

2ND EDITION

Birds *of* Utah

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

Birds that are mostly black p. 25

Birds that are mostly black and white p. 51

Birds that are mostly blue p. 77

Birds that are mostly brown p. 99

Birds that are mostly gray p. 219

Birds that have prominent green p. 287

Birds that have prominent orange p. 305

Birds that have prominent red p. 309

Birds that are mostly white p. 319

Birds that have prominent yellow p. 325

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.

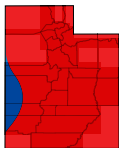
Each color section is also arranged by size, generally with the smaller birds first. Sections may also incorporate the average size in a range, which in some cases reflects size differences between male and female birds. Flip through the pages in the color section to find the bird. If you already know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

in flight





YEAR-ROUND
WINTER

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

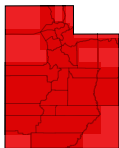
Food: fruit, insects, mammals, fish, carrion; will come to seed and suet feeders

Compare: Common Raven (p. 45) is similar, but it has a larger bill and has shaggy throat feathers. Crow's call is higher than the raspy, low calls of the raven. Crow has a squared tail. Raven has a wedge-shaped tail, apparent in flight. Black-billed Magpie (p. 67) has a long tail and white belly.

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

in flight





YEAR-ROUND

Common Raven

Corvus corax

Size: 22–27" (56–69 cm)

Male: Large all-black bird with a shaggy beard of feathers on throat and chin. Large black bill. Large wedge-shaped tail, best seen in flight.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adult

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

Eggs: 4–6; pale green with brown markings

Incubation: 18–21 days; female incubates

Fledging: 38–44 days; female and male feed the young

Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator

Food: insects, fruit, small animals, carrion

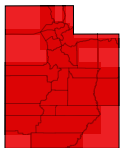
Compare: American Crow (p. 43) is smaller and lacks the shaggy throat feathers. Low raspy call, compared with the higher-pitched call of the American Crow.

Stan's Notes: Considered by some people to be the smartest of all birds. Known for its aerial acrobatics and long swooping dives. Soars on wind without flapping, like a raptor. Sometimes scavenges with crows and gulls. A cooperative hunter that often communicates the location of a good source of food to other ravens. Most start to breed at 3–4 years. Complex courtship includes grabbing bills, preening each other, and cooing. Long-term pair bond. Uses the same nest site for many years.

male

female





YEAR-ROUND

Downy Woodpecker

Dryobates pubescens

Size: 6½" (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. 55) is larger. Look for the Downy's shorter, thinner bill.

Stan's Notes: 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. Repeats a high-pitched "peek-peek" call. Male performs most of the brooding. During winter, it will roost in a cavity. Doesn't breed in high elevations but often moves there in winter for food. Undulates in flight.



soaring

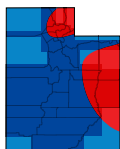


juvenile



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

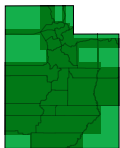
Migration: non-migrator to partial, to the Southwest

Food: fish, carrion, birds (mainly ducks)

Compare: The Golden Eagle (p. 215) and Turkey Vulture (p. 47) lack the white head and white tail of adult Bald Eagle. The juvenile Golden Eagle, with its white wrist marks and white base of tail, is similar to the juvenile 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 have not reached breeding age. Long-term pair bond but will switch mates when not successful at reproducing. Juveniles attain the white head and tail at 4–5 years of age.





SUMMER

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Size: 7" (18 cm)

Male: Sleek swallow. Blue-black back, cinnamon belly, and reddish-brown chin. White spots on a long, deeply forked tail.

Female: same as male but with a whitish belly

Juvenile: similar to adults, with a tan belly and chin, and shorter tail

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

Eggs: 4–5; white with brown markings

Incubation: 13–17 days; female incubates

Fledging: 18–23 days; female and male feed the young

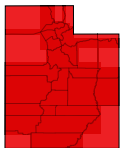
Migration: complete, to South America

Food: insects (prefers beetles, wasps, flies)

Compare: Tree Swallow (p. 81) has a white belly and chin and a notched tail. Cliff Swallow (p. 115) and Violet-green Swallow (p. 293) are smaller and lack a distinctive, deeply forked tail. Violet-green Swallow is green with a white face. Look for Barn Swallow's deeply forked tail.

