

2ND EDITION

Birds *of* New Jersey

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

Birds that are mostly black p. 25

Birds that are mostly black and white p. 49

Birds that are mostly blue p. 85

Birds that are mostly brown p. 103

Birds that are mostly gray p. 215

Birds that have prominent green p. 275

Birds that have prominent orange p. 287

Birds that have prominent red p. 293

Birds that are mostly white p. 305

Birds that have prominent yellow p. 325

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

What's New?	6
Why Watch Birds in New Jersey?	7
Observation Strategies: Tips for Identifying Birds	9
Bird Basics	11
Bird Color Variables	12
Bird Nests.	13
Who Builds the Nest?	16
Fledging.	16
Why Birds Migrate	17
How Birds Migrate	18
How to Use This Guide	20
Range Maps.	21

Sample Pages 22–23

The Birds

Black	25
Black and White	49
Blue	85
Brown	103
Gray	215
Green	275
Orange	287
Red	293
White	305
Yellow	325

Birding on the Internet 346

Checklist/Index by Species 347

More for New Jersey by Stan Tekiela 350

About the Author 352

of hawks pass over Montclair Hawkwatch, while a wide range of warblers can be seen passing through Cape May.

The state offers distinctly different habitats, each of which supports a different group of birds. The forested northern highlands and Kittatinny Mountains are home to birds such as the Great Crested Flycatcher. Long-legged shorebirds, such as the Sanderling, gravitate to the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean, while tiny bright-colored warblers, such as the American Redstart and Magnolia Warbler, flit amongst the pines in central New Jersey.

Whether witnessing a migration of hawks in the fall or welcoming back the hummingbirds in the spring, there is variety and excitement in birding in New Jersey.

OBSERVATION STRATEGIES: TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING BIRDS

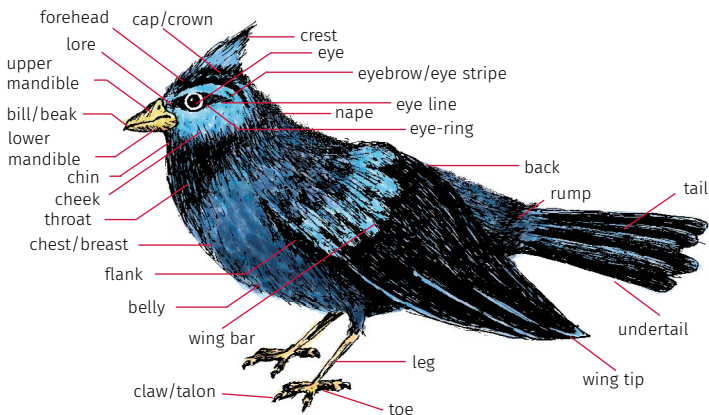
Identifying birds isn't as difficult as you might think. By simply following a few basic strategies, you can increase your chances of successfully identifying most birds that you see. One of the first and easiest things to do when you see a new bird is to note **its color**. This field guide is organized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

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.

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.

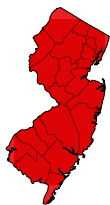
Each color section is also arranged by size, generally with the smaller birds first. Sections may also incorporate the average size in a range, which in some cases reflects size differences between male and female birds. Flip through the pages in the color section to find the bird. If you already know 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. 22–23.

in flight





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.

YEAR-ROUND 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

Compare: Nearly identical to the Fish Crow (p. 39), but American Crow is larger, has a shorter tail and a larger head and bill. American Crow is most easily differentiated from Fish Crow by its lower-pitched call.

