

Bird Guide

to Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park,
Alberta



Big Lake Environment Support Society



Credits

Technical information

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Photographs

Local photographers were approached for good quality images, and where good photographs were not available then freely available images from Wikipedia were used (see page 166 for individual photo credits).

Funding

City of St. Albert, Environmental Initiatives Grant

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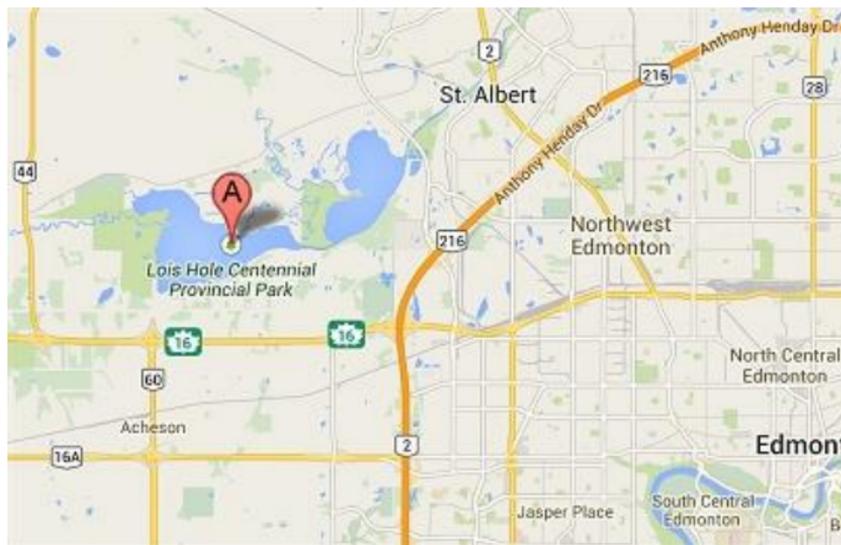
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2016

Location of Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park, Alberta



Map courtesy of Google, Inc.

There are a great many birds to be seen in Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park as Big Lake has been designated an Important Bird Area. This Guide features the most commonly seen birds; however, it is not a complete guide to all birds that could be seen at Big Lake. If you are, or become, passionate about birds, we recommend a comprehensive guide to the birds of North America as there are many species that migrate through Big Lake, or that are expanding their range into this area for a variety of reasons. There are also simply those individuals that wander off course and end up in our area; those wonderful lost individuals that keep birders on their toes.

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**Perching Birds
(PASSERIFORMES)**

**Crows and Jays
(Corvidae)**



American Crow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Corvidae*
Corvus brachyrhynchos



Size: The American crow is A large, long-legged, thick-necked bird with a heavy, straight bill. In flight, the wings are fairly broad and rounded with the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. The short tail is rounded or squared off at the end. They can be confused with Ravens, but the latter are larger, heavier with thicker bills and a wedge-shaped tail.

Colour: American Crows are all black, even the legs and bill. When crows molt, the old feathers can appear brownish or scaly compared to the glossy new feathers.

Behavior: Crows are very social, sometimes forming flocks in the millions. Inquisitive and sometimes mischievous, crows are good learners and problem-solvers, often raiding garbage cans and picking over discarded food containers. They're also aggressive and often chase away larger birds including hawks, owls and herons.

Location: Crows are common birds of fields, open woodlands, and forests. They thrive around people, and you'll often find them in agricultural fields, lawns, parking lots, roadsides, and garbage dumps. They migrate into the USA for winter, returning early in spring. Ravens occupy the vacant habitat in winter.

Common Raven, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Corvidae*
Corvus corax



Size: Not just large but massive, with a thick neck, shaggy throat feathers, and a heavy beak. In flight, ravens have long, wedge-shaped tails. Their wings are more slender than crows, with longer, thinner “fingers” at the wingtips. They can be confused with American crows, but generally crows are smaller and more slender.

Colour: Common Ravens are entirely black, right down to the legs, eyes, and beak.

Behavior: Common Ravens aren't as social as crows; you tend to see them alone or in pairs except at food sources like dead animals or garbage dumps. Ravens are confident, inquisitive birds that strut around or occasionally bound forward with light, two-footed hops. In flight they are buoyant and graceful, interspersing soaring, gliding, and slow flaps.

Location: Common Ravens live in open and forest habitats across western and northern North America. This includes deciduous and evergreen forests up to treeline, as well as high desert, sea coast, sagebrush, tundra, and grasslands. They do well around people, particularly rural settlements but also some towns and cities. They overwinter in Alberta.

Black-billed Magpie, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Corvidae*
Pica hudsonia



Size: Black-billed Magpies are smaller than crows and larger than jays with long, diamond-shaped tails and straight bills. In flight, their wings seem to be too short to support their graceful flight.

Colour: These birds are black and white overall with blue-green iridescent flashes in the wing and tail. The upperparts are mostly black with a white patch in the outer wing and two white stripes (“backpack straps”) on the back.

Behavior: Black-billed Magpies are social, inquisitive birds that eat fruits, grains, insects, small animals, and frequently gather in large flocks at carrion. Magpies move in groups and give a variety of loud trill, cackle, and whistle calls. They flap steadily in flight, alternating deep and shallow wingbeats, and use their very long tails to negotiate abrupt turns.

Location: Black-billed Magpies are widespread in towns, fields, and streams. They also concentrate in flocks at feedlots and other areas where food is easy to find. They typically nest in large trees in cities, towns and country. They overwinter in Alberta.

Blue Jay, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Corvidae*
Cyanocitta cristata



Size: Blue Jays are large crested birds with broad, rounded tails and a stout, sharp beak. They are smaller than magpies, but larger than robins.

Colour: White or light gray underneath, various shades of blue, black, and white above.

Behavior: Blue Jays are not especially social, but will travel with their mate when looking for food. Blue Jays make a large variety of calls that carry long distances. Most calls produced while the jay is perched within a tree. They usually fly across open areas silently, especially during migration. They stuff food items in their throat pouch to cache elsewhere; when eating; they hold a seed or nut in their feet and peck it open.

Location: Blue Jays are birds of forest edges. A favorite food is nuts, and they are often found near feeders, in forests, woodlots, towns, cities, parks. They overwinter in Alberta, in towns and cities they thrive on bird feeders.

Gray Jay, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Corvidae*
Perisoreus canadensis



Size: Gray Jays are stocky, fairly large birds about the size of other Jays, with short, stout bills. They have round heads and long tails, with broad, rounded wings.

Colour: Gray Jays are dark gray above and light gray below, with black on the back of the head forming a partial hood. Juveniles are grayish black overall, and usually show a pale gape at the base of the bill.

Behavior: Gray Jays are typically found in small groups. They fly in quiet swoops, generally holding their wings below the horizontal. While they have a large variety of vocalizations including hoots and chatters, they are less noisy overall than other jays. Gray Jays have very broad diets, eating anything from berries to carrion to handouts from hikers. They have earned many nicknames, including “camp robber”.

Location: Gray Jays live in evergreen (especially spruce) and mixed evergreen-deciduous forest across the boreal forest of the northern United States and Canada, as well as in high mountain ranges of the West. They overwinter in Alberta, but are rarely seen in cities.

Finches
(Fringillidae)



American Goldfinch, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Fringillidae*
Spinus tristis



M



F

Size: A small finch with a short, conical bill and a small, head, long wings, and short, notched tail.

Colour: Adult males in spring and early summer are bright yellow with black forehead, black wings with white markings, and white patches both above and beneath the tail. Adult females are duller yellow beneath, olive above.

Behavior: These are active and acrobatic little finches that cling to weeds and seed socks, and sometimes mill about in large numbers at feeders or on the ground beneath them. Goldfinches fly with a bouncy, undulating pattern and often call in flight, drawing attention to themselves.

Location: The goldfinch's main natural habitats are weedy fields and floodplains, where plants such as thistles and asters are common. They're also found in cultivated areas, roadsides, and backyards, especially at feeders.

Pine Siskin, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Fringillidae*
Spinus pinus



Size: Pine Siskins are very small songbirds with sharp, pointed bills and short, notched tails. Their uniquely shaped bill is more slender than that of most finches. In flight, look for their forked tails and pointed wingtips.

Colour: Pine siskins are brown and very streaky birds with subtle yellow edgings on wings and tails. Flashes of yellow can erupt as they take flight, flutter at branch tips, or display during mating.

Behavior: Pine Siskins often visit feeders in winter (particularly for thistle or nyjer seed) or cling to branch tips of pines and other conifers, sometimes hanging upside down to pick at seeds below them. They are gregarious, foraging in tight flocks and twittering incessantly to each other, even during their undulating flight.

Location: Although Pine Siskins prefer coniferous or mixed coniferous and deciduous forests with open canopies, they are opportunistic and adaptable in their search for seeds. They'll forage in weedy fields, scrubby thickets, or backyards and gardens. And they'll flock around feeders, especially thistle feeders, in woodlands and suburbs. They may overwinter in southern Alberta, but not around Edmonton.

Red Crossbill, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Fringillidae*
Loxia curvirostra



Size: A stocky finch, a bit smaller than a robin.

Colour:

Male: Head and body deep brick red to reddish yellow, or greenish. Wing feathers blackish brown, without wing bars. Tail blackish brown.

