

A GUIDE TO BIRDS AT EDGMONT COUNTRY CLUB

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FOREWORD

I am constantly amazed at the amount of wildlife, and especially bird life, that inhabits Edgmont Country Club. Many times while golfing, members of my foursome have seen a bird and been curious to find out what it was. I thought it might be fun to have a guide to some of the birds I've seen at Edgmont over the years.

This is in no way an exhaustive list of Edgmont birds. In particular, I'm slow to include sparrows, although I'm sure we have them, nor any wrens, titmice, warblers and some of the finches—mainly because I haven't taken the time to identify them at Edgmont (come on—I have to concentrate on my game just a little!). Perhaps some of you will help me add to the list.

The list is compiled using information from:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide>

It's a great site and has a lot of information for beginners on how to identify birds. The list is arranged in taxonomic order, which means that similar types of birds are grouped together. Under some of the bird names, I've included information on where I most often have encountered them, so you'll know where to look.

Enjoy, and happy birding!

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WATERFOWL

Canada Goose

(Every@#\$%!where!!)

The most familiar and widespread goose in North America, the Canada Goose can be found in all kinds of water all across the continent, from the tundra to the Gulf Coast. Some populations have become resident in urban areas, and are now coming into conflict with people.



Description

- Large waterbird
- Black head
- Long, black neck
- White chinstrap
- Light tan to cream breast feathers
- Brownish back
- White undertail
- Size: 76-110 cm (30-43 in)
- Wingspan: 127-170 cm (50-67 in)
- Weight: 3000-9000 g (105.9-317.7 ounces)

Cool Facts

Individual Canada Geese from most populations make annual northward migrations after breeding. Nonbreeding geese, or those that lost nests early in the breeding season, may move anywhere from several kilometers to more than 1500 km northward. There they take advantage of vegetation in an earlier state of growth to fuel their molt. Even members of "resident" populations, which do not migrate southward in winter, will move north in late summer to molt.

Snow Goose

(near the pond on 13)

A medium-sized goose that breeds on the arctic tundra, the Snow Goose travels south in very large, high-flying, noisy flocks. The swirling white of a descending flock suggests snow, but among the white birds are darker individuals. Until recently, the Blue Geese, as the dark birds were called, were considered a separate species. They are now recognized as merely a dark form (or "morph") of the Snow Goose.



Description

- Medium-sized goose
- Black patch on bill edges, the “grinning patch” or “smile”
- Two color forms: White morph: White all over, except for black primaries. Blue morph: White head and front of neck, body dark gray-brown. Complete range of intermediate forms occur.
- Length: 69-83 cm (27.2-32.7 in)
- Wingspan: 138 cm (54.3 in)
- Weight: 1600-3300 g (56.4-116.4 ounces)

Cool Facts

Snow Goose hunting in the eastern United States was stopped in 1916 because of low population levels. Hunting was allowed again in 1975 after populations had increased. Populations have been growing so large that the geese are destroying nesting habitat. Hunting has not slowed the dramatic increases in population size.

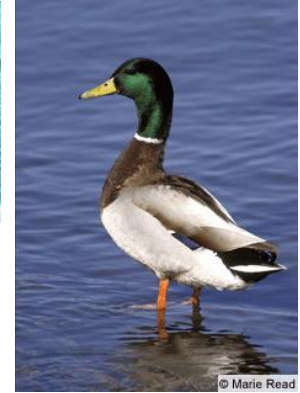
The dark color of the blue morph Snow Goose is controlled by a single gene, with dark being partially dominant over white. If a pure dark goose mates with a white goose, the offspring will all be dark (possibly with white bellies). If two white geese mate, they have only white offspring. If two dark geese mate, they will have mostly dark offspring, but might have a few white ones too.

Parents stay with their young through the first winter. Families travel together on both the southbound and northbound migrations, separating only after they return to the arctic breeding grounds. Family groups can easily be seen in migrating and wintering flocks.

Mallard

(pond on 10th, creek next to 12th tee)

One of the most familiar of ducks, the Mallard is found throughout North America and all across Eurasia. Where it does not occur naturally, it often has been introduced. It is found in all kinds of wetlands and is a familiar inhabitant of urban park ponds.



Description

- Large dabbling duck
- Male with iridescent green head, rusty chest, and gray body
- Female mottled brown
- Size: 50-65 cm (20-26 in)
- Wingspan: 82-95 cm (32-37 in)
- Weight: 1000-1300 g (35.3-45.89 ounces)

Cool Facts

The Mallard is the ancestor of nearly all domestic duck breeds (everything except the Muscovy Duck). Many of the domestic breeds look like the wild birds, but usually are larger. They are variable in plumage, often lacking the white neck ring or having white on the chest. Feral domestic ducks breed with wild Mallards and produce a variety of forms that often show up with wild ducks, especially in city parks.

Mallard pairs are generally monogamous. Mallard pairs form long before the spring breeding season. Pairing takes place in the fall, but courtship can be seen all winter. Only the female incubates the eggs and takes care of the ducklings.

Bufflehead

(pond right of 11)

A buoyant, large-headed duck that abruptly vanishes and resurfaces as it feeds, the tiny Bufflehead spends winters bobbing in bays, estuaries, reservoirs and lakes. Males are striking black-and white from a distance. A closer look at the head shows glossy green and purple setting off the striking white patch. Females are a subdued gray-brown with a neat white patch on the cheek. Bufflehead nest in old woodpecker holes, particularly those made by Northern Flickers, in the forests of northern North America.



