

2ND EDITION

Birds *of* Arkansas

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

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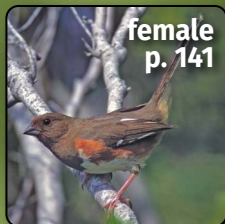
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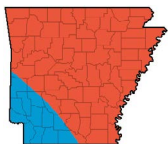
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male



YEAR-ROUND
WINTER

Eastern Towhee

Pipilo erythrophthalmus

Size: 7–8" (18–20 cm)

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

Female: similar to male but brown instead of black

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

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–4; creamy white with brown markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

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

Migration: non-migrator to partial in Arkansas

Food: insects, seeds, fruit; visits ground feeders

Compare: American Robin (p. 249) is slightly larger. The Gray Catbird (p. 245) lacks a black “hood” and rusty sides. Common Grackle (p. 33) lacks a white belly and has a long thin bill. Male Rose-breasted Grosbeak (p. 53) has a rosy patch in center of chest.

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



breeding



winter



YEAR-ROUND

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Size: 7½" (19 cm)

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

Female: same as male

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

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

Eggs: 4–6; bluish with brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female and male incubate

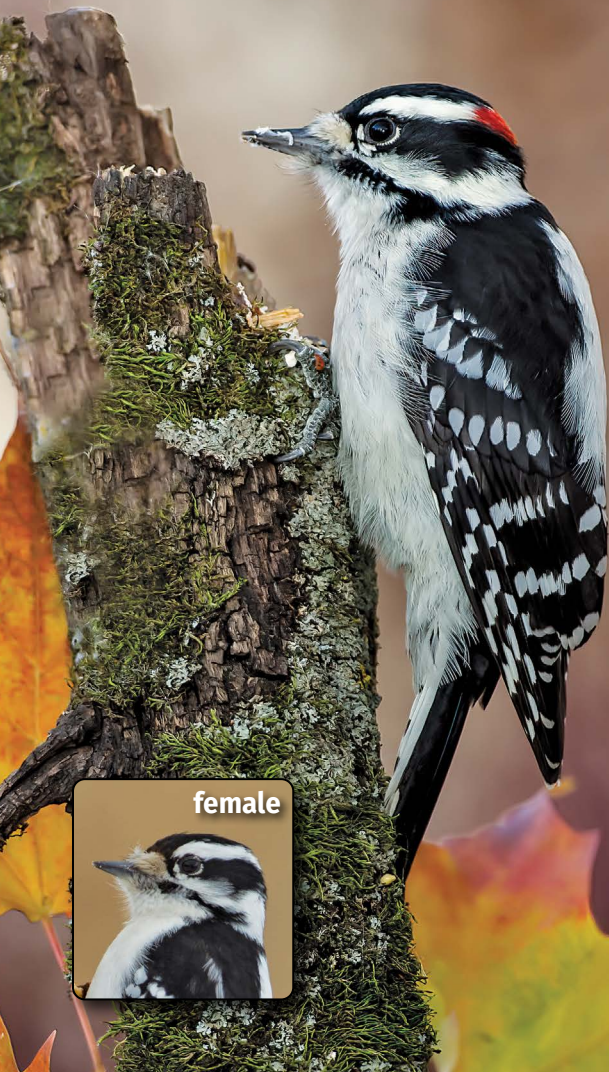
Fledging: 18–20 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator in Arkansas

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

Compare: The Common Grackle (p. 33) has a long tail. 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 common songbird. Mimics the songs of up to 20 bird species and imitates sounds, including the human voice. Often displaces woodpeckers, chickadees and other cavity-nesting birds. 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. Gathers in the hundreds in fall and winter. Large families gather with blackbirds in the fall. Not a native bird; 100 starlings were introduced to New York City in 1890–91 from Europe. Bill changes color in spring and fall.



male



female



YEAR-ROUND

Downy Woodpecker

Dryobates pubescens

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 seed and suet feeders

Compare: The Hairy Woodpecker (p. 57) 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 US. 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. A very common feeder bird, seen across Arkansas.



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 Arkansas

Food: fish, carrion, birds (mainly ducks)

Compare: Black Vulture (p. 43) is smaller, has a shorter tail, and lacks the adult Bald Eagle's white head and tail. Turkey Vulture (p. 45) is smaller and flies with its two-toned wings held in a V shape, unlike the straight-out wing position of the Bald Eagle.

