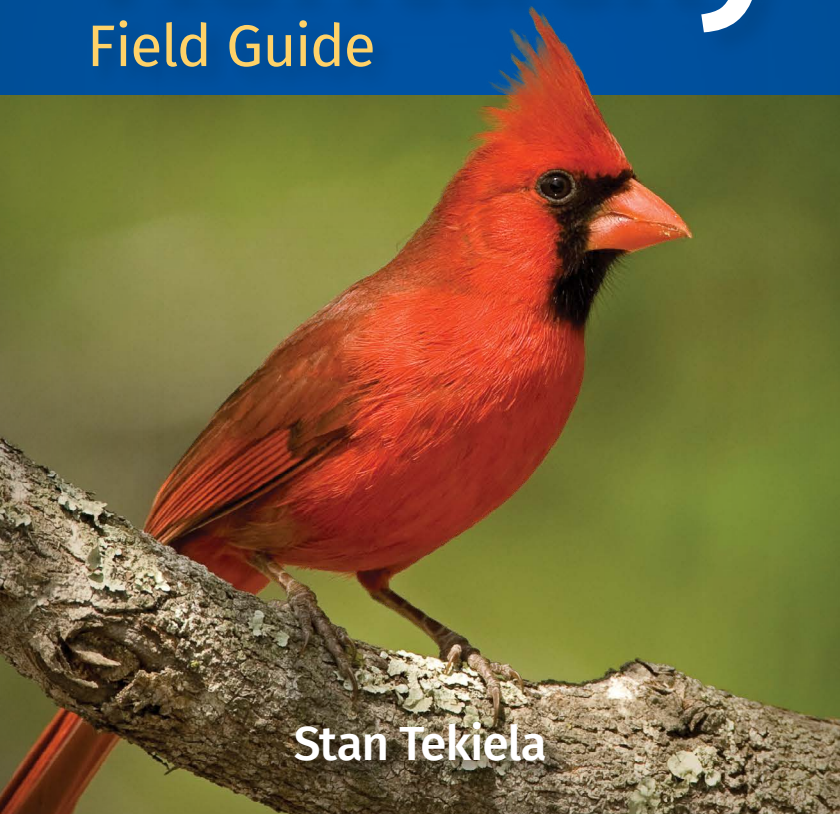


2ND EDITION

Birds *of* Kentucky

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

Birds that are mostly black p. 25

Birds that are mostly black and white p. 47

Birds that are mostly blue p. 73

Birds that are mostly brown p. 91

Birds that are mostly gray p. 199

Birds that have prominent green p. 251

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The south-central portion of the state (Highland Rim), which was originally a prairie habitat, is now agricultural with many open-country birds such as the Horned Lark and Eastern Kingbird.

Eastern Kentucky (Cumberland Plateau and Appalachian Plateau) is known for its extensive tracts of forest, rolling hills and mountain ranges. The forested valleys and ridges are home to many birds such as the Scarlet Tanager.

Varying habitats in Kentucky also mean variations in weather. Since the state extends over 400 miles (644 km) from east to west, the weather ranges greatly. From the high and relatively snowy Appalachian Plateau in the east to the steamy summers in lowland western Kentucky, there are birds to watch in every season. Whether witnessing a migration of hawks in the fall or welcoming back the hummingbirds in the spring, there is variety and excitement in birding as each season turns to the next.

OBSERVE WITH A STRATEGY: TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING BIRDS

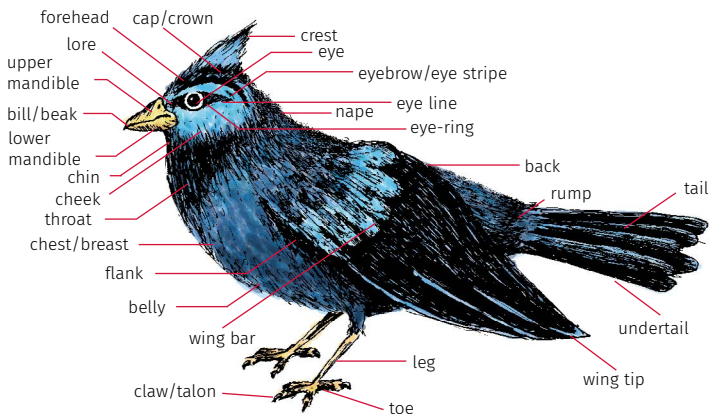
Identifying birds isn't as difficult as you might think. By simply following a few basic strategies, you can increase your chances of successfully identifying most birds that you see. One of the first and easiest things to do when you see a new bird is to note **its color**. This field guide is organized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

Next, note the **size of the bird**. A strategy to quickly estimate size is to compare different birds. Pick a small, a medium and a large bird. Select an American Robin as the medium bird. Measured from bill tip to tail tip, a robin is 10 inches (25 cm). Now select two other birds, one smaller and one larger. Good choices are a House Sparrow, at about 6 inches (15 cm), and an American Crow, around 18 inches (45 cm). When you see a

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

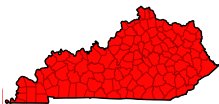
To help you quickly and easily identify birds, this field guide is organized by color. Refer to the color key on the first page, note the color of the bird, and turn to that section. For example, the male Red-headed Woodpecker is black-and-white with a red head. Because the bird is mostly black-and-white,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

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

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

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





YEAR-ROUND

Common Grackle

Quiscalus quiscula

Size: 11–13" (28–33 cm)

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

Female: similar to male but smaller and duller

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–5; greenish white with brown markings

Incubation: 13–14 days; female incubates

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

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

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 breeding season. The male Red-winged Blackbird (p. 31) has red-and-yellow wing markings (epaulets).