Stan's Notes: Seen in wetlands, farms, suburban yards, and parks. Of the seven swallow species regularly found in Utah, this is the only one with a deeply forked tail. Unlike other swallows, it rarely glides in flight. Usually flies low over land or water. Drinks as it flies, skimming water, or will sip water droplets on wet leaves. Bathes while flying through rain or sprinklers. Gives a twittering warble, followed by a mechanical sound. Builds a mud nest with up to 1,000 beak-loads of mud. Nests on barns and houses, under bridges and in other sheltered places. Often nests in colonies of 4–6 birds; sometimes nests alone.





YEAR-ROUND

Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay

Aphelocoma woodhouseii

Size: 11" (28 cm)

Male: Blue head, wings, tail, and breast band. Brownish patch on back. Dull white chin, breast, and belly. Very long tail.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adult, overall gray with light-blue wings and tail

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

Eggs: 3–6; pale green with red-brown markings

Incubation: 15–17 days; female incubates

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

Migration: non-migrator; moves around to find food in winter

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

Compare: Same size as the Pinyon Jay (p. 93), which lacks the white chest and belly. Same size as the Steller's Jay (p. 95), but lacks the black head and pointed crest. The Canada Jay (p. 259) is gray and white, lacking any blue of the Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay.

Stan's Notes: A tame bird of urban areas that visits feeders. Forms a long-term pair bond, with the male feeding female before and during incubation. Young of a pair remain close by for up to a couple years, helping parents raise subsequent brothers and sisters. Caches food by burying it for later consumption. Likely serves as a major distributor of oaks and pines by not returning to eat the seeds it buried.

soaring

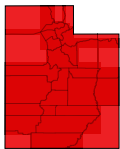


**juvenile
soaring**



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-sized animals, large birds, snakes, fish, insects, bats, carrion

Compare: Swainson's Hawk (p. 201) is slimmer with longer, more pointed wings.

Stan's Notes: Common in open country and cities in Utah. 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.

soaring

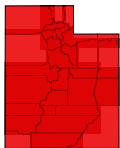


juvenile



juvenile





YEAR-ROUND

Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

Size: 30–40" (76–102 cm); up to 7¼' wingspan

Male: Uniform dark brown with a golden-yellow head and nape of neck. Yellow around base of bill. Yellow feet.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: similar to adult, with white "wrist" patches and a white base of tail

Nest: platform, on a cliff; female and male build; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 1–2; white with brown markings

Incubation: 43–45 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 63–75 days; female and male feed young

Migration: non-migrator in Utah, moves around to find food

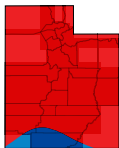
Food: mammals, birds, reptiles, insects

Compare: The Bald Eagle (p. 75) adult is similar, but it has a white head and white tail. Bald Eagle juvenile is often confused with the Golden Eagle juvenile; both are large dark birds with white markings.

Stan's Notes: A large, powerful raptor that has no trouble taking larger prey such as jackrabbits. Hunts by perching or soaring and watching for movement. Inhabits mountainous terrain, requiring large territories to provide a large supply of food. Long-term pair bond, renewing its bond late in winter with spectacular high-flying courtship displays. Usually nests on cliff faces; rarely nests in trees. Uses a well-established nest that's been used for generations. Will add items to the nest such as antlers, bones, and barbed wire.

in flight





YEAR-ROUND
WINTER

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Size: 25–43" (64–109 cm); up to 5½' wingspan

Male: Large gray goose with a black neck and head. White chin and cheek strap.

Female: same as male

Juvenile: same as adults

Nest: platform, on the ground; female builds;
1 brood per year

Eggs: 5–10; white without markings

Incubation: 25–30 days; female incubates

Fledging: 42–55 days; male and female teach the young to feed

Migration: non-migrator to partial in Utah

Food: aquatic plants, insects, seeds

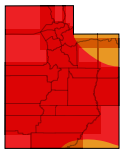
Compare: Large goose that is rarely confused with any other bird.