Description

- Small diving duck
- Size: 32-40 cm (12-16 in)
- Wingspan: 55 cm (22 in)
- Weight: 272-635 g (9.6-22.4 ounces)



Cool Facts

The Bufflehead nests almost exclusively in holes excavated by Northern Flickers and, on occasion, by Pileated Woodpeckers. Unlike most ducks, the Bufflehead is mostly monogamous, often remaining with the same mate for several years.

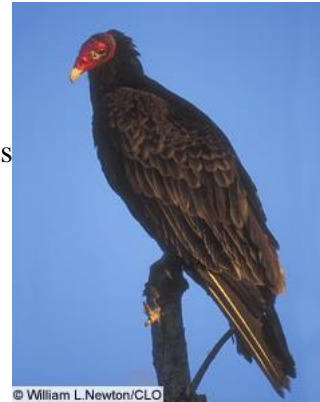
Bufflehead normally live only in North America, but in winter they occasionally show up elsewhere, including Kamchatka, Japan, Greenland, Iceland, the British Isles, Belgium, France, Finland, and Czechoslovakia. In some of these cases, the birds may have escaped from captivity. The oldest Bufflehead on record was at least 18 years and 8 months old. It was caught and re-released by a bird bander in New York in 1975.

VULTURES, HAWKS AND FALCONS

Turkey Vulture

(soaring over any open area)

Although it has an ugly, bare-skinned face, the Turkey Vulture is beautiful on the wing. Seldom does this graceful and talented bird flap its wings as it soars over large areas searching for carrion.



Description

- Large soaring bird
- Long wings and tail
- Body feathers entirely blackish-brown
- Red head mostly unfeathered
- Size: 64-81 cm (25-32 in)
- Wingspan: 170-178 cm (67-70 in)
- Weight: 2000 g (70.6 ounces)

Cool Facts

The Turkey Vulture uses its sense of smell to locate carrion. The part of its brain responsible for processing smells is particularly large, compared to other birds. Its heightened ability to detect odors allows it to find dead animals below a forest canopy.

Red-tailed Hawk

(all over the course)

The most common and widespread hawk in North America, the Red-tailed Hawk is a bird of open country. It is frequently seen sitting on utility poles where it watches for rodents in the grass along the roadside.



Description

- Large hawk
- Wings long and broad
- Tail broad and red
- Most commonly with pale chest and dark band across belly
- Size: 45-65 cm (18-26 in)
- Wingspan: 114-133 cm (45-52 in)
- Weight: 690-1460 g (24.36-51.54 ounces)

Cool Facts

The raspy cry of the Red-tailed Hawk is used in movies to represent any eagle or hawk anywhere in the world.

Bald Eagle

(various spots on the course)

The national emblem of the United States, the Bald Eagle was threatened with extinction in the lower 48 states because of DDT (a type of pesticide) poisoning. Protection under the Endangered Species Act, together with reintroduction programs, brought populations up, and the species was reclassified as Threatened in 1995. By 1999 some were suggesting that Bald Eagles could be removed from the endangered species list, and they were delisted in June 2007—a true conservation success story.



Description

- Very large raptor
- Adults unmistakable with brown body and white head and tail
- Bill large and hooked
- Long broad wings held flat while soaring
- Length: 71-96 cm (28-37.8 in)
- Wingspan: 204 cm (80.3 in)
- Weight: 3000-6300 g (105.8-222.2 oz)

Cool Facts

Humans are the most important source of mortality for this threatened species. Bald Eagles occasionally hunt cooperatively, with one individual flushing prey towards another. The immature Bald Eagle has a prolonged period of exploration lasting for four years. Some young from Florida have wandered north to Michigan, and birds from California have reached Alaska.

Osprey

(pond right of 11)

One of the largest birds of prey in North America, the Osprey eats almost exclusively fish. It is one of the most widespread birds in the world, found on all continents except Antarctica.



Description

- Large raptor
- White breast and belly
- Black back and wings
- Long wings, held with wingtips angled slightly backwards
- Dark eyestripe
- Crown and forehead white
- Length: 54-58 cm (21.3-22.8 in)
- Wingspan: 150-180 cm (59.1-70.9 in)
- Weight: 1400-2000 g (49.4-70.5 oz)

Cool Facts

The Osprey readily builds its nest on manmade structures, such as telephone poles, channel markers, duck blinds, and nest platforms designed especially for it. Such platforms have become an important tool in reestablishing Ospreys in areas where they had disappeared. In some areas nests are placed almost exclusively on artificial structures.

Osprey eggs do not hatch all at once, but instead the first chick hatches out up to five days before the last one. The older chick dominates its younger siblings, and can monopolize the food brought by the parents. If food is abundant, little aggression is seen amongst the chicks, but if food is limited, the younger chicks often starve.

The Osprey is a fish-eating specialist, with live fish accounting for about 99% of its diet. Barbed pads on the soles of its feet help it grip slippery fish. When an Osprey takes a large fish to its nest, it carries the fish headfirst to make it as aerodynamic as possible.

Peregrine Falcon

(two possible sightings along Hole 13—contact me if you see it)

Powerful and fast-flying, the Peregrine Falcon hunts medium-sized birds, dropping down on them from high above in a spectacular stoop. Virtually exterminated from eastern North America by pesticide poisoning in the middle 20th century, restoration efforts have made it a regular, if still uncommon sight in many large cities.



