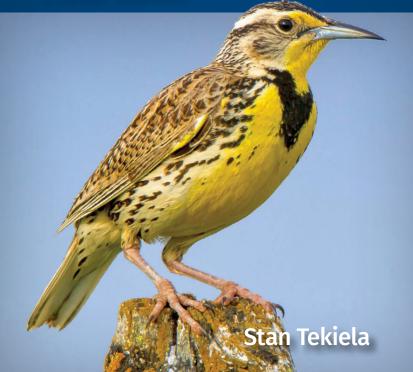
Birds of Montana

Field Guide



Birds that are mostly black	p. 25
Birds that are mostly black and white	p. 53
Birds that are mostly blue	p. 89
Birds that are mostly brown	p. 105
Birds that are mostly gray	p. 229
Birds that have prominent green	p. 291
Birds that have prominent orange	p. 307
Birds that have prominent red	p. 317
Birds that are mostly white	p. 325
Birds that have prominent yellow	p. 335

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

	What's New?		6
	Why Watch Birds in Montana?		7
	Observe with a Strategy; Tips for Identifying Birds		. 9
	Bird Basics		
	Bird Color Variables		
	Bird Nests		
	Who Builds the Nest?		. 17
	Fledging		
	Why Birds Migrate		
	How Do Birds Migrate?		
	How to Use This Guide		
	Range Maps		. 21
S	ample Pages	2	2–23
	he Birds		
_	Black		. 25
	Black and White		. 53
	Blue		
	Brown		
	Gray		
	Green		
	Orange		
	Red		
	White		.325
	Yellow		.335
В	irding on the Internet		360
	hecklist/Index by Species		
	Nore for Montana by Stan Tekiela		
	bout the Author		
H	wout the Author		308

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.

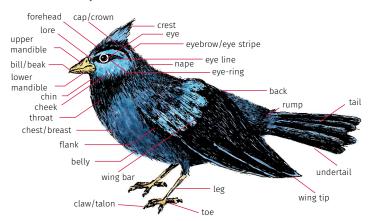
Next, note the **size of the bird.** A strategy to quickly estimate size is to compare different birds. Pick a small, a medium and a large bird. Select an American Robin as the medium bird. Measured from bill tip to tail tip, a robin is 10 inches (25 cm). Now select two other birds, one smaller and one 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 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 Evening Grosbeaks, have bills that are thick and strong enough to crack even the toughest seeds. Birds that sip nectar, such as Rufous 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.

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 the head of a Steller's Jay 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.

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 Williamson's Sapsucker is black and white with a yellow belly. 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

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 adult

Nest: platform; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–6; bluish to olive-green with brown marks

Incubation: 18 days; female incubates

Fledging: 28-35 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator

Food: fruit, insects, mammals, fish, carrion; will

come to seed and suet feeders

Compare: Common Raven (p. 47) is similar, but it has a larger bill and has shaggy throat feathers.

Crow's call is higher than the raspy, low calls of ravens. Crow has a squared tail. Ravens have wedge-shaped tails, apparent in flight. Black-billed Magpie (p. 77) has a long tail and

white belly.

Stan's Notes: One of the most recognizable birds in Montana, found in most 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. 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.



YEAR-ROUND WINTER

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, 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: non-migrator to partial, to southwestern

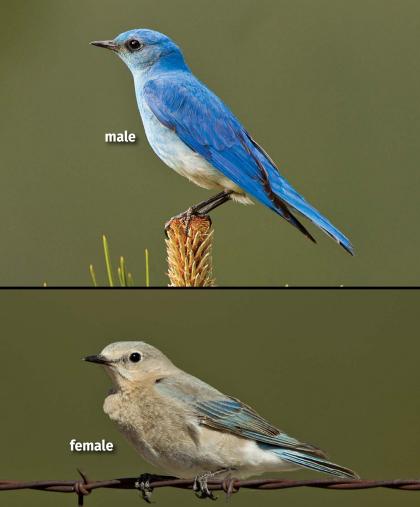
states and Mexico

Food: aquatic plants, insects, fish, mollusks

Compare: The black-and-white male Lesser Scaup

(p. 69) is similar but smaller. American Coot (p. 43) is smaller and lacks the bright-golden eyes and white spot in front of each eye.

