sap. Oozing sap attracts bugs, which it also eats. Defends its sapping sites from other birds that try to drink from the taps. Does not suck sap; rather, it laps the sticky liquid 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

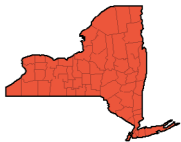
**Food:** insects, nuts, seeds; will come to suet and seed feeders

**Compare:** Much larger than the Downy Woodpecker (p. 49) and has a much longer bill, nearly equal to the width of its head.

**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. Often prefers to excavate nest cavities in live aspen trees. Excavates a larger, more oval-shaped entrance than the round entrance hole of the Downy Woodpecker. Makes short flights from tree to tree.







## Red-headed Woodpecker

*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

YEAR-ROUND

**Size:** 9" (23 cm)

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

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** grayish-brown head and white chest

**Nest:** cavity; male excavates with some help from the 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 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 New York has an all-red head. The Pileated Woodpecker (p. 71) is the only other woodpecker with a solid black back, but it has a partial red head.

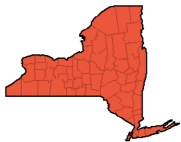
**Stan's Notes:** One of the few non-dimorphic woodpeckers, with males and females that look alike. Bill is strong enough to excavate a nest cavity only in soft, dead trees. Prefers open woodlands or woodland edges with many dead or rotting branches. Nests later than its close relative, the Red-bellied Woodpecker, 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



## Red-bellied Woodpecker

*Melanerpes carolinus*

YEAR-ROUND

**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:** Similar to the Northern Flicker (p. 161) and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (p. 53). Look for the zebra-striped back to help identify the Red-bellied Woodpecker.

**Stan's Notes:** Likes shady woodlands, forest edges and backyards. Digs holes in rotten wood to find spiders, centipedes, beetles and more. 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. Often kicked out of nest hole by European Starlings. 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. Expanding its range all over the country.



winter  
p. 241



breeding





MIGRATION  
WINTER

## Black-bellied Plover

*Pluvialis squatarola*

**Size:** 11–12" (28–30 cm)

**Male:** Striking black-and-white breeding plumage. Belly, breast, sides, face and neck are black. Cap, nape of neck, and belly near tail are white. Black legs and bill.

**Female:** less black on belly and breast than male

**Juvenile:** grayer than adults, with much less black

**Nest:** ground; male and female construct; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 3–4; pinkish or greenish with black-brown markings

**Incubation:** 26–27 days; male incubates during the day, female incubates at night

**Fledging:** 35–45 days; male feeds the young, and the young learn quickly to feed themselves

**Migration:** complete to the East and Gulf Coasts, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America; a few spend winter on Long Island

**Food:** insects

**Compare:** The breeding Dunlin (p. 145) is slightly smaller, with a rusty back and long down-curved bill. Look for Black-bellied's large black patch on the belly, face and chest, and a white cap.

**Stan's Notes:** Males perform a "butterfly" courtship flight to attract females. Female leaves male and young about 12 days after the eggs hatch. Breeds at age 3. Begins fall migration in July and August. During flight, in any plumage, displays a white rump and stripe on wings with black axillaries (armpits). Often darts across the ground to grab an insect and run.

female p.173



male





MIGRATION  
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 New York and southern states; moves around to find open water in winter

**Food:** aquatic plants and insects

**Compare:** The male Common Goldeneye (p. 67) has a white chest. The male Blue-winged Teal (p. 171) is slightly smaller, with a white crescent on its bill. The white sides and gray back help identify the male Lesser Scaup.

**Stan's Notes:** A common diving duck. Often in large flocks along western Lake Erie each spring. Mostly seen when it migrates in late February and October. Submerges completely to feed on the bottom (unlike dabbling ducks, which tip forward to reach the bottom). Note the bold white stripe under the wings when in flight. 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.

female  
p. 181



male





YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER

## Hooded Merganser

*Lophodytes cucullatus*

**Size:** 16–19" (41–48 cm)

**Male:** Black and white with rust-brown sides. Crest “hood” raises to show a large white patch on each side of the head. Long, thin black bill.