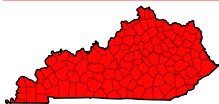
Stan's Notes: Usually nests in small colonies of up to 75 pairs but travels with other blackbird species in large flocks. Known to feed in farm fields. The common name is derived from the Latin word *gracula*, meaning “jackdaw,” another species of bird and a term that can refer to any bird in the *Quiscalus*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

female
p. 177



male





YEAR-ROUND

Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus



Size: 16–19" (40–48 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 in Kentucky

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

Compare: Male Wood Duck (p. 255) has a green head. The white patch on the head and rust-brown sides distinguish the male Hoodie.

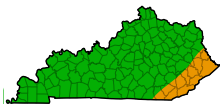
Stan's Notes: A small diving bird of shallow ponds, sloughs, lakes and rivers, usually in small groups. Quick, low flight across the water, with fast wingbeats. Male has a deep, rolling call. Female gives a hoarse quack. Nests in wooded areas. Female will lay some eggs in the nests of other Hooded Mergansers or Wood Ducks, resulting in 20–25 eggs in some nests. Rarely, she shares a nest, sitting with a Wood Duck.



female
p. 123



male



Blue Grosbeak

Passerina caerulea

Size: 7" (18 cm)

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

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

Juvenile: similar to female

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

Eggs: 3-6; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 11-12 days; female incubates

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

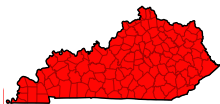
Migration: complete, to Florida, Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, seeds; will come to seed feeders

Compare: The more common male Indigo Bunting (p. 75) is very similar, but it is smaller and lacks wing bars. The male Eastern Bluebird (p. 83) is the same size, but it lacks the wing bars and oversized bill.

Stan's Notes: Increasing population in Kentucky over the past 30 to 40 years, Blue Grosbeaks return to the state by mid-April. A bird of semi-open habitats such as overgrown fields, riversides, woodland edges and fencerows. Visits seed feeders, where it is often confused with male Indigo Buntings. Frequently seen twitching and spreading its tail. The first-year males show only some blue, obtaining the full complement of blue feathers in the second winter.





YEAR-ROUND

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Size: 12" (30 cm)

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

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult but duller

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

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

Incubation: 16–18 days; female incubates

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

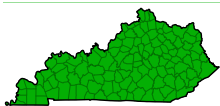
Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator; will move around to find an abundant food source

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

Compare: The Belted Kingfisher (p. 89) has a larger, more ragged crest. The Eastern Bluebird (p. 83) 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.





SUMMER

Wood Thrush

Hylocichla mustelina

Size: 8" (20 cm)

Male: Reddish-brown head, back and wings with color fading into a brown tail. A distinctive white breast, belly and sides, covered with black spots. White ring around black eyes, obvious on a black-streaked white face.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adult

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

Eggs: 2-4; greenish blue without markings

Incubation: 13-14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 11-12 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: complete, to Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, fruit

Compare: American Robin (p. 227) is a similar body shape, but it has a red breast. Brown Thrasher (p. 155) is a similar rusty color, but it has a much longer rusty-red tail and bright-yellow eyes in comparison to the shorter brown tail and black eyes of Wood Thrush.

Stan's Notes: An easy thrush to identify due to the large dark spots on breast and belly. Well known for its liquid flute-like calls, heard deep within woodlots throughout Kentucky. Returns to the state in spring after spending the winter in Mexico and Central America. Returns to the same woodlands year after year. Often seen on the ground, hopping around like a robin in search of insects.

soaring

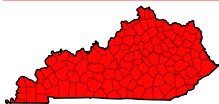


**juvenile
soaring**



juvenile





YEAR-ROUND

Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Size: 19–23" (48–63 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 build; 1 brood per year

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

Incubation: 30–35 days; female and male incubate

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

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

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

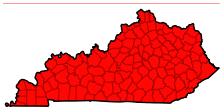
Compare: Red-shouldered Hawk (p. 171) and Sharp-shinned Hawk (p. 235) are much smaller.

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.



in flight





YEAR-ROUND

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Size: 42–48" (107–122 cm); up to 6' wingspan

Male: Tall and gray. Black eyebrows end in long plumes at the back of the head. Long yellow bill. Long feathers at the base of the neck drop down in a kind of necklace. Long legs.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults, but more brown than gray, with a black crown; lacks plumes

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

Eggs: 3–5; blue-green without markings

Incubation: 27–28 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 56–60 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: non-migrator; moves around to find food

Food: small fish, frogs, insects, snakes, baby birds

Compare: Similar size as the Sandhill Crane (p. 249), but lacks the Crane's red crown. Look for the long, yellow bill to help identify the Great Blue Heron.

