

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

American Goldfinch

Carduelis tristis

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family FRINGILLIDAE - Subfamily Carduelinae

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

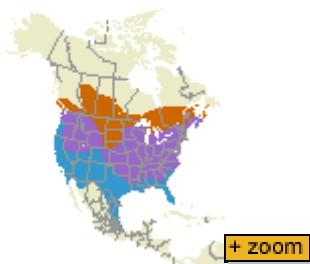
For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

American Goldfinch, male, breeding plumage

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



+ zoom

American Goldfinch, female, breeding plumage



+ zoom

American Goldfinch, male, nonbreeding plumage



+ zoom

American Goldfinch, female, nonbreeding plumage



[+ zoom](#)

American Goldfinch nest



[+ zoom](#)

American Goldfinch eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Summer male is bright yellow with a black cap whereas female is drab olive. Sexes similar and drab in winter.

Sound

Song a long series of twittering and warbling notes. Common contact call a "tsee-tsi-tsi-tsit," often given in flight. May be described as "per-chic-o-ree" or "po-ta-to-chip."

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Abundant and widespread. Populations appear stable.

Other Names

Chardonneret jaune (French)

Dominiquito viajero, Dominiquito triste (Spanish)

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 one of the latest nesting birds. It usually does not start until late June or early July, when most other songbirds are finishing with breeding. The late timing may be related to the availability of suitable nesting materials and seeds for feeding young.
- The American Goldfinch is gregarious throughout the year. In winter it is found almost exclusively in flocks. In the breeding season it feeds in small groups. Whether it maintains breeding territories is debatable.
- 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.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Middleton, A. L. A. 1993. American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 80 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

American Tree Sparrow

Spizella arborea

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family EMBERIZIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

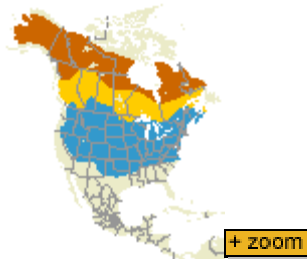


© Isidor Jeklin/CLO

+ zoom

American Tree Sparrow

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The American Tree Sparrow is a common winter visitor in backyards all across southern Canada and the northern United States. Despite its common name, it forages on the ground, nests on the ground, and breeds primarily above treeline in the far North.

Description

[top](#)

- Small songbird.
- Rusty brown crown and eyestripe on gray head.
- Dark spot in center of unstreaked breast.
- Two white wingbars.
- Tail rather long.

- Size: 14 cm (6 in)
- Wingspan: 24 cm (9 in)
- Weight: 13-28 g (0.46-0.99 ounces)

Sex Differences

Sexes alike.

Sound

Song a series of thin, high, sweet whistled notes. Call a hard "tseet."

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Common. Remote breeding areas little affected by people. Uses human-modified habitats readily in winter.

Other Names

Bruant hudsonien (French)

Cool Facts

- During the summer, the American Tree Sparrow eats nearly 100% animal matter (mostly insects). In the winter it eats none, turning then to eating entirely seeds and other plant foods.
- As in most birds, the American Tree Sparrow is sensitive to changes in day length, which influence the growth of the sex organs. Increasing day length in late winter causes the gonads to grow. This sensitivity to light is independent of vision. Blind tree sparrows in captivity still show normal patterns of gonadal growth when kept in the proper light conditions.
- No one knows just how many American Tree Sparrows exist. But they breed across a vast expanse of northern Canada and Alaska, approximately 100 million hectares (247 million acres). If the area is about 10-20% filled by tree sparrows, and they have 1-ha territories, as is the case near Churchill, Manitoba where they have been well studied, then approximately 10 to 20 million pairs should be breeding.
- A study found that the American Tree Sparrow seems to prefer to look for predators out of its left eye. This preference may be because the right hemisphere of the brain is dominant for processing visual information. Oddly, the Dark-eyed Juncos examined in the same study preferred to look out of their right eyes.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

1. Franklin, W. E., III, and S. L. Lima. 2001. Laterality in avian vigilance: Do sparrows have a favourite eye? *Animal Behaviour* 62: 879-885.
2. Naugler, C. T. 1993. American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 37 (A. Poole, P. Stettenheim, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family CORVIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

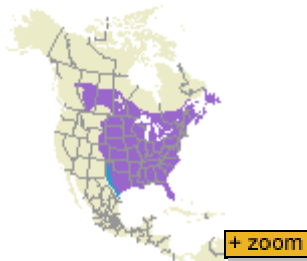
For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

Blue Jay adult and nestlings

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

Blue Jay nest



[+ zoom](#)

Blue Jay eggs



[+ zoom](#)

Baby Blue Jays

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- Large songbird.
- Crest on head.
- Upperparts 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)

Sex Differences

Sexes alike.

Sound

Very vocal; make a large variety of calls. Most frequent call is a harsh "jeer." Also clear whistled notes and gurgling sounds.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Breeding Bird Survey data show a slight but significant decline in Blue Jay numbers across the United States, with most of the decline in the East. Some have implicated it in the decline of some Neotropical migrant species because it is a nest predator and prefers forest edges, but little direct evidence has been found.