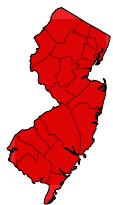
Stan's Notes: A familiar bird, found in all habitats. Imitates other birds and human voices. One of the smartest of all birds and very social, often entertaining itself by provoking chases with other birds. Eats roadkill but is rarely hit by vehicles. Can live as long as 15–20 years. Often reuses its nest every year if it's not taken over by a Great Horned Owl. Unmated birds, known as helpers, help to raise the young. Extended families roost together at night, dispersing daily to hunt. Cannot soar on thermals; flaps constantly and glides downward. Gathers in huge communal flocks of up to 10,000 birds in winter.

female
p. 183



male





YEAR-ROUND

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

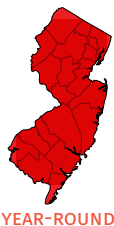
Migration: non-migrator to partial; moves around to find open water in winter

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

Compare: The male Wood Duck (p. 279) has a green head. The male Common Merganser (p. 285) 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.





Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Size: 12" (30 cm)

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

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult but duller

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

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

Incubation: 16-18 days; female incubates

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

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

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

Compare: The Belted Kingfisher (p. 97) has a larger, more ragged crest. The Eastern Bluebird (p. 93) is much smaller and has a rust-red breast. Look for the large crest to help identify the Blue Jay.

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

male
p. 279

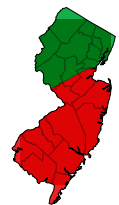


female



Wood Duck

Aix sponsa



YEAR-ROUND
SUMMER

Size: 17–20" (43–51 cm)

Female: Small brown dabbling duck. Bright-white eye-ring and a not-so-obvious crest. Blue patch on wings (speculum), often hidden.

Male: Highly ornamented, with a mostly green head and crest patterned with black and white. Rusty chest. White belly and red eyes.

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cavity; female lines an old woodpecker cavity or a nest box in a tree; 1–2 broods per year

Eggs: 10–15; cream-white without markings

Incubation: 28–36 days; female incubates

Fledging: 56–68 days; female teaches the young to feed

Migration: non-migrator to partial, to southern states; many don't migrate each winter

Food: aquatic insects, plants, seeds

Compare: The female Mallard (p. 197) lacks the eye-ring and crest. The female Northern Shoveler (p. 199) has a large, spoon-shaped bill.

Stan's Notes: A common duck of quiet, shallow backwater ponds. Nearly went extinct around 1900 due to overhunting, but it's doing well now. Nests in a tree cavity or a nest box in a tree. Seen flying in forests or perching on high branches. Female takes off with a loud, squealing call and enters the nest cavity from full flight. Lays some eggs in a neighboring nest (egg dumping), resulting in more than 20 eggs in some clutches. Hatchlings stay in the nest for 24 hours, then jump from as high as 60 feet (18 m) to the ground or water to follow their mother. They never return to the nest.

soaring

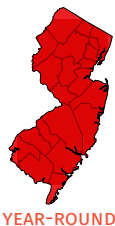


**juvenile
soaring**



juvenile





Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Size: 19–23" (48–58 cm); up to 4½' wingspan

Male: Variety of colorations, from chocolate brown to nearly all white. Often brown with a white breast and brown belly band. Rust-red tail. Underside of wing is white with a small dark patch on the leading edge near the shoulder.

Female: same as male but slightly larger

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a speckled breast and light eyes; lacks a red tail

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

Eggs: 2–3; white without markings, sometimes marked with brown

Incubation: 30–35 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 45–46 days; male and female feed the young

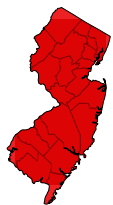
Migration: partial migrator, to sothern states; small percentage to not migrate

Food: small and medium-size animals, large birds, snakes, fish, insects, bats, carrion

Compare: Broad-winged Hawk (p. 181), Cooper's Hawk (p. 263) and Sharp-shinned Hawk (p. 261) are smaller and lack the red tail.

Stan's Notes: Common in open country and cities. Seen perching on fences, freeway lampposts, and trees. Look for it circling above open fields and roadsides, searching for prey. Gives a high-pitched scream that trails off. Often builds a large stick nest in large trees along roads. Lines nest with finer material, like evergreen needles. Returns to the same nest site each year. The red tail develops in the second year and is best seen from above.





