

Backyard Birding for Kids



An Introduction to Ornithology

Field Guide, Projects, and More!



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Life Cycle

EGGS Birds lay eggs, then keep them warm so the chicks can develop inside the eggs. Sometimes both parents keep the eggs warm, sometimes just the mom, sometimes just the dad.



European Starling

CHICKS Once chicks hatch, many need to be fed by their parents until they grow strong enough to feed on their own (these are known as altricial chicks). There are exceptions: precocial chicks, like plovers, can feed by themselves, but they need the protection of their parents against predators. Most chicks are born with soft, downy feathers

that can make them look like little fuzzballs, but they eventually grow adult feathers.

JUVENILES Juvenile birds are not quite adults yet. They may look different than adults because they don't have all their adult feathers, or they don't have the plumage colors of adults. They are usually

Getting Started as a Birder

The only thing you really need to be a good birder is curiosity about the natural world. You can see birds everywhere, from the pigeons and sparrows of the city to the robins and jays of suburban neighborhoods to the meadowlarks and bluebirds of open fields.

Look at each bird carefully, and if it helps, take notes on what you observe. What color are they, and where are the colors on the bird's body? What does the bill look like? Approximately how big is the bird? Importantly, note the habitat in which the bird appears. Some species, like Belted Kingfishers, are only found near water, while others, including Pine Warblers, prefer specific species of trees. The more you bird, the more these relationships will stand out to you.

Though you don't need anything but your eyes and ears for birding, there are a few tools to help make identification easier.

Binoculars

Binoculars zoom in on the bird, making it easier to spot a bird's distinguishing field marks, or traits, that distinguish it from other species.





PAINTED BUNTING

When and where you'll see

them: In Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, parts of Mississippi, Kansas, and Missouri, as well as along the Southeastern coast in the summer. They migrate across the Southeast in the spring and fall, and can be found in the winter in South Florida.

Look for: Brilliantly colored, males have bright-red stomachs, blue heads, and green and red backs; females are a more uniform green.

Comes to feeders: Yes. They prefer seeds in a bird feeder with plenty of nearby cover.



LAZULI BUNTING

When you'll see them: Summer and during migration.

Where you'll see them: Western half of the United States.

Look for: Sky-blue head, back, and wings, with orange chest above a white stomach.

Comes to feeders: Yes. They will eat millet, thistle seeds, and sunflower seeds.

Many backyard birds are woodpecker species! Woodpeckers use their specially formed bills and skulls to pound into the trunks and branches of trees to find food and build nests. Because they do not have songs, they use their drumming to communicate. Northern Flickers, sapsuckers, and Pileated Woodpeckers are all examples of woodpecker species.



RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

When you'll see them:

Year-round.

Where you'll see them: Eastern half of United States.

Look for: A medium-size woodpecker with a bright-red head, white face, and black-and-white back.

Comes to feeders: Yes, for suet and peanuts.



PILEATED WOODPECKER

When you'll see them:

Year-round.

Where you'll see them: Eastern half of United States, the Pacific Northwest.

Look for: A large woodpecker with a large, bright-red crest.

Comes to feeders: Occasionally, if there is suet available.

Does a songbird have to have a beautiful voice?
Not necessarily.

Because there are more than 4,000 species of songbirds, you are sure to see one on your birding adventures! They vary widely in color, shape, and size, but they may not have a beautiful singing voice.

Another trait that sets them apart: they are able to exert special control over their voice box, called a syrinx. American Robins, chickadees, Blue Jays, and wrens are just a few examples of songbirds.



VERMILION FLYCATCHER

When you'll see them: It depends (see below).

Where you'll see them: Parts of the Southwest United States year-round, and the southeastern United States along the Gulf Coast in the winter months. In the summer they can also be seen farther inland in Texas, as well as in Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

Look for: Bright-red head and chest and stomach, with a dark back eye stripe.

Comes to feeders: No.



TURKEY VULTURE

When you'll see them:

Year-round in the Southeast, Southwest, and coastal California; year-round in the rest of the Lower 48.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States.

Look for: Red, bald heads and silver wing edges.

Comes to feeders: No. Watch for them circling slowly in the sky.



BALD EAGLE

When you'll see them: Year-round in much of the United States, more prevalent in the winter months.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States.

Look for: Bright-white heads against dark-brown bodies. Juveniles are more mottled.

Comes to feeders: No.



juvenile

These birds are generally large with long legs, perfect for wading around in water or mud in search of prey. Ibises, herons, egrets, storks, and the American Flamingo (pg. 92) are all wading birds.



GREAT EGRET

When you'll see them:

Year-round.

Where you'll see them: Pacific Coast states, Atlantic Coast states, Gulf Coast states, less common in interior states but possible in the summer.

Look for: Bright white, very tall bird. Long yellow bill.

Comes to feeders: No. Look in ponds or lakes, along rivers, or on the coast.



GREAT BLUE HERON

When you'll see them: Year-round; more common in the summer in northern states.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States.

Look for: Large gray/blue bird. Very tall.

Comes to feeders: No. Look in ponds or lakes, along rivers, or on the coast.



CANADA GOOSE

When you'll see them: Year-round, though in the southern half of the US. they are more common in winter. In Alaska they are found in the summer months.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States.

Look for: Brown goose with black neck and head, white patch on face.

Comes to feeders: Sometimes, if they can scoop leftover grain from the ground. Canada Geese can be aggressive, so it is probably not a good idea to encourage them to come too close to your house. If you build a nesting platform in a pond or lake they may use it!



MALLARD

When you'll see them: Year-round; in winter in the Southeast and Southwest.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States.

Look for: Females are all brown, while males have a stunning emerald-green head.

Comes to feeders: No. They do occasionally swim in people's pools.



SANDHILL CRANE

When you'll see them: Year-round in Florida; during the winter in Texas, parts of Louisiana, parts of Southwestern states and California. They migrate along specific flyways to breed in northern states, Canada, and Alaska.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States during different parts of the year.

Look for: Large gray birds with long legs and red forehead.

Comes to feeders: No.



WILD TURKEY

When you'll see them: Year-round.

Where you'll see them: Across the United States, except Alaska.

Look for: Giant, brown bird walking along the ground, with a bald head.

Comes to feeders: Yes, to corn or birdseed on the ground.



ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD

When and where you'll see

them: West Coast states, New Mexico, Arizona. Year-round.

Look for: Males have pink-orange throat and head, while females are more drab, with green-and-white plumage.

Comes to feeders: Yes, to sugar-water hummingbird feeders or native flowers.



BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD

When and where you'll see

them: In the summer months they can be found in habitat patches in Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Oregon.

Look for: Green backs and white fronts; males have a red chin, while females have a white chin. In flight, they have white tips on their tail feathers, followed by a stripe of black, then a reddish stripe.

Comes to feeders: Yes, to sugar-water feeders. Planting flowers will also bring them to your yard.



Get to Know Your Feathered Friends!

Become a young ornithologist. Learn all about the scientific study of birds. Author, birder, and outdoors researcher Erika Zambello presents a kids' introduction to bird-watching. With fascinating information for beginners, the book provides readers with an understanding of bird anatomy, life cycles, habitat, and 60 species of backyard birds!

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND

- "How to" section, including details on getting started as a birder
- The basics of ornithology, the study of birds
- Identification guide to common and important birds to know
- A section on endangered species, such as California Condors and Elf Owls
- Bird-related activities that the entire family can enjoy



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PUBLICATIONS
Adventure
an imprint of AdventureKEEN

CHILDREN'S / NATURE / BIRDS



ISBN 978-1-64755-223-7



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