Other Names

Geai bleu (French)

Cool Facts

- Although the migration of Blue Jays is an obvious phenomenon, with thousands moving past some points along the coast, much about it remains a mystery. Some jays are present throughout the winter in all parts of the range. Which jays move and which stay put? Although young jays may be more likely to migrate than adults, many adults do migrate. Some individual jays may migrate south in one year, stay north the next winter, and then migrate south again the next year. Why do they migrate when they do?
- 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.
- The Blue Jay frequently mimics the calls of hawks, especially the Red-shouldered Hawk. It has been suggested that these calls provide information to other jays that a hawk is around, or that they are used to deceive other species into believing a hawk is present.
- Tool use in birds is rare. Although no tool use has been reported for wild Blue Jays, captive jays used strips of newspaper to rake in food pellets from outside of their cages.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Tarvin, K. A., and G. E. Woolfenden. 1999. Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 469 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Brown-headed Nuthatch

Sitta pusilla

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family SITTIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

Brown-headed Nuthatch

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)



Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

One of the few birds found almost exclusively in the United States, the Brown-headed Nuthatch is restricted to the pine forests of the southeastern states. A small but declining population is also found in The Bahamas.

Description

[top](#)

- Small nuthatch; climbs headfirst down tree trunks.
- Crown dull brown.
- Underparts whitish.
- Back, nape, wings, and rump blue gray.

- Size: 10-11 cm (4-4 in)
- Wingspan: 16-18 cm (6-7 in)
- Weight: 10 g (0.35 ounces)

Sex Differences

Sexes alike.

Sound

Calls are high pitched and squeaky, like the squeaks of a rubber duck toy.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Decreasing throughout range because of habitat degradation. The population on Grand Bahama Island, which is possibly a distinct subspecies, is nearly gone, probably the result of logging. Listed on the [Audubon Watchlist](#).

Other Names

Sitelle à tête brune (French)

Sita del Pinar (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Tool use in birds is rare, but the Brown-headed Nuthatch will use a piece of bark as a lever to pry up other bark to look for food. It may carry the bark tool from tree to tree, and may use it to cover a

seed cache.

- Nests of Brown-headed Nuthatches are regularly attended by extra birds, usually young males. Whether these helpers-at-the-nest are older offspring of the breeding pair is not yet known.
- The Brown-headed Nuthatch may sleep in a tree cavity or in the open on pine branches. The female or the breeding pair roosts in the nest cavity before the eggs are laid and throughout the nestling period.
- The Brown-headed Nuthatch often joins mixed species foraging flocks in winter. In these flocks the nuthatch appears to compete for food with the Pine Warbler, another pine specialist species. The two birds displace each other from the preferred foraging spots, with the nuthatch attacking the warbler just as frequently as the warbler attacks the nuthatch.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Withgott, J. H., and K. G. Smith. 1998. Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 349 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Downy Woodpecker

Picoides pubescens

Order PICIFORMES - Family PICIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

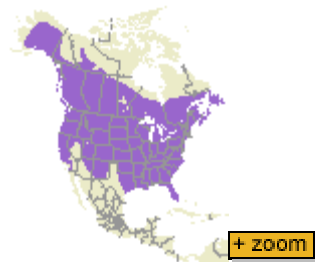


© Bill Marchel/CLO

+ zoom

Downy Woodpecker, male

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA

 [Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

Downy Woodpecker, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Male with red patch on back of head, female with black patch.

Sound

Call note a sharp "pik." Also a harsh rattle or whinny.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)
[top](#)

Conservation Status

Widespread and abundant. May be slightly increasing in some areas.

Other Names

Pic mineur (French)

Cool Facts

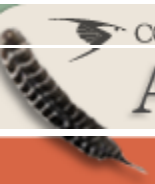
- The Downy Woodpecker is a frequent member of mixed species flocks in winter. The woodpecker is less vigilant looking for predators and more successful at foraging when in such a flock. It will readily join chickadees or other birds mobbing a predator, but it remains quiet and does not actually join in the mobbing.
- 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.
- The Downy Woodpecker uses sources of food that larger woodpeckers cannot, such as the insect fauna of weed stems. It will cling to goldenrod galls to extract the gall fly larvae. The woodpecker prefers larger galls, and uses the exit tube constructed by the larva to extract it.
- The Downy Woodpecker varies gradually across its range. Larger birds are found in the north and at higher elevations, while smaller birds live in the south and at lower elevations. Western woodpeckers tend to have less white in the wings and less black on the outer tail feathers.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Jackson, J. A., and H. R. Ouellet. 2002. Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 613 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family TURDIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

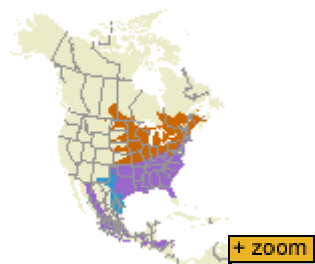


© Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen/CLO

+ zoom

Eastern Bluebird, adult male

[About the photographs](#)



+ zoom

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)

© Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen/CLO



+ zoom

Eastern Bluebird, adult female



© Jane Calabria

+ zoom

Eastern Bluebird juvenile



+ zoom

Eastern Bluebird nest



[+ zoom](#)

Eastern Bluebird eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Male dark blue with bright reddish chest. Female drab gray-blue with duller reddish chest.

