



madison  
AUDUBON



# BIRD GUIDE *for* KIDS





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT THIS GUIDE</b> .....	2
<b>HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE</b> .....	3
<b>BIRDS BY THE SEASON</b> .....	4
<b>SONGBIRDS</b>	
Blue jay .....	5
American crow .....	6
Barn swallow .....	7
Black-capped chickadee .....	8
Tufted titmouse .....	9
White-breasted nuthatch .....	10
House wren .....	11
American robin .....	12
Eastern bluebird .....	13
Gray catbird .....	14
European starling .....	15
Dark-eyed junco .....	16
Northern cardinal .....	17
Red-winged blackbird .....	18
Common grackle .....	19
Baltimore oriole .....	20
House finch .....	21
American goldfinch .....	22
House sparrow .....	23
<b>BIRDS OF PREY</b>	
Eastern screech-owl .....	24
Red-tailed hawk .....	25
Cooper's hawk .....	26
<b>OTHER BIRDS</b>	
Ruby-throated hummingbird .....	27
Chimney swift .....	28
Mourning dove .....	29
Downy woodpecker .....	30
Hairy woodpecker .....	31

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Madison Audubon Bird Guide for Kids was created to further Madison Audubon's mission to protect and improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through land acquisition and management, education, and advocacy. This guide provides a simple introduction to some of the most common birds southern Wisconsin students might see in their schoolyards, neighborhoods, and backyards.

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Learn more about Madison Audubon:

<http://madisonaudubon.org>

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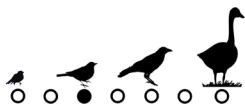
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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Birds in this guide are categorized as “Songbirds,” “Birds of Prey,” and “Other Birds.” Each bird page gives a description of the adult’s appearance, one or more photos of the adult bird (unless noted), as well as the following information:



How big is this bird? Look for the black circle to see how it compares to other birds.



Where will you find this bird? What type of habitat does it live in and where does it typically find its food?



What does this bird’s nest look like? What is it made from? Where does this bird nest?



What types of food does this bird eat?



What sounds does this bird make? What are its common songs and calls?

**Fun Fact:** A cool tidbit about this bird that will help you remember it!

# BIRDS BY THE SEASONS

What time of year should you expect to see the birds in this guide in southern Wisconsin? We've got the answer here!

## YEAR-ROUND

Blue jay	American goldfinch
American crow	House sparrow
Black-capped chickadee	Eastern screech-owl
Tufted titmouse	Red-tailed hawk
White-breasted nuthatch	Cooper's hawk
European starling	Mourning dove
Northern cardinal	Downy woodpecker
House Finch	Hairy woodpecker

## SUMMER

Barn swallow	Red-winged blackbird
House wren	Common grackle
American robin	Baltimore oriole
Eastern bluebird	Ruby-throated hummingbird
Gray catbird	Chimney swift

## WINTER

Dark-eyed junco

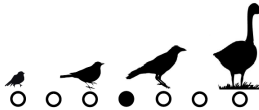
**Fun Fact:** Approximately 400 different kinds of birds have been seen in Wisconsin.

# BLUE JAY

Bright blue on top and white below. Tuft of feathers (crest) on head and a black ring around neck. White bars on wings.



Rob Hanson / CC BY



Forests and urban and suburban areas, especially with oak trees and bird feeders. Usually searches for food on the ground.



Open cup made from twigs, grass, rootlets, and sometimes mud. Nests in trees.



Insects, nuts, seeds, and grains.



*lay, jay* and *tweedle-dee*. Many other calls.

**Fun Fact:** The blue jay is an intelligent bird. In captivity, blue jays have used strips of newspaper as tools to get food.

# AMERICAN CROW

All black with a strong, black beak and rather short, square-tipped tail.



Dick Daniels / CC BY-SA



Fields, open woodlands, forests, agricultural fields, parking lots, towns, and garbage dumps. Found in groups and feeds on the ground.



Open bowl made of twigs and lined with pine needles, weeds, or animal hair. Nests in trees, preferring evergreens.



Grains, seeds, nuts, fruits, insects, fish, bird eggs, mice, earthworms, garbage, and more.



A harsh *caw*.