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.



Mountain Bluebird

Sialia currucoides

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Overall sky-blue bird with a darker blue head,

back, wings and tail. White lower belly. Thin

black bill.

Female: similar to male, but paler with a nearly gray

head and chest and a whitish belly

Juvenile: similar to adult of the same sex

Nest: cavity, old woodpecker cavity, wooden nest

box; female builds; 1–2 broods per year

Eggs: 4–6; pale blue without markings

Incubation: 13–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 22–23 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, to southwestern states

Food: insects, fruit

Compare: Western Bluebird (p. 97) is similar, but it is

darker blue with a rusty-red chest.

Stan's Notes: Common in open mountainous country. Main diet is insects. Often hovers just before diving to the ground to grab an insect. Hovers at the entrance of nesting cavity. Due to conservation of suitable nesting sites (dead trees with cavities and man-made nest boxes), populations have increased over the past 40 years. Like other bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds take well to nest boxes and tolerate close contact with people. Female sits on baby birds (brood) for up to six days after the eggs hatch. Young imprint on their first nest box or cavity and then choose a similar type of box or cavity throughout their life. Any open field is a good place to look for Mountain Bluebirds.



Brown Thrasher

Toxostoma rufum

Size: 11" (28 cm)

Male: Rust-red with a long tail. Heavy streaking on the breast and belly. Two white wing bars.

Long, curved bill and bright-yellow eyes.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults but with grayish eyes

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

Eggs: 4–5; pale blue with brown markings

Incubation: 11–14 days; female and male incubate

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

Migration: complete, to southwestern states

Food: insects, fruit

Compare: American Robin (p. 259) and Gray Catbird

(p. 255) are similar, but both are smaller and lack a streaked chest, rusty color and yellow eyes. Look for the long rusty-red tail to help

identify the Brown Thrasher.

Stan's Notes: A prodigious songster. Sings along forest edges and in suburban yards. Often found in thick shrubs, where it will sing deliberate musical phrases, repeating each twice. The male Brown Thrasher has the largest documented repertoire of all North American songbirds, with more than 1,100 types of songs. Builds nest low in dense shrubs, often in fencerows. Quickly flies or runs on the ground in and out of thick shrubs. A noisy feeder due to its habit of turning over leaves, small rocks and branches to find food.



YEAR-ROUND

Northern Harrier

Circus hudsonius

Size: 18–22" (45–56 cm); up to 4' wingspan

Female: Slender, low-flying hawk with a dark-brown

back and brown streaking on the chest and belly. Large white rump patch. Thin black tail bands and black wing tips. Yellow eyes.

Male: silver-gray with a large white rump patch and

white belly, black wing tips, yellow eyes, faint,

thin bands across the tail

Juvenile: similar to female, with an orange breast

Nest: ground: female and male construct: 1 brood

per vear

Eggs: 4–8; bluish white without markings

Incubation: 31–32 days; female incubates

Fledging: 30–35 days; male and female feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to complete, to Arizona, New

Mexico. Texas and Mexico

Food: mice, snakes, insects, small birds

Compare: Slimmer than the Red-tailed Hawk (p. 215).

Look for the characteristic low gliding and the black tail bands to identify the

female Harrier

Stan's Notes: One of the easiest of hawks to identify. Glides just above the ground, following the contours of the land while searching for prey. Holds its wings just above horizontal, tilting back and forth in the wind, similar to the Turkey Vulture. Formerly called Marsh Hawk due to its habit of hunting over marshes. Feeds and nests on the ground. Will also preen and rest on the ground. Unlike other hawks, mainly uses its hearing to find prey, followed by its sight. At any age, it has a distinctive owl-like face disk.



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 Mourning Dove (p. 171) 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. 277) feeding on Rock Pigeons, which keeps their numbers in check.



YEAR-ROUND SUMMER

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: complete, to southwestern states, Mexico.

Central and South America: non-migrator

in parts of Montana

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

Compare: The Sandhill Crane (p. 289) has a red cap.