Sound

Song a rich warbling whistle broken into short phrases: "Tu-wheet-tudu." Also a dry chatter.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Populations declined in 1960s and 1970s, but increased thereafter. Increased popularity of nest box campaigns 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.

Other Names

Merlebleu de l'Est (French)
Azulejo garganta canela (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Life inside a bluebird nestbox is very active. Go [here](#) to take a look at what goes on, through the help of a [Nest Box Cam](#) provided by [The Birdhouse Network](#) at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- 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. See a [Birdscope article](#) for data from [The Birdhouse Network](#) that show this graphically. Young produced in early nests usually leave their parents in summer, but young from later nests frequently stay with their parents over the winter.
- Clutch size varies with latitude and longitude, with bluebirds farther north and farther west having larger clutches. For a discussion of this phenomenon based on data from [The Birdhouse Network](#), click [here](#) or [here](#).

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Gowaty, P. A., and J. H. Plissner. 1998. Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 381 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family STURNIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

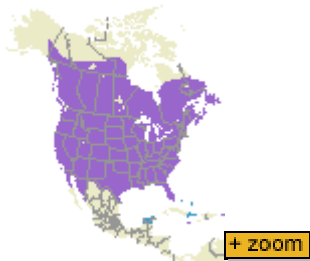


© D.P.H. Watson/CLO

+ zoom

European Starling, adult, breeding plumage

[About the photographs](#)



+ zoom

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

European Starling, adult, non-breeding plumage



[+ zoom](#)

European Starling, juvenile molting to 1st winter plumage



[+ zoom](#)

European Starling nest



[+ zoom](#)

European Starling eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Sexes similar.

Sound

Song is a rather quiet series of rattles and whistled notes, often containing mimicry of other bird species. Flight call a purring "prurrp."

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Introduced into North America in the 1890s, the European Starling quickly spread across the continent. It is a fierce competitor for nest cavities, and frequently expels native bird species. It is believed to be responsible for a decline in native cavity-nesting bird populations, but a study in 2003 found few actual effects on populations of 27 native species. Only sapsuckers showed declines because of starlings, and other species appeared to be holding their own against the invaders.

Other Names

L'étourneau sansonnet (French)
Estornino pinto (Spanish)

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.
- Although the sexes look very similar, they do show some subtle differences. The male tends to be larger, more iridescent, and have longer throat feathers, but some females can be larger, more glossy, and have longer feathers than some males. During breeding when they have yellow bills, the base of a male's lower mandible is blue-gray, while the female's is pinkish. The male's eyes are a uniform deep brown, but the female has a narrow, lighter colored ring around the outer edge. In confusing cases, some males four years old or older can develop a faint ring in the eye, and some older females can lose it.
- A female European Starling may try to lay an egg in the nest of another female. A female that tries this parasitic tactic often is one that could not get a mate early in the breeding season. The best females find mates and start laying early. The longer it takes to get started, the lower the probability of a nest's success. Those parasitic females may be trying to enhance their own breeding efforts during the time that they cannot breed on their own.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

1. Cabe, P. R. 1993. European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 48 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.
2. Koenig, W. D. 2003. European Starlings and their effect on native cavity-nesting birds. *Conservation Biology* 17: 1134-1140.
3. Sandell, M. I., and M. Diemer. 1999. Intraspecific brood parasitism: a strategy for floating females in the European starling. *Animal Behaviour* 57: 197-202.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Field Sparrow

Spizella pusilla

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family EMBERIZIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

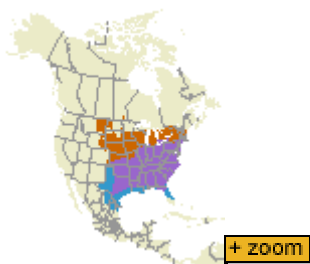
For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

Field Sparrow

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)

6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The Field Sparrow is a common, drab sparrow of brushy pastures and old fields. It has a simple, yet distinctive song of repeated clear whistled notes on one pitch that increase in rate until they make a trill.

Description

- Small sparrow.
 - Dully marked.
 - Unstreaked chest.
 - Reddish cap.
 - Gray face with thin white eyering.
 - Bill pink.
-
- Size: 12-15 cm (5-6 in)
 - Wingspan: 20 cm (8 in)
 - Weight: 11-15 g (0.39-0.53 ounces)

Sex Differences

Sexes alike, males slightly larger.

Sound

Song a series of clear whistled notes, increasing in rate until they become a trill, much in the same pattern as a bouncing ball.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Declining throughout range.

Other Names

Bruant des champs (French)

Chimbito Llanero (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- The Field Sparrow often feeds directly on fallen seeds. It may fly to the top of grass stalks, let its weight carry the stems to the ground, and then begin removing the seed.
- If a male Field Sparrow survives the winter, it usually returns to breed in the same territory each year. The female is less likely to return to the same territory, and young sparrows only rarely return the next year to where they were born.
- The male Field Sparrow starts singing as soon as he gets back in the spring. He sings vigorously until he finds a mate, but after that he sings only occasionally.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Carey, M. D. E. Burhans, and D. A. Nelson. 1994. Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 103 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The

American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) ©2003 Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Bird Guide

Species Accounts

Video Gallery

Hairy Woodpecker

Picoides villosus

Order PICIFORMES - Family PICIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

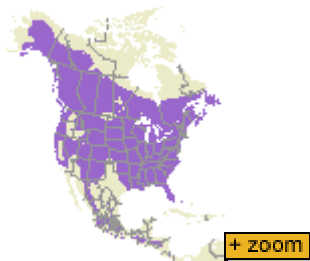


© J.R.Woodward/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Hairy Woodpecker, male

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

[+ zoom](#)

Hairy Woodpecker, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The most widespread resident woodpecker in North America, the Hairy Woodpecker is one of the most familiar too. It comes readily to bird feeders and is found in a variety of habitats.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium-sized woodpecker.
- Black and white plumage.
- Plain white back.
- Bill thick and rather long.

