

OBSERVER

ISSUE 7 MAY EXCLUSIVE



Added:

Attracting Birds
In Your Backyard
w/ Native Plants

+ 2 Bird
Classifications

**BIRDS OF NEW
YORK FIELD
GUIDE**

Image from Pinterest



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

A quintessential guide to birdwatching in New York State



Written by: Abigail Tarun, Design Manager

Blessed with many habitats, there's a reason birdwatchers list New York as one of the top bird-watching destinations in the Northeast. Over 450 bird species spend time within this state each year, and with its beautiful hotspots like the Adirondacks and the Finger Lakes, New York offers unique opportunities to view many of those diverse species. Even if you've never birdwatched before, you can enjoy this simple pastime activity just by being observant in your own backyard or neighborhood year-round, and you don't have to spend so much money on equipment. All you really need is a good informative field guide and a decent pair of binoculars to get started. The activity of birdwatching itself can get you closer to nature as you learn more about a bird's behavior through observation.

Eastern Bluebird, the
State Bird of New York

Image from pixels.com



For any beginner wanting to take birdwatching seriously, you will enjoy your new hobby well if you gather the right equipment and clothing beforehand. Note that you can purchase any of these items at any local birding festival or event (like the annual Adirondack Boreal Birding Festival) from vendors. You can also visit a specialty bird store or nature shop at a local refuge or nature center. Of course if you don't have any of these places near you, you can always order online for the items listed below from any specialty store. ([Audubon](#) is great!)

Binoculars This is your primary tool for a birdwatcher. It gives you a super 8-times to 10-times magnified vision which helps you see birds better so that you can identify them. If you can, spend around \$150 to \$350 for a great starting binocular. It's highly recommended that you try out the binoculars before purchasing it in order to select a model that fits your hands, eyes, and style for birding.

Field Guide Just as binoculars give you the magnified vision to spot birds, field guides enable you to identify birds by matching the image and text in the guide with the bird or birds you are seeing. There are two types of field guides: one with photographs to illustrate fieldmarks, or ones that use artworks and illustrations. Pick whichever one feels best for you. Some of the most popular field guides to get are Peterson, Sibley, Kaufman, and National Geographic, which you can order online or get at your local bookstore.

Comfy Footwear It's hard to enjoy bird watching if your feet aren't comfortable. Bring the appropriate shoes for the type of environment you'll be in. Ankle-supporting hikers for woodlands or rocky trails, rubber boots for marshes, and lightweight tennis shoes or sturdy sandals for casual birdwatching along a boardwalk.

If you're ready to invest a little more money and effort, here are some great supplementary items for an even greater bird-watching experience.

Bird Club Membership There's no better way to expand your birding skills and opportunities than by joining a bird club. You'll be surrounded by a new social circle of people who share your interest in birds, and you'll be able to participate in the club's activities, such as field trips, bird counts, meetings, and presentations. Here are some great clubs that might be located near you: [Jamestown Audubon Society](#), [Allegany Co. Bird Club](#) in Belmont, and [Burroughs Audubon Nature Club](#) in Rochester.

Field Journal or Life List Many birders enjoy keeping notes about their field trips or birdwatching experiences and even keep a life list of any sightings. Basically, a life list documents all the bird species you've seen at least once in your life. Speaking of species, there are more than 900 regularly occurring bird species north of Mexico and, according to recent studies, 18,000 species worldwide. With so many species, recording your sightings allows you to keep track of which species you've seen in the area. A great tool to use is [eBird](#), a site which you can use to store your observations, recordings, notes, and sightings into one place.

Additional Resources for Birdwatching

These sites offer comprehensive information on thousands of bird species in North America and articles on just about every birdwatching topic or important birding event.

<https://www.audubon.org/>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>

Here is a comprehensive checklist of all 433 recognized bird species in New York:

<https://www.nybirds.org/Publications/NYSOA-FieldChecklist.pdf>



Now that you've prepared for an enjoyable birdwatching experience, it's time to learn some useful pointers and tips on how to bird in any location, time of day, weather, or season. With enough patience and practice, you'll start becoming a seasoned birdwatcher!