Female: Uniformly olive or grayish, with greenish or greenish yellow chest and rump. Wing feathers blackish brown, without wing bars. Tail blackish brown.

Immature: Immature birds are like the adult female, but some males may be reddish or mixed red and yellow.

Behavior: A finch of mature coniferous forests, the Red Crossbill is dependent on the seed cones that are its main food. It typically remains high in conifers.

Location: Its peculiar crossed bill allows it to pry open cones to access the seeds, and it will breed whenever it finds areas with an abundance of cones. It may wander widely between years to find a good cone crop. They may remain in the Edmonton area all year long.

White-winged Crossbill, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Fringillidae*
Loxia leucoptera



M



F

Size: A stocky finch, a bit smaller than a robin.

Colour:

Male: The head and body are pink in winter, turning deeper red by spring or summer. The belly and flanks are grayish, with dusky streaks on flanks. Variable amount of black on rear of face. The wings and tail are black, and the wings have two large white wing bars and white tips to the tertial feathers.

Female:

The breast and rump are grayish green to yellowish olive, streaked with dusky. The back and top of the head are greenish mottled with brown. The belly and flanks are tan with dusky streaks. Wings and tail are dark brown, with two large white wingbars.

Immature: The juveniles are heavily streaked all over.

Behavior: A finch of mature coniferous forests, this Crossbill is dependent on the seed cones that are its main food. It typically remains high in conifers.

Location: Its peculiar crossed bill allows it to pry open cones to access the seeds, and it will breed whenever it finds areas with an abundance of cones. It may wander widely between years to find a good cone crop. They may remain in the Edmonton area all year long, and are found throughout much of Alberta all year long.

Thrushes

(Turdidae)



American Robin, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Turdidae*
Turdus migratorius



Size: American Robins are fairly large songbirds with a large, round body, long legs, and fairly long tail. Robins are the largest North American thrushes, and their profile offers a good chance to learn the basic shape of most thrushes. Robins make a good reference point for comparing the size and shape of other birds, too.

Colour: American Robins are gray-brown birds with warm orange underparts and dark heads. In flight, a white patch on the lower belly and under the tail can be conspicuous. Compared with males, females have paler heads that contrast less with the gray back.

Behavior: American Robins are industrious and authoritarian birds that bound across lawns or stand erect, beak tilted upward, to survey their environs. When alighting they habitually flick their tails downward several times.

Location: Around Big Lake, Robins are common in urban areas, golf courses, fields, pastures, as well as aspen woodlands, and shrub lands.

Sparrows
(Emberizidae)



American Tree Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Spizella arbora



Size: American Tree Sparrows are small, round-headed birds that often fluff out their feathers, making their plump bodies look even chubbier. Among sparrows, they have fairly small bills and long, thin tails.

Colour: A rusty cap and rusty (not black) eyeline on a gray head, a streaked brown back, and a smooth gray to buff breast in both male and female American Tree Sparrows give an overall impression of reddish-brown and gray. A dark smudge in the center of the unstreaked breast is common.

Behavior: Small flocks of American Tree Sparrows hop about on the ground, scrabbling for grass and weed seeds, calling back and forth with a soft, musical twitter. Individuals may perch in the open atop goldenrod stalks or shrubs, or on low tree branches.

Location: Look for small flocks of American Tree Sparrows during spring and fall migration in weedy fields with hedgerows or shrubs, along forest edges, or near marshes. They readily visit backyards, especially if there's a seed feeder. American Tree Sparrows breed in the far north and are rarely seen south of northern Canada in summer.

Chipping Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Spizella passerina



Size: The Chipping Sparrow is a slender, fairly long-tailed sparrow with a medium-sized bill that is a bit small for a sparrow. Learning the shape of this classic *Spizella* sparrow is a key step in mastering sparrow identification.

Colour: Chipping Sparrows look clean and crisp, with frosty underparts, pale face, black line through the eye, topped off with a bright rusty crown.

Behavior: Chipping Sparrows feed on the ground, take cover in shrubs, and sing from the tops of small trees (often evergreens). You'll often see loose groups of them flitting up from open ground. When singing, they cling to high outer limbs. On the ground they hop or run through grasses searching for seeds.

Location: Look for Chipping Sparrows in open woodlands and forests with grassy clearings across North America. You'll also see them in parks, along roadsides, and in your backyard, particularly if you have feeders and trees. They winter in Mexico, Texas, Florida and Cuba.

Clay-Colored Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Spizella pallida



Size: Clay-colored Sparrows are petite, trim sparrows with a small bill, slender body, and fairly long, notched tail. The small, slender shape of these and other *Spizella* sparrows is distinctive.

Colour: These are mostly pale, tan-and-gray birds with a contrasting face pattern. Their pale gray collar is a helpful mark at all times of the year. The crown is finely streaked, with a pale stripe over the eye and darker cheek. The dark eyeline does not extend in front of the eye.

Behavior: Clay-colored Sparrows typically forage low in shrubs, or on the ground within close reach of shrubby cover. Males sing from near the tops of low shrubs. They winter in Mexico.

Location: They breed in shrubs, field edges, and thickets across the northern prairies. At the eastern edge of their range, look for them in Christmas tree farms and grassy areas with short, scattered conifers.

Dark-Eyed Junco, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Junco hyemalis



Size: The Dark-eyed Junco is a medium-sized sparrow with a rounded head, a short, stout bill and a fairly long, conspicuous tail.

Colour: Juncos vary in colour across the country, but in our area they're brown birds with a dark gray hood, brightened up by a pink bill and white outer tail feathers that periodically flash open, particularly in flight.

Behavior: These are birds of the ground. They hop around the bases of trees and shrubs in forests or venture out onto lawns looking for fallen seeds. You'll often hear their high chip notes, given almost absent-mindedly while foraging, or intensifying as they take short, low flights through cover.

Location: Dark-eyed Juncos breed in coniferous or mixed-coniferous forests across Canada, the western U.S., and in the Appalachians. During winter you'll find them in open woodlands, fields, parks, roadsides, and backyards. They can be found year round in our area.

Fox Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Passerella iliaca



Size: Fox Sparrows are large, round-bodied sparrows with stout bills and medium-length tails.

Colour: These sparrows are highly variable in colour and bill size across North America. The “Red” Fox Sparrow is widely distributed across the boreal forest of northern North America, are rusty above with some pale gray on the head and rufous splotches on the underparts. The bill can range from yellowish to dark gray.

Behavior: Fox Sparrows spend a lot of time on the ground, using their sturdy legs to kick away leaf litter in search of insects and seeds. They rarely venture far from cover, and they frequently associate with other sparrows. In spring and summer, listen for Fox Sparrows’ sweet, whistled song from scrub or forest; also, pay attention for a sharp *smack* call.

Location: Fox Sparrows breed in coniferous forest and dense mountain scrub. They spend winters in the SE USA.

Le Conte's Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Ammodramus leconteii



Size: Le Conte's Sparrow is very small and chunky sparrow.

Colour: The Le Conte's sparrow is a small sparrow with a relatively large head, short grey bill and short pointed tail. It has a buffy yellow-orange face with grey cheeks, and a dark brown crown with a white central stripe. The nape of the neck is lilac grey with chestnut streaks, and the back is streaked with brown and beige. Its belly is off white, while the breast and sides are a buffy orange-yellow with dark brown streaks. The feet and legs are a brownish-pink colour.

Behavior: The Le Conte's Sparrow is difficult to see because of its secretive nature. On the breeding grounds it usually sings from concealed perches.

Location: This small sparrow prefers wet grasslands and meadows for feeding, with nearby trees for perching and concealment.

Nelson's Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Ammodramus nelsoni



Size: Nelson's Sparrow is small, even for sparrows.

Colour: Adults have brownish upperparts with gray on the crown and nape, a cream-colored breast with light or indistinct streaking and a white throat and belly; they have an orange face with gray cheeks and a short pointed tail.

Behavior: A secretive sparrow, the Nelson's Sparrow breeds along the edges of freshwater marshes and in wet meadows of interior North America.

Location: They forage on the ground or in marsh vegetation, sometimes probing in mud and eat mainly insects, aquatic invertebrates and seeds. Their call is a raspy trill, almost a mechanical sound. It may be given in flight during the nesting season. The sound has been likened to a drop of water hitting a hot fry pan.

Savannah Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Passerculus sandwichensis



Size: Savannah Sparrows are medium-sized sparrows with short, notched tails. The head appears small for the plump body, and the crown feathers often flare up to give the bird's head a small peak. The thick-based, seed-eating bill is small for a sparrow.

Colour: These sparrows are brown above and white below, with crisp streaks throughout. Their upperparts are brown with black streaks, and the underparts are white with thin brown or black streaks on the breast and flanks. Look for a small yellow patch on the face in front of the eye.

Behavior: Savannah Sparrows eat seeds on or near the ground, alone or in small flocks. When flushed, they usually fly up, flare their short tails, and circle around to land some yards away. In spring and summer, males sing their dry, insect-like melodies from exposed, low perches such as fence posts. Also, listen for a thin, high-pitched *tsss* call.

Location: Savannah Sparrows breed in open areas with low vegetation, including most of northern North America from tundra to grassland, marsh, and farmland.

Song Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Melospiza melodia



Size: Song Sparrows are medium-sized and fairly bulky sparrows. For a sparrow, the bill is short and stout and the head fairly rounded. The tail is long and rounded, and the wings are broad.