Description

- Large falcon, medium-sized hawk
- Black mustache mark on face
- Long pointed wings
- Length: 36-49 cm (14.2-19.3 in)
- Wingspan: 100-110 cm (39.4-43.3 in)
- Weight: 530-1600 g (18.7-56.4 oz)

Cool Facts

The name “peregrine” means wanderer, and the Peregrine Falcon has one of the longest migrations of any North American bird. Tundra-nesting falcons winter in South America, and may move 25,000 km (15,500 mi) in a year.

People have trained falcons for hunting for over a thousand years, and the Peregrine Falcon was always one of the most prized birds. Efforts to breed the Peregrine in captivity and reestablish populations depleted during the DDT years were greatly assisted by the existence of methods of handling captive falcons developed by falconers.

The Peregrine Falcon is one of the most widespread birds in the world. It is found on all continents except Antarctica, and on many oceanic islands.

GALLINACEOUS BIRDS

Helmeted Guineafowl

(back of 5th green, 6th tee)

The guineafowl are a family of birds in the Galliformes order. The guineafowl are native to Africa, but the Helmeted Guineafowl has been domesticated, and both feral and wild-type birds have been introduced elsewhere.



Description

- Gregarious, chicken-like birds with distinctively spotted and striped plumage; they are often domesticated or found in zoos.
- Guineafowl resemble partridges, but with featherless heads, though both members of the genus *Guttera* have a distinctive black crest. Most species of guineafowl have a dark grey or blackish plumage with dense white spots,
- Size: 40-71 cm (16-28 in)
- Weight: 700-1600 g (24-56 ounces)

Cool Facts

The species is normally monogamous, mating for life. However, occasional bigamy has been recorded for the Helmeted Guineafowl. All guineafowl are social, and typically live in small groups.

This family of insect and seed-eating, ground-nesting birds are sometimes used to control ticks.

My guess is they escaped from the colonial plantation in Ridley Creek State Park.

HERONS AND EGRETS

Great Egret

(13th hole along the pond)

A large white heron, the Great Egret is found across much of the world, from southern Canada southward to Argentina, and in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. It's the largest egret in the Old World, and thus has garnered the name Great White Egret. In the New World, however, the white form of the Great Blue Heron is larger. In the United States, the Great Egret used to be called the American Egret but that was hardly appropriate, since its range extends beyond the Americas and indeed farther than other herons.



Description

- Large, all white heron.
- Long, black legs and feet.
- Yellow bill is long, stout, and straight.
- Flies with neck pulled back in S-curve
- Length: 94-104 cm (37-41 in)
- Wingspan: 131-145 cm (51.6-57.1 in)
- Weight: 1000 g (35 oz)

Cool Facts

The Great Egret is the symbol of the National Audubon Society, one of the oldest environmental organizations in North America. Audubon was founded to protect birds from being killed for their feathers.

Not all young that hatch survive the nestling period. Aggression among nestlings is common and large chicks frequently kill their smaller siblings.

The longevity record for a wild Great Egret is nearly 23 years.

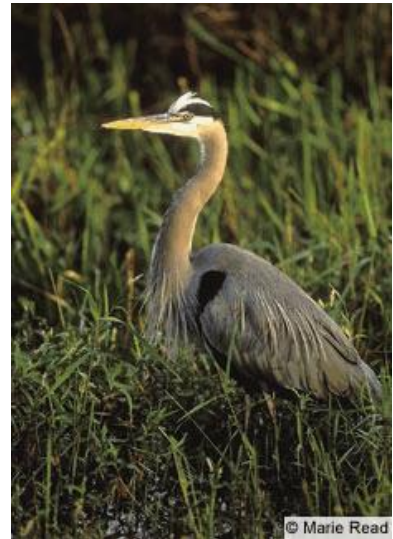
Great Blue Heron

(near creeks and ponds)

The largest and most widespread heron in North America, the Great Blue Heron can be found along the ocean shore or the edge of a small inland pond. An all white form is found from southern Florida into the Caribbean, and used to be considered a separate species, the "Great White Heron."

Description

- Large, gray bird
- Long legs
- Long, "S"-shaped neck
- Long, thick bill
- White crown stripe
- Black plume extending from behind eye to off the back of the neck
- Shaggy feathers on neck and back
- Bluish gray back, wings, and belly
- Reddish or gray neck
- White morph all white with pale legs, yellow bill
- Size: 97-137 cm (38-54 in)
- Wingspan: 167-201 cm (66-79 in)
- Weight: 2100-2500 g (74.13-88.25 ounces)



Cool Facts

Although the Great Blue Heron eats primarily fish, it is adaptable and willing to eat other animals as well. Several studies have found that voles (mice) were a very important part of the diet, making up nearly half of what was fed to nestlings in Idaho. Occasionally a heron will choke to death trying to eat a fish that is too large to swallow.

Green Heron

(13th hole, in creek right of bridge)

A small, stocky wading bird, the Green Heron is common in wet spots across much of North America. It can be difficult to see as it stands motionless waiting for small fish to approach within striking range, but it frequently announces its presence by its loud squawking.



Cool Facts

The Green Heron is one of the few tool-using birds. It commonly drops bait onto the surface of the water and grabs the small fish that are attracted. It uses a variety of baits and lures, including crusts of bread, insects, earthworms, twigs, or feathers.

Description

- Size: 41-46 cm (16-18 in)
- Wingspan: 64-68 cm (25-27 in)
- Weight: 240 g (8.47 ounces)
- Small, dark heron
- Long yellowish legs
- Long, dark, pointed bill
- Long neck often kept pulled in tight to body
- Legs and neck long, but shorter than most herons
- Greenish black cap on head. Wings blackish with greenish or bluish gloss. Neck rufous. Underparts gray. Wing feathers edged in buff. Legs yellow or yellowish orange; glossy orange during breeding. Slight crest can be raised on back of head. Eyes orange or yellow.