- Size: 18-26 cm (7-10 in)
- Wingspan: 33-41 cm (13-16 in)
- Weight: 40-95 g (1.41-3.35 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male with red patch on back of head, female with black patch.

Sound

Call note a sharp "peek." Also a harsh rattle. Drum is very fast, with abrupt beginning and end.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)
[top](#)

Conservation Status

Common and widespread. May be declining slightly in some areas.

Other Names

Pic chevelu (French)
Carpintero-veloso mayor (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- The Hairy Woodpecker shows a great deal of morphological variation across its broad range, with more than 17 recognized subspecies. Northern birds tend to be larger than those farther south. Western birds are dark underneath and have few spots on the wings, while eastern birds are white underneath and have extensive spotting. Hairies in the Rocky Mountains are white below, but have few spots on their wings. Populations on islands often are distinctive.
- Across most of North America the Hairy Woodpecker can be found at a variety of elevations from sea level to high in the mountains. In Central America, it is restricted to the higher mountain forests.
- The Hairy and Downy woodpeckers occur together throughout most of their ranges. The Downy Woodpecker uses smaller branches while the Hairy Woodpecker tends to spend more time on the trunk. It might be thought that the larger woodpecker excludes the smaller one from more productive foraging spots, but it appears that just the reverse is true. In the Bahamas, where the Downy Woodpecker does not occur, the Hairy Woodpecker uses the branches more frequently.
- The Hairy Woodpecker is attracted to the heavy blows a Pileated Woodpecker makes when it is excavating a tree. The hairy forages in close association with the larger woodpecker, pecking in the deep excavations and taking insects that the pileated missed.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Jackson, J. A., H. R. Ouellet, and B. J. S. Jackson. 2002. Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 702 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

House Finch

Carpodacus mexicanus

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family FRINGILLIDAE - Subfamily Carduelinae

▼ **Summary Page**

► **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

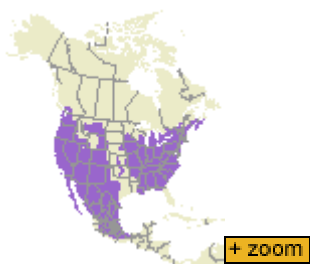


© Marie Read

[+ zoom](#)

House Finch, male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



+ zoom

House Finch, female



+ zoom



+ zoom

House Finch eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)

6. [Full detailed species account](#)

A bright red and brown-striped bird of the cities and suburbs, the House Finch comes readily to feeders. It also breeds in close association with people, and often chooses a hanging plant in which to put its nest.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium-sized finch.
- Male bright red on head, chest, and rump; female brown and striped.
- Bill short and thick, with rounded top edge.
- Two thin white wingbars.

- Size: 13-14 cm (5-6 in)
- Wingspan: 20-25 cm (8-10 in)
- Weight: 16-27 g (0.56-0.95 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male red, female grayish brown with stripes.

Sound

Song a hoarse warble that goes up and down rapidly. Call note a sharp "cheep."

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Common and benefiting from human development. Eastern populations cut in half by eye disease in the last decade. To find out more about this disease and learn how you can help track it and its effects, go to the [House Finch Disease Survey](#) home page, or [here](#) for an article on the topic from *Birdscope*.

Other Names

Roselin familiar (French)

Gorrión doméstico, Gorrión común, Gorrión mexicano (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- The House Finch was originally a bird of the southwestern United States and Mexico. In 1940 a small number of finches were turned loose on Long Island, New York, and they quickly started breeding. They spread across the entire eastern United States and southern Canada within the next 50 years.
- The red or yellow color of a male House Finch comes from pigments that it gets in its food during molt. The more pigment in the food, the redder the male. Females prefer to mate with the reddest male they can find, perhaps assuring that they get a capable male who can find enough food to feed the nestlings.
- When nestling House Finches defecate, the feces are contained in a membranous sac, as in most birds. The parents eat the fecal sacs of the nestlings for about the first five days. In most songbird species, when the parents stop eating the sacs, they carry the sacs away and dispose of them. But House Finch parents do not remove them, and the sacs accumulate around the rim of the nest.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Hill, G. E. 1993. House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 46 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family PASSERIDAE

▼ **Summary Page**

► **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

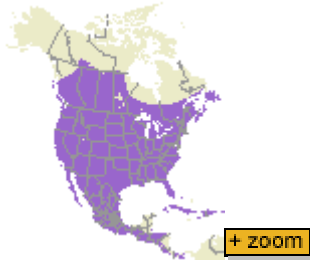


© Lang Elliott/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

House Sparrow, adult male, breeding plumage

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



+ zoom

House Sparrow, adult male, non-breeding plumage



+ zoom

House Sparrow, adult female, winter



+ zoom

House Sparrow nest



[+ zoom](#)

House Sparrow eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The Sparrow to many, the House Sparrow was introduced into North America from its native Europe in the 1850s. It successfully spread across the continent, and is abundant in urban and agricultural habitats. Although it is found in many remote places, it nearly always stays near people and their buildings.