Colour: Song Sparrows are streaky and brown with thick streaks on a white chest and flanks. On a closer look, the head is an attractive mix of warm red-brown and slaty gray, though these shades, as well as the amount of streaking, vary extensively across North America.

Behavior: Song Sparrows flit through dense, low vegetation or low branches, occasionally moving onto open ground after food. Flights are short and fluttering, with a characteristic downward pumping of the tail. Male Song Sparrows sing from exposed perches such as small trees.

Location: Look for Song Sparrows in nearly any open habitat, including marsh edges, overgrown fields, backyards, desert washes, and forest edges. Song Sparrows commonly visit bird feeders and build nests in residential areas.

Vesper Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Pooecetes gramineus



Size: This is a medium to large sparrow.

Colour: Adults have light brown upperparts and light underparts, both with darker streaking. They have a white eye ring and a long dark brown tail which shows white outer feathers in flight.

Behavior: These birds forage on the ground, mainly eating insects and seeds. Outside the nesting season they often feed in small flocks.

As its name suggests, it often sings in the evening twilight, though it sings actively in early morning as well. The male sings from a higher perch, such as a shrub or fencepost, which indicates his ownership of the nesting territory. The musical song begins with two pairs of repeated whistled notes and ends in a series of trills, somewhat similar to that of the song sparrow.

Location: The Vesper Sparrow inhabits grasslands and fields across much of the north-central United States and Canada.

White-crowned Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Zonotrichia leucophrys



Size: The White-crowned Sparrow is a large sparrow with a small bill and a long tail.

Colour: Overall, the White-crowned Sparrow is a plain, pale-gray bird with very bold black-and-white stripes on the head and a pale pink or yellow bill.

Behavior: You'll see White-crowned Sparrows low at the edges of brushy habitat, hopping on the ground or on branches usually below waist level. They're also found in open ground (particularly on their breeding grounds) but typically with the safety of shrubs or trees nearby.

Location: Look for White-crowned Sparrows in places where safe tangles of brush mix with open or grassy ground for foraging. They winter in most of the lower 48 American states.

White-throated Sparrow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Emberizidae*
Zonotrichia albicollis



Size: The White-throated Sparrow is a large, full-bodied sparrow with a fairly prominent bill, rounded head, long legs, and long, narrow tail.

Colour: White-throated Sparrows are brown above and gray below with a striking head pattern. The black-and-white-striped head is augmented by a bright white throat and yellow between the eye and the bill, which is gray (bird on right). You'll also see a less boldly marked form, known as "tan-striped," with a buff-on-brown face pattern instead of white-on-black (bird on left).

Behavior: White-throated Sparrows stay near the ground, scratching through leaves in search of food, often in flocks. You may see them low in bushes as well, particularly in spring when they eat fresh buds. White-throated Sparrows sing their distinctive songs frequently.

Location: Look for White-throated Sparrows in woods, at forest edges, in the regrowth that follows logging or forest fires, at pond and bog edges, and in copses near treeline.

Blackbirds

(Icteridae)



Brewer's Blackbird, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Icteridae*
Euphagus cyanocephalus



Size: A small, fairly long-legged songbird with the well-proportioned look of many blackbirds: the fairly long tail is balanced by a full body, round head, and long, thick-based beak. In perching males, the tail appears widened and rounded toward the tip.

Colour: Males are glossy black all over with a staring yellow eye and a blue sheen on the head grading to greenish iridescence on the body. Females are plainer brown, darkest on the wings and tail, with a dark eye. Immature birds look like washed out, lighter-brown versions of the females.

Behavior: Brewer's Blackbirds feed on open ground or underfoot in parks and busy streets. Their long legs give them a halting walk, head jerking with each step almost like a chicken's. They eat nearly anything, from bugs and seeds to the eggs and young of other species. In flocks, Brewer's Blackbirds rise and fall as they fly. At landing, birds may circle in a slow fluttering flight before settling.

Location: Look for Brewer's Blackbirds in open habitats, such as grasslands, riversides, meadows, as well as lawns, golf courses, parks, and city streets.

Brown-headed Cowbird, *PASSERIFORMES, Icteridae*
Molothrus ater



Size: Brown-headed Cowbirds are smallish blackbirds, with a shorter tail and thicker head than most other blackbirds. The bill has a distinctive shape: it's much shorter and thicker-based than other blackbirds', almost finch-like at first glance. In flight, look for the shorter tail.

Colour: Male Brown-headed Cowbirds have glossy black plumage and a rich brown head that often looks black in poor lighting or at distance. Female Brown-headed Cowbirds are plain brown birds, lightest on the head and underparts, with fine streaking on the belly and a dark eye.

Behavior: Brown-headed Cowbirds feed on the ground. Females prowl woodlands and edges in search of other bird's nests in which to lay their eggs. Brown-headed Cowbirds are noisy, making a multitude of clicks, whistles and chatter-like calls in addition to a flowing, gurgling song.

Location: Brown-headed Cowbirds are found in many open habitats, such as fields, pastures, meadows, and forest edges. When not displaying or feeding on the ground, they often perch high on prominent tree branches.

Common Grackle, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Icteridae*
Quiscalus quiscula



Size: Common Grackles are large, lanky blackbirds with long legs and long tails. The head is flat and the bill is longer than in most blackbirds, with the hint of a downward curve. In flight, the wings appear short in comparison to the tail. Males are slightly larger than females.

Colour: Common Grackles appear black from a distance, but up close their glossy purple heads contrast with bronzy-iridescent bodies. A bright golden eye gives grackles an intent expression. Females are slightly less glossy than males. Young birds are dark brown with a dark eye.

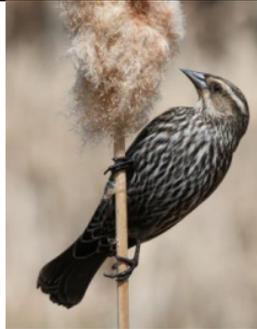
Behavior: You'll often find Common Grackles in large flocks, flying or foraging on lawns and in agricultural fields. They strut on their long legs, pecking for food rather than scratching. When resting they sit atop trees or on telephone lines, keeping up a raucous chattering. Flight is direct, with stiff wingbeats.

Location: Common Grackles thrive around agricultural fields, feedlots, city parks, and suburban lawns. They're also common in open habitats including woodland, forest edges, meadows, and marshes.

Red-winged Blackbird, *PASSERIFORMES, Icteridae*
Agelaius phoeniceus



M



F

Size: A stocky, broad-shouldered blackbird with a slender, conical bill and a medium-length tail. Red-winged Blackbirds often show a hump-backed silhouette while perched; males often sit with tail slightly flared.

Colour: Male Red-winged Blackbirds are hard to mistake. They're an even glossy black with red-and-yellow shoulder badges. Females are crisply streaked and dark brownish overall, paler on the breast and often show a whitish eyebrow.

Behavior: Male Red-winged Blackbirds do everything they can to get noticed, sitting on high perches and belting out their *konk-la-ree!* song all day long. Females stay lower, skulking through vegetation for food and quietly weaving together their remarkable nests.

Location: Look for Red-winged Blackbirds in fresh and saltwater marshes, along watercourses, water hazards on golf courses, and wet roadsides, as well as drier meadows and old fields. They are found year round in southern British Columbia and most of the continental USA. and northwest Mexico.

Yellow-headed Blackbird, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Icteridae*
Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus



M



F

Size: Yellow-headed Blackbirds are fairly large blackbirds, with a stout body, a large head, and a long, conical bill.

Colour: Males are striking blackbirds with yellow heads and chests, and black bodies with prominent white patches at the bend of the wing. Females and immatures are brown instead of black, with duller yellow heads. Immature males show some white at the bend of the wing, while females don't.

Behavior: Yellow-headed Blackbirds breed in loose colonies, and males mate with several females. During the breeding season, they eat insects and aquatic invertebrates. Their "song" sounds much like a rusty gate opening.

Location: Yellow-headed Blackbirds breed and roost in freshwater wetlands with dense, emergent vegetation such as cattails. They often forage in fields, typically wintering in large, open agricultural areas.

Rusty Blackbird, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Icteridae*
Euphagus carolinus



M



F

Size: Rusty Blackbird is a medium-sized blackbird with a slender bill and medium-length tail. The bill is slightly decurved. They are a bit larger and longer-tailed than Red-winged Blackbird with a more slender bill.

Colour: Breeding males are dark glossy black. Females are gray-brown; they also have rusty feather edges, pale eyes and a bold eyebrow, contrasting with darker feathers right around the eye.

Behavior: They feed on the ground by walking and flipping over leaves and debris. They tend to hold their long tail up when feeding on the ground, which can help pick them out in a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds. Flocks often perch at the tops of trees. Rusty Blackbirds frequently give a distinctive bubbly call, kurlulr-teEE, often ending on a high-pitched rising note.

Location: Look for Rusty Blackbirds in wet areas during the breeding season, they favor bogs, beaver ponds and wet woods in the boreal forest. The Rusty Blackbird is one of North America's most rapidly declining species. The population has plunged an estimated 85-99 percent over the past forty years and scientists are completely puzzled as to what is the cause.

Baltimore Oriole, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Icteridae*
Icterus galbula



M



F

Size: Smaller and more slender than an American Robin, Baltimore Orioles are medium-sized, sturdy-bodied songbirds with thick necks and long legs. Look for their long, thick-based, pointed bills, a hallmark of the blackbird family they belong to.

