

# Birds *of* Nevada

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

**Birds that are mostly black**

p. 23



**Birds that are mostly black and white**

p. 45



**Birds that are mostly blue**

p. 71



**Birds that are mostly brown**

p. 91



**Birds that are mostly gray**

p. 217



**Birds that have prominent green**

p. 285



**Birds that have prominent orange**

p. 303



**Birds that have prominent red**

p. 307



**Birds that are mostly white**

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**Birds that have prominent yellow**

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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 without markings

**Incubation:** 12–14 days; female and male incubate

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

**Migration:** non-migrator to partial migrator; some will move to southern states; moves around to find food

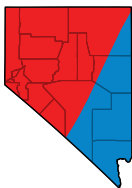
**Food:** insects, seeds, fruit; visits seed or suet feeders

**Compare:** The male Brown-headed Cowbird (p. 23) has a brown head. Look for the shiny, dark feathers to help identify the European Starling.

**Stan's Notes:** One of our most numerous songbirds. Mimics the songs of up to 20 bird species and imitates sounds, including the human voice. 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. 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.

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 and male build; 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. 41) 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. 63) has a long tail and white belly.

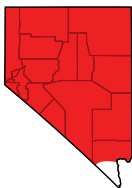
**Stan's Notes:** One of the most recognizable birds in Nevada, found in most habitats. Imitates other birds and human voices. One of the smartest of all birds and very social, often entertaining itself by provoking chases with other birds. Eats roadkill but is rarely hit by vehicles. Can live as long 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.

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. 49) is larger. Look for the Downy's shorter, thinner bill.

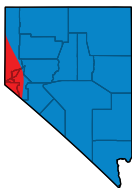
**Stan's Notes:** This is perhaps the most common woodpecker in the US. Stiff tail feathers help to brace it like a tripod as it clings to a tree. Like other woodpeckers, it has a long, barbed tongue to pull insects from tiny places. Mates drum on branches or hollow logs to announce territory. Repeats 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.

female  
p. 177



male





YEAR-ROUND  
WINTER

# Ring-necked Duck

*Aythya collaris*

**Size:** 16–19" (41–48 cm)

**Male:** Striking black duck with light-gray-to-white sides. Blue bill with a bold white ring and a thinner ring at the base. Peaked head with a sloped forehead.

**Female:** brown with darker-brown back and crown, light-brown sides, gray face, white eye-ring, white ring around the bill, and peaked head

**Juvenile:** similar to female

**Nest:** ground; female builds; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 8–10; olive-gray to brown without markings

**Incubation:** 26–27 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 49–56 days; female teaches the young to feed

**Migration:** complete, to Nevada and southwestern states; non-migrator in parts of the state

**Food:** aquatic plants and insects

**Compare:** Look for the blue bill with a bold white ring to identify the male Ring-necked Duck.

**Stan's Notes:** Usually in larger freshwater lakes rather than saltwater marshes, in small flocks or just pairs. Watch for this diving duck to dive underwater to forage for food. Springs up off the water to take flight. Flattens its crown when diving. Male gives a quick series of grating barks and grunts. Female gives high-pitched peeps. Named "Ring-necked" for its cinnamon collar, which is nearly impossible to see in the field. Also called Ring-billed Duck due to the white ring on its bill.

**male**



**female**





SUMMER  
WINTER

# Western Bluebird

*Sialia mexicana*

**Size:** 7" (18 cm)

**Male:** Deep blue head, neck, throat, back, wings, and tail. Rusty-red chest and flanks.

**Female:** similar to male, only duller with a gray head

**Juvenile:** similar to female, with a speckled chest

**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 and Mexico

**Food:** insects, fruit

**Compare:** The Mountain Bluebird (p. 81) is similar but lacks the rusty-red breast. Male Lazuli Bunting (p. 73) is smaller and has white wing bars.

**Stan's Notes:** Not as common and widespread as the Mountain Bluebird. Found in a variety of habitats, from agricultural land to clear-cuts. Requires a cavity for nesting. Competes with starlings for nest cavities. Like the Mountain Bluebird, it uses nest boxes, which are responsible for the stable populations. A courting male will fly in front of the female, spread his wings and tail, and perch next to her. Often goes in and out of its nest box or cavity as if to say, "Look inside." Male may offer food to the female to establish a pair bond.

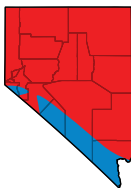


female



soaring





YEAR-ROUND  
WINTER

# 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 year

**Eggs:** 4–8; bluish white without markings

**Incubation:** 31–32 days; female incubates

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

**Migration:** partial migrator, to southwestern states, Mexico, and Central America; non-migrator in much of Nevada

**Food:** mice, snakes, insects, small birds

**Compare:** Slimmer than the Red-tailed Hawk (p. 199). 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.

**soaring**



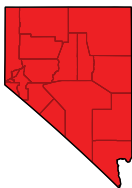
**juvenile  
soaring**



**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 mammals, large birds, snakes, insects, bats, carrion

**Compare:** Swainson's Hawk (p. 197) is slimmer with longer, more pointed wings.

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

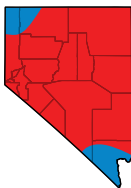


soaring



juvenile





YEAR-ROUND  
WINTER

# Sharp-shinned Hawk

*Accipiter striatus*

**Size:** 10–14" (25–36 cm); up to 2' wingspan

**Male:** Small woodland hawk with a gray back and head and a rust-red chest. Short wings. Long, squared tail and several dark tail bands, with the widest at the end of the tail. Red eyes.