YEAR-ROUND

Tufted Titmouse

Baeolophus bicolor

Size: 6" (15 cm)

Male: Slate gray with a white chest and belly. Pointed crest. Rust-brown wash on the flanks. Gray legs and dark eyes.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults

Nest: cavity; female lines an old woodpecker cavity; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 5–7; white with brown markings

Incubation: 13–14 days; female incubates

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

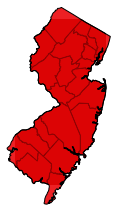
Migration: non-migrator; moves around in winter

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

Compare: The Black-capped Chickadee (p. 221) and Carolina Chickadee (p. 223) are close relatives but are smaller and lack a crest. The White-breasted Nuthatch (p. 225) has a rust-brown undertail. Look for the pointed crest to help identify the Tufted Titmouse.

Stan's Notes: A common feeder bird that can be attracted with an offering of black oil sunflower seeds or suet. Can also be attracted with a nest box. Well known for its “peter-peter-peter” call, which it quickly repeats. Notorious for pulling hair from sleeping dogs, cats, and squirrels to line its nest. Usually seen only one or two at a time. Male feeds female during courtship and nesting. The prefix *tit* in the common name comes from a Scandinavian word meaning “little.” Suffix *mouse* is derived from the Old English word *mase*, meaning “bird.” Simply translated, it is a “small bird.”





YEAR-ROUND

Rock Pigeon

Columba livia

Size: 13" (33 cm)

Male: No set color pattern. Shades of gray to white with patches of gleaming, iridescent green and blue. Often has a light rump patch.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults

Nest: platform; female builds; 3–4 broods per year

Eggs: 1–2; white without markings

Incubation: 18–20 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 25–26 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator

Food: seeds, fruit; visits ground and seed feeders

Compare: The Mourning Dove (p. 167) is smaller and light brown and lacks the variety of color combinations of the Rock Pigeon.

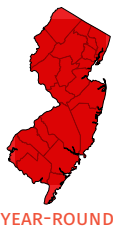
Stan's Notes: Also known as the Domestic Pigeon. Formerly known as the Rock Dove. Introduced to North America from Europe by the early settlers. Most common around cities and barnyards, where it scratches for seeds. One of the few birds with a wide variety of colors, produced by years of selective breeding while in captivity. Parents feed the young a regurgitated liquid known as crop-milk for the first few days of life. One of the few birds that can drink without tilting its head back. Nests under bridges or on buildings, balconies, barns, and sheds. Was once thought to be a nuisance in cities and was poisoned. Now, many cities have Peregrine Falcons feeding on Rock Pigeons, which keeps their numbers in check.

female
p. 197



male





Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Size: 19–21" (48–53 cm)

Male: Large, bulbous green head, white necklace, and rust-brown or chestnut chest. Gray-and-white sides. Yellow bill. Orange legs and feet.

Female: brown with an orange-and-black bill and blue-and-white wing mark (speculum)

Juvenile: same as female but with a yellow bill

Nest: ground; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 7–10; greenish to whitish, unmarked

Incubation: 26–30 days; female incubates

Fledging: 42–52 days; female leads the young to food

Migration: non-migrator to partial, to southern states; small percentage are non-migrators

Food: seeds, plants, aquatic insects; will come to ground feeders offering corn

Compare: Most people recognize this common duck. The male Northern Shoveler (p. 283) has a white chest with rusty sides and a very large, spoon-shaped bill. Look for the green head and yellow bill to identify the male Mallard.