- **Become familiar with your surroundings.** When you start out birding, you may need to spend some time becoming acquainted with even your most commonplace species (near your backyard for example), become familiar with some of the best birdwatching places in the area, and even understand what birds you might expect to see at different times of the year. For your first trips, don't try to spot every bird you encounter. Rather, try to focus on the birds you see well, and then, learn how to identify those birds by their shape, color, size, habitat, behavior, and the sound of their calls.
- **Know the habitat.** Every bird has its preferred habitat for feeding and breeding - woods, fields, grasslands, wetlands, ponds, etc. - and is seldom found far from it. Learn what birds you will likely encounter in one habitat and which habitats a certain bird you are looking for prefers. Also, don't ignore what time of year it is. Different birds are present in the same habitats at different times of the year.
- **Blend in with your environment.** Many birds have poor color vision, but bright clothes, like whites, will contrast with the surrounding environment and enhance the appearance of movement. Wear darker colors or earth tones to blend into the background. Also, avoid any sudden movement to not startle the birds. The closer you are to a bird, the more slowly and quietly you should move.
- **Find a good spot.** The best places to go birdwatching are where two habitats meet, such as the edge of a forest and a meadow, or where muddy shorelines meet the water. Finding a spot where birds can find food and water can increase your chances of finding interesting species. Keep in mind the time of day, as well. While birds can be found 24 hours a day, many birds call out or sing at dusk and dawn because the cooler air and lower wind carries their song further. These songs will announce their presence and even help you locate the birds you can't see.
- **Be patient.** Having patience is a virtue and for birdwatching, especially. Some birds like to call out and make themselves known while others are more quiet by nature because they like to blend in with their environment. Either way, just keep listening to the sounds of their calls, and most importantly, remain calm even if you can't identify them. The challenges of birdwatching is part of the reason why the activity is rewarding, so just keep being persistent while also learning to enjoy nature's surroundings.

Helpful Observational Key - Look for the following symbols in this field guide (next to bird species). General areas of observation for bird species native to NY reported by bird observers to the NYSARC (New York State Avian Records Committee)

- * Species known to breed, to have bred, or to have established breeding in New York.
- Notation unavailable or not recorded by Committee
- (N) Anywhere within New York.
- (U) In upstate New York.
- (D) In downstate New York.
- (A) Outside the Adirondacks.
- (P) Outside of the pelagic zone but within New York State. Pelagic zone begins 3 [statute] miles from shore extends to the 200 nautical mile mark with state boundary lines marked.
- (S) Anywhere in New York State in spring.



Family *Passerellidae*: New World Sparrows and Allies

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Family: Passerellidae

The *Passerellidae* are a large family of passerines (sparrows) with distinctive finch-like beaks that primarily eat seeds.

1



Image from
massaudubon.org

3



Image from
audubon.org

5



Image from
massaudubon.org

4

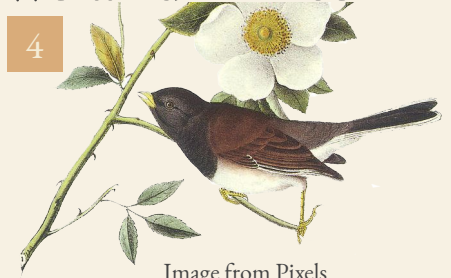


Image from Pixels

2



Image from
massaudubon.org

1. Vesper Sparrow *Poocetes gramineus* *

With its noticeable brown-streaked pattern and white tail feathers, the Vesper Sparrow is quite easy to spot anywhere out in the open field. In the summertime, its melodic tune or *vesper* can be heard clearly throughout the day in a descending series of trills and musical slurs. Often, the Vesper Sparrow will dust-bathe in the bare soil of open fields or meadows to pat out any of its feathers.

2. Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus* *

Under dense thickets of leaf-litter, you can typically hear the Eastern Towhee rummaging through the dry leaves and making lots of noise for its small size. During the nesting season, the males will make distinctive a *chewink* call to their mates, letting you know how common they really are in the forest. If you look near the leaf-litter, you will see the towhee's distinctive black coat layered in reddish-browns and a white underbelly.

3. American Tree Sparrow *Spizelloides arborea* (--)

Highly common in Canada's icy tundras, the plump-winged American Tree Sparrow typically make its way to weedy areas and marshes during the wintertime. They will scavenge for grass and weed seeds in open areas or will likely visit your backyard if they spot a seed feeder. While feeding or foraging in flocks, the American Tree Sparrow will toss back and forth making a *teel-wit* twitter sound varying from flock to flock.

4. Dark-Eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* *

Abundant in many coniferous forests and woods, the Dark-Eyed Junco commonly ventures to the forest floor looking for fallen seeds. While foraging through the ground, you will often hear high chip notes given almost absent-mindedly and sometimes even, intensifying in volume as they stoop for cover. While regional differences do exist, generally, the Juncos will have a slate-colored body with white outer tail feathers and a light pink bill.

5. Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis* *

Throughout North America, the Savannah Sparrow takes on three subtle yet distinct regional appearances which can confuse newer birdwatchers into thinking they are separate species. Look closely, however, and you will find that all three subspecies share the same thin, rounded underparts with a yellow mark in front of their eye. Savannah Sparrows tend to breed in open areas with low vegetation including tundras, grasslands, and farmlands. Males will sometimes make a distinct insect-sounding "hiss" to warn off intruders or alarm others nearby.