Habitat

Breeds in swampy thickets. Forages in swamps, along creeks and streams, in marshes, ponds, lake edges, salt marshes, ponds and pastures.

Food

Small fish, invertebrates, insects, frogs, and other small animals. Stands still next to water and grabs small fish with explosive dart of head and neck.

SHOREBIRDS AND GULLS

Great Black-backed Gull

The largest gull in the world, the Great Black-backed Gull is primarily a coastal species. A bird of the North Atlantic, it has been expanding its breeding and wintering ranges farther south along the East Coast and into the Great Lakes.



Description

- Large gull
- Underparts pure white
- Back and wings slaty to sooty black
- Thick yellow bill with red spot on lower mandible
- Legs pale pink
- Head has little dusky streaking in winter
- Takes four years to reach adult plumage
- Length: 71-79 cm (28-31 in)
- Wingspan: 146-160 cm (57.5-63 in)
- Weight: 1300-2000 g (45.9-70.5 oz)

Cool Facts

The Great Black-backed Gull is one of the many species whose feathers were used for fashionable clothing in the 1800s. After the demise of the feather trade in the early 1900s, Great Black-backed Gull populations increased and the species spread farther south. The exploitation of human refuse undoubtedly has contributed to the successful spread of the species.

Young Great Black-backed Gulls do not fly away from the nest area until they are about 50 days old. They return to the nesting territory to rest and be fed for another 50 days. Some young may remain with their parents for months after leaving the breeding colony, but most join congregations of other immature gulls in places where food is easy to find.

In winter, large numbers of young Great Black-backed Gulls eat fish driven to the surface by humpback whales.

PIGEONS AND DOVES

Mourning Dove

Abundant and widespread, the Mourning Dove is well known throughout most of North America. Its mournful call is heard from deserts to forest edges, from farmlands to inner cities.

Description

- Medium-sized bird
- Small head
- Long, pointed tail
- Light brown body
- Tail with white outer edges
- Size: 23-34 cm (9-13 in)
- Wingspan: 37-45 cm (15-18 in)
- Weight: 86-170 g (3.04-6.0 ounces)



Cool Facts

During nest-building, the female stays at the nest and the male collects sticks. He stands on her back to give her the nest material. She takes it and weaves it into the nest. Maybe that's why the nests are so poorly built!

A Mourning Dove pair rarely leaves its eggs unattended. The male usually incubates from midmorning until late afternoon, and the female sits the rest of the day and night.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

(in flowers outside the club house dining room)

The only species of hummingbird that breeds in eastern North America, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is found throughout the eastern deciduous and mixed forests. It flies nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico to winter in Central America.



Description

- Tiny bird
- Back iridescent green
- Hovers at flowers
- Male with brilliant iridescent red throat
- Size: 7-9 cm (3-4 in)
- Wingspan: 8-11 cm (3-4 in)
- Weight: 2-6 g (0.07-0.21 ounces)

Cool Facts

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird beats its wings 53 times a second.

The extremely short legs of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird prevent it from walking or hopping. The best it can do is shuffle along a perch. Nevertheless, it scratches its head and neck by raising its foot up and over its wing.

The Ruby-throated Hummingbird does not show a strong preference for any particular color of feeder. Instead, it prefers specific feeder locations.

KINGFISHERS

Belted Kingfisher

(diving into the pond on 10)

A common waterside resident throughout North America, the Belted Kingfisher is often seen hovering before it plunges headfirst into water to catch a fish. It frequently announces its presence by its loud rattling cry.

Description

- Medium-sized bird
- Large head and shaggy crest
- Large, thick bill
- Bluish head and back
- White throat and collar
- White underneath with blue breast band
- Size: 28-35 cm (11-14 in)
- Wingspan: 48-58 cm (19-23 in)
- Weight: 140-170 g (4.94-6.0 ounces)



Cool Facts

The Belted Kingfisher is one of the few bird species in which the female is more brightly colored than the male.

WOODPECKERS

Yellow-shafted Flicker

(between 13 and 14)

A common ant-eating woodpecker of open areas, the Northern Flicker has two color forms found in different regions. The yellow-shafted form is common across the eastern and northern parts of North America, while the red-shafted form is the one found in the West.

Description

- Medium to large woodpecker
- Grayish brown
- Barred on top, spotted below
- Black crescent on chest
- Rump white, conspicuous in flight
- Yellow patches in wings obvious in flight. Flight characterized by several wing flaps followed by a descending glide.
- Size: 28-31 cm (11-12 in)
- Wingspan: 42-51 cm (17-20 in)
- Weight: 110-160 g (3.88-5.65 ounces)



Cool Facts

Although it can climb up the trunks of trees and hammer on wood like other woodpeckers, the Flicker prefers to find food on the ground. Ants are its favorite food, and the flicker digs in the dirt to find them. It uses its long barbed tongue to lap up the ants.

The Flicker is one of the few North American woodpeckers that is strongly migratory. Flickers in the northern parts of the range move south for the winter, although a few individuals often stay rather far north.

Pileated Woodpecker

(once, flying over the 2nd green)

Nearly as large as a crow, the Pileated Woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in most of North America. Its loud ringing calls and huge, rectangular excavations in dead trees announce its presence in forests across the continent.

Description

- Large woodpecker
- Red crest on head
- Black body
- Size: 40-49 cm (16-19 in)
- Wingspan: 66-75 cm (26-30 in)
- Weight: 250-350 g (8.83-12.36 ounces)



Sound

Call a loud, ringing "kuk-kuk-kuk." Drumming loud and resonant.