Description

[top](#)

- Small, stocky songbird.
- Bill thick.
- Legs short.
- Chest unstreaked.
- Wingbars.
- Male with black throat and white cheeks.

- Size: 14-16 cm (6-6 in)
- Wingspan: 19-25 cm (7-10 in)
- Weight: 26-32 g (0.92-1.13 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male with reddish back and black bib, female brown with eyestripe.

Sound

Calls a slightly metallic "cheep, chirrup." Song a series of cheeps.

» [listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Competition from the House Sparrow for cavity nests can cause decline of some native species. House Sparrow populations declining across most of range.

Other Names

Moineau domestique (French)
Gorrión domestico, Gorrión común (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- The House Sparrow was introduced into Brooklyn, New York, in 1851. By 1900 it had spread to the Rocky Mountains. Its spread throughout the West was aided by additional introductions in San Francisco, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah.
- The House Sparrow has been present in North America long enough for evolution to have influenced their morphology. Populations in the north are larger than those in the south, as is generally true for native species (a relationship known as Bergman's Rule).
- Although not a water bird, the House Sparrow can swim if it needs to, such as to escape a predator. Sparrows caught in a trap over a water dish tried to escape by diving into the water and swimming underwater from one part of the trap to another.
- The House Sparrow is a frequent dust bather. It throws soil and dust over its body feathers, just as if it were bathing with water.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Lowther, P. E. and C. L. Cink. 1992. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 12 (A. Poole, P. Stettenheim, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Mountain Bluebird

Sialia currucoides

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family TURDIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

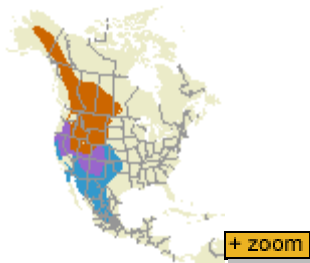
For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

Mountain Bluebird, male

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

[+ zoom](#)

Mountain Bluebird, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

A common sight in rangeland and other open areas of the American West, the male Mountain Bluebird is a breathtaking brilliant sky blue. It prefers more open habitats than the other bluebirds and can be found in colder habitats in winter.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium-sized songbird; small thrush.
- Head large and round.
- Body chunky.
- Tail medium length.
- Blue in wings and tail.

- Male sky blue overall.
- Size: 16-20 cm (6-8 in)
- Weight: 30 g (1.06 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male entirely sky blue, female gray with blue in wings and tail.

Sound

Song a short series of burry whistles. Call a nasal, nonmusical "tew."

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Benefits from many human activities; populations stable or increasing.

Other Names

Merlebleu azuré (French)

Azulejo pálido (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Most studies of the Mountain Bluebird involve birds in nest boxes. Little is known about natural nest site requirements.
- Only the female builds the nest. The male sometimes acts as if he is helping, but he either brings no nest material or he drops it on the way.
- Mountain and Western bluebirds compete for nest boxes, and may exclude each other from their territories. In the small area where they overlap, the Mountain Bluebird dominates the Eastern Bluebird. This relationship may limit the westward expansion of the Eastern Bluebird.
- The Mountain Bluebird often occurs outside its normal range in winter. Individuals are casually recorded in western and northern Alaska, and in the midwestern and eastern states.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Power, H. W., and M. P. Lombardo. 1996. Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 222 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura

Order COLUMBIFORMES - Family COLUMBIDAE

▼ [Summary Page](#)

► [Detailed Page](#)

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



© Michael J. Hopiak/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Mourning Dove, adult male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



+ zoom

Mourning Dove, female



+ zoom

Mourning Dove juvenile



+ zoom

Mourning Dove nest



[+ zoom](#)

Mourning Dove eggs



[+ zoom](#)

Mourning Dove nest

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Sexes similar, but males slightly larger and slightly more colorful, with bluish crown and pink chest.

Sound

Song a plaintive Òcoo-OOH, Ooo-Ooo-OooÓ. Wings whistle in flight.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)
[top](#)

Conservation Status

Widespread and abundant. Hunted throughout its range. Possibly declining in West.

Other Names

Tourterelle triste (French)
Huilota (Spanish)

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!
- The Mourning Dove almost invariably lays two eggs. Clutches of three or four are the result of more than one female laying in the nest. A dove may have up to five or six clutches in a single year.
- 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.
- The Mourning Dove is the most widespread and abundant game bird in North America. Despite being hunted throughout most of its range, it remains among the 10 most abundant birds in the United States.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Mirarchi, R. E., and T. S. Baskett. 1994. Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 117 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis cardinalis

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family CARDINALIDAE

▼ [Summary Page](#)

► [Detailed Page](#)

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

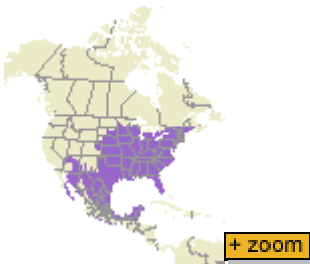


© Marie Read

[+ zoom](#)

Northern Cardinal, adult male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



+ zoom

Northern Cardinal, adult female



+ zoom

Northern Cardinal, juvenile



+ zoom

Northern Cardinal nest



[+ zoom](#)

Northern Cardinal eggs

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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.