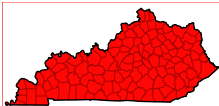
Stan's Notes: One of the most common herons. Found in open water, from small ponds to large lakes. Stalks small fish in shallow water. Will strike at mice, squirrels and nearly anything it comes across. Red-winged Blackbirds will attack it to stop it from taking their babies out of the nest. In flight, it holds its neck in an S shape and slightly cups its wings, while the legs trail straight out behind. Nests in a colony of up to 100 birds. Nests in trees near or hanging over water. Barks like a dog when startled.

female
p. 185



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 to partial migrator

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

Compare: Most people recognize this common duck. The male Northern Shoveler (p. 259) has a white chest with rust on sides and a dark spoon-shaped bill. Look for the green head and yellow bill to identify the male Mallard.

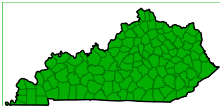
Stan's Notes: A familiar dabbling duck of lakes and ponds. Also found in rivers, streams and some backyards. Tips forward to feed on vegetation on the bottom of shallow water. The name "Mallard" comes from the Latin word *masculus*, meaning "male," referring to the male's habit of taking no part in raising 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. 299



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. 265) is much darker orange. Male American Redstart (p. 261) is smaller and has more black than orange. Look for the flaming orange to identify the male Baltimore Oriole.

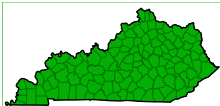
Stan's Notes: A fantastic songster, often heard before seen. Easily attracted to a feeder that offers sugar water (nectar), orange halves or grape jelly. Parents bring their young to feeders. Hunts at the top of trees, feeding on caterpillars. Female builds a sock-like nest at the outermost branches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



male



female
p. 303



SUMMER

Summer Tanager

Piranga rubra

Size: 8" (20 cm)

Male: Bright rosy-red bird with darker red wings.

Female: overall yellow with slightly darker wings

Juvenile: male has patches of red and green over the entire body, female is same as adult female

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

Eggs: 3-5; pale blue with dark markings

Incubation: 10-12 days; female incubates

Fledging: 12-15 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, to Mexico and Central and South America

Food: insects, fruit

Compare: Male Scarlet Tanager (p. 271) is slightly smaller and is scarlet red with black wings, compared to the rosy red of male Summer Tanager. Male Northern Cardinal (p. 275) is similar in size, but it has a black mask, large crest and red bill.

Stan's Notes: Found throughout Kentucky where woodlands exist, especially in mixed pine and oak forests. Due to clearing of land for agriculture, populations have decreased for over a century and especially most recently. Returning to the state in late April and with young hatching in late May, some pairs have two broods per year. While fruit makes up some of the diet, most of it consists of insects such as bees and wasps. Summer Tanagers unfortunately seem to be parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

in flight



breeding

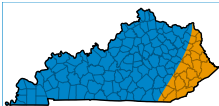


juvenile



winter





MIGRATION
WINTER

Herring Gull

Larus argentatus

Size: 23–26" (58–66 cm); up to 5' wingspan

Male: White with slate-gray wings. Black wing tips with tiny white spots. Yellow bill with an orange-red spot near the tip of the lower bill (mandible). Pinkish legs and feet. Winter plumage has gray speckles on head and neck.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: mottled brown to gray, with a black bill

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

Eggs: 2–3; olive with brown markings

Incubation: 24–28 days; female and male incubate

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

Migration: complete, to Kentucky and southern states

Food: fish, insects, clams, eggs, baby birds

Compare: Ring-billed Gull (p. 277) is smaller and has yellowish legs and feet and a black ring on its bill. Look for the orange-red spot on the bill to help identify the Herring Gull.

Stan's Notes: A common gull of large lakes. An opportunistic bird, scavenging for human food in dumpsters, parking lots and other places with garbage. Takes eggs and young from other bird nests. Often drops clams and other shellfish from heights to break the shells and get to the soft interior. Nests in colonies, returning to the same site annually. Lines its nest with grass and seaweed. It takes about four years for the juveniles to obtain adult plumage. Adults have spotted heads during winter.



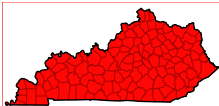
male



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

Food: seeds, insects; will come to seed feeders

Compare: Male Yellow Warbler (p. 283) is all yellow with orange streaking on chest. The Pine Siskin (p. 99) has a streaked chest and belly and yellow wing bars. The female House Finch (p. 101) and female Purple Finch (p. 115) have heavily streaked chests.

Stan's Notes: A common year-round 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. Moves only far enough south to find food.

Kentucky's Best-Selling Bird Guide

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- **Compare feature:** Decide between look-alikes
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This 2nd Edition includes 7 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.

IDENTIFY NATURE WITH THE ADVENTURE QUICK GUIDES



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