Colour: Adult males are flame-orange and black, with a solid-black head and one white bar on their black wings. Females and immature males are yellow-orange on the breast, grayish on the head and back, with two bold white wing bars.

Behavior: Baltimore Orioles are more often heard than seen as they feed high in trees, searching leaves and small branches for insects, flowers, and fruit. You may also spot them lower down, plucking fruit from vines and bushes or sipping from hummingbird feeders. Watch for the male's slow, fluttering flights between tree tops and listen for their characteristic *wink* or chatter calls.

Location: Look for Baltimore Orioles high in leafy deciduous trees, but not in deep forests: they're found in open woodland, forest edge, orchards, and stands of trees along rivers, in parks, and in backyards.

Chickadees

(Paridae)



Black-capped Chickadee, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Paridae*
Poecile atricapillus



Size: This tiny bird has a short neck and large head, giving it a distinctive, rather spherical body shape. It also has a long, narrow tail and a short bill a bit thicker than a warbler's but thinner than a finch's.

Colour: The cap and bib are black, the cheeks white, the back soft gray, the wing feathers gray edged with white, and the underparts soft buffy on the sides grading to white beneath. The cap extends down just beyond the black eyes, making the small eyes tricky to see.

Behavior: Black-capped Chickadees seldom remain still, especially at feeders except to grab a seed to eat elsewhere. They are acrobatic and associate in flocks, the sudden activity when a flock arrives is distinctive. They often fly across roads and open areas one at a time with a bouncy flight. Their continuous, distinctive chirpy calls are often the only bird sounds in the winter woods.

Location: Chickadees may be found in any habitat that has trees or woody shrubs, from forests and woodlots to residential neighborhoods and parks, and sometimes weedy fields and cattail marshes. They frequently nest in birch or alder trees. They are resident around Big Lake all year long.

Boreal Chickadee, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Paridae*

Poecile hudsonicus



Size: This tiny bird has a short neck and large head, giving it a distinctive, rather spherical body shape. It also has a long, narrow tail and a short bill a bit thicker than a warbler's but thinner than a finch's.

Colour: The boreal chickadee has a brownish cap, a black bib, white cheeks, reddish-brown flanks and a brown back. The eye is easier to see due to the brown cap than on the black-capped chickadee. The rufous flanks are a good field identifier.

Behavior: Boreal chickadees tend to associate in small flocks, or are solitary. They nest in a hole in a tree; the pair excavates the nest, using a natural cavity or sometimes an old woodpecker nest. They mate for life. They are much quieter than their black and white cousins.

Location: They are primarily found in spruce forests as they eat largely spruce seeds and insect larvae. They are resident around Big Lake all year long.

Flycatchers

(Tyrannidae)



Eastern Kingbird, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Tyrannidae*

Tyrannus tyrannus



Size: The Eastern Kingbird is a sturdy, medium-sized songbird with a large head, upright posture, square-tipped tail, and a relatively short, straight bill.

Colour: Eastern Kingbirds are blackish above and white below. The head is a darker black than the wings and back, and the black tail has a conspicuous white tip.

Behavior: These Kingbirds often perch in the open atop trees or along utility lines or fences. They fly with very shallow, rowing wingbeats and a raised head, usually accompanied by metallic, sputtering calls. They are visual hunters, sallying out from perches to snatch flying insects.

Location: Eastern Kingbirds breed in open habitats such as yards, fields, pastures, grasslands, or wetlands, and are especially abundant in open places along forest edges or water. They spend winters in the forests of South America.

Eastern Phoebe, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Tyrannidae*
Sayornis phoebe



Size: The Eastern Phoebe is a plump songbird with a medium-length tail. It appears large-headed for a bird of its size. The head often appears flat on top, but phoebes sometimes raise the feathers up into a peak. Like most small flycatchers, they have short, thin bills used for catching insects.

Colour: The Eastern Phoebe is brownish-gray above and off-white below, with a dusky wash to the sides of the breast. The head is typically the darkest part of the upperparts. Birds in fresh fall plumage show faint yellow on the belly and whitish edging on the folded wing feathers.

Behavior: The Eastern Phoebe generally perches low in trees or on fencelines. Phoebes are very active, making short flights to capture insects and very often returning to the same perch. They make sharp “peep” calls in addition to their familiar “phoebe” vocalizations. When perched, Eastern Phoebes wag their tails down and up frequently.

Location: These birds favor open woods such as yards, parks, woodlands, and woodland edges. Phoebes usually breed around buildings or bridges on which they construct their nests under the protection of an eave or ledge.

Wrens
(Troglodytidae)



House Wren, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Troglodytidae*
Troglodytes aedon



Size: House Wrens are small and compact, with a flat head and fairly long, curved beak. They are short-winged, often keeping their longish tail either cocked above the line of the body or slightly drooped.

Colour: Their colouration is subdued brown overall with darker barring on the wings and tail. The pale eyebrow that is characteristic of many wren species is much fainter in House Wrens.

Behavior: These birds are bubbly and energetic, just like their songs. Look for House Wrens hopping quickly through tangles and low branches and, in spring and summer, frequently pausing to deliver cheerful trilling songs.

Location: In summer, House Wrens are at home in open forests, forest edges, and areas with scattered grass and trees. Backyards, farmyards, and city parks are perfect for them. They migrate to Mexico for winter.

Marsh Wren, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Troglodytidae*
Cistothorus palustris



Size: The Marsh Wren is a small, active bird, smaller than most sparrows.

Colour: Adults have brown upperparts with a light brown belly and flanks and a white throat and breast. The back is black with white stripes. They have a dark cap with a white line over the eyes and a short thin bill.

Behavior: These birds forage actively in vegetation, sometimes flying up to catch insects in flight. They mainly eat insects, also spiders and snails. The males often defend their territory from the tops of cattails. Characteristic of wrens they often hold their tails erect.

Location: Their breeding habitat is marshes with tall vegetation such as cattails across North America. They winter in central USA and Mexico.

Sedge Wren, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Troglodytidae*
Cistothorus platensis



Size: A small wren (smaller than a chickadee) with a thin bill.

Colour: A small, buff coloured bird with bold streaks on the back, and narrow streaks on the crown.

Behavior: They forage in reed beds near the shoreline. If seen the male typically is perched on a high reed with its tail held up and defending its territory with song.

Location: A secretive bird that breeds in short grass and sedge marshes. Perhaps because of the highly transitory nature of its nesting habitats, the Sedge Wren moves around a great deal from year to year, not staying in one place for long. The Edmonton area is the farthest and most westerly extent of its distribution. It winters in South America.

Warblers

(Parulidae)



Orange-Crowned Warbler, *PASSERIFORMES*,
Parulidae Oreothlypis celata



Size: Orange-crowned Warblers are small songbirds. Compared with other warblers, they have noticeably thin, sharply pointed bills. They have short wings and short, square tails.

Colour: Orange-crowned Warblers are fairly plain yellowish or olive—they are more yellow on the Pacific coast and grayer, particularly on the head, farther east. They have a thin white or yellow stripe over the eye, a blackish line through the eye, and a pale partial eye-ring. The namesake orange crown patch is rarely seen. The undertail coverts are bright yellow and are often the brightest part of the plumage.

Behavior: Orange-crowned Warblers forage in dense shrubbery and low trees. They tend to be quiet and unobtrusive, although their low foraging habits can help you spot them. They often give a high, faint contact call while foraging.

Location: Orange-crowned Warblers breed in dense areas of deciduous shrubs, usually within or adjacent to forest. They can occur from low-elevation shrubs to stunted forest near timberline. During migration you may find them in nearly any habitat, though they still show a preference for dense, low vegetation.

Tennessee Warbler, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Parulidae*
Oreothlypis peregrina



Size: Warblers, in general, are small songbirds, about the size of a Chickadee, but slimmer.

Colour: Breeding plumage (males are slightly more colourful): Forehead, crown and nape pale bluish gray. Sides of face and neck pale gray. White eyestripe above a dark line through eyes. Back, wings, and rump bright olive-green. Dull whitish from chin to undertail. May have slight yellowish wash across breast or on flanks. Wing feathers and tail dark gray. Non-breeding plumage is duller, and non-distinct.

Behavior: This warbler, like most others, is nervous and quick while foraging. It creeps along branches and is found at all levels. It is solitary while nesting, but forms mixed flocks after breeding.

Location: A dainty warbler of the Canadian boreal forest, the Tennessee Warbler specializes in eating the spruce budworm. Consequently its population goes up and down with fluctuations in the populations of the budworm. It winters in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Yellow-rumped Warbler, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Parulidae*
Setophaga coronata



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Size: Yellow-rumped Warblers are fairly large for warblers, and full-bodied with a large head, sturdy bill, and long, narrow tail.

Colour: In summer, both sexes are gray with flashes of white in the wings and yellow on the face, sides, and rump. Males are very strikingly shaded; females are duller and may show some brown.

Behavior: Yellow-rumped Warblers typically forage for insects in the outer tree canopies at middle heights. They're active, and you'll often see them sally out to catch insects in midair, sometimes on long flights.

Location: In summer, Yellow-rumped Warblers are birds of open coniferous forests and edges, and to a lesser extent deciduous forests. In fall they move to open woods and shrubby habitats, and residential areas before migrating to the southern USA, Mexico and Middle America.