Family *Parulidae*: Wood-Warblers

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Passeriformes

Superfamily: Passeroidea

Family: Parulidae

The family *Parulidae* consists primarily of New World warblers, which are a group of small, colorful passerine birds. Most members of this family are insectivores. It's likely that these types of warblers originated in Central America, where the greatest number of species there are found.

1. Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia* *

Many male warblers are black and yellow, but the Magnolia Warblers stand out from the rest with their bold black necklaces complete with a lengthy tassel, black mask, and a pronounced white wing. Females bear white eyerings on their grey head and a moderate streaking pattern unlike the males. They will breed in dense strands of conifers and will perch by forests during migration to forage for hidden insects. Both males and females will call out with a nasal *zic* or *zeep* chirping sound.



Image from Fine Art America



Image from Fine Art America



Image from minniesland.com

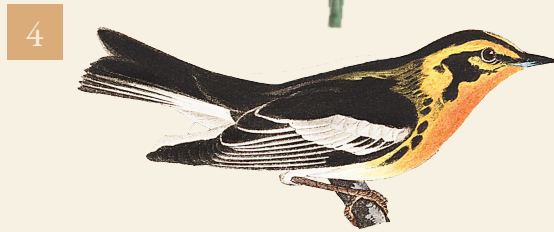


Image from National Audubon Society

2. Northern Parula *Setophaga americana* *

Hidden in the upper canopies of forests, the Northern Parula cheerfully hops about plucking the insects off of tree branches. While they may not be visible, the males, however, are easy to hear if you can recognize their buzzy trill heard constantly though early spring and mid-summer. During nesting season, the Northern Parulas like to hide their nests in Spanish Moss (in the South) or in the similar *Ursa* lichens of the North.

3. Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrina* *

Sharing a double life between the West Indies' palm trees in the winter and the northern spruce woods in the summer, the Cape May Warbler has differing tastes in food depending on where it lives at that time. In the summertime, the Cape May Warbler likes to collect nectar from tropical flowers with its curled semitubular tongue that is unique to this species. Its preferred food, however, is the spruce budworm which seemingly ties in with highly populated areas of the species. Among birders, it's easy to recognize the tiger-striped males in the spring, but the drab appearance (nonbreeding) in the fall can be quite confusing for any birdwatcher.

4. Blackburnian Warbler *Setophaga fusca* *

A fiery gem in the forest, the Blackburnian Warblers have a distinct look to them with a black and white plumage offset by a flame-orange face and throat. In the high tops of both deciduous and coniferous forests, Blackburnian Warblers will glean for lurking insects hidden in the undersides of dead leaves even while hovering (called "hover-gleaning") and will sometimes catch them in flight. Males will primarily sing a thin but rapid trilly pattern of *zip zip zips* with the last note, *tsee*, being much higher in pitch than the rest.



Family Trochilidae: Hummingbirds

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Clade: Apodiformes

Family: Trochilidae

The Family *Trochilidae* contains more than 300 species of brilliantly-colored hummingbirds which are the only birds that can fly backwards. Five species have been recorded in New York.



Image from
Pixels.com

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris* *

Glimmering in the sunlight, the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird radiates a jewel-like appearance with its viridian crown and white underpart coupled with its brilliant red throat. Hovering their position with exquisite control, the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird beats its wings 50 times per second in order to sip sugary-sweet nectar from tubular flowers such as honeysuckles, trumpet creepers, and morning glories. They will often visit backyards with hummingbird feeders as well and can easily pick up tiny insects in midair. If you listen closely, you can hear the soft mouse-like squeaks of the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird. Beyond the Great Plains, the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird is the only breeding species in the East.



Family *Accipitridae*: Hawks | Kites | Eagles

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

The *Accipitridae* are a family of small to large birds with strongly hooked bills for ripping apart flesh, keen eyesight, and powerful talons. Fourteen species have been recorded in New York from this family.

1. Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* *

A powerful predator of northern and mountain woods, the stealthy Northern Goshawk watches for prey on high perches and then attacks them with short, quick bursts of agile flight even through densely packed layers of vegetation. Classified as an accipiter, its short broad wings and long rudderlike tail give the Northern Goshawk superb aerial agility to chase birds and mammal prey. Northern Goshawks are known to be extremely protective of their nests. They commonly attack any animal or human that approach them too closely.