**Fun Fact:** In the winter, crows sleep in groups (roosts) of a few hundred up to 2 million.



# BARN SWALLOW

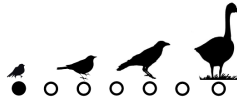
Long, forked tail. Steel blue back and cinnamon-colored forehead and throat. Reddish-brown to creamy white chest and belly.



Charles | Sharp CC BY-SA



Thermos / CC BY-SA



Fields, parks, roadway edges, marshes, meadows, ponds, and other open habitats. Feeds almost exclusively in flight.



Cup-shaped nest of mud lined with grass and feathers. Nests on rafters, barn beams, sheds, the undersides of bridges, and other structures.



Primarily flies, along with beetles, bees, wasps, butterflies, and other flying insects.



A long series of twittering squeaks followed by many mechanical-sounding *whirrs*.

**Fun Fact:** Legend says the barn swallow stole fire from the gods, so an angry god burned away its middle tail feathers!

# BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Black cap on head, black chin, and white cheeks. Gray back, wings, and tail. White underside with dark cream sides.



Minette Layne / CC BY-SA



Deciduous and mixed forests, open woods, parks, and disturbed areas. Usually perched on trees and shrubs.



Digs out a cavity in dead trees or branches and builds a cup-shaped nest inside. Nest often made of moss and lined with rabbit fur.



Seeds, berries, insects, spiders, and suet.



*Fee-bee* or *cheese-burger*. Also, *chickadee-dee-dee* when alarmed.

**Fun Fact:** Chickadees hide seeds to eat later and can remember thousands of hiding places.

# TUFTED TITMOUSE

Mostly gray and white with a perky tuft of feathers on top of head (crest). Black forehead and a rusty-colored tinge on sides.



Mike's Birds / CC BY-SA



Woodlands, backyards, parks, and orchards. Flits among branches looking for food. Will hold a seed with its feet and hammer it open with its beak.



Cup-shaped nest made of damp leaves, moss, and grasses and lined with hair, fur, or wool. Nests are built in natural holes or old woodpecker holes.



Mainly insects. Also spiders, snails, seeds, nuts, and berries.



*Peter-peter-peter* repeated several times. Also a mechanical *tsee-day-day-day*.

**Fun Fact:** Tufted titmice will sometimes line their nests with hair plucked directly from living animals.

# WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

All white face and chest with a black (or gray) stripe down its head. Lower belly is orange-brown.



Bill Bouton / CC BY-SA



Mature woods, parks, and yards, especially with deciduous trees. Creeps along trunks and branches probing the bark for food.



Lines a natural tree hole or old woodpecker hole with fur, bark, and dirt. Builds a cup-shaped nest of grass, bark, and feathers on top.



Mainly insects, including larvae, beetles, and caterpillars. Also eats seeds and nuts.



A rapid *wha-wha-wha*. Also a loud, nasal *yank* repeated a few times.

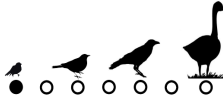
**Fun Fact:** Nuthatches can move head first down trees and can hang upside down beneath branches.

# HOUSE WREN

Dark brown on top and paler below with bars on wings and tail. Fairly long, curved beak and long tail.



AD/18z / CC BY



Open forests, backyards, farmyards, and city parks. In winter: brushy tangles and hedgerows. Looks for food in low tree branches and shrubs.



Piles twigs into old woodpecker holes, natural crevices, and nest boxes. Builds a cup of twigs and soft materials on top.



Spiders and insects such as beetles, caterpillars, and earwigs. Also eats snail shells.



Long, jumbled bubbling. Males often sing 9-11 times per minute during breeding season.

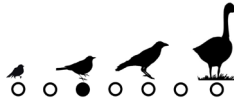
**Fun Fact:** House wrens can live anywhere from Canada to the tip of South America.

# AMERICAN ROBIN

Brick-red chest, gray back, and streaks on white chin. Small white spots around the eyes. Male usually has a blacker head and slightly richer colors than the female.



MdF / CC BY-SA



Lawns, fields, city parks, woodlands, and forests. Searches for food on the ground.



Cup-shaped nest made mostly from dead grass and twigs and strengthened with mud. Typically nests in trees.