Yellow Warbler, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Parulidae*
Setophaga petechia



Size: Yellow Warblers are small, evenly proportioned songbirds with medium-length tails and rounded heads. For a warbler, the straight, thin bill is relatively large.

Colour: Yellow Warblers are uniformly yellow birds. Males are a bright, egg-yolk yellow with reddish streaks on the underparts. The females and immatures aren't as bright, and lack the male's rich chestnut streaking. Both sexes flash yellow patches in the tail. The face is unmarked, accentuating the large black eye.

Behavior: Look for Yellow Warblers near the tops of tall shrubs and small trees. They forage restlessly, with quick hops along small branches and twigs to glean caterpillars and other insects. Males sing their sweet, whistled songs from high perches.

Location: Yellow Warblers breed in shrubby thickets and woods, particularly along watercourses and in wetlands. Common trees include willows, alders, and cottonwoods across North America and up to about 9,000 feet in the West. In winter they mainly occur in mangrove forests of Central and South America.

Nuthatches (Sittidae)



Red-breasted Nuthatch, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Sittidae*
Sitta canadensis



Size: A small, compact bird with a sharp expression accentuated by its long, pointed bill. Red-breasted Nuthatches have very short tails and almost no neck; the body is plump or barrel-chested, and the short wings are very broad.

Colour: These Nuthatches are blue-gray birds with strongly patterned heads: their black cap and stripe through the eye is characteristic. The underparts are rich rusty-cinnamon, paler in females.

Behavior: Red-breasted Nuthatches move quickly over trunks and branches probing for food in crevices and under flakes of bark. They creep up, down, and sideways without regard for which way is up, and they don't lean against their tail the way woodpeckers do. Flight is short and bouncy.

Location: They are mainly birds of coniferous woods and mountains. Look for them among spruce, fir, pine, hemlock, larch, and western red cedar as well as around aspens and poplars. They remain year-long in our area.

White-breasted Nuthatch, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Sittidae*
Sitta carolinensis



Size: The largest nuthatch, this is still a small bird with a large head and almost no neck. The tail is very short, and the long, narrow bill is straight or slightly upturned.

Colour: White-breasted Nuthatches are gray-blue on the back, with a frosty white face and underparts. The black or gray cap and neck frame the face and make it look like this bird is wearing a hood. The lower belly and under the tail are often chestnut.

Behavior: They are agile birds that creep along trunks and large branches, probing into bark furrows with their straight, pointed bills. Like other nuthatches, they often turn sideways and upside down on vertical surfaces as they forage. They don't lean against their tails the way woodpeckers do.

Location: They are birds of mature woods and woodland edges. They're particularly associated with deciduous stands, though they can be found in some coniferous forests. Our area is on the eastern boundary of their distribution. Commonly seen at feeders in winter.

Kinglets
(Regulidae)



Golden Crowned Kinglet, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Regulidae*
Regulus satrapa



Size: These are tiny songbirds with a rounded body, short wings, and skinny tail. They have relatively large heads, and their bills are short and thin, perfect for gleaning small insects.

Colour: Golden-crowned Kinglets are pale olive above and gray below, with a black-and-white striped face and bright yellow-orange crown patch. They have a thin white wingbar and yellow edges to their black flight feathers.

Behavior: These tiny songbirds usually stay concealed high in dense trees, revealing their presence with thin, very high-pitched calls. They pluck small insects from clusters of conifer needles, often hovering briefly to reach them. In migration and winter, kinglets frequently join other insectivorous songbirds such as warblers in mixed flocks.

Location: Golden-crowned Kinglets live mainly in coniferous forests. They breed in boreal or montane forests (especially spruce and fir), as well as in conifer plantations. In winter, kinglets are somewhat less selective about their habitat: though they still use conifers, you may also find them in deciduous forests, suburbs, swamps, bottomlands, and scrubby habitat. They can occur from sea level to more than 10,000 feet elevation.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Regulidae*
Regulus calendula



Size: Kinglets are tiny songbirds (smaller than chickadees) with relatively large heads, almost no neck, and thin tails. They have very small, thin, straight bills.

Colour: Ruby-crowned Kinglets are olive-green birds with a prominent white eyering and white wingbar. This wingbar contrasts with an adjacent blackish bar in the wing. The “ruby crown” of the male is only occasionally visible, the female has no colourful crown.

Behavior: These are restless, acrobatic birds that move quickly through foliage, typically at lower and middle levels. They flick their wings almost constantly as they go, which is a good identification key.

Location: They breed in tall, dense conifer forests such as spruce, fir, and tamarack. During migration, also look for them in shrubby habitats, deciduous forests, parks, and suburbs. They winter in the southern United States and Mexico.

Swallows
(Hirundinidae)



Barn Swallow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Hirundinidae*
Hirundo rustica



Size: When perched, the sparrow-sized Barn Swallow appears cone shaped, with a slightly flattened head, no visible neck, and broad shoulders that taper to long, pointed wings. The tail extends well beyond the wingtips and the long outer feathers give the tail a deep fork.

Colour: Barn Swallows have a steely blue back, wings, and tail, and rufous to tawny underparts. The blue crown and face contrast with the cinnamon-colored forehead and throat. White spots under the tail can be difficult to see except in flight. Males are more boldly colored than females.

Behavior: 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.

Location: You can find the adaptable Barn Swallow feeding in open habitats from fields, parks, and roadway edges to marshes, meadows, and ponds. Their nests are often easy to spot under the eaves or inside of sheds, barns, bridges and other structures.

Bank Swallow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Hirundinidae*
Riparia riparia



Size: These swallows are relatively small, with adults about 12 cm (4.5 in) long.

Colour: The bank swallow is brown above, white below with a narrow brown band on the breast; the bill is black, the legs brown. The tail is forked and the wings are pointed.

Behavior: All swallows catch insects on the wing with rapid flight, often making sudden turns. The bank swallow's twittering song is continuous when the birds are on the wing and becomes a conversational undertone after they have settled in the roost. The harsh alarm is heard when a passing falcon, crow or other suspected predator requires combined action to drive it away.

Location: These swallows nest in colonies in the banks of rivers. The bank swallow is found all across North America, wintering in Latin America.

Cliff Swallow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Hirundinidae*
Cistothorus platensis



Size: These compact swallows have pointed, broad-based wings, a small head, and a medium-length, squared tail.

Colour: In poor light, Cliff Swallows look brownish with dark throats and white underparts. In good light you'll see their metallic, dark-blue backs and pale, pumpkin-colored rumps. They have rich, brick-red faces and a bright buff-white forehead patch like a headlamp. Some juveniles show whitish throats in summer and fall.

Behavior: Cliff Swallows zoom around in intricate aerial patterns to catch insects on the wing. When feeding in flocks with other species of swallows, they often stay higher in the air. They build mud nests in colonies on cliff ledges or under bridges, eaves, and culverts.

Location: Cliff Swallows traditionally built their nests on vertical cliff faces. With the expansion of road infrastructure they have adopted many bridges, overpasses, and culverts as their colonial nesting sites. They feed in areas near and over water, frequently mixing with other species of swallows.

Tree Swallow, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Hirundinidae*
Tachycineta bicolor



Size: Tree Swallows are streamlined small songbirds with long, pointed wings and a short, squared or slightly notched tail. Their bills are very short and flat.

Colour: Adult males are blue-green above and white below with blackish flight feathers and a thin black eye mask; females are duller with more brown in their upperparts, and juveniles are completely brown above. Juveniles and some females can show a weak, blurry gray-brown breast band.

Behavior: Tree Swallows feed on small, aerial insects that they catch in their mouths during acrobatic flight. After breeding, Tree Swallows gather in large flocks to molt and migrate. In the nonbreeding season, they form huge communal roosts.

Location: Tree Swallows breed in open habitats such as fields and wetlands, usually adjacent to water. They nest in artificial nest boxes as well as tree cavities. Foraging flocks are frequently seen over wetlands, water, and agricultural fields.

Other Perching Birds

Cardinals
(**Cardinalidae**)

Vireos
(**Vireonidae**)

Mockingbirds and Catbirds
(**Mimidae**)

Waxwings
(**Bombycillidae**)

Western Tanager, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Cardinalidae*
Piranga ludoviciana



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Size: Western Tanagers are stocky songbirds; fairly small yet noticeably larger and heavier-bodied than warblers. They have short, thick-based bills and medium-length tails.

Colour: Adult male Western Tanagers are yellow birds with black wings and a flaming orange-red head. The wings have two bold wingbars; the upper one yellow and the lower white. The back and tail are black. Adult females have red restricted to the front of the face, with subdued yellow-green plumage on the body. Immatures in fall lack red, while in spring show less red on the head relative to that on adults of their respective sex.

Behavior: They forage slowly and methodically along branches and among leaves or needles of trees. They eat primarily insects, supplemented with small fruits in fall and winter.

Location: Western Tanagers breed in coniferous forests, though they are not particularly choosy about which conifer species. They breed in juniper-pine mixtures at low elevation, up to spruce-fir near treeline. During migration, you may find them in nearly any shrubby or wooded habitats, and even in fairly open country. Their winter habitat is in Middle America.