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

male



female
p. 115





SUMMER

Indigo Bunting

Passerina cyanea

Size: 5½" (14 cm)

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

Female: light-brown with faint markings

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 3–4; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 10–11 days; female feeds the young

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

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

Compare: The male Eastern Bluebird (p. 91) is larger and has a rust-red chest. Male Blue Grosbeak (p. 89) is larger, has chestnut-colored wing bars and a large bill. 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 individuals.





YEAR-ROUND

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Size: 12" (30 cm)

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

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult but duller

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

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

Incubation: 16–18 days; female and male incubate

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

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

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

Compare: The Belted Kingfisher (p. 97) has a larger, more ragged crest. The Eastern Bluebird (p. 91) 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. 233



female



Oregon
female





WINTER

Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis

Size: 5½" (14 cm)

Female: Plump, dark-eyed bird with a tan-to-brown chest, head and back. White belly. Ivory-to-pink bill. White outer tail feathers appear like a white V in flight.

Male: round with gray plumage

Juvenile: similar to female, with streaking on the breast and head

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

Eggs: 3–5; white with reddish-brown markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 10–13 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: complete, to Arkansas, other southern states

Food: seeds, insects; visits ground and seed feeders

Compare: Rarely confused with any other bird. Look for the ivory-to-pink bill and small flocks feeding under feeders to help identify the female Dark-eyed Junco.

Stan's Notes: A common winter bird in the state. Migrates from Canada to Arkansas and beyond. Females tend to migrate farther south than males. Adheres to a rigid social hierarchy, with dominant birds chasing the less dominant ones. Look for the white outer tail feathers flashing in flight. Often seen in small flocks on the ground, where it uses its feet to simultaneously “double-scratch” to expose seeds and insects. Eats many weed seeds. Nests in a wide variety of wooded habitats. Several subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco (see lower inset) were previously considered to be separate species.



female





YEAR-ROUND

Brown-headed Cowbird

Molothrus ater

Size: 7½" (19 cm)

Female: Dull brown with no obvious markings. Pointed, sharp, gray bill. Dark eyes.

Male: glossy black with a chocolate-brown head

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 bird incubates the eggs

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

Migration: non-migrator in Arkansas

Food: insects, seeds; will come to seed feeders

Compare: The female Red-winged Blackbird (p. 151) has white eyebrows and heavy streaking. The European Starling (p. 29) has speckles and a shorter tail. The pointed gray bill helps identify female Brown-headed Cowbird.

Stan's Notes: Cowbirds are members of the blackbird family. Known as brood parasites, Brown-headed Cowbirds are the only parasitic birds in Arkansas. 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. Numbers may increase during winter, when migratory birds from the north join resident birds for the season.

male



female





YEAR-ROUND

White-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta carolinensis

Size: 5–6" (13–15 cm)

Male: Slate gray with a white face, breast, and belly. Large white patch on the rump. Black cap and nape. Bill is long and thin, slightly upturned. Chestnut undertail.

Female: similar to male, but has a gray cap and nape

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cavity; female and male build a nest within;
1 brood per year

Eggs: 5–7; white with brown markings

Incubation: 11–12 days; female incubates

Fledging: 13–14 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator

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

Compare: The Red-breasted Nuthatch (p. 223) is smaller and has a rust-red belly and distinctive black eye line. Look for the white breast to help identify the White-breasted Nuthatch.

Stan's Notes: The nuthatch hops headfirst down trees, looking for insects missed by birds climbing up. Its climbing agility is due to an extra-long hind toe claw, or nail, that is nearly twice the size of its front claws. "Nuthatch," from the Middle English *nuthak*, refers to the bird's habit of wedging a seed in a crevice and hacking it open. Often seen in flocks with chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers. Mates stay together year-round, defending a small territory. Gives a characteristic "whi-whi-whi-whi" spring call during February and March. One of 17 worldwide nuthatch species.