Earthworms, insects, snails, and a variety of fruits.



*Cheerily, cheer up, cheer up, cheerily, cheer up.*

**Fun Fact:** The robin is the state bird of Wisconsin. A robin can eat as much as 14 feet of earthworms in one day.

# EASTERN BLUEBIRD

Bright blue on top with a reddish brown throat and chest and a white belly. Females are paler and duller than the males.



Deham / CC BY-SA



Meadows, open areas surrounded by trees, golf courses, pastures, and backyards. Perches above fields looking for insects on the ground to eat.



Loosely woven nest of grasses and pine needles lined with fine grasses, horsehair, or turkey feathers. Nests in old woodpecker holes, dead trees, and nest boxes.



Insects caught on the ground like crickets and beetles. Also eats fruits and berries.



Low pitched *tu-a-wee*. Also a low-pitched warbling song with groups of 1-3 short notes.

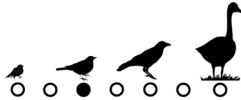
**Fun Fact:** Since the 1960s, volunteers have been building nest boxes across America to keep eastern bluebirds from going extinct.

# GRAY CATBIRD

Smooth gray with a black cap on the top of its head. Long tail with chestnut coloring underneath.



Peter Masare / CC BY-SA



Dense shrubs, vine tangles, roadsides, and residential areas. Hops along the ground to find food.



Bulky, open cup made of twigs, bark, mud, and sometimes trash. Lined with grass, hair, and pine needles. Nest hidden in dense shrubs or small trees.



Mainly insects like ants and grasshoppers. Also eats fruit and berries.



Raspy *mew* that sounds like a cat. Also a long series of short notes lasting many minutes.

**Fun Fact:** The gray catbird's song may last for up to 10 minutes.

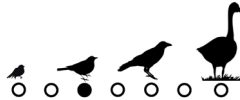


# EUROPEAN STARLING

A chunky short-tailed bird with a thin, straight beak. Feathers are black with purple and green gloss in spring and summer. Beak is bright yellow in the spring. In the fall, feathers have many white spots that go away during the winter. A non-native, invasive species.



Pierre Sellim / CC BY-SA



Towns, suburbs, and countryside near human settlements. Feeds on the ground on lawns, fields, and sidewalks. Travels in large, loud groups.



Fills a hollow in a building or old woodpecker hole with pine needles, grass, and trash. Builds a cup lined with feathers, leaves, and grass on top.



Mainly insects but will eat almost anything including fruits, seeds, nectar, and garbage.



A wide variety of sounds. Able to copy the calls and songs of other birds.

**Fun Fact:** Shakespeare mentioned the European starling in his works. People wanted it in America and brought it over in the 1890s.

# DARK-EYED JUNCO

Solid gray on head, back, and sides. White belly and pale pink beak. Female is slightly browner than male.



Mdr / CC BY-SA



Coniferous or mixed forests. In the winter: open woodlands, fields, parks, and backyards. Hops along the ground to find food.



Woven cup made of a variety of materials such as grass, pine needles, twigs, leaves, hair, moss, or ferns. Usually nests on the ground.



Primarily seeds and sometimes insects.



A loud trill of 7-23 notes that lasts up to 2 seconds.

**Fun Fact:** In the summer, dark-eyed juncos can be found very far north, even in the Arctic.

# NORTHERN CARDINAL

Male is bright red with a tuft of feathers on the top of its head (a crest). Black face with a stout, red beak. Female is brown with a tinge of red. It also has a crest and a big, red beak.



Shanthanu Bhardwaj / CC BY-SA

Male



Ken Thomas / Public domain

Female



Forest edges, overgrown fields, hedgerows, backyards, and other shrubby areas. Searches for food on or near the ground.



Seeds, fruit, and sometimes insects.



Cup made of coarse twigs, leaves, grapevine bark, and grasses, stems, rootlets, and pine needles. Nests in shrubs or saplings.



*Birdie, birdie, birdie or cheer, cheer, cheer.*

**Fun Fact:** Male cardinals are very territorial. When one sees its reflection, it may spend hours fighting the imaginary intruder.

# RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

Male is all black with a shoulder patch that is bright red and bordered with yellow. Female is streaky brown with a cream colored “eyebrow.” Spikier beak and darker belly than a sparrow.