Description

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Male brilliant red, female tan.

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."

» [listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Population density and range increased over the last 200 years, largely as a response to habitat changes made by people. The cardinal benefits from park-like urban habitats and the presence of bird feeders. However, it is listed as a species of special concern in California and may disappear there because of habitat loss.

Other Names

Cardinal rouge (French)
Cardenal rojo, Cardenal norteño, Cardenal común (Spanish)

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 female Northern Cardinal sings, often from the nest. The song may give the male information about when to bring food to the nest. A mated pair shares song phrases, but the female may sing a longer and slightly more complex song than the male.
- 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.
- Brighter red males hold territories with denser vegetation, feed at higher rates, and have greater reproductive success than duller males.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Halkin, S. L., and S. U. Linville. 1999. Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 440 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus

Order PICIFORMES - Family PICIDAE

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

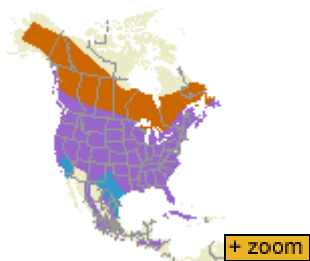


© Isidor Jeklin/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Northern Flicker, adult male, yellow-shafted

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

Northern Flicker, adult female, yellow-shafted



+ zoom

Northern Flicker, adult male, red-shafted



+ zoom

Northern Flicker, female, red-shafted

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)

5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- Medium to large woodpecker.
- Grayish brown.
- Barred on top, spotted below.
- Black crescent on chest.
- Rump white, conspicuous in flight.
- Yellow or red patches in wings obvious in flight.

- Size: 28-31 cm (11-12 in)
- Wingspan: 42-51 cm (17-20 in)
- Weight: 110-160 g (3.88-5.65 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male with black or red mustache stripe. Female without mustache stripe, or with brown one.

Sound

Call a long series of loud "wik-wik-wik" notes. Also a softer "wik-a-wik-a-wik-a," and a strong single-note "peah."

» [listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Widespread and common, but populations declining.

Other Names

Pic flamboyant (French)

Carpintero alirrojo, Pic-palo lombricero (Red-shafted Flicker) (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Although it can climb up the trunks of trees and hammer on wood like other woodpeckers, the Northern 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 red-shafted and yellow-shafted forms of the Northern Flicker formerly were considered different species. The two forms hybridize extensively in a wide zone from Alaska to the panhandle of Texas. A hybrid often has some traits from each of the two forms and some traits that are intermediate between them. The Red-shafted Flicker also hybridizes with the Gilded Flicker, but less frequently, and the Gilded Flicker is considered a separate species.
- The Northern 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.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Moore, W. S. 1995. Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*). In The Birds of North America, No. 166 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

Order PICIFORMES - Family PICIDAE

▼ **Summary Page**

► **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

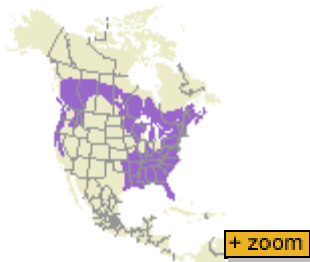


© Warren Greene/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Pileated Woodpecker, male

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)



© Fred K. Truslow/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Pileated Woodpecker, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

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

[top](#)

- 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)

Sex Differences

Sexes similar, male has red crown and forehead and red in black mustache stripe. Female has gray to yellow-brown forehead and no red in mustache stripe.

Sound

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

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

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.

Other Names

Grand pic (French)

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.
- The feeding excavations of a Pileated Woodpecker are so extensive that they often attract other birds. Other woodpeckers, as well as House Wrens, may come and feed there.
- The Pileated Woodpecker prefers large trees for nesting. In young forests, it will use any large trees remaining from before the forest was cut. Because these trees are larger than the rest of the forest, they present a lightning hazard to the nesting birds.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Bull, E. L., and J. A. Jackson. 1995. Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 148 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Purple Martin

Progne subis

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family HIRUNDINIDAE

▼ [Summary Page](#)

► [Detailed Page](#)

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

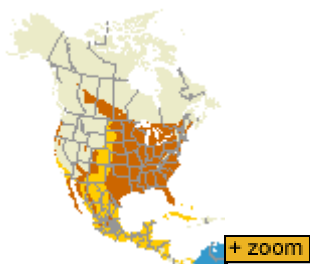


© Kevin T. Karlson

[+ zoom](#)

Purple Martin, male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

Purple Martin, sub-adult male

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The largest of the North American swallows, the Purple Martin is a popular tenant of backyard birdhouses. In fact, in eastern North America it has nested almost exclusively in nest boxes for more than 100 years.

Description

[top](#)

- Large swallow; medium-sized songbird.
- Large head.
- Thick chest.
- Broad, pointed wings.
- Male entirely bluish-black.