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

Compare: The Eurasian Collared-Dove (p. 257) has a black collar on the nape. 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 (p. 263) feeding on Rock Pigeons, which keeps their numbers in check.

in flight





SUMMER

Green Heron

Butorides virescens

Size: 16–22" (41–56 cm)

Male: Short and stocky. Blue-green back and rust-red neck and breast. Dark-green crest. Short legs are normally yellow but turn bright orange during the breeding season.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a bluish-gray back and white-streaked breast and neck

Nest: platform; female and male build; 2 broods

Eggs: 2–4; light green without markings

Incubation: 21–25 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 35–36 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to the Gulf Coast, South America

Food: small fish, aquatic insects, small amphibians, aquatic plants

Compare: Great Blue Heron (p. 273) is larger and has a long neck. Green Heron lacks the long neck of most other herons. Look for a small heron with a dark green back and crest stalking wetlands.

Stan's Notes: Often gives an explosive, rasping “skyew” call when startled. Waits on the shore or wades stealthily, hunting for small fish, aquatic insects, and small amphibians. Places an object, such as an insect, on the water’s surface to attract fish to catch. Nests in a tall tree, often a short distance from the water. The nest can be very high up in the tree. Babies give a loud ticking sound, like the ticktock of a clock.

female
p. 197



male





YEAR-ROUND

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 in Arkansas

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

Compare: Most people recognize this common duck. Male Northern Shoveler (p. 285) has a white chest with rust on sides and a dark spoon-shaped bill.

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. 333



male





SUMMER

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 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 tops 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. Young males turn orange-and-black at 1½ years of age. Some of the last birds to arrive in spring and first to leave in fall. Seen during migration and summer.



male



female
p. 149



juvenile



YEAR-ROUND

Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis cardinalis

Size: 8–9" (20–23 cm)

Male: Red with a black mask that extends from the face to the throat. Large crest and a large red bill.

Female: buff-brown with a black mask, large reddish bill, and red tinges on the crest and wings

Juvenile: same as female but with a blackish-gray bill

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

Eggs: 3–4; bluish white with brown markings

Incubation: 12–13 days; female incubates

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

Migration: non-migrator

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

Compare: Similar size as male Summer Tanager (p. 297), but the male Tanager is rosy red. Look for the black mask, large crest, and red bill to identify the male Northern Cardinal.

Stan's Notes: A familiar backyard bird. Seen in a variety of habitats, including parks. Usually likes thick vegetation. One of the few species in which both males and females sing. Can be heard all year. Listen for its “whata-cheer-cheer-cheer” territorial call in spring. Watch for a male feeding a female during courtship. The male also feeds the young of the first brood while the female builds a second nest. Territorial in spring, fighting its own reflection in a window or other reflective surface. Non-territorial in winter, gathering in small flocks of up to 20 birds. Makes short flights from cover to cover, often landing on the ground. *Cardinalis* denotes importance, as represented by the red priestly garments of Catholic cardinals.



in flight





SUMMER

Great Egret

Ardea alba

Size: 36–40" (91–102 cm); up to 4½' wingspan

Male: Tall, thin, all-white bird with a long neck and a long, pointed yellow bill. Black, stilt-like legs and black feet.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults

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

Eggs: 2–3; light blue without markings

Incubation: 23–26 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 43–49 days; female and male feed the young

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

Food: small fish, aquatic insects, frogs, crayfish

Compare: Cattle Egret (p. 311) is about half the size of Great Egret and has a much shorter neck and much smaller bill. The Snowy Egret (p. 313) is much smaller with yellow feet and a black bill. Juvenile Little Blue Heron (p. 99) is smaller and has a black-tipped gray bill.

Stan's Notes: Slowly stalks shallow ponds, lakes, and wetlands in search of small fish to spear with its long, sharp bill. The name "Egret" comes from the French word *aigrette*, meaning "ornamental tufts of plumes." The plumes grow near the tail during the breeding season. Hunted to near extinction in the 1800s and early 1900s for its long plumes, which were used to decorate women's hats. Today, the egret is a protected species.



male



winter
male



female



YEAR-ROUND
WINTER

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: non-migrator to partial; small flocks of up to 20 birds move around to find food

Food: seeds, insects; will come to seed feeders

Compare: The Pine Siskin (p. 105) has a streaked chest and belly and yellow wing bars. The female House Finch (p. 107) and female Purple Finch (p. 125) have heavily streaked chests.

Stan's Notes: A 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.

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About the Author

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

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