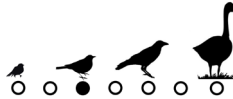
Walter Stegmann / CC BY-SA

Male



Rodney Campbell / CC BY

Female



Marshes, agricultural fields, and pastures. Searches along the ground for food. Often perches high over its territory.



Winds plant material around upright stems and weaves in a platform of wet vegetation. Adds more wet leaves and plasters inside with mud to form a cup. Nests low in shrubs, trees, and marsh vegetation.



Mainly insects in summer and seeds like corn and wheat in the winter.



*Conk-la-ree!* Also a distinctive *check*.

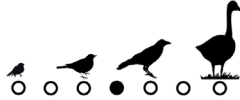
**Fun Fact:** Red-winged blackbirds sleep (roost) in large numbers. Each morning, they spread out, traveling up to 50 miles to feed.

# COMMON GRACKLE

Glossy purple head with bronze, shiny body. Appears black from a distance. Bright, golden eyes and strong beak. Long legs and tail.



Mdf / CC BY-SA



Agricultural fields, city parks, suburban lawns, woodlands, and meadows. Often in large, noisy flocks. Pecks the ground in search of food.



Bulky cup made of twigs, leaves, grasses, paper, and cornhusks. It is reinforced with mud and lined with grass and horsehair. Nests high in coniferous trees.



Mainly seeds, especially agricultural grains like corn and rice. Also eats insects, frogs, mice, and birds.



A rough *readle-eak* along with high-pitched whistles. A variety of other squeaks and croaks.

**Fun Fact:** Common grackles will let ants crawl all over them. The ants release formic acid that may rid the birds of parasites.

# BALTIMORE ORIOLE

Male is bright orange with black head, back, and wings. Wings have white bars. Female is usually brown on top and slightly orange underneath with white bars on its wings. It sometimes has black on its head.



Hannah McBrearty / Public domain



Mike's Birds / CC BY-SA

Male

Female



Open woodlands, parks, and backyards with leafy deciduous trees. Found high in trees or in bushes searching for food.



Sock-like hanging nest woven from thin fibers made of grass, wool, horsehair, twine, or fishing line. Nest is hung high in a tree using these fibers.



Insects, nectar, and fruits such as raspberries, oranges, and cherries.



*Here, come right here, dear.*  
Has a flute-like sound.

**Fun Fact:** The Baltimore oriole was named for Lord Baltimore, founder of Maryland, because his coat of arms had similar colors.

# HOUSE FINCH

Male has red “eyebrow,” forehead, throat, and chest. Whitish belly with dark stripes on sides. Female is plainer with brown face and blurry stripes all over pale belly.



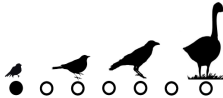
Omakiimenne / CC BY-SA

Male



GranitzStateBirds / CC BY-SA

Female



Buildings, lawns, small conifers, barns, urban areas, and many natural habitats. Feeds on the ground, at feeders, or on fruiting trees in big flocks.



Seeds, buds, and fruits such as cherries, blackberries, and strawberries.



Cup made of stems, leaves, rootlets, twigs, string, wool, and feathers. Nests in trees and on buildings.



A jumbled warbling composed of short notes or a sharp *cheep*.

**Fun Fact:** Pigments in the berries and fruit house finches eat make their feathers red. Females prefer the reddest male they can find.

# AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

In summer, male is bright yellow with black wings, tail, and forehead. Female is duller yellow-green in summer. Winter goldfinches vary from yellowish to brown to gray, but still have white bars on their black wings.



Mdf / CC BY-SA



Omaksimenko / CC BY-SA



C. Houshron / CC BY-SA

Summer male

Summer female

Winter male



Weedy fields, overgrown areas, suburbs, parks, and backyards. Often perched on seed heads of plants like thistles and dandelions.



Open cup of rootlets and plant fibers lined with plant down. Tightly woven and attached to shrub branches using spider silk.



Seeds from sunflowers, thistle, asters, trees, and grasses.



*Po-ta-to-chip* call and a variable song made of twitters and warbles.