- Size: 19-20 cm (7-8 in)
- Wingspan: 39-41 cm (15-16 in)
- Weight: 45-60 g (1.59-2.12 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male all dark, female dingy below.

Sound

Song a series of musical chirps interspersed with raspy twitters.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Some populations are undergoing a long-term decline. Not listed as threatened or endangered anywhere.

Other Names

Hirondelle noire (French)

Golondrina grande negruzca, Golondrina azul americana (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Native Americans hung up empty gourds for the Purple Martin before Europeans arrived in North America. Purple Martins in eastern North America now nest almost exclusively in birdhouses, but those in the West use mostly natural cavities.
- Despite the term "scout" used for the first returning Purple Martins, the first arriving individuals are not checking out the area to make sure it is safe for the rest of the group. They are the older martins returning to areas where they nested before. Martins returning north to breed for their first time come back several weeks later. The earlier return of older individuals is a common occurrence in species of migratory birds.
- The Purple Martin is unusual among birds that use nest boxes; several pairs will nest in a single box with multiple compartments. However, one male will attempt to defend multiple compartments. Western martins are less likely to use boxes with multiple compartments.
- 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.
- The [Purple Martin Conservation Association](#) supports the study of the Purple Martin, and has more information available on its web site. [The Purple Martin Society of North America](#) also provides information on martins and martin houses.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Brown, C. R. 1997. Purple Martin (*Progne subis*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 287 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

Order PICIFORMES - Family PICIDAE - Subfamily Picinae

▼ **Summary Page**

▶ **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



© Gary W. Carter/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Red-bellied Woodpecker, male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

[+ zoom](#)

Red-bellied Woodpecker, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The most common woodpecker in the Southeast, the Red-bellied Woodpecker is a familiar sight at bird feeders and in backyards. Yes, its belly is covered in a light red wash. But this woodpecker is easier to spot by the red on the back and top of its head.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium to large-sized woodpecker.
- Red hood from top of head to back of neck.
- Back barred black and white.

- Size: 24 cm (9 in)
- Wingspan: 33-42 cm (13-17 in)

- Weight: 56-91 g (1.98-3.21 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male with red hood extending to forehead, female with red nape only.

Sound

Call: a loud raspy "kwirr." Also shorter "cha" notes.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)
[top](#)

Conservation Status

The Red-bellied Woodpecker has extended its breeding range north over the last 100 years. Populations are increasing throughout most of the range.

Other Names

Pic à ventre roux (French)

Cool Facts

- The Red-bellied Woodpecker competes vigorously for nest holes with other woodpeckers, in one case even dragging a Red-cockaded Woodpecker from a nest cavity and killing it. But it is often evicted from nest holes by the European Starling. In some areas, half of all Red-bellied Woodpecker nesting cavities are taken over by starlings.
- Stores food in cracks and crevices of trees and fence posts. The woodpecker does not appear to defend its caches from other birds or mammals.
- The male Red-bellied Woodpecker has a longer bill and a longer, wider tongue tip than the female. These adaptations may allow the male to reach deeper into furrows to extract prey and may allow the sexes to divide up the resources in one area.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Shackleford, C. E., R. E. Brown, and R. N. Conner. 2000. Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 500 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)



[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Western Bluebird

Sialia mexicana

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family TURDIDAE

▼ **Summary Page**

► **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

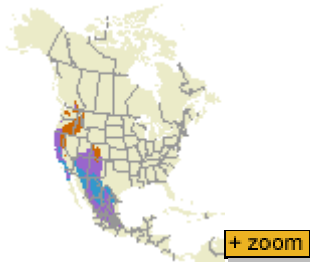


© Robert E. Barber/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

Western Bluebird, male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

Western Bluebird, female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

The Western Bluebird is a common sight in parklands of the West. Unlike the other species of bluebirds, it does not like large meadows, preferring open forests instead.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium-sized songbird; small thrush.
- Head large and round.
- Wings and tail blue.
- Chest red.
- Some reddish on back.

- Size: 16-19 cm (6-7 in)
- Weight: 24-31 g (0.85-1.09 ounces)

Sex Differences

Male dark blue with bright red chest. Female drab gray blue with duller reddish chest.

Sound

Call a soft "kew," often repeated several times. Also a chatter. Songs can be repeated calls.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Declining in California and Arizona, as well as in other parts of range.

Other Names

Merleblue de l'Ouest (French)
Azulejo garganta azul (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Go [here](#) to take a look at what goes on inside a Western Bluebird nestbox, through the help of a [Nest Box Cam](#) provided by [The Birdhouse Network](#) at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- Occasionally Western Bluebirds have helpers at the nest. Most of the extra birds attending nests are helping their presumed parents, some after their own nests have failed.
- Genetic studies showed that 45% of nests had young that were not fathered by the defending male, and that 19% of all the young were fathered outside the pair bond.
- Western Bluebirds can be helped by birds far beyond family members. Violet-green Swallows have been observed feeding and defending nests of Western Bluebirds.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Guinan, J. A., P. A. Gowaty, and E. K. Eltzroth. 2000. Western Bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 510 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

Whip-poor-will

Caprimulgus vociferus

Order CAPRIMULGIFORMES - Family CAPRIMULGIDAE - Subfamily Caprimulginae

▼ Summary Page

► Detailed Page

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).