4. Red-Tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis* *

A lone predator of the open country, the Red-Tailed Hawk has a bulky and broad-winged build designed to effortlessly soar in the air. Like most predators, the Red-Tailed Hawk does most of its hunting by watching from a high perch, then swooping down to capture prey in its talons. Despite its widespread distribution and trademark reddish-brown tail, the rest of the Hawk's plumage can be quite variable, especially west of the Mississippi Red-Tails which can range from blackish to rufous-brown to nearly white. The Red-Tailed Hawk has the iconic war-like *keeeeer* cry you've probably heard by now in Old Western movies.

1

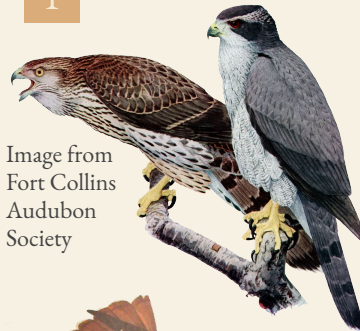


Image from
Fort Collins
Audubon
Society

3



Image
from
Pinterest

4



Image
from
Audubon
Galleries

2

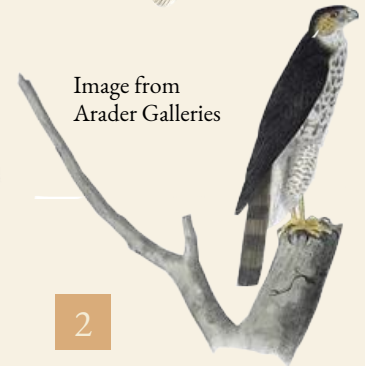


Image from
Arader Galleries

2. Cooper's Hawk *Accipiter cooperii* *

A skillful flier of the woodlands, the Cooper's Hawk tears through cluttered canopy layers in high speed pursuit of smaller birds (in the size of jays and robins) and mammals. They will conserve their flying with a flap-flap-glide pattern over time, and once they have spotted their prey, the Cooper's Hawk will cruise low to the ground, approaching from behind an obstruction to take down their prey as swiftly as possible. A typical adult has a steely blue-gray back with warm reddish bars on the underparts and thick dark bands on the tail.

3. Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* *

Bearing uncanny similarities to owls, the Northern Harrier mainly relies on their hearing as well as vision to capture their prey. Their disk-shaped face looks and functions much like an owl's, with stiff facial feathers helping to direct sound to the ears. This owl-like face can even hear mice and voles lurking beneath the vegetation. From a distance, the Northern Harrier has a distinctive appearance holding out its wings in a V-shape and sporting a white patch at the base of its tail. Each gray-and-white male may mate with as many as five females, which are larger and brown in appearance.



Family Anatidae: Ducks | Geese | Swan

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

The Family *Anatidae* classifies ducks and most duck-like waterfowl like geese and swans. These waterfowl have adapted to an aquatic lifestyle with webbed feet, a bill flattened to a lesser or greater extent, and feathers with special oil that can shed water. There are 47 registered species of this family recorded in New York.

1. Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* *

One of the most stunningly pretty waterfowls, both sexes of the Wood Duck share elegant yet distinct characteristics which include the iridescent chestnut and green body of the male and the delicate white pattern around the eyes of the female. Their diet consists mainly of seeds from trees and shrubs but also insects and crustaceans living by the swamps and marshes. Wood Ducks are one of the few species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on tree branches.

4. Canvasback *Aythya valisineria* *

Often called the aristocrat of ducks, the Canvasback has a certain condescending look to them with its long sloping forehead held high. Males stand out with a coppery-rusty head and neck with a pale whitish body bookended in black. As the largest within its genus, the Canvasback is known to be an excellent diver going all the way to the bottom of lakes and wetlands mainly to eat the roots or the leaves of the aquatic vegetation.



2. Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* (--)

A black-and-white sea duck common on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts in winter, the Surf Scoter's boldly patterned colors somewhat associate themselves to that of a skunk which is the colloquial basis for its name "skunk-headed coot." When feeding, the Surf Scoter springs forward and dives with its wings partly opened. They like to feed primarily on mollusks along with crustaceans, small fishes, echinoderms, and aquatic insects. You will most likely find the Surf Scoter around a fishing pier or a harbor of an ocean in Long Island.

3. Redhead *Aythya americana* (D)

Just as its name suggests, the Redhead duck has a dapper appearance with a cinnamon-brown head, a black breast and tail, and a neat gray body. These sociable ducks like to congregate together in huge flocks to molt and migrate in the wintertime particularly along the Gulf Coast of Mexico, where winter numbers can reach the thousands. While ducks in general often lay their eggs in the nests of others, Redheads take this parasitic behavior to the extremes by laying their eggs in at least 10 other species' nests including the predatory Northern Harrier. Strangely enough, a call of Redheads sounds like a grunting mew of a cat.

5. Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola* (--)

A tiny buoyant duck with a puffy shaped head, the Bufflehead spends winter bobbing in freshwater lakes or reservoirs usually alone, in pairs, but never in a flock. From a closer look, the males' heads illuminate a glossy green and purple setting off their striking white patch while the females have a subdued gray-brown head along with a white patch. Buffleheads like to use old tree cavities especially those used by woodpeckers as nests for their young.

6. Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* *

The Common Goldeneye adds a pleasant note to winter with its incandescent yellow eyes, glistening green-black head, and a crisp black-and-white body and wings. Eating mostly aquatic invertebrates and fish, these distinctively-shaped large-headed ducks will synchronously dive for their food at the same time in sections with their flock. Although, they tend not to mix well with other waterfowl. Look for Common Goldeneyes in large rivers, lakes, as well as the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts in winter.



Family Strigidae: Owls

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Strigiformes

Family: Strigidae

The Family *Strigidae* includes typical owls ranging from small to large nocturnal birds of prey. They have large forward-facing eyes, a hawk-like beak, and a facial disk that surrounds their eyes. Eleven owl species from this family have been recorded in New York.

1. Northern Saw-Whet Owl *Aegolius acadicus* (N)

A tiny cat-like owl with an oversized head and bright yellow eyes, the Northern Saw-Whet Owl may appear to be cute, but is actually very predatory when it comes to mice and other small rodents. At wintertime, they will prowl in the conifer trees late at night to avoid any detection. During daylight, the Northern Saw-Whet Owl will roost in dense vegetation, typically just above eye-level and near the trunk in evergreen trees. Saw-whets will make a soft *too-too* whisper-like song which can be heard up to half a mile away.

1



Image from
adopt-an-audubon-bird.nyhistory.org

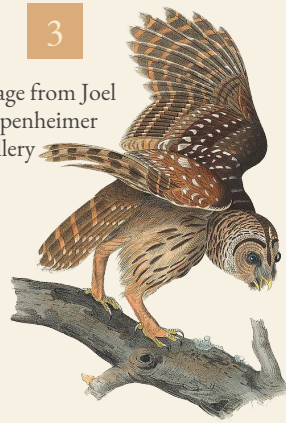
2



Image from
fineartamerica.com

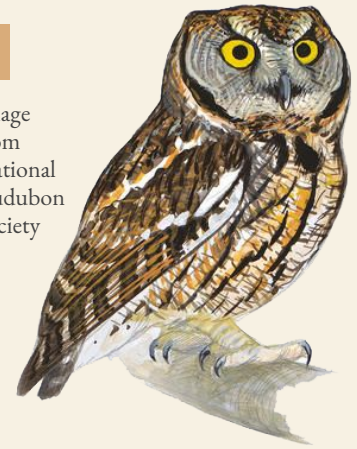
3

Image from Joel
Oppenheimer
Gallery



4

Image
from
National
Audubon
Society



2. Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus* *

With long, earlike tufts, the intimidating yellow-eyed stare, and deep hooting call, the Great Horned Owl is the quintessential owl of storybooks. A powerful predator, the Great Horned Owl can take down birds and mammals larger than its size including skunks, geese, and even hawks. Yet, it can also choose to go for daintier prey such as tiny scorpions, mice, and frogs. Great Horned Owls begin nesting very early in the north, and their hoots may be heard rolling across the floor late at night.

3. Barred Owl *Strix varia* *

While they are easy to hear with their distinct baritone hooting call, the Barred Owl can also pass completely unnoticed as it flies noiselessly through dense canopies of trees. Although the bird is mostly active at night, it will also call and even hunt in the daytime for small mammals and rodents. The Barred Owl has some attractive qualities to its appearance with its deep brown eyes and brown-and-white striped pattern. Their deep *boo* pattern sounds like a barking dog and a variety of other screeches mixed into it.

4. Eastern Screech Owl *Megascops asio* *

If you ever hear an eerie soft trill at night, know that it's coming from a tiny owl no larger than a pint glass. Common in the East, this robin-sized nightbird dwells in just about any city park or suburb as long as they are trees nearby for them to perch. While they may be in plain sight, these birds are actually highly camouflaged in the daytime hidden in nooks and crannies of inconspicuous places. Be sure to listen for their distinct mewing purr at night.



Family *Alcidae*: Murres | Puffins | Allies

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Charadriiformes

Clade: Pan-Alcidae

Family: Alcidae

The Family *Alcidae* consists of diving birds having short wings and tail, webbed feet, a large head and heavy body, and thick compact plumage. Including auks, puffins, guillemots, and murres, many of these species are confined to the Northern Hemisphere's northern parts like the Arctic Circle or Greenland.