**Female:** same as male but larger

**Juvenile:** same size as adults, with a brown back, heavy streaking on the chest, and yellow eyes

**Nest:** platform; female builds; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 4–5; white with brown markings

**Incubation:** 32–35 days; female incubates

**Fledging:** 24–27 days; female and male feed the young

**Migration:** complete migrator, to southwestern states, Mexico, and Central America; non-migrator in much of Nevada

**Food:** birds, small mammals

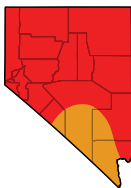
**Compare:** Cooper's Hawk (p. 271) is larger and has a larger head, a slightly longer neck, and a rounded tail. Look for the squared tail to help identify the Sharp-shinned Hawk.

**Stan's Notes:** A hawk of backyards, parks, and woodlands. Seen swooping on birds visiting feeders and chasing them as they flee. Its short wingspan and long tail help it to maneuver through thick stands of trees in pursuit of prey. Calls a loud, high-pitched "kik-kik-kik-kik." Named "Sharp-shinned" for the sharp projection (keel) on the leading edge of its shin. A bird's shin is actually below the ankle (rather than above it, like ours) on the tarsus bone of its foot. In most birds, the tarsus bone is rounded, not sharp.



**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; pale blue without markings

**Incubation:** 27–28 days; female and male incubate

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

**Migration:** non-migrator; will move around to find food in winter

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

**Compare:** The Sandhill Crane (p. 283) 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.

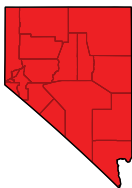
female  
p. 189



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 Nevada

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

**Compare:** Male Northern Shoveler (p. 299) has a white chest with rusty sides and a very large, spoon-shaped bill. Breeding male Northern Pintail (p. 191) 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.

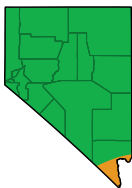


female  
p. 135



male





SUMMER  
MIGRATION

## 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. 339), but male Black-headed has an orange breast and lacks a yellow belly. Male Bullock's Oriole (p. 301) 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. 251) and Western Tanager's (p. 335), making it hard to tell them apart by song. Males don't get adult plumage until 2 years of age. Comes to seed feeders.





YEAR-ROUND  
WINTER

## 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; bluish green with brown 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

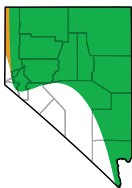
**Compare:** Male House Finch (p. 307) has a brown cap, is heavily streaked on its flanks, and is orange-red. Much more red than the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (p. 117).

**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.

**in flight**



**breeding**

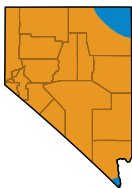


**juvenile**



**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:** 35–50 days; female and male feed the young

**Migration:** complete, to West Coast from British Columbia to Mexico

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

**Compare:** 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.

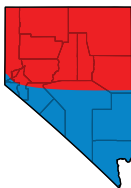


**male**

**winter  
male**

**female**





YEAR-ROUND  
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:** 12–14 days; female incubates

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

**Migration:** partial migrator to non-migrator; 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. 95) and female House Finch (p. 97) both have a streaked chest. Male Yellow Warbler (p. 331) is all yellow with orange streaks on chest.

**Stan's Notes:** A common backyard resident. Most often found in open fields, scrubby areas, and woodlands. Enjoys Nyjer seed in feeders. Lines its nest with the silky down from wild thistle. Almost always in small flocks. Twitters while it flies. Flight is roller coaster-like. 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.



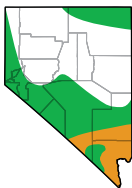
male



non-breeding  
male



female



SUMMER  
MIGRATION

# Western Tanager

*Piranga ludoviciana*

**Size:** 7¼" (18.5 cm)

**Male:** A canary-yellow bird with a red head. Black back, tail, wings. One white and one yellow wing bar. Non-breeding lacks the red head.

**Female:** duller than male, lacking the red head

**Juvenile:** similar to female

**Nest:** cup; female builds; 1 brood per year

**Eggs:** 3–5; light blue with brown markings

**Incubation:** 14–18 days; female incubates

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

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

**Food:** insects, fruit

**Compare:** The unique coloring makes the breeding male Tanager easy to identify. Male American Goldfinch (p. 325) male has a black forehead. Female Bullock's Oriole (p. 337) lacks the female Tanager's single yellow wing bars.

**Stan's Notes:** The male is stunning in its breeding plumage. Feeds mainly on insects, such as bees, wasps, cicadas, and grasshoppers, and to a lesser degree on fruit. The male feeds the female while she incubates. Female builds a cup nest in a horizontal fork of a coniferous tree, well away from the main trunk, 20–40 feet (6–12 m) aboveground. This is the farthest-nesting tanager species, reaching far up into the Northwest Territories of Canada. An early fall migrant, often seen migrating in late July (when non-breeding males lack red heads). Seen in many habitats during migration.

# Identify Nevada Birds by Color!

## Make bird watching more informative and enjoyable

- **139 species:** Only Nevada 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
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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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