Red-Eyed Vireo, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Vireonidae*
Vireo olivaceus



Size: Red-eyed Vireos are large, chunky vireos with a long, angular head, thick neck, and a strong, long bill with a small but noticeable hook at the tip. The body is stocky and the tail fairly short.

Colour: Red-eyed Vireos are olive-green above and clean white below with a strong head pattern: a gray crown and white eyebrow stripe bordered above and below by blackish lines. The flanks and under the tail have a green-yellow wash. Adults have red eyes that appear dark from a distance; immatures have dark eyes.

Behavior: They forage in deciduous canopies where they can be difficult to find among the green leaves. They move slowly and methodically, carefully scanning leaves above and below for their favored caterpillar prey. However, their habit of near-incessant singing in summer, even in the heat of midafternoon, helps draw attention to them.

Location: Large expanses of deciduous forest, particularly deciduous trees with large leaves (such as maples), typify Red-eyed Vireo habitat during the breeding season. They winter in South America.

Gray Catbird, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Mimidae*
Dumetella carolinensis



Size: A medium-sized, slender songbird with a long, rounded, black tail and a narrow, straight bill. Catbirds are fairly long legged and have broad, rounded wings.

Colour: Catbirds give the impression of being entirely slaty gray. With a closer look you'll see a small black cap, blackish tail, and a rich rufous-brown patch under the tail.

Behavior: Catbirds are secretive but energetic, hopping and fluttering from branch to branch through tangles of vegetation. Singing males sit atop shrubs and small trees. Catbirds are reluctant to fly across open areas, preferring quick, low flights over vegetation.

Location: Look for Gray Catbirds in dense tangles of shrubs, small trees, and vines, along forest edges, streamside thickets, old fields, and fencerows.

Cedar Waxwing, *PASSERIFORMES*, *Bombycillidae*
Bombycilla cedrorum



Size: The Cedar Waxwing is a medium-sized, sleek bird with a large head, short neck, and short, wide bill. Waxwings have a crest that often lies flat and droops over the back of the head. The wings are broad and pointed, like a starling's. The tail is fairly short and square-tipped.

Colour: Cedar Waxwings are pale brown on the head and chest fading to soft gray on the wings. The belly is pale yellow, and the tail is gray with a bright yellow tip. The face has a narrow black mask neatly outlined in white. The red waxy tips to the wing feathers are not always easy to see.

Behavior: Cedar Waxwings are social birds that you're likely to see in flocks year-round. They sit in fruiting trees swallowing berries whole, or pluck them in mid-air with a brief fluttering hover. They favour Mountain Ash berries in winter. They also course over water for insects, flying like tubby, slightly clumsy swallows.

Location: Look for Cedar Waxwings in woodlands of all kinds, and during winter in the City wherever Mountain Ash trees grow.

Woodpeckers
(PICIFORMES)
(Picidae)



Downy Woodpecker, *PICIFORMES*, *Picidae*
Picoides pubescens



Size: Downy Woodpeckers are small versions of the classic woodpecker body plan. They have a straight, chisel-like bill, blocky head, wide shoulders, and straight-backed posture as they lean away from tree limbs and onto their tail feathers. The bill tends to look smaller for the bird's size than in other woodpeckers.

Colour: These woodpeckers give a checkered black-and-white impression. The black upperparts are checked with white on the wings, the head is boldly striped, and the back has a broad white stripe down the center. Males have a small red patch on the back of the head. The outer tail feathers are typically white with a few black spots.

Behavior: Downy Woodpeckers hitch around tree limbs and trunks or drop into tall weeds to feed on galls, moving more acrobatically than larger woodpeckers. Their rising-and-falling flight style is distinctive of many woodpeckers. In spring and summer, Downy Woodpeckers make lots of noise, both with their shrill whinnying call and by drumming on trees.

Location: You'll find Downy Woodpeckers in open woodlands, particularly among deciduous trees, and brushy or weedy edges.

American Three-toed Woodpecker, *PICIFORMES*,

Picidae

Picoides dorsalis



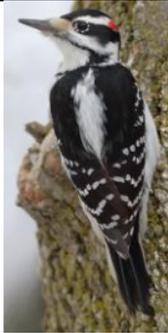
Size: The American Three-toed woodpecker is medium sized for woodpeckers.

Colour: A black-and-white woodpecker, more black than white. The head is black with a white mustache stripe and a thin white line behind the eye. The throat, breast, and belly are white. Males have a yellow cap.

Behavior: Three-toed woodpeckers forage on conifers in search of wood-boring beetle larvae or other insects. They may also eat fruit and tree sap. These birds often move into areas with large numbers of insect-infested trees, often following a forest fire or flood.

Location: The breeding habitat is coniferous forests across western Canada, Alaska and the midwestern USA. The female usually lays 4 eggs in a nest cavity in a dead conifer or sometimes a live tree or pole. The pair excavates a new nest each year. This bird is normally a permanent resident of Alberta, but northern birds may move south and birds at high elevations may move to lower levels in winter.

Hairy Woodpecker, *PICIFORMES*, *Picidae*
Leuconotopicus villosus



Size: Larger than the Downy, the Hairy Woodpecker is a medium-sized woodpecker with a fairly square head, a long, straight, chisel-like bill, and stiff, long tail feathers to lean against on tree trunks. The bill is nearly the same length as the head.

Colour: Hairy Woodpeckers are contrastingly black and white. The black wings are checkered with white; the head has two white stripes (and, in males, a flash of red toward the back of the head). A large white patch runs down the center of the black back. These woodpeckers can easily be confused with the Downy Woodpecker.

Behavior: Hairy Woodpeckers hitch up tree trunks and along main branches. They sometimes feed at the bases of trees, along fallen logs, and even on the ground at times. They have the slowly undulating flight pattern of most woodpeckers.

Location: Hairy Woodpeckers are birds of mature forests across the continent. They're also found in woodlots, suburbs, and parks, as well as forest edges, open woodlands, recently burned forests, and stands infested by bark beetles.

Pileated Woodpecker, *PICIFORMES, Picidae*

Dryocopus pileatus



Size: The Pileated Woodpecker is a very large woodpecker with a long neck and a triangular red crest that sweeps off the back of the head. The bill is long and chisel-like, about the length of the head. In flight, the wings are broad and the bird can seem crow-like.

Colour: The Pileated Woodpecker is one of the most striking forest birds on the continent; black with bold white stripes down the neck and a flaming-red crest in both sexes. Males have a red stripe on the cheek.

Behavior: Pileated Woodpeckers drill distinctive rectangular-shaped holes in rotten wood to get at carpenter ants and other insects. They are loud birds with whinnying calls. They also drum on dead trees in a deep, slow, rolling pattern, and even the heavy chopping sound of foraging carries well. Their flight undulates like other woodpeckers, which helps separate them from a crow's straight flight path.

Location: Pileated Woodpeckers are forest birds that require large, standing dead trees and downed wood. Forests can be evergreen, deciduous, or mixed and are often old. Found all year in Alberta.

Northern Flicker, *PICIFORMES*, *Picidae*
Colaptes auratus



Size: Flickers are fairly large woodpeckers with a slim, rounded head, slightly down curved bill, and long, flared tail that tapers to a point.

Colour: Flickers appear brownish overall with a white rump patch that's conspicuous in flight and often visible when perched. The undersides of the wing and tail feathers are red in western birds. With a closer look you'll see the brown plumage is richly patterned with black spots, bars, and crescents. There are nine sub-species which make for a confusing bird that varies a lot in colouration.

Behavior: Northern Flickers spend lots of time on the ground, and when in trees they're often perched upright on horizontal branches instead of leaning against their tails on a trunk. They fly in an up-and-down path using heavy flaps interspersed with glides, like many woodpeckers.

Location: Look for flickers in open habitats near trees, including woodlands, edges, yards, and parks. In western Alberta you can find them in mountain forests. They migrate to the USA in winter.

Yellow-bellied Sucker, *PICIFORMES, Picidae*
Sphyrapicus varius



Size: Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are fairly small woodpeckers with stout, straight bills. The long wings extend about halfway to the tip of the stiff, pointed tail at rest. Often, sapsuckers hold their crown feathers up to form a peak at the back of the head.

Colour: Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are mostly black and white with boldly patterned faces. Both sexes have red foreheads, and males also have red throats. Look for a long white stripe along the folded wing. Bold black-and-white stripes curve from the face toward a black chest shield and white or yellowish underparts.

Behavior: Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers perch upright on trees, leaning on their tails like other woodpeckers. They feed at sapwells—neat rows of shallow holes they drill in tree bark. They lap up the sugary sap along with any insects that may get caught there. Sapsuckers drum on trees and metal objects in a distinctive stuttering pattern.

Location: Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers live in both hardwood and conifer forests up to about 6,500 feet elevation. They often nest in groves of small trees such as aspens. They fly to south eastern USA, Mexico and the Caribbean for winter.

Kingfishers
(CORACIIFORMES)
(Alcedinidae)



Belted Kingfisher, *CORACIIFORMES*, *Alcedinidae*
Megaceryle alcyon



Size: Belted Kingfishers are stocky, large-headed birds with a shaggy crest on the top and back of the head and a straight, thick, pointed bill. Their legs are short and their tails are medium length and square-tipped.

Colour: These kingfishers are powder blue above with fine, white spotting on the wings and tail. The underparts are white with a broad, blue breast band. Females also have a broad rusty band on their bellies. Juveniles show irregular rusty spotting in the breast band.