**Female:** brown and rust with ragged, rust-red “hair” and a long, thin brown bill

**Juvenile:** similar to female

**Nest:** cavity; female lines an old woodpecker cavity or a nest box near water; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 10–12; white without markings

**Incubation:** 32–33 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 71 days; female feeds the young

**Migration:** complete, to Long Island, southern states

**Food:** small fish, aquatic insects, crustaceans (especially crayfish)

**Compare:** The male Wood Duck (p. 267) has a green head. The male Common Merganser (p. 273) is much larger. The white patch on the head and rust-brown sides distinguish the male Hoodie.

**Stan's Notes:** A small diving duck, found in shallow ponds, sloughs, lakes and rivers, usually in small groups. Quick, low flight across the water, with fast wingbeats. Male has a deep, rolling call. Female gives a hoarse quack. Nests in wooded areas. Female will lay some eggs in the nests of other mergansers, goldeneyes or Wood Ducks (egg dumping), resulting in 20–25 eggs in some nests. Rarely, she shares a nest, sitting with a Wood Duck. Not as common as the Common Merganser.

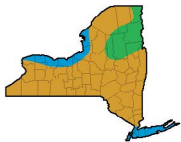
female  
p. 185



male







## Common Goldeneye

*Bucephala clangula*

**Size:** 18–20" (45–51 cm)

**Male:** Mostly white duck with a black back and a large, puffy green head. Large white spot on the face. Bright-golden eyes. Dark bill.

**Female:** Large dark-brown head with a gray body and a white collar. Bright-golden eyes and a yellow-tipped, dark bill.

**Juvenile:** same as female but has dark eyes

**Nest:** cavity; female lines an old woodpecker cavity; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 8–10; light green without markings

**Incubation:** 28–32 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 56–59 days; female leads the young to food

**Migration:** complete, to New York, southern states and Mexico

**Food:** aquatic plants, insects, fish, mollusks

**Compare:** Similar to the black-and-white male Lesser Scaup (p. 63), which is smaller. Look for the distinctive white spot on the sides of the face and the golden eyes to identify the male Common Goldeneye.

**Stan's Notes:** Known for the loud whistling sound produced by its wings during flight. During late winter and early spring, the male performs elaborate mating displays that include throwing his head back and calling a raspy note. The female will lay some of her eggs in other goldeneye nests or in the nests of other species (called egg dumping), causing some mothers to incubate as many as 30 eggs in a brood. Named for its bright-golden eyes. Winters in parts of New York where it finds open water.







# American Oystercatcher

*Haematopus palliatus*

YEAR-ROUND

**Size:** 18–19" (45–48 cm)

**Male:** Large shorebird with dark-brown sides, wings and back, and a white chest and belly. Black head. Red ring around the eyes and a large red-orange bill. Pink legs.

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** more gray than black and lacks the brightly colored bill

**Nest:** ground; male and female construct; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 2–4; olive with sparse brown markings

**Incubation:** 24–29 days; female incubates during the day, male incubates at night

**Fledging:** 35–40 days; male and female feed the young, the young learn quickly to feed themselves

**Migration:** complete, to the East and Gulf Coasts, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America; some don't migrate

**Food:** shellfish, insects, aquatic insects, worms

**Compare:** Breeding Black-bellied Plover (p. 61) is smaller. Look for the Oystercatcher's large and obvious red-orange bill.

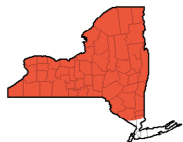
**Stan's Notes:** A large, stunningly beautiful bird that stands out on the beach. This chunky shorebird has a flattened, heavy bill, which it uses to pry open shellfish and probe sand for insects and worms. Oystercatchers open oysters in two different ways. Some, known as "stabbers," sneak up on mollusks and stab their bills between shells before they have a chance to close. Others, called "hammerers," shatter one half.



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; moves around to find food

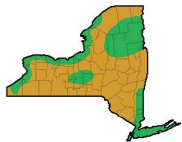
**Food:** insects; will come to suet and peanut feeders

**Compare:** The Red-headed Woodpecker (p. 57) 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, and Central and South America

**Food:** fish

**Compare:** The juvenile Bald Eagle (p. 79) 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.

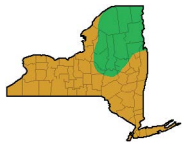
**Stan's Notes:** The only species in its family, and the only raptor that plunges into water feetfirst to catch fish. Always near water. Can hover for a few seconds before diving. Carries fish in a head-first position for better aerodynamics. Wings angle back in flight. Often harassed by Bald Eagles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

winter



breeding





SUMMER  
MIGRATION

## Common Loon

*Gavia immer*

**Size:** 28–36" (71–91 cm)

**Male:** Checkerboard back, black head, white neck-lace. Deep-red eyes. Long, pointed black bill. Winter plumage has a gray body and bill.