**Fun Fact:** Goldfinches shed their body feathers (molt) twice each year, once in late winter and again in late summer.



# HOUSE SPARROW

Male has a black throat and white cheeks. The top of its head is gray and the back of its neck is red-brown. Females have stripes of black, brown, and dark cream on back and are dirty white below. Females have a pale cream “eyebrow.” A non-native, invasive species.



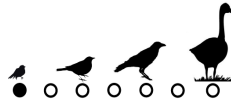
J.M. Gang / CC BY-SA

Male



David Friel / CC BY

Female



Cities, towns, suburbs, and farms, especially around livestock. Hops along the ground to find food.



Nest of dried vegetation lined with feathers, string, and paper that is stuffed into a hole in a building or other structure.



Grains, seeds, livestock feed, discarded food, and sometimes insects.



One or many *cheep* or *chirrup* notes.

**Fun Fact:** House sparrows were brought over from Europe in 1851. In 9 years, they spread from New York to the Rocky Mountains.

# EASTERN SCREECH-OWL

A small owl with blotchy coloring and yellow eyes. Usually gray, but sometimes red or brown. Typically has prominent “ear” tufts though they are sometimes flattened.



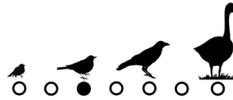
Dick Daniels / CC BY-SA



Dick Daniels / CC BY-SA

Gray morph

Red morph



Almost anywhere with enough trees. Forests, farmland, suburbs, and parks. Mostly active at night. Watches from above for prey.



Does not build a nest. Lays eggs in tree holes made by woodpeckers, squirrels, fungus, or rot. Also lays in nest boxes.



Small animals including birds, mammals, insects, frogs, and lizards.



A shrill, descending whinny (like a horse) and an even-pitched (monotonic) trill.

**Fun Fact:** Screech-owls throw-up the bones, fur, and feathers of their prey in an oval pellet. We learn about their diet from pellets.

# RED-TAILED HAWK

Large hawk with very broad, rounded wings and a short, wide tail. Brown back and pale chest, with a streaked belly. Underside of wing has a dark bar between shoulder and wrist. Tail is usually pale below and cinnamon-red above, but red color shows through in flight



Adrian Pingstone / Public domain

Bob MacInnes / CC BY



Open country such as fields. Often perched on telephone poles, fence posts, or trees standing alone or along field edges.



Tall piles of dry sticks up to 6.5 ft high and 3 ft across. Lined with bark and vegetation. Typically nests in the crowns of tall trees.



Primarily mammals, including voles, mice, and rabbits. Also eats birds and snakes.



A hoarse, screaming *kee-eeee-arr* usually given while soaring.

**Fun Fact:** Red-tailed hawks have been known to steal prey from other raptors.

# COOPER'S HAWK

Blue-gray above with reddish bars underneath. Broad, rounded wings and a very long, rounded tail. Red eyes. Young (juvenile) has yellow eyes and is brown above with sharp, brown streaks on chest. Keeps juvenile plumage for over a year.



Adult

Juvenile



Forests and subdivisions, backyards, and parks with trees. Flies after and catches other birds for food.



Cup made of piled sticks and lined with bark flakes and green twigs. Nests in trees on flat ground.



Mainly medium-sized birds such as mourning doves and American robins. Sometimes eats small mammals.



Usually silent. Sometimes a loud *cak-cak-cak* in defense or a *kik* call to a mate.

**Fun Fact:** A Cooper's hawk captures a bird with its feet and squeezes it to death. They've even been known to drown prey.

# RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

Tiny bird. Long, thin beak. Male has a shiny, ruby-red throat that looks black in most lights. Has white chest, green sides, and black, forked tail. Female is green on top and whitish below with white tip on its tail.



Matt Tillett / CC BY

Male



Russ / CC BY

Female



Open woodlands, grasslands, parks, gardens, and yards. Usually seen flying or hovering to eat.



Thimble-sized nest made of thistle or dandelion down and held together with spider silk or pine resin. Nests in trees.



Nectar of red or orange tubular flowers. Also eats tree sap and insects caught in mid-air.



*Chee-dit.* Wings make a quiet humming sound.