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.



Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Size: 19–21" (48–53 cm)

Male: Large, bulbous green head, white necklace

and rust-brown or chestnut chest. Gray-andwhite 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; moves around to find

open water and food

Food: seeds, plants, aquatic insects; will come to

ground feeders offering corn

Compare: Male Northern Shoveler (p. 301) has a white

chest with rusty sides and a very large, spoon-shaped bill. Breeding male Northern Pintail (p. 205) has long tail feathers and a brown head. 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.



YEAR-ROUND

Common Merganser

Mergus merganser

Size: 26–28" (66–71 cm)

Male: Long, thin, duck-like bird with a green head and black back. White sides, chest and neck. Long, pointed, orange bill. Often looks black

and white in poor light.

Female: same size and shape as the male, with a rust-

red head and ragged "hair," gray body, white

chest and chin

Juvenile: same as female

Nest: cavity; female lines an old woodpecker hole

or a natural cavity; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 9–11; ivory without markings

Incubation: 28–33 days; female incubates

Fledging: 70-80 days; female feeds the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial in Montana; moves

around to find open water

Food: small fish, aquatic insects, amphibians

Compare: The male Mallard (p. 303) is smaller and lacks

the black back and long, pointed, orange bill.

Stan's Notes: Seen on any open water during the winter but more common along large rivers than lakes. A large, shallow-water diver that feeds on fish in 10–15 feet (3–4.5 m) of water. Bill has a fine, serrated-like edge that helps catch slippery fish. Female often lays some eggs in other merganser nests (egg dumping), resulting in up to 15 young in some broods. Male leaves female once she starts incubating. Orphans are accepted by other merganser mothers with young. Fast flight, often low and close to the water, in groups but not in formation. Usually not vocal except for an alarm call.



Bullock's Oriole

Icterus bullockii

Size: 8" (20 cm)

Male: Bright-orange-and-black bird. Black crown,

eye line, nape, chin, back and wings with a

bold white patch on wings.

Female: dull-yellow overall, pale-white belly, white

wing bars on gray-to-black wings

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: pendulous; female and male build; 1 brood

per year

Eggs: 4–6; pale white to gray, brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

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

Migration: complete, to Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, berries, nectar; visits nectar feeders

Compare: Similar size as the male Black-headed

Grosbeak (p. 311), which has more black on its head and a short, thick bicolored bill. Look for Bullock's bright markings and a thin

black line running through each eye.

Stan's Notes: So closely related to Baltimore Orioles of the eastern U.S., at one time both were considered a single species. Interbreeds with Baltimores where their ranges overlap. Most common in the state where cottonwood trees grow along rivers and other wetlands. Also found at edges of clearings, in city parks, on farms and along irrigation ditches. Hanging sock-like nest is constructed of plant fibers such as inner bark of junipers and willows. Will incorporate yarn and thread into its nest if offered at the time of nest building.



VEAR-ROUND.

Cassin's Finch

Haemorhous cassinii

Size: 6½" (16 cm)

Male: Overall light wash of crimson red with an especially bright-red crown. Distinct brown

streaks on back and wings. White belly.

Female: overall brown to gray, fine black streaks on

the back and wings, heavily streaked white

chest and belly

Juvenile: similar to female

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

Eggs: 3–5; white without markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

Fledging: 14–18 days; female and male feed young

Migration: partial migrator to non-migrator; will move

around to find food

Food: seeds, insects, fruits, berries; will visit

seed feeders

Compare: Male House Finch (p. 317) has a brown

cap, is heavily streaked on its flanks and is orange-red. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (p. 131) is similar, but Cassin's Finch is

much more red.