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** similar to winter plumage but lacks red eyes

**Nest:** ground, usually at the shoreline; female and male build; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 2; olive-brown; occasionally brown markings

**Incubation:** 26–31 days; female and male incubate

**Fledging:** 75–80 days; female and male feed the young

**Migration:** complete, to southern states, the Gulf Coast and Mexico

**Food:** fish, aquatic insects, crayfish, salamanders

**Compare:** The Double-crested Cormorant (p. 45) has a black chest and gray bill with a hooked tip and yellow at the base. Look for the checkerboard back to identify the Common Loon.

**Stan's Notes:** Hunts for fish by sight; prefers clear, clean lakes. A great swimmer, but its legs are set so far back that it has a hard time walking. "Loon" comes from the Scandinavian *lom*, meaning "lame," for the awkward way it walks. To take off, it faces into the wind and runs on the water while flapping. Its wailing call suggests wild laughter, which led to the phrase "crazy as a loon." Also gives soft hoots. In the water, young ride on their parents' backs for about 10 days. Adults perform distraction displays to protect the young. Very sensitive to disturbance during nesting and will abandon the nest.



juvenile



breeding





YEAR-ROUND

# Great Black-backed Gull

*Larus marinus*

**Size:** 30" (76 cm); up to 5½' wingspan

**Male:** An extremely large gull. Black-and-white breeding plumage with a white head, chest and belly and black back and wings. Has a distinctive yellow bill with an orange mark near the end of the lower bill. Pink legs.

**Female:** same as male

**Juvenile:** gray and brown, lacking any large black spots; gray bill

**Nest:** ground; male and female construct; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 2–3; olive with sparse brown markings

**Incubation:** 26–29 days; female and male incubate

**Fledging:** 49–56 days; male and female feed the young

**Migration:** non-migrator to partial migrator in New York; moves around to find food

**Food:** fish, insects, crustaceans

**Compare:** Ring-billed Gull (p. 297), Herring Gull (p. 299) and Laughing Gull (p. 295) are smaller. Look for a white head, black back and bright-yellow bill with an orange spot.

**Stan's Notes:** One of the largest gulls. A four-year gull, meaning it undergoes four distinct color phases to reach adulthood. Phases are often hard to distinguish and depend upon the amount of black on the bird. First-year gull lacks black on the back and has a gray bill. Second-summer gull has small amounts of black and a pale-yellow bill with a black tip. Third-summer gull has much more black on the back and wings and a black-tipped yellow bill. Fourth-summer gull or breeding adult has a black back and wings.



soaring

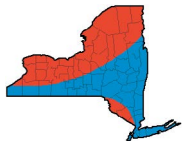


juvenile



soaring  
juvenile





YEAR-ROUND  
WINTER

## 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:** non-migrator to partial in New York; moves around in winter

**Food:** fish, carrion, birds (mainly ducks)

**Compare:** The Turkey Vulture (p. 43) is smaller, has two-toned wings and holds them in a V shape in flight. The Eagle holds its wings straight out.

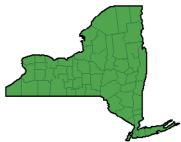
**Stan's Notes:** Nearly became extinct due to DDT poisoning and illegal killing. Now making a comeback in North America. Returns to the same nest each year, adding more sticks and enlarging it to huge proportions, at times up to 1,000 pounds (450 kg). In their midair mating ritual, one eagle flips upside 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. 113





# Indigo Bunting

*Passerina cyanea*



SUMMER

**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 southern Florida, Mexico, and Central and South America

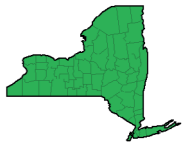
**Food:** insects, seeds, fruit; will visit seed feeders

**Compare:** The male Eastern Bluebird (p. 87) is larger and has a rust-red chest. Look for the bright-blue plumage to identify the male Indigo Bunting.

**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.







SUMMER

## Tree Swallow

*Tachycineta bicolor*

**Size:** 5–6" (13–15 cm)

**Male:** Blue-green in spring, greener in fall. Changes color in direct sunlight. White from chin to belly. Long, pointed wing tips. Notched tail.