**Fun Fact:** Ruby-throated hummingbirds can beat their wings about 53 times a second.

# CHIMNEY SWIFT

All dark gray with slightly paler throat. Easiest to identify by shape. Long, narrow, curved wings. Slender body with round head and short, tapered tail. Sometimes called “a cigar with wings.”



Jim McCulloch / CC BY



Todd Kulesza / CC BY-SA



Urban and suburban habitats, especially places with many chimneys. Spends most of its life in flight. Snatches food from the air.



A half-saucer shaped nest of loosely woven twigs cemented to a chimney wall with the bird's glue-like saliva.



Airborne insects such as flies, bees, wasps, ants, and beetles.



Fast, twittering series of high-pitched chips. Can sound like a buzzy insect.

**Fun Fact:** Chimney swift numbers are in decline as new chimneys are often covered and narrow, which prevents them from nesting.

# MOURNING DOVE

Mostly plain with black spots on wings. Long, pointed tail. Male has a pinkish chest and is blue-gray on the top of its head. Female is a duller plain brown.



USFWS / Public domain



Everywhere except the deep woods. Often seen in fields or overhead perches like telephone wires. Feeds on the ground and in the open.



Flimsy nest of pine needles, twigs, and grass stems. Nests in trees, on the ground, or on gutters of buildings.



99% of diet is seeds. Sometimes it eats snails and berries.



*Hoo-la-hoop, hoop, hoop.*

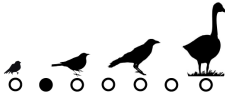
**Fun Fact:** Unlike humans, mourning doves can drink slightly salty water without becoming dehydrated.

# DOWNY WOODPECKER

Small woodpecker. Black with white back, white belly, and striped face. Has a very short beak. Male has a red spot on back of head.



Wolfgang Wandler / CC BY-SA



Woodlands, parks, and backyards. Moves quickly over tree trunks, branches, and stems of grasses and flowers looking for food.



Digs a nest hole in dead trees or dead parts of living trees. Usually nests in deciduous trees.



Mainly insects like beetle larvae that live inside wood or tree bark. Also eats berries, acorns, and grains.



A string of high-pitched notes as well as a sharp *pik* note. Also drums on trees with its beak.

**Fun Fact:** Think—downy woodpeckers are downsized compared to hairy woodpeckers—to help remember the difference.

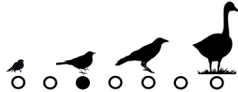


# HAIRY WOODPECKER

Larger, with a much longer beak than the downy woodpecker. Black with white back, white belly, and striped face. Male has a red spot on back of head.



USFWS / Public domain



Mature forests, suburbs, parks, and woodlands. Hitches up tree trunks and along big branches.



Mainly insects, especially larvae of wood and bark beetles, ants, and moth pupae. Also eats fruit and seeds.



Digs a hole in dead trees or dead stubs of living trees. Nest hole is bare except for a bed of wood chips.



Short, sharp *peek* note. Also rapidly drums on trees with its beak.

**Fun Fact:** Woodpeckers don't drum on trees when eating. They are actually quiet eaters and drum in order to communicate.

# BIRDING CHECKLIST

Keep track of the birds you discover. When you see or hear a bird in the wild, place an “X” in the box next to its name. See how many you can find!

## BIRDS IN THIS GUIDE

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue jay                | <input type="checkbox"/> Common grackle            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American crow           | <input type="checkbox"/> Baltimore oriole          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barn swallow            | <input type="checkbox"/> House finch               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-capped chickadee  | <input type="checkbox"/> American goldfinch        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tufted titmouse         | <input type="checkbox"/> House sparrow             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White-breasted nuthatch | <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern screen-owl        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> House wren              | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-tailed hawk           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American robin          | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooper’s hawk             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern bluebird        | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruby-throated hummingbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gray catbird            | <input type="checkbox"/> Chimney swift             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> European starling       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mourning dove             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dark-eyed junco         | <input type="checkbox"/> Downy woodpecker          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern cardinal       | <input type="checkbox"/> Hairy woodpecker          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-winged blackbird    |  |

## OTHER BIRDS YOU’VE SEEN

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

**Fun Fact:** From January to December 2013, one birder saw a record of 750 different bird species in the U.S., Canada, and nearby islands.



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