Behavior: Belted Kingfishers spend much of their time perched alone along the edges of streams and lakes searching for small fish. They also fly quickly up and down rivers and shorelines giving loud rattling calls. They hunt either by plunging directly from a perch, or by hovering over the water, bill downward, before diving after a fish they've spotted.

Location: Kingfishers live near streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, and estuaries. They nest in burrows that they dig into soft earthen banks, usually adjacent to or directly over water. Kingfishers summer throughout most of Canada.

Hérons and Pelicans (PELECANIFORMES)

Hérons (Ardeidae)



Great Blue Heron, *PELECANIFORMES*, *Ardeidae*
Ardea herodias



Size: Largest of the North American herons with long legs, a sinuous neck, and thick, dagger like bill. Head, chest, and wing plumes give a shaggy appearance. In flight, the Great Blue Heron curls its neck into a tight “S” shape; its wings are broad and rounded and its legs trail well beyond the tail.

Colour: Great Blue Herons appear blue-gray from a distance, with a wide black stripe over the eye. In flight, the upper side of the wing is two-toned: pale on the forewing and darker on the flight feathers.

Behaviour: Hunting Great Blue Herons wade slowly or stand statue-like, stalking fish and other prey in shallow water or open fields. Watch for the lightning-fast thrust of the neck and head as they stab with their strong bills. Their very slow wingbeats, tucked-in neck and trailing legs create an unmistakable image in flight.

Location: Look for Great Blue Herons in most freshwater habitats, from marshes, sloughs, riverbanks, and lakes to backyard goldfish ponds. They also forage in grasslands and agricultural fields. Breeding birds gather in colonies or “heronries” to build stick nests high off the ground.

Black-crowned Night-heron, *PELECANIFORMES*,

Ardeidae Nycticorax nycticorax



Size: Black-crowned Night-Herons are small herons with rather squat, thick proportions. They have thick necks, large, flat heads, and heavy, pointed bills. The legs are short and, in flight, barely reach the end of the tail. The wings are broad and rounded.

Colour: Adults are light-gray birds with a neatly defined black back and black crown. Immatures are brown with large white spots on the wings and blurry streaks on the underparts. Adults have all-black bills; immatures have yellow-and-black bills.

Behaviour: Black-crowned Night-Herons often spend their days perched on tree limbs or concealed among foliage and branches. They forage in the evening and at night, in water, on mudflats, and on land. In flight they fold their head back against their shoulders, almost making the neck disappear.

Location: These are social birds that tend to roost and nest in groups, although they typically forage on their own. Look for them in most wetland habitats, including marshes, streams, lakes, and reservoirs.

American Bittern, *PELECANIFORMES*, *Ardeidae*
Botaurus lentiginosus



Size: American Bitterns are medium-sized herons with thick, compact bodies. They have shorter legs and thicker necks than typical herons and a slightly hunched posture. The daggerlike bill is long, straight, and sharply pointed. The wings are broad but the wingtips are somewhat pointed.

Colour: American Bitterns are mostly warm brown, buff, and white. They are strongly streaked, especially on the neck, and they can be very hard to see against marsh vegetation. In flight the dark outer wings contrast sharply with the brown of the rest of the bird.

Behaviour: Bitterns are stealth predators and typically stand motionless as they wait for prey to approach, or stalk it with barely perceptible motions. They adopt a classic pose when alarmed, with the beak pointing straight up, helping this streaky bird blend in with its reedy background. They tend to forage alone.

Location: Look for American Bitterns in shallow freshwater marshes, typically toward the margins and among reeds and other vegetation; they are rarely out in the open. They winter in the southern USA and Mexico.

Pelicans
(Pelicanidae)



American White Pelican, *PELECANIFORMES,*
Pelicanidae
Pelecanus erythrorhynchos



Size: A huge waterbird with very broad wings, a long neck, and a massive bill that gives the head a unique, long shape. They have thick bodies, short legs, and short, square tails. During the breeding season, adults grow an unusual projection or horn on the upper mandible near the tip of the bill.

Colour: Adult American White Pelicans are snowy white with black flight feathers visible only when the wings are spread. A small patch of ornamental feathers on the chest can become yellow in spring. The bill and legs are yellow-orange. Immatures are mostly white as well, but the head, neck, and back are variably dusky.

Behaviour: American White Pelicans feed from the water's surface, dipping their beaks into the water to catch fish and other aquatic organisms. They often upend, like a very large dabbling duck, in this process. They are superb soarers (they are among the heaviest flying birds in the world) and often travel long distances in large flocks by soaring. When flapping, their wingbeats are slow and methodical.

Location: American White Pelicans typically breed on islands in shallow wetlands in the interior of the continent. They spend winters in western and south eastern USA and Mexico.

Cranes, Crakes, Coots and Rails (GRUIFORMES)

Coots and Rails (Rallidae)



Sora, *GRUIFORMES*, *Rallidae*
Porzana carolina



Size: The Sora is a small marshbird with a triangular body shape, and a deep rear end. They have short tails, often held upright showing white underneath. They are sometimes referred to as the sora rail or sora crane.

Colour: They have slate gray bodies underneath, with a brown, black and white patterned back and sides, with a short, yellow bill, a black face and bib.

Behaviour: The sora's breeding habitat is marshes throughout much of North America. They nest in a well-concealed location in dense vegetation. Soras forage while walking or swimming. They are omnivores, eating seeds, insects and snails. Although soras are more often heard than seen, they are sometimes seen walking near open water.

Location: They are found all across Canadian marshes in summer and winter in Mexico and northern South America.

American Coot, *GRUIFORMES, Rallidae*
Fulica americana



Size: The waterborne American Coot is one good reminder that not everything that floats is a duck. The American Coot is a plump, duck-like bird with a rounded head and a sloping bill. Their tiny tail, short wings, and large feet are visible on the rare occasions they take flight.

Colour: Coots are dark-gray to black birds with a bright-white bill and forehead. The legs are yellow-green. At close range you may see a small patch of red on the forehead.

Behaviour: You'll find coots eating aquatic plants on almost any body of water. When swimming they look like small ducks (and often dive), but on land they look more chicken-like, walking rather than waddling. An awkward and often clumsy flier, the American Coot requires long running takeoffs to get airborne.

Location: Look for American Coots at ponds in city parks, in marshes, reservoirs, along the edges of lakes, in roadside ditches, and even sewage treatment ponds. Any where there is water and aquatic vegetation can be home to Coots.

Shorebirds, Gulls and Terns (CHARADRIIFORMES)



Sandpipers

(Scolopacidae)



Greater Yellowlegs, *CHARADRIIFORMES*, *Scolopacidae*
Tringa melanoleuca



Size: A medium-sized to large shorebird.

Colour: Adults have long yellow legs and a long, thin, dark bill which has a slight upward curve and is longer than the head. The body is grey-brown on top and white underneath; the neck and breast are streaked with dark brown. The rump is white.

Behaviour: These birds forage in shallow water, sometimes using their bills to stir up the water. They mainly eat insects and small fish, as well as crustaceans and marine worms. It often walks in sand or mud and leaves clear tracks; it can be possible to gather information about this species using its tracks. Their breeding habitat is bogs and marshes in the boreal forest region of Canada and Alaska. They nest on the ground, usually in well-hidden locations near water.

Location: They migrate to the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States and south to South America.

Lesser Yellowlegs, CHARADRIIFORMES, Scolopacidae
Tringa flavipes



Size: A medium sized shorebird, smaller than the Greater Yellowlegs.

Colour: Compared to the Greater Yellowlegs, the bill is shorter (visually about the same length as the head), slim, straight, and uniformly dark. The legs are yellow. The breast is streaked and the flanks are finely marked with short bars. These two species are often confused.

Behaviour: It is an active feeder, often running through the shallow water to chase its prey.

Location: During breeding season the western population moves far inland to nest in grasslands and prairies near freshwater. These birds forage in shallow water, sometimes using their bill to stir up the water. They mainly eat insects, small fish and crustaceans.

Long-billed Dowitcher, *CHARADRIIFORMES*,
Scolopacidae
Limnodromus scolopaceus



Size: A medium sized shorebird with a long bill.

Colour: Adults have yellowish legs and a long straight dark bill. The body is dark brown on top and reddish underneath with spotted throat and breast, bars on flanks. The tail has a black and white barred pattern. The winter plumage of both an adult and a juvenile is largely grey.

Behaviour: These birds forage by probing in shallow water or on wet mud. They mainly eat insects, mollusks, crustaceans and marine worms, but also eat some plant material.

Location: They are seen in Alberta during migration, as their breeding habitat is wet tundra in the far north of North America and eastern Siberia. They nest on the ground, usually near water. They migrate to the southern United States and to Central America.

Short-billed Dowitcher, CHARADRIIFORMES,

Scolopacidae *Limnodromus griseus*



Size: A medium-sized, stocky, long-billed shorebird with moderately long, pale legs. Its long bill is short only in comparison with the very similar Long-billed Dowitcher.

Colour: The body of adults is dark brown on top and reddish underneath. The tail has a black and white barred pattern. The legs are a yellowish color.

Behaviour: This species favors a variety of habitats including tundra in the north to ponds and mudflats in the south. It feeds on invertebrates often by rapidly probing its bill into mud in a sewing machine fashion.