+ zoom

Whip-poor-will, adult female

[About the photographs](#)



[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)

6. [Full detailed species account](#)

Because of its nocturnal habits, the Whip-poor-will is infrequently seen. Its cryptic coloring keeps it hidden during the day, too. However, its loud calling at dusk makes it well known wherever it breeds.

Description

[top](#)

- Medium-sized nightjar.
- Large-headed with a tiny bill.
- Very well camouflaged, colored in browns, black, and gray.

- Size: 22-26 cm (9-10 in)
- Wingspan: 45-48 cm (18-19 in)
- Weight: 43-64 g (1.52-2.26 ounces)

Sex Differences

Sexes similar, but male has white tips to tail, female's tail tips are buff.

Sound

Song an emphatic "Whip-poor-will," with the accent and the first and third syllables and a tremolo in the second. Call note a short, quiet "quirt." Claps wings to defend territory.

»[listen to songs of this species](#)

[top](#)

Conservation Status

Considered declining in some areas; good data lacking because of the difficulty in censusing this bird.

Other Names

Engoulevent bois-pourri (French)

Tapacamino cuerporruín-nortefío (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Chicks can move about during the nestling stage, and they often move a bit apart, perhaps to make it difficult for a predator to find them. The parent aids this process by forcibly shoving aside one of the young with its foot as it flushes from the nest. The nestling may be sent tumbling head over heels by the shove.
- The male Whip-poor-will often will investigate intruders near the nest by hovering in place with its body nearly vertical and its tail spread wide to show off the broad white tips of the tail feathers.
- The western populations of the Whip-poor-will differ slightly in plumage from the eastern form, and sometimes are considered a different species (the Mexican Whip-poor-will). Their songs are slower and lower pitched, and their eggs are whiter and less highly colored.
- The Whip-poor-will lays its eggs in phase with the lunar cycle, so that the eggs hatch on average 10 days before a full moon. When the moon is near full the adults can forage the entire night, and so best provide the nestlings with insects.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

Cink, C. L. 2002. Whip-poor-will (*Caprimulgus vociferus*). In The Birds of North America, No. 620 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

[Bird Guide](#)

[Species Accounts](#)

[Video Gallery](#)

White-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta carolinensis

Order PASSERIFORMES - Family SITTIDAE

▼ **Summary Page**

► **Detailed Page**

For complete Life History Information on this species, visit [Birds of North America Online](#).

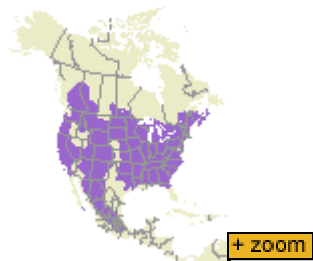


© Michael J. Hopiak/CLO

[+ zoom](#)

White-breasted Nuthatch male

[About the photographs](#)



[+ zoom](#)

[About the map](#)

MULTIMEDIA



[Play sound from this species](#)



[+ zoom](#)

White-breasted Nuthatch female

Menu

1. [Description](#)
2. [Sound](#)
3. [Conservation Status](#)
4. [Other Names](#)
5. [Cool Facts](#)
6. [Full detailed species account](#)

A common bird of deciduous forests and wooded suburbs, the White-breasted Nuthatch can be seen hopping headfirst down the trunks of trees in search of insect food. It frequents bird feeders and takes sunflower seeds off to the side of a tree, where it wedges them into a crevice and hammers them open.

Description

[top](#)

- Large nuthatch; creeps headfirst down tree trunks.
- Dark gray or black cap.
- Bright white face and underparts.

- Blue-gray upper parts.
- Long bill either straight or slightly upturned.
- Size: 13-14 cm (5-6 in)
- Wingspan: 20-27 cm (8-11 in)
- Weight: 18-30 g (0.64-1.06 ounces)

Sex Differences

Sexes similar; male with black cap, female with grayer cap.

Sound

Song a series of soft, slightly nasal "what, what, what" notes. Call a soft "yank."
 »[listen to songs of this species](#)
[top](#)

Conservation Status

Common and widespread. Populations increasing over most of range.

Other Names

Sittelle à poitrine blanche (French)
 Saltapalo blanco (Spanish)

Cool Facts

- Nuthatches gather nuts and seeds, jam them into tree bark, and hammer or "hatch" the food open with their bills.
- The White-breasted Nuthatch is normally territorial throughout the year, with pairs staying together. The male is more vigilant when he forages alone than when he is with the female. The female, however, is in danger of having the more dominant male displace her from foraging sites, and she is more vigilant when he is around than when she is alone.
- In winter, the White-breasted Nuthatch joins foraging flocks led by chickadees or titmice. One explanation for these flocks is that the birds gain protection from predators by the vigilance of the other birds. In support of this idea, one study found that if titmice were removed from a flock, nuthatches were more wary and reluctant to come to exposed bird feeders.

Sources used to construct this page:

[top](#)

- 1) Dolby, A. S. and T. C. Grubb, Jr. 2000. Social context affects risk taking by a satellite species in a mixed-species foraging group. *Behavioral Ecology* 11: 110-114.
- 2) Pravosudov, V. V., and T. C. Grubb, Jr. 1993. White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*). In [The Birds of North America](#), No. 54 (A. Poole, and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, PA, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.

[Full detailed species account »](#)