1. Razorbill *Alca torda* (U)

Found only in the North Atlantic, this stocky, thick-billed auk nests on northern islands and coasts, often in the same colonies as murres. In winter, Razorbills live in flocks well offshore, but hardy observers who go out to the coast during winter storms may see them in flocks sweeping past, low over the water. Razorbills like to dive anywhere from 5 to 20 inches to get their food. Their diet consists mainly of fish especially like sand lance, herring, sprat, and capelin. Razorbills have a low gutturing croak call that sounds like a toad.

1

Image from
adopt-an-audubon-bird.nyhistory.org



2

Image from
adopt-an-audubon-bird.n
yhistory.org



3

Image from
Amazon



4

Image from
adopt-an-audubon-bird.n
yhistory.org



2. Dovekie *Alle alle* (U)

The smallest member of the auk family in the North Atlantic, Dovekie feeds on abundant tiny crustaceans in icy waters, and nests by the millions far above the Arctic Circle, often in northwest Greenland. In the wintertime, small numbers of Dovekies come as far as New England or occasionally all the way to Virginia in scarce numbers but the vast majority of Dovekies still remain farther up north. On the water, Dovekies bob about buoyantly; flocks fly low over the waves. Winter storms sometimes drive them close to the coast or even inland.

3. Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica* (N)

Sharply dressed in black and white with a huge multicolored bill, the Atlantic Puffin is often called the clown of the sea. It breeds in burrows on islands in the North Atlantic and winters at sea. In flight, puffins frantically flap their small wings to stay aloft, but underwater, those wings become powerful flippers that allow the birds to catch small fish one by one until they have a full beak. Outside of the breeding season, you'll likely need to take a pelagic birding trip well offshore to find one.

4. Thick-Billed Murre *Uria lomvia* (N)

A common bird of the far northern oceans, the Thick-Billed Murre is found in Arctic waters all across the globe, but there has also been reported sightings of this robust auk all the way down to South Carolina's coastlines. Using its wings underwater to hunt for fish and crustaceans, the Thick-Billed Murre can dive great depths anywhere from 100 to even 200 m below the surface. In fact, it can remain submerged for more than three minutes. Thick-Billed Murres will remain very far from land over deep waters, mostly in pack ice or cliff edges of rocks.



Family *Picidae*: Woodpeckers | Allies

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Piciformes

Infraorder: Picides

Family: *Picidae*

The Family *Picidae* consists of near-passerine birds including piculets, wrynecks, and sapsuckers. Most of these species live in forests or woodland habitats, although some species are known to live in treeless areas. Most members of the family forage for insect prey on the trunks and branches of trees, and often communicates by drumming with their beak.

1. Red-Headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus* *

Nicknamed the “flying checkerboard” due to its boldly patterned colors, the Red-Headed Woodpecker has a distinct appearance you will immediately recognize from its crimson head, snowy white body, and half white and inky black wings. Unlike most woodpeckers, the Red-Headed Woodpecker can skillfully catch insects midair and will even prefer to eat lots of acorns and beechnuts, often storing the remaining food in tree crevices for later. The harsh drilling sound from the wood and the distinctive *querr querr* call will give away the Red-Headed Woodpecker’s presence.

5. Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens* *

Barely outsize flocks of chickadees and nuthatches, the Downy Woodpecker is the smallest of all the woodpeckers in North America. In many parks and backyards with feeders, the Downy Woodpecker will become a frequent visitor eating suet, sunflower seeds, millet, peanuts, and even chunky peanut butter. Its small size, however, makes the Downy Woodpecker versatile to forage on weed stalks as well as large trees where it will even acrobatically hang upside down on minor branches and twigs. When excited, the Downy Woodpecker will make a quiet *pik* call repeated several times.

2. Black-Backed Woodpecker *Picoides arcticus* (A)*

One of the most enigmatic woodpecker species, the Black-Backed Woodpecker tends to stay confined to the boreal mountains and forests of central Alaska and northern Canada but will occasionally be spotted near the Adirondack Mountain range. Strangely enough, the Black-Backed Woodpecker will preferably forage on outbreaks of bark from dead trees and wood-boring insects such as the Cerambycidae beetle which colonizes on recently burned habitats. Its sooty jet black plumage will easily camouflage the woodpecker against the bark of the burned trees for foraging. Be sure to listen for its aggressive *kyik* call and scolding rattle.

3. Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus* *

Recognized by its flaming crest and strong chisel-shaped bill, the Pileated Woodpecker can easily excavate deep into dead bark to find nests of carpenter ants and other wood larvae. They will favor living in dead or deteriorating trees with enough hollow diameter for them to roost at night which will later be used by other mammals and birds like the Wood Duck and Boreal Owl for shelter and nesting. To indicate their territory, Pileated Woodpeckers will call out a series of piping *cuk-cuk-cuk* calls that fall in pitch and rise in volume.

4. Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus* *

Flashing bright colors under its wings (yellow if you are in the East and red if you are in the West), the tame Northern Flicker has soft brown plumage richly patterned with black spots, crescents, and bars. In most wooded regions of North America, the Northern Flicker will forage in the ground looking for ants and beetles using their slightly curved bill. Two subspecies, the Yellow-Shafted Flicker of eastern North America and the Red-Shafted Flicker of western North America, exist separately across the continent with some areas like the Great Plains having an intermixing of the two. Both subspecies will make a long evenly-spread *kikiki* call that will last 7 or 8 seconds.

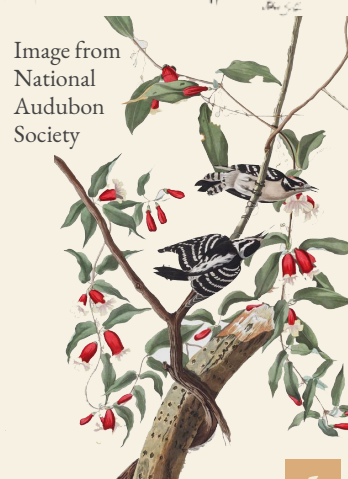
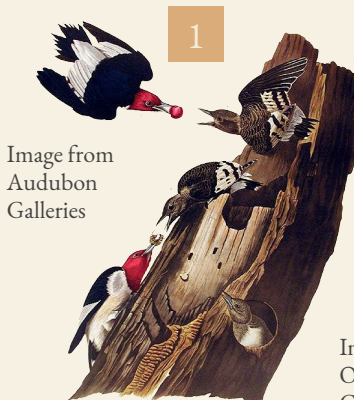


Image from Find A Bird

Image from Joel Oppenheimer Gallery

Image from finearta.merica.com

Image from National Audubon Society



Family *Ardeidae*: Bitterns | Herons | Egrets

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

The Family *Ardeidae* consists of long-legged freshwater bird species which are egrets, bitterns, and herons. Members of this family have longer harpoon-like bills and eat a wide variety of aquatic prey.

1

Image from
Heritage
Auctions



2

Image from
Rawpixels



3

Image from
Arader
Galleries



4

Image
from
Audubon
Prints



4. Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias**

Standing greatly poised at the riverbend, the Great Blue Heron slowly wades in the water waiting for fish to swim near, and afterwards, striking the prey with the thrust of its bill. As the most commonly widespread heron in North America, the Great Blue Heron thrives in all kinds of waters from the subtropical mangroves swamps to desert rivers and even the southern tip of Alaska. In flight, the Great Blue Heron will appear widespread with its head tucked in and long legs trailing out behind.

2. American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus**

Easily concealed within the reeds, the American Bittern is quite hard to spot because of its streaky brown pattern and striking concealment pose it makes with its bill pointed skyward. Amidst the tall marsh vegetation, the American Bittern will patiently stalk a fish, frog, or insect or they will stand motionless waiting for more prey. They become more visible around spring, when the American Bitterns are likely to make an odd mating sound that sounds whale-like.

1. Green Heron *Butorides virescens**

Seen alone on quiet riverbanks and enclosed marshes, the stocky Green Heron appears hunched over on the edge of shallow waters stalking for lurking minnows and crayfish. Sometimes, the Green Heron will lure its prey using "bait" like small twigs or insects. If it's out in the open, the Green Heron will nervously flick its tail raise or lower its crest. Seen up close, the Green Heron has a bold appearance with a rich chestnut body and velvety green back.

3. Little Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis**

One of the most smallest herons in the world, the Least Bittern will cling and climb to the stems of cattails and reeds with its long toes. Its narrow body allows it to slip through the dense vegetation and will often go unnoticed in its natural habitats, the marshes and reedy ponds. Even its quiet soft *coo-coo* call can go unnoticed at nighttime.



Create a Bird-Friendly Backyard with These Native Plants

By cultivating the right plants, you can attract specific avians to your backyard and create a healthy ecosystem for them to thrive in.



Image from Pinterest

Stag-Horn Sumac

Rhus typhina

Attracts: Black-capped Chickadee, Carolina Chickadee, Mountain Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Juniper Titmouse, Oak Titmouse

When food becomes scarce in wintertime, the Stag-horn Sumac produces fuzzy, red berries for many bird species to thrive on. In the fall, this perennial deciduous plant turns vivid shades of yellow and red and can grow comfortably in dry soil.