Conservation Status

Pileated Woodpecker populations declined greatly with the clearing of the eastern forests. The species rebounded in the middle 20th century, and has been increasing slowly but steadily in most of its range. Only in Arkansas do numbers seem to be going down.

Cool Facts

The Pileated Woodpecker digs characteristically rectangular holes in trees to find ants. These excavations can be so broad and deep that they can cause small trees to break in half.

A Pileated Woodpecker pair stays together on its territory all year round. It will defend the territory in all seasons, but will tolerate floaters during the winter.

Downy Woodpecker

(creeping up trees)

The smallest and most common American woodpecker, the Downy Woodpecker is found throughout most of North America from Alaska to Florida. It lives in a variety of habitats from wilderness forests to urban backyards, and comes readily to bird feeders.

Description

- Small woodpecker
- Black and white plumage
- Plain white back
- Small, pointed bill
- Size: 14-17 cm (6-7 in)
- Wingspan: 25-30 cm (10-12 in)
- Weight: 21-28 g (0.74-0.99 ounces)



Cool Facts

Male and female Downy Woodpeckers may stay in the same areas in winter, but they divide up where they look for food. The male feeds more on small branches and weed stems, and the female feeds more on large branches and the trunks of trees. Males appear to keep the females from foraging in the more productive spots. When the male is removed from a woodlot, the female shifts her foraging to the smaller branches.

PERCHING BIRDS

Eastern Kingbird

A large dark flycatcher of fields and other open areas, the Eastern Kingbird is a common and widespread species. Despite its name, its range extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Head and back dark
- Throat, chest, and belly white
- White tip to dark tail
- Size: 19-23 cm (7-9 in)
- Wingspan: 33-38 cm (13-15 in)
- Weight: 33-55 g (1.16-1.94 ounces)



Cool Facts

The Eastern Kingbird is highly aggressive toward nest predators and larger birds. Hawks and crows are attacked regularly. A kingbird was observed to knock a Blue Jay out of a tree and cause it to hide under bush to escape the attack.

During the summer the Eastern Kingbird eats mostly flying insects and maintains a breeding territory that it defends vigorously against all other kingbirds. In the winter along the Amazon, however, it has a completely different lifestyle: it travels in flocks and eats fruit.

Parent Eastern Kingbirds feed their young for about seven weeks. Because of this relatively long period of dependence, a pair generally raises only one brood of young per nesting season.

Eastern Phoebe

Perhaps the most familiar flycatcher in eastern North America, the Eastern Phoebe nests near people on buildings and bridges. It can be recognized by its emphatic “phee-bee” call and its habit of constantly wagging its tail.

Description

- Small songbird
- Dark grayish brown back and head
- Lighter underparts
- No eyering or conspicuous wingbars
- Wags tail
- Size: 14-17 cm (6-7 in)
- Wingspan: 26-28 cm (10-11 in)
- Weight: 16-21 g (0.56-0.74 ounces)

Sound

Song is two rough, whistled notes, "fee-bee" with the second note rasping or with a stuttered, more whistly second note "fee-b-be-bee." Call note a clear chip.

Cool Facts

In 1804, the Eastern Phoebe became the first banded bird in North America. John James Audubon attached silvered thread to an Eastern Phoebe's leg to track its return in successive years.

The use of buildings and bridges for nest sites has allowed the Eastern Phoebe to tolerate the landscape changes made by humans and even expand its range. However, it still uses natural nest sites when they are available.



Tree Swallow

(nesting box near 5th Ladies' tee, flying low on 9th fairway)

A common swallow of marshes and open fields, the Tree Swallow is a ready inhabitant of nest boxes.

Description

- Size: 12-15 cm (5-6 in)
- Wingspan: 30-35 cm (12-14 in)
- Weight: 16-25 g (0.56-0.88 ounces)
- Small slender songbird
- White underneath and shiny blue-green on top
- Small bill
- Long wings
- Tail notched and of medium length
- Face dark, throat white



Cool Facts

The Tree Swallow winters farther north than any other American swallow, and it returns to its nesting grounds long before other swallows come back. Its ability to use plant foods helps it survive periods of bad weather.

Habitat

Open areas near water and fields, especially wooded swamps and shorelines.

Food

Flying insects and some berries. Catches insects in flight.

Reproduction

Nest is an open cup of grass or pine needles placed in tree cavity or nest box. Lined with feathers, usually of waterfowl.

Barn Swallow

(flying low between 11 and 18)

Glistening cobalt blue above and tawny below, Barn Swallows dart gracefully over fields, barnyards, and open water in search of flying insect prey. Look for the long, deeply forked tail that streams out behind this agile flyer and sets it apart from all other North American swallows. Barn Swallows often cruise low, flying just a few inches above the ground or water. True to their name, they build their cup-shaped mud nests almost exclusively on human-made structures.



Description

- Size: 15-19 cm (6-7.5 in)
- Wingspan: 29-32 cm (11-13 in)
- Weight: 17-20 g (0.6-0.7 ounces)
- When perched, appears cone shaped
- Steely blue back, wings and tail; rufous to tawny underparts
- Deep-forked tail

Cool Facts

The Barn Swallow is the most abundant and widely distributed swallow species in the world. It breeds throughout the Northern Hemisphere and winters in much of the Southern Hemisphere.