Stan's Notes: Common year-round residents in the state, breeding throughout Utah. Flocks fly in a large V when traveling long distances. Begins breeding in the third year. Adults mate for many years. If threatened, they will hiss as a warning. Males stand as sentinels at the edge of their group and will bob their heads and become aggressive if approached. Adults molt their primary flight feathers while raising their young, rendering family groups temporarily flightless. Several subspecies vary in the US. Generally eastern groups are paler than western. Their size also varies, decreasing northward. The smallest subspecies is in the Arctic.



in flight





YEAR-ROUND
MIGRATION

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 migrator, to southwestern states, Mexico, and Central and South America; non-migrator in most of Utah

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

Compare: The Sandhill Crane (p. 285) has a red cap. Look for the long, yellow bill to help identify the Great Blue Heron.

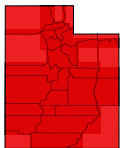
Stan's Notes: One of the most common herons. Found in open water, from small ponds to large lakes. Stalks small fish in shallow water. Will strike at mice, squirrels, and nearly anything it comes across. Red-winged Blackbirds will attack it to stop it from taking their babies out of the nest. In flight, 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.

female
p. 193



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

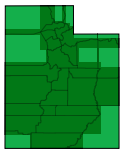
Migration: non-migrator to partial migrator in Utah

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. 195) 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.





SUMMER

Black-headed Grosbeak

Pheucticus melanocephalus

Size: 8" (20 cm)

Male: Stocky bird with burnt-orange chest, neck, and rump. Black head, tail and wings. Irregularly shaped white wing patches. Large bill, with upper bill darker than lower.

Female: appears like an overgrown sparrow, overall brown with a lighter breast and belly, large two-toned bill, prominent white eyebrows, yellow wing linings, as seen in flight

Juvenile: similar to adult of the same sex

Nest: cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

Eggs: 3–4; pale green or bluish, brown markings

Incubation: 11–13 days; female and male incubate

Fledging: 11–13 days; female and male feed young

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

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

Compare: Same size as the male Evening Grosbeak (p. 341), but male Black-headed has an orange breast and lacks a yellow belly. Male Bullock's Oriole (p. 305) has more white on the wings than the male Black-headed. Look for Black-headed's large bicolored bill.

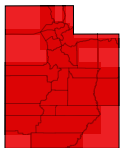
Stan's Notes: A cosmopolitan bird that nests in a wide variety of habitats, seeming to prefer the foothills slightly more than other places. Both the male and female sing and will aggressively defend the nest against intruders. Song is very similar to American Robin's (p. 253) and Western Tanager's (p. 337), making it hard to tell them apart by song. Populations increasing in Utah and across the US.

female
p. 129



male





YEAR-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

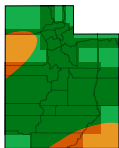
Compare: Male House Finch (p. 309) has a brown cap, is heavily streaked on its flanks, and is orange-red. Much more red than the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (p. 127) and Black Rosy-Finch (p. 25).

Stan's Notes: This is a mountain finch of coniferous forests. Usually forages for seeds on the ground, but eats evergreen buds and aspen and willow catkins. 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.



in flight





SUMMER
MIGRATION

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 southern Arizona and Mexico

Food: aquatic insects, small fish

Compare: This is the only all-white egret in the state. Look for the black bill and yellow feet of Snowy Egret to help identify.

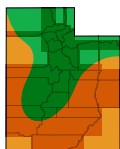
Stan's Notes: Common in wetlands. Colonies may include up to several hundred nests. Nests are low in shrubs 5–10 feet (1.5–3 m) tall or constructs a nest on the ground, usually mixed among other egret and heron nests. Chicks hatch days apart (asynchronous), leading to starvation of last to hatch. Will 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.

female



male





SUMMER
MIGRATION

Wilson's Warbler

Cardellina pusilla

Size: 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (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 migrator, to coastal Texas, Central America, and Mexico

Food: insects

Compare: Yellow Warbler (p. 333) is brighter yellow with orange streaking on the male's chest. Male American Goldfinch (p. 327) has a black forehead and black wings. The male Common Yellowthroat (p. 329) 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). Nests in higher elevations produce more young than the lower elevation or coastal nests.

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This 2nd Edition includes 8 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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