Stan's Notes: A familiar dabbling duck of lakes and ponds. Also found in rivers, streams, and some backyards. Tips forward to feed on vegetation on the bottom of shallow water. The name "Mallard" comes from the Latin word *masculus*, meaning "male," referring to the male's habit of taking no part in raising the young. Male and female have white underwings and white tails, but only the male has black central tail feathers that curl upward. Unlike the female, the male doesn't quack. Returns to its birthplace each year.

female
p. 339



male





Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula

Size: 7–8" (18–20 cm)

Male: Flaming orange with a black head and back. White-and-orange wing bars. Orange-and-black tail. Gray bill and dark eyes.

Female: pale yellow with orange tones, gray-brown wings, white wing bars, gray bill, dark eyes

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: pendulous; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; bluish with brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 12–14 days; female and male feed the young

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

Food: insects, fruit, nectar; comes to nectar, orange-half and grape-jelly feeders

Compare: The male American Redstart (p. 287) has much less orange. The male Orchard Oriole (p. 291) is much darker orange. Look for the flaming orange to identify the male Baltimore Oriole.

Stan's Notes: A fantastic songster, often heard before seen. Easily attracted to a feeder that offers sugar water (nectar), orange halves, or grape jelly. Parents bring their young to feeders. Sits at the top of trees, feeding on caterpillars. Female builds a sock-like nest at the outermost branches of tall trees. Prefers parks, yards, and forests and often returns to the same area year after year. Seen during migration and summer. Some of the last birds to arrive in spring (May) and some of the first to leave in the fall (September). Young males turn orange-and-black at 1½ years of age.





SUMMER

Scarlet Tanager

Piranga olivacea

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Bright scarlet with coal-black wings and tail. Ivory bill and dark eyes.

Female: drab greenish yellow with olive wings and tail, whitish wing linings and dark eyes

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

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

Incubation: 13–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 9–11 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to Central and South America

Food: insects, fruit

Compare: The male Northern Cardinal (p. 299) is larger, with a black mask and red bill. Look for the black wings and tail to help identify the male Scarlet Tanager.

Stan's Notes: A tropical-looking bird. Found in mature deciduous woodlands, where it hunts for insects high up in trees. Requires a territory covering at least 4 acres (1.5 ha) for nesting but prefers 8 acres (3 ha). Arrives late in spring and leaves early in fall. Male and female both sing like American Robins, but the tanagers intersperse an unusual “chick-burr” call in their songs. The song of the female is like that of the male, only softer. This bird is one of hundreds of tanager species in the world. Nearly all are brightly colored and live in the tropics. The name “Tanager” comes from a South American Tupi Indian word meaning “any small, brightly colored bird.” The male sheds (molts) his bright-scarlet plumage in the fall, appearing more like the female during winter.



in flight





Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

Size: 22–26" (56–66 cm); up to 3½' wingspan

Male: All-white bird with black bill. Black legs. Bright-yellow feet. Long feather plumes on head, neck and back during breeding season.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adult, but backs of legs are yellow

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

Eggs: 3–5; light blue-green without markings

Incubation: 20–24 days; female and male incubate

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

Migration: complete, to Gulf Coast and Mexico

Food: aquatic insects, small fish

Compare: Great Egret (p. 317) is much larger and has a yellow bill and black feet. Look for the black bill and yellow feet of Snowy Egret to help identify.

Stan's Notes: Common in wetlands and often seen with other egrets. Colonies may include up to several hundred nests. Nests are low in shrubs 5–10 feet (1.5–3 m) tall or constructs a nest on the ground, usually mixed among other egret and heron nests. Chicks hatch days apart (asynchronous), leading to starvation of last to hatch. Will actively "hunt" prey by moving around quickly, stirring up small fish and aquatic insects with its feet. In the breeding state, a yellow patch at the base of bill and the yellow feet turn orange-red. Was hunted to near extinction in the late 1800s for its feathers. Returned to New Jersey in 1928.