Barn Swallows feed on the wing, snagging insects from just above the ground or water to heights of 100 feet or more. They fly with fluid wingbeats in bursts of straight flight, rarely gliding, and can execute quick, tight turns and dives. When aquatic insects hatch, Barn Swallows may join other swallow species in mixed foraging flocks.

Although the killing of egrets is often cited for inspiring the U.S. conservation movement, it was the millinery (hat-making) trade's impact on Barn Swallows that prompted naturalist George Bird Grinnell's 1886 *Forest & Stream* editorial decrying the waste of bird life. His essay led to the founding of the first Audubon Society.

According to legend, the Barn Swallow got its forked tail because it stole fire from the gods to bring to people. An angry deity hurled a firebrand at the swallow, singeing away its middle tail feathers.

The oldest known Barn Swallow in North America was 8 years, 1 month old.

Purple Martin

(bird house between 11 and 18)

Putting up a Purple Martin house is like installing a miniature neighborhood in your backyard. In the East, dark, glossy-blue males and brown females will peer from the entrances and chirp from the rooftops all summer. In the West, martins mainly still nest the old-fashioned way—in woodpecker holes. Our largest swallows, Purple Martins perform aerial acrobatics to snap up flying insects. At the end of the breeding season they gather in big flocks and make their way to South America.



Description

- Size: 19-20 cm (7.5-8 in)
- Wingspan: 39-41 cm (15-16 in)
- Weight: 45-60 g (1.6-2.1 ounces)
- Very large, broad-chested swallows with stout, slightly hooked bills, short, forked tails and long tapered wings
- Males are iridescent, dark blue-purple with brown-black wings and tail
- Females and immatures are duller, with variable amounts of gray on the head and chest and a whitish lower belly

Cool Facts

Purple Martins fly rapidly with a mix of flapping and gliding. They feed in midair, catching large, aerial insects such as dragonflies. Martins feed and roost in flocks, often mixed with other species of swallows. They often feed higher in the air than other swallows, which can make them tough to spot.

Purple Martins are colonial, with dozens of martins nesting in the same spot; they feed in open areas, especially near water. In the East they nest almost exclusively in nest boxes and martin houses; in the West you'll find them nesting in natural cavities.

Putting up martin houses used to be so common that John James Audubon used them to choose his lodgings for the night. In 1831, he remarked, "Almost every country tavern has a martin box on the upper part of its sign-board; and I have observed that the handsomer the box, the better does the inn generally prove to be."

Purple Martins roost together by the thousands in late summer, as soon as the chicks leave the nest. They form such dense gatherings that you can easily see them on weather radar. It's particularly noticeable in the early morning as the birds leave their roosts for the day, and looks like an expanding donut on the radar map.

The Purple Martin not only gets all its food in flight, it gets all its water that way too. It skims the surface of a pond and scoops up the water with its lower bill.

Blue Jay

A familiar sight at bird feeders, the boldly patterned Blue Jay is unmistakable. It is abundant in the East and is extending into the West, using food and shelter provided by humans.



Description

- Large songbird
- Crest on head
- Upper parts various shades of blue
- Size: 25-30 cm (10-12 in)
- Wingspan: 34-43 cm (13-17 in)
- Weight: 70-100 g (2.47-3.53 ounces)

Cool Facts

Many people dislike the Blue Jay because it is known to eat the eggs and nestlings of other birds. However, in an extensive study of Blue Jay feeding habits, only 1% of jays had evidence of eggs or birds in their stomachs. Most of the diet was composed of insects and nuts.

Common Crow

Widespread, common, and obvious, the American Crow is known by most people. What is less well known is how complex its life is. Young crows remain with their parents until they can find a home of their own, and individual relationships may last years.



Description

- Eyes dark brown
- Legs black
- All feathers black glossed with violet
- Size: 40-53 cm (16-21 in)
- Wingspan: 85-100 cm (33-39 in)
- Weight: 316-620 g (11.15-21.89 ounces)

Cool Facts

American Crows congregate in large numbers in winter to sleep in communal roosts. These roosts can be of a few hundred, to up to two million crows. Some roosts have been forming in the same general area for well over 100 years. In the last few decades some of these roosts have moved into urban areas where the noise and mess cause conflicts with people.

Young American Crows do not breed until they are at least two years old, and most do not breed until they are four or more. In most, but not all, populations the young stay with their parents and help them raise young in subsequent years. Families may include up to 15 individuals and contain young from 5 different years.

Black-capped Chickadee

(heard more than seen)

One of the most familiar and beloved birds in northern North America, the Black-capped Chickadee is a frequent visitor to bird feeders. Its apparently cheerful activity throughout the harshest winters has won it the admiration of many people.

Description

- Small, short-billed bird
- Black cap
- Black bib
- White cheeks
- Size: 12-15 cm (5-6 in)
- Wingspan: 16-21 cm (6-8 in)
- Weight: 9-14 g (0.32-0.49 ounces)
- Song: two or three notes whistled, with first higher in pitch; call suggests name "chick-a-dee-dee."



Cool Facts

The Black-Capped Chickadee hides seeds and other food items for later recovery. Each item is placed in a different spot and a bird can remember thousands of hiding places.

The chickadee's simple-sounding calls have been found to be extremely complex and language-like. They code information on identity and recognition of other flocks as well as predator alarms and contact calls.

Mockingbird

(all over, but especially around 6th green and 9th tee)

The "American nightingale," the Northern Mockingbird is known for its long, complex songs that include imitations of many other birds. It is a common bird of hedgerows and suburbs, and has been slowly expanding its range northward.



Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Long tail
- Pale gray above, whitish below
- Bill thin
- Two white wingbars
- Large white patches show in wings in flight
- White outer tail feathers
- Size: 21-26 cm (8-10 in)
- Wingspan: 31-35 cm (12-14 in)
- Weight: 45-58 g (1.59-2.05 ounces)

Cool Facts

The Northern Mockingbird is a loud and persistent singer. It sings all through the day, and often into the night. Most nocturnal singers are unmated males, which sing more than mated males during the day too. Nighttime singing is more common during the full moon. In well-lit areas around people, even mated males may sing at night.

A Northern Mockingbird continues to add new sounds to its song repertoire throughout its life.

The female Northern Mockingbird sings too, although usually more quietly than the male does. She rarely sings in the summer, usually only when the male is away from the territory. She sings more in the fall, perhaps to establish a winter territory.

Gray Catbird

A secretive, but curious skulker of dense thickets, the Gray Catbird is heard more than it is seen. Its rambling song contains imitations of other bird songs, but the characteristic "mew" that gives it its name is not an imitation and sounds only vaguely cat-like.

Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Small bill
- Long tail
- Uniform gray all over
- Black cap
- Size: 21-24 cm (8-9 in)
- Wingspan: 22-30 cm (9-12 in)
- Weight: 23-56 g (0.81-1.98 ounces)



Cool Facts

Although the Brown-headed Cowbird (see p. 21) lays eggs in Gray Catbird nests, the catbird throws most of them out. The catbird learns to recognize its own eggs, probably by looking at them. If a cowbird quickly replaces the first catbird egg in a nest, the catbird may recognize the cowbird egg as its own and throw out its own eggs as they are laid. But such mistakes are rare, and few catbirds are ever seen incubating cowbird eggs.

Eastern Bluebird

(nest boxes, especially next to Ladies' 5th tee)

The red, white, and blue Eastern Bluebird is a familiar and welcomed tenant of birdhouses in suburban yards, parks, and golf courses. The popularity of "bluebird trails" and the erection of nest boxes across the country have led to increased bluebird populations in many areas.



Description

- Medium-sized songbird; small thrush
- Head large and round
- Wings and tail blue
- Chest reddish-orange
- Size: 16-21 cm (6-8 in)
- Wingspan: 25-32 cm (10-13 in)
- Weight: 28-32 g (0.99-1.13 ounces)

Conservation Status

Populations declined in 1960s and 1970s, but increased thereafter. Increased popularity of nest box campaigns is probably responsible for increases. Vulnerable to competition from introduced nest-hole competitors, such as European Starlings and House Sparrows. Common and increasing in eastern North America.

Cool Facts

Life inside a bluebird nestbox is very active. The male Eastern Bluebird does a "Nest Demonstration Display" at the nest cavity to attract the female. He brings nest material to the hole, goes in and out, and waves his wings while perched above it. That is pretty much his contribution to nest building; only the female Eastern Bluebird builds the nest and incubates the eggs.

Eastern Bluebirds typically have more than one successful brood each year. Young produced in early nests usually leave their parents in summer, but young from later nests frequently stay with their parents over the winter.

American Robin

The American Robin is a familiar sight pulling up worms on suburban lawns. Although it's at home breeding in deep, mature forests, the robin is the most widespread thrush in North America thanks to a tolerance for human-modified habitats.



Description

- Large thrush
- Back and wings gray
- Underparts red
- Dark head with white eye crescents
- Size: 20-28 cm (8-11 in)
- Wingspan: 31-40 cm (12-16 in)
- Weight: 77 g (2.72 ounces)

Cool Facts

The American Robin eats both fruit and invertebrates. Earthworms are important during the breeding season, but fruit is the main diet during winter. Robins eat different types of food depending on the time of day; they eat earthworms early in the day and more fruit later in the day. Because the robin forages largely on lawns, it is vulnerable to pesticide poisoning and can be an important indicator of chemical pollution.

Although the appearance of a robin is considered a harbinger of spring, the American Robin actually spends the winter in much of its breeding range. However, because they spend less time in yards and congregate in large flocks during winter, you're much less likely to see them.

European Starling

Beginning with 100 individuals introduced into Central Park in New York City in the early 1890s, the European Starling has become one of the most numerous birds on the North American continent. Its successful spread is believed to have come at the expense of many native birds that compete with the starling for nest holes.

Description

- Stocky, black bird
- Short, square-tipped tail
- Pointed, triangular wings
- Long pointed bill, yellow in breeding season
- Shimmering green and purple feathers in spring
- Size: 20-23 cm (8-9 in)
- Wingspan: 31-40 cm (12-16 in)
- Weight: 60-96 g (2.12-3.39 ounces)



Cool Facts

All the European Starlings in North America descended from 100 birds released in New York's Central Park in the early 1890s. A group dedicated to introducing America to all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's works set the birds free. Today, European Starlings range from Alaska to Florida and northern Mexico, and their population is estimated at over 200 million birds.

Red-winged Blackbird

One of the most abundant birds in North America, the Red-winged Blackbird is found in wetlands and agricultural areas across the continent. The black male can hide the brilliant red shoulders or show them off in a dazzling display. The striped female looks strikingly different than the male and could almost be mistaken for a large dark sparrow.

Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Moderately long and slender bill
- Tail of medium length
- Male plumage is well described by the name
- Size: 17-23 cm (7-9 in)
- Wingspan: 31-40 cm (12-16 in)
- Weight: 32-77 g (1.13-2.72 ounces)



Cool Facts

The male Red-winged Blackbird fiercely defends his territory during the breeding season. He may spend more than a quarter of all the daylight hours in territory defense. He vigorously keeps all other males out of the territory and defends the nests from predators. He will attack much larger animals, including horses and people.