Stan's Notes: This is a common mountain finch of coniferous forests. Usually forages for seeds on the ground, but eats evergreen buds and aspen and willow catkins. Breeds in May. A colony nester, depending on the regional source of food. The more food available, the larger the colony. Male sings a rapid warble, often imitating other birds such as jays, tanagers and grosbeaks. A cowbird host







breeding



California Gull

Larus californicus

Size: 21" (53 cm); up to 41/2' wingspan

Male: White bird with gray wings and black wing tips. A red-and-black mark on the tip of a

yellow bill. Red ring around dark eyes. Winter or non-breeding adult has brown streaks on

back of head and nape of neck.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: all brown for the first two years, similar to

winter adult by the third year

Nest: ground; female and male construct; 1 brood

per year

Eggs: 2–5; pale brown or olive, brown markings

Incubation: 24–26 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 40-45 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, along the Pacific Coast from

Washington to California

Food: insects, seeds, mammals

Compare: Ring-billed Gull (p. 325) is smaller and

lacks California Gull's dark eyes and red mark on bill. Breeding Franklin's Gull (p. 273)

has a black head.

Stan's Notes: This is the famed gull species that saved crops from overpopulations of grasshoppers during 1848 and inspired the gull monuments in Salt Lake City. A four-year gull that appears nearly all brown during the first two years. Third-year bird is similar to the winter adult. Usually doesn't nest until the fourth year, when it obtains adult plumage. Nests in large colonies of up to 1,000 nests. Named for its usual winter sites along the California coast. Common on reservoirs.



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 coastal Texas, New Mexico,

southern coastal California and Mexico

Food: aquatic insects and plants

Compare: The Canada Goose (p. 285) is larger and

has a black neck and white chin strap. The American White Pelican (p. 333) shares black

wing tips, but it has an enormous bill.

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. Very similar to Ross's Goose (see inset), which is slighly smaller with a much smaller pink bill. Commonly seen with Ross's Geese and Sandhill Cranes.



Wilson's Warbler

Cardellina pusilla

Size: 4¾" (12 cm)

Male: Dull-yellow upper and bright-yellow lower.

Distinctive black cap. Large black eyes and

small thin bill.

Female: same as male, but lacking the black cap

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 4–6; white with brown markings

Incubation: 10–13 days; female incubates

Fledging: 8-11 days; female and male feed young

Migration: complete, to coastal Texas, Mexico and

Central America

Food: insects

Compare: Yellow Warbler (p. 345) is brighter yellow

with orange streaking on the male's chest. Male American Goldfinch (p. 339) has a black forehead and black wings. The male Common Yellowthroat (p. 341) has a very distinctive

black mask.

Stan's Notes: A widespread warbler of low to mid-level elevations. Can be found near water in willow and alder thickets. Its all-insect diet makes it one of the top insect-eating birds in North America. Often flicks its tail and spreads its wings when hopping among thick shrubs, looking for insects. Females often mate with males that have the best territories and that might already have mates (polygyny).



Bullock's Oriole

Icterus bullockii

Size: 8" (20 cm)

Female: Dull-yellow head and chest. Gray-to-black

wings with white wing bars. A pale-white

belly. Gray back, as seen in flight.

Male: bright-orange-and-black bird with a bold

white patch on wings

Juvenile: similar to female

Nest: pendulous; female and male build; 1 brood

per year

Eggs: 4–6; pale white to gray, brown markings

Incubation: 12–14 days; female incubates

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

Migration: complete, to Mexico and Central America

Food: insects, berries, nectar; visits nectar feeders

Compare: Smaller female Western Tanager (p. 351) has a

black back, unlike female Bullock's gray back. Look for the female Bullock's dull-yellow and

gray appearance.

Stan's Notes: So closely related to Baltimore Orioles of the eastern U.S., at one time both were considered a single species. Interbreeds with Baltimores where their ranges overlap. Most common in the state where cottonwood trees grow along rivers and other wetlands. Also found at edges of clearings, in city parks, on farms and along irrigation ditches. Hanging sock-like nest is constructed of plant fibers such as inner bark of junipers and willows. Will incorporate yarn and thread into its nest if offered at the time of nest building.

Montana's Best-Selling Bird Guide

Make bird watching more informative and enjoyable

- 143 species: Only Montana birds!
- Simple color guide: See a yellow bird? Go to the yellow section
- Compare feature: Decide between look-alikes
- Stan's Notes: Naturalist tidbits and facts
- Professional photos: Crisp, stunning full-page images

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

















I SBN 978-1-64755-301-2