**Female:** similar to male but duller

**Juvenile:** grayish brown with a white belly and a grayish breast band

**Nest:** cavity; female and male line a vacant woodpecker cavity or nest box; 2 broods per year

**Eggs:** 4–6; white without markings

**Incubation:** 13–16 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 20–24 days; female and male feed the young

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

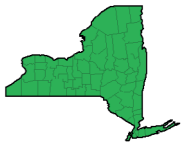
**Food:** insects

**Compare:** The Purple Martin (p. 89) is much larger and darker. The Barn Swallow (p. 85) has a rusty belly and a long, deeply forked tail. Look for the white chin, chest and belly and the notched tail to help identify the Tree Swallow.

**Stan's Notes:** First swallow species to return each spring. Found at ponds, lakes, rivers and farm fields. Often seen flying back and forth across fields, feeding on insects. Can be attracted to your yard with a nest box. Competes with the Eastern Bluebird for tree cavities and nest boxes. Builds a grass nest within and will travel long distances, looking for dropped feathers for the lining. Watch for it playing and chasing after feathers. Flies with rapid wingbeats, then glides. Gives a series of gurgles and chirps. Chatters when upset or threatened. Eats many nuisance bugs. Families gather in large flocks for migration.







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 a 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 Tree Swallow (p. 83) is white from chin to belly. The Purple Martin (p. 89) is larger and has a dark-purple belly. The Chimney Swift (p. 99) has a narrow, pointed tail. Look for the deeply forked tail to identify the Barn Swallow.

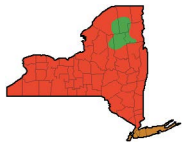
**Stan's Notes:** Seen in wetlands, farms, suburban yards and parks. New York has six swallow species, but this is the only one with a deeply forked tail. Unlike other swallows, it rarely glides in flight. Usually flies low over land or water. Drinks as it flies, skimming water, or will sip water droplets 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**



YEAR-ROUND  
SUMMER  
MIGRATION

# 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 to non-migrator in New York

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

**Compare:** The male Indigo Bunting (p. 81) is nearly all blue. The Blue Jay (p. 91) is much larger and has a crest. Look for the rusty breast to help identify the Eastern Bluebird.

**Stan's Notes:** Nearly eliminated from New York due to a lack of nest cavities. Thanks to people who installed thousands of nest boxes, bluebirds now thrive. Prefers open habitats, such as farm fields, pastures and roadsides, but also likes forest edges, parks and yards. Easily tamed. Often perches on trees or fence posts and drops to the ground to grab bugs, especially grasshoppers. Makes short flights from tree to tree. Song is a distinctive “churlee chur-lee.” The rust-red breast is like that of the American Robin, its cousin. The young of the first brood help raise the second brood.

**male**



**female**





SUMMER  
MIGRATION

# Purple Martin

*Progne subis*

**Size:** 8½" (21.5 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.



## 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.

<b>Site</b>	<b>Address</b>
Author Stan Tekiela's homepage	<a href="http://naturesmart.com">naturesmart.com</a>
American Birding Association	<a href="http://aba.org">aba.org</a>
Audubon New York	<a href="http://ny.audubon.org">ny.audubon.org</a>
New York City Audubon	<a href="http://nycaudubon.org">nycaudubon.org</a>
New York eBird	<a href="http://ebird.org/atlasny/home">ebird.org/atlasny/home</a>
New York State Ornithological Association	<a href="http://nybirds.org">nybirds.org</a>
Silent Wings Raptor Rehab and Education	<a href="http://silentwingsraptors.org">silentwingsraptors.org</a>
Western New York Raptor and Wildlife Care, Inc.	<a href="http://wnyraptor.com">wnyraptor.com</a>



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## 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 New York 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.

With a Bachelor of Science degree in natural history from the University of Minnesota and as an active professional naturalist for more than 30 years, Stan studies and photographs wildlife throughout the United States and Canada. He has received national and regional awards for his books and photographs and is also a well-known columnist and radio personality. His syndicated column appears in more than 25 newspapers, and his wildlife programs are broadcast on a number of Midwest radio stations. You can follow Stan on Facebook and Twitter or contact him via his website, [nauresmart.com](http://nauresmart.com).





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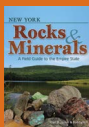
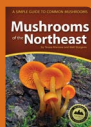
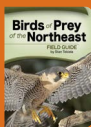
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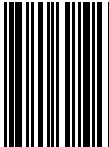
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