Common Grackle

A familiar sight on suburban lawns, the Common Grackle can be recognized by its iridescent purple and bronze plumage and long, keel-shaped tail. It's expanding its range into the far West, but is most common in the East.

Description

- Large blackbird
- Iridescent black all over
- Long tail, keel-shaped in flight
- Eyes yellow
- Size: 28-34 cm (11-13 in)
- Wingspan: 36-46 cm (14-18 in)
- Weight: 74-142 g (2.61-5.01 ounces)



Cool Facts

The Common Grackle is an opportunistic forager, taking advantage of whatever food sources it can find. It will follow plows for invertebrates and mice, wade into water to catch small fish, and sometimes kill and eat other birds at bird feeders.

Brown-headed Cowbird

The Brown-headed Cowbird is the only brood parasite common across North America. A female cowbird makes no nest of her own, but instead lays her eggs in the nests of other bird species, who then raise the young cowbirds.



Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Medium-long tail
- Bill stout and pointed
- Male shiny black with brown head and neck
- Female dull gray-brown
- Size: 17-22 cm (7-9 in)
- Wingspan: 28-36 cm (11-14 in)
- Weight: 38-50 g (1.34-1.77 ounces)

Cool Facts

The Brown-headed Cowbird is the only brood parasite common across North America. A female cowbird makes no nest of her own, but instead lays her eggs in the nests of other bird species, who then raise the young cowbirds.

The Brown-headed Cowbird lays eggs in the nests of many different species of birds. Recent genetic analyses have shown that some female cowbirds will use a number of different hosts, but most females specialize on one particular host species.

Social relationships are difficult to figure out in birds that do not build nests, but male and female Brown-headed Cowbirds are not monogamous. Genetic analyses show that males and females have several different mates within a single season.

Baltimore Oriole

With its brilliant orange and black plumage, the Baltimore Oriole's arrival is eagerly awaited by birders each spring migration. Its preference for open areas with tall trees has made it a common inhabitant of parks and suburban areas.

Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Male brilliant orange with black head
- Size: 17-19 cm (7-7 in)
- Wingspan: 23-30 cm (9-12 in)
- Weight: 30-40 g (1.06-1.41 ounces)



Cool Facts

The “orioles” of the Americas were named after similarly-appearing birds in the Old World. The American orioles are not closely related to the true orioles in the family Oriolidae. They are more closely related to blackbirds and meadowlarks. Both New and Old world orioles are brightly colored with red, yellow, and black; have long tails and long pointed bills; build hanging, woven nests; and prefer tall trees around open areas.

Young male Baltimore Orioles do not achieve adult plumage until the fall of their second year. But some first-year males with female-like plumage succeed in attracting a mate and nest successfully.

Northern Cardinal

The brilliantly colored Northern Cardinal has the record for popularity as a state bird: in the United States, it holds that title in seven states.

This common bird is a winter fixture at snow-covered bird feeders throughout the Northeast, but it only spread to New York and New England in the mid-20th century.



Northeast, but it only

Description

- Medium-sized songbird
- Large crest on head
- Heavy, conical red bill
- Face surrounded by black
- Male entirely brilliant red
- Female grayish-tan with red tail and wings
- Size: 21-23 cm (8-9 in)
- Wingspan: 25-31 cm (10-12 in)
- Weight: 42-48 g (1.48-1.69 ounces)

Sound

Song a series of clear whistles, the first down-slurred and ending in a slow trill. "Cheer, cheer, cheer, what, what, what, what." Call a sharp "chip."

Cool Facts

Population density and range of the Northern Cardinal has increased over the last 200 years, largely as a response to habitat changes made by people. However, it is listed as a species of special concern in California and may disappear there because of habitat loss.

The male cardinal fiercely defends its breeding territory from other males. When a male sees its reflection in glass surfaces, it frequently will spend hours fighting the imaginary intruder.

American Goldfinch

A familiar and abundant small colorful bird, the American Goldfinch is frequently found in weedy fields and visiting feeders. It shows a particular fondness for thistles, eating the seeds and using the down to line its nest.



Description

- Small bird
- Bill small, pointed, conical, and pink
- Body bright yellow to dull brown
- Wings dark with large white wingbars
- Tail short and notched
- Breeding male bright yellow with black cap and wings
- Size: 11-13 cm (4-5 in)
- Wingspan: 19-22 cm (7-9 in)
- Weight: 11-20 g (0.39-0.71 ounces)

Cool Facts

The American Goldfinch changes from winter plumage to breeding plumage by a complete molt of its body feathers. It is the only member of its family to have this second molt in the spring; all the other species have just one molt each year in the fall.

The American Goldfinch is mostly monogamous, but a number of females switch mates after producing a first brood. The first male takes care of the fledglings while the female goes off to start another brood with a different male.

Chipping Sparrow

A common small sparrow of yards, gardens, and forest openings, the Chipping Sparrow is probably best known for its dry, trilling song. One of the smallest sparrows, it commonly nests in ornamental evergreens.

Description

- Small sparrow
- Breast unmarked
- Rufous crown
- White line above eye
- Black stripe through eye
- Size: 12-14 cm (5-6 in)
- Wingspan: 19-21 cm (7-8 in)
- Weight: 11-15 g (0.39-0.53 ounces)



Cool Facts

Instead of having simple molts like most birds and changing its body feathers once or twice a year, the Chipping Sparrow may change the feathers of its face and throat up to six times in one year. The rest of the body feathers are only replaced once or twice in the same period.