**white
morph**



blue morph



juvenile



in flight



Snow Goose

Chen caerulescens

Size: 25–38" (64–97 cm); up to 4½' wingspan

Male: White morph has black wing tips and varying patches of black and brown. Blue morph has a white head and a gray breast and back. Both morphs have a pink bill and legs.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: overall dull gray with a dark bill

Nest: ground; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–5; white without markings

Incubation: 23–25 days; female incubates

Fledging: 45–49 days; female and male teach the young to feed

Migration: complete, to New Jersey, the East Coast, southern states, and Mexico

Food: aquatic insects and plants

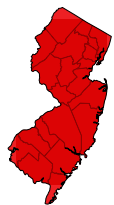
Compare: The Mute Swan (p. 323) is nearly twice the average size of the Snow Goose and lacks the black wings of Snow Goose. Much smaller than Tundra Swan (p. 321), lacking Tundra's black bill and legs. The Canada Goose (p. 271) is larger and has a black neck and white chin strap.

Stan's Notes: This bird occurs in light (white) and dark (blue) color morphs. The white morph is more common than the blue. A bird of wide-open fields, wetlands, and lakes of any size. It has a thick, serrated bill, which helps it to grab and pull up plants. Breeds in large colonies on the northern tundra in Canada. Female starts to breed at 2–3 years. Older females produce more eggs and are more successful at reproduction than younger females. Seen by the thousands during migration.

male

**winter
male**

female



YEAR-ROUND

American Goldfinch

Spinus tristis

Size: 5" (13 cm)

Male: Canary-yellow finch with a black forehead and tail. Black wings with white wing bars. White rump. No markings on the chest. Winter male is similar to the female.

Female: dull olive-yellow plumage with brown wings; lacks a black forehead

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–6; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 10–12 days; female incubates

Fledging: 11–17 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: partial migrator; small flocks of up to 20 birds move around North America; small percent-age in New Jersey will not migrate

Food: seeds, insects; comes to seed feeders

Compare: The male Yellow Warbler (p. 333) is yellow with orange streaks on its chest. The Pine Siskin (p. 111) has a streaked chest and belly and yellow wing bars. The female House Finch (p. 113) and female Purple Finch (p. 129) have heavily streaked chests.

Stan's Notes: Common backyard resident. Most often found in open fields, scrubby areas, and woodlands. Enjoys Nyjer seed in feeders. Breeds in late summer. Lines its nest with the silky down from wild thistle. Almost always in small flocks. Twitters while it flies. Flight is roller coaster-like. Moves around to find adequate food during winter. Often called Wild Canary due to the male's canary-colored plumage. Male sings a pleasant, high-pitched song. The state bird of New Jersey.

male
p. 289



female





Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula

Size: 7–8" (18–20 cm)

Female: Pale yellow with orange tones and gray-brown wings with white wing bars. Gray bill. Dark eyes.

Male: flaming orange with a black head and back, white-and-orange wing bars, an orange-and-black tail, a gray bill, and dark eyes

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: pendulous; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–5; bluish with brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 12–14 days; female and male feed the young

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

Food: insects, fruit, nectar; comes to nectar, orange-half, and grape-jelly feeders

Compare: The female Orchard Oriole (p. 341) has a dull-yellow belly. Look for the gray-brown wings to identify the female Baltimore Oriole.

Stan's Notes: A fantastic songster, often heard before seen. Easily attracted to bird feeders that offer sugar water (nectar), orange halves, or grape jelly. Parents bring young to feeders. Sits at the top of trees, feeding on caterpillars. Female builds a sock-like nest at the outermost branches of tall trees. Prefers parks, yards, and forests, and often returns to the same area year after year. Seen during migration and summer. Some of the last birds to arrive in spring (May) and some of the first to leave in the fall (September). Young males turn orange-and-black at 1½ years of age.

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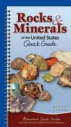
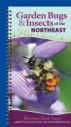
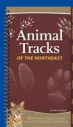
This 2nd Edition includes 10 new species, updated photographs and range maps, expanded information in Stan's Notes, and much more!



About the Author

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

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