Image from Pinterest

Black Raspberry

Rubus occidentalis

Attracts: Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lark Sparrow

Producing dark, purple-black fruit in the late summer, the Black Raspberry provides a perfect nesting habitat for sparrows, shelter from the harsh weather, and even foraging grounds where all birds alike can hunt for insects.



Image from Pinterest

Black-Eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta

Attracts: House Finch, Purple Finch, Cassin's Finch, American Goldfinch, Lesser Goldfinch, Pine Siskin

This daisy-like flower with a brownish purple eye produces tiny seeds that finches can nibble at. Insects will pollinate the dainty annual for its nectar which draws out plenty of birds. The Black-Eyed Susan grows 1 to 2 inches tall in full sunlight with well-drained soil.



Image from Pinterest

American Elderberry

Sambucus canadensis

Attracts: Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-headed Grosbeak, Blue Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Western Tanager

A lesser known fruit, elderberries are a prized favorite to cardinals, grosbeaks, and tanagers. In the springtime, elderberry flowers will attract more insects which will attract more birds. One species, in particular, the Rose-breasted Grosbeak heavily depends on the purple fruit during fall migration.



Image from Pinterest

American Beech

Fagus grandifolia

Attracts: American Crow, Fish Crow, Northwestern Crow, Blue Jay, California Scrub-Jay, Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay, Florida Scrub-Jay

Aging golden bronze in the fall, the American Beech begins to produce triangular nuts enclosed by a spiky bract. During the fall and wintertime, many bird species will break open the nuts and eat them. The American Beech will also attract numerous caterpillars and butterflies which will in turn, draw many migrating birds.

Explore the best native plants to grow in New York using Audubon's Native Plants Database!

<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/grow-these-native-plants-so-your-backyard-birds-can-feast>



Bird Bibliography

Thanks for reading! Be sure to share this article with others!

“Birding For Beginners (U.S. National Park Service).” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, www.nps.gov/articles/birding-for-beginners.htm.

“Birding Tips for Beginners.” *Rochester Birding Association*, RBA, 16 Nov. 2018, rochesterbirding.com/birding-101/birding-tips-for-beginners/.

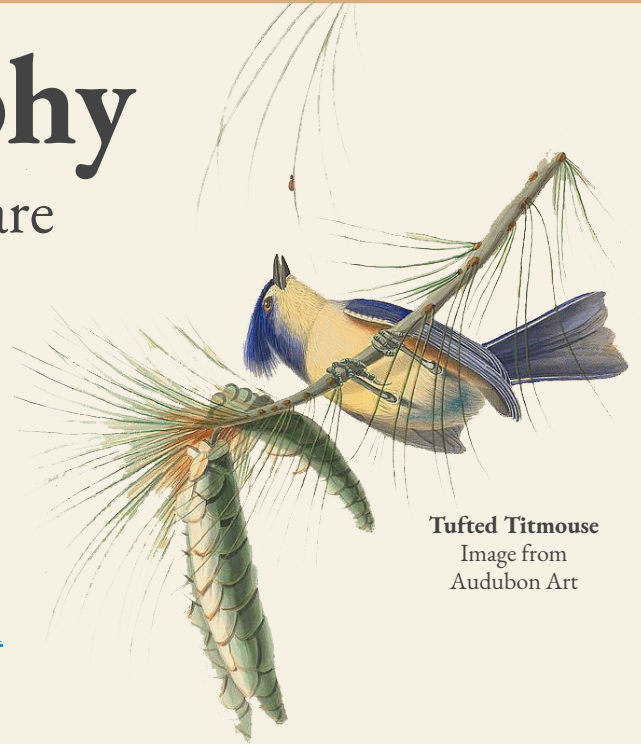
“Checklist of the Birds of New York State.” *New York State Ornithological Association, Formerly Federation of New York State Bird Clubs*, NYSARC, nybirds.org/Publications/ChecklistNYS.htm.

Kaufmann, Kenn. “Audubon Guide to North American Birds.” *Audubon*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, www.audubon.org/bird-guide.

“List of Birds of New York (State).” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 2 Mar. 2019, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_New_York_\(state\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_New_York_(state)).

“Search, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.” *Search, All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology*, Cornell University, 2015, www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/.

Thompson, Bill. “Top 10 Tips for Better Bird Watching.” *Bird Watcher's Digest*, Bird Watcher's Digest, 9 Oct. 2017, www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/youngbirders/how-to-find-birds.php.



Tufted Titmouse
Image from
Audubon Art

**Yellow-Billed
Cuckoo**
Image from
Audubon
Galleries



“The BWD Bird Club Finder.” *Bird Watcher's Digest*, Bird Watcher's Digest, <https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/birdclubs.php>

**All scientific drawings of birds used
in this article were created by
ornithologist John James Audubon**