Location: They migrate to the southern United States and as far south as Brazil. This bird is likely to be seen near ocean coasts during migration.

Solitary Sandpiper, CHARADRIIFORMES, Scolopacidae
Tringa solitaria



Size: The Solitary Sandpiper is a medium-sized shorebird, with moderately long neck and legs. The bill is also medium-sized.

Colour: The back is dark olive with scattered small white spots. They have a bold white eye-ring, with a tail that is distinctly barred. The rump and center tail feathers are dark.

Behaviour: It frequently bobs its head as it hunts around a pond. Food is small invertebrates, sometimes small frogs, picked off the mud as the bird works steadily around the edges of its chosen pond.

Location: The solitary sandpiper is not a gregarious species, usually seen alone during migration, although sometimes small numbers congregate in suitable feeding areas. The solitary sandpiper is very much a bird of fresh water, and is often found in sites, such as ditches, too restricted for other waders, which tend to like a clear all-round view. The Solitary Sandpiper breeds in woodlands across Canada. It winters in Mexico and South America.

Wilson's Phalarope, CHARADRIIFORMES, Scolopacidae
Phalaropus tricolor



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Size: Wilson's Phalaropes are small shorebirds with long legs, slender necks, and very thin, straight, long bills. They have sharply pointed wings.

Colour: Wilson's Phalaropes are grayish birds with cinnamon or rusty highlights especially on the neck. In the breeding season females are more colorful than males (which is unusual for birds), with a dark line through the eye extending down the neck. The throat is white and the neck is washed rusty. Nonbreeding birds are pale gray above, white below, without the strong facial markings of other phalarope species.

Behaviour: Phalaropes are the only shorebirds that regularly swim in deep water. They bob on the surface, often spinning in circles to bring small food items within reach of their slender bills.

Location: Wilson's Phalaropes breed in marshes of the Great Plains and intermountain West. They spend winters in South America, mainly on high lakes in the Andes. On migration, great numbers congregate on salty lakes and coastal marshes of the West.

Spotted Sandpiper, *CHARADRIIFORMES*, *Scolopacidae*
Actitis macularius



Size: The Spotted Sandpiper is a medium-sized shorebird with a bill slightly shorter than its head and a body that tapers to a longish tail. They have a rounded breast and usually appear as though they are leaning forward.

Colour: In breeding season Spotted Sandpipers have bold dark spots on their bright white breast and an orange bill. The back is dark brown. In winter, a Spotted Sandpiper's breast is not spotted; it's plain white, while the back is grayish brown and the bill is pale yellow. In flight, Spotted Sandpipers have a thin white stripe along the wing.

Behaviour: Spotted Sandpipers are often solitary and walk with a distinctive teeter, bobbing their tails up and down constantly. When foraging they walk quickly, crouching low, occasionally darting toward prey, all the while bobbing the tail. In flight, Spotted Sandpipers have quick, snappy wingbeats interspersed with glides, keeping their wings below horizontal. Listen for a few high whistled notes as they take off from the shoreline.

Location: Look for Spotted Sandpipers nearly anywhere near water—along streambanks, rivers, ponds, lakes, and beaches, particularly on rocky shores.

Wilson's Snipe, CHARADRIIFORMES, Scolopacidae
Gallinago delicata



Size: Wilson's Snipes are medium-sized, pudgy shorebirds with short, stocky legs. The bill is straight and very long (several times the length of the head). The head is rounded and the tail is short.

Colour: These birds are intricately patterned in buff and brown stripes and bars. The dark head has prominent buffy to whitish stripes. The dark back has three long buffy streaks, one running down each edge, one down the center. The buff chest is streaked and spotted with brown; the sides are heavily barred with black. In flight, the wings are dark above and below.

Behaviour: Wilson's Snipes forage by methodically probing in muddy ground for earthworms and other invertebrates. Individuals usually sit tight until suddenly flushing near your feet and flying off in fast zigzags. Displaying males fly high in the sky and make a curious whistling noise ("winnowing"), created by air passing over his modified outer tail feathers.

Location: Wilson's Snipe live in muddy pond edges, damp fields, and other wet, open habitats. Typically these contain thick, low vegetation into which these well-camouflaged birds can disappear.

Marbled Godwit, *CHARADRIIFORMES*, *Scolopacidae*
Limosa fedoa



Size: Marbled Godwit's are large shorebirds, up to 20 inches (50 cm) from tip of the beak to tail.

Colour: Adults have long blue-grey hairy legs and a very long pink bill with a slight upward curve and dark at the tip. The long neck, breast and belly are pale brown with dark bars on the breast and flanks. The back is mottled and dark. They show cinnamon wing linings in flight.

Behaviour: These birds forage by probing on mudflats, in marshes, or at the beach (see picture below). In short grass, they may pick up insects by sight. They mainly eat insects and crustaceans, but also eat parts of aquatic plants.

Location: Their breeding habitat is the northern prairies of western Canada, and the north central Great Plains, United States near marshes or ponds. They nest on the ground, usually in short grass. In autumn, they migrate in flocks to the coasts of California, the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico and South America.

Plovers
(Charadriidae)



Killdeer, CHARADRIIFORMES, Charadriidae

Charadrius vociferus



Size: Killdeer have the characteristic large, round head, large eye, and short bill of all plovers. They are especially slender and lanky, with a long, pointed tail and long wings.

Colour: Brownish-tan on top and white below. The white chest is barred with two black bands, and the brown face is marked with black and white patches. The bright orange-buff rump is conspicuous in flight.

Behaviour: Killdeer spend their time walking along the ground or running ahead a few steps, stopping to look around, and running on again. When disturbed they break into flight and circle overhead, calling repeatedly. If you approach an occupied nest the female will try to lead you away by faking a broken-wing. Their flight is rapid, with stiff, intermittent wingbeats.

Location: Look for Killdeer on open ground with low vegetation (or no vegetation at all), including pastures, fields, sandbars and mudflats, as well as lawns, and golf courses. This species is one of the least water-associated of all shorebirds.

Waders
(Recurvirostridae)



American Avocet, CHARADRIIFORMES, *Recurvirostridae*
Recurvirostra americana



Size: Avocets are large shorebirds, with long legs, long necks, and a long upturned bill.

Colour: They have black and white wings and tail, creamy underside and a rusty to peach coloured neck and head. The beak is black.

Behaviour: Avocets can often be seen striding through shallow water sweeping their bills side to side to catch aquatic insects. In deeper water they will float calmly.

Location: The breeding habitat is marshes, beaches, prairie ponds, and shallow lakes in the mid-west as far north as southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and on the Pacific coast. American avocets form breeding colonies numbering dozens of pairs. Nesting occurs near water, usually on small islands or boggy shorelines where access by predators is difficult. They can occasionally be seen in the shallow waters around most of Big Lake. This area is the northern extent of their range and they are not very common in the easily accessible parts of the lake.

Willet, CHARADRIIFORMES, *Recurvirostridae*
Tringa semipalmata



Size: Willets are large, stocky shorebirds with long legs and thick, straight bills considerably longer than the head. Their wings are broader and rounder than those of many shorebirds and the tail is short and squared off at the base.

Colour: Willets are gray or brown birds that, when flying, display a striking white and black stripe along each wing. In summer, Willets are mottled gray, brown, and black; in winter they are a more consistent plain gray. The legs are bluish gray.

Behaviour: Willets are often seen alone. They walk deliberately, pausing to probe for crabs, worms and other prey in sand and mudflats, or to pick at insects and mollusks. When startled, they react with a piercing call, often opening their wings and running rather than taking flight.

Location: During breeding season the western population moves far inland to nest in grasslands and prairies near freshwater. They winter on the west coast of the USA.

Gulls and Terns

(Laridae)



Franklin's Gull, CHARADRIIFORMES, Laridae
Leucophaeus pipixcan



Size: A small, black-headed gull of the prairies,

Colour: Adult Franklin's Gulls have an ashy gray back, white underparts, with the ends of the wings black with white tips and a white band. The entire head is black in breeding season. Colouration varies with age with immature and first year birds with brownish wings and variable head markings.

Behaviour: The Franklin's Gull is a common sight in the interior of North America, following plows to eat exposed worms, insects, and mice.

Location: When water is high enough they build a colony of floating nests on the west end of Big Lake. They eat small fish, and insects in the water and on land. They can be seen anywhere over the lake hunting by flying low over the water, or floating.

Bonaparte's Gull, CHARADRIIFORMES, Laridae
Chroicocephalus philadelphia



Size: This is the smallest gull found on Big Lake, slightly smaller than the Franklin's.

Colour: Adult Bonaparte's Gulls have an ashy gray back, white underparts, with a white triangle in outer part of wing. The entire head is black in breeding season. Colouration varies with age with immature and first year birds with brownish wings and variable head markings.

Behaviour: Like most gulls, Bonaparte's gull has a varied diet including flying, land and water insects, fish and their eggs, crustaceans, frogs and salamanders.

Location: Bonaparte's gull breeds in boreal forest across southern Alaska and much of interior western Canada, as far east as central Quebec and south to within 320 km (200 mi) of the United States/Canada border. It avoids dense stands of conifers, instead choosing more open areas, such as the treed edges of bogs, fens, marshes, ponds, or islands. It typically nests within 60 m (200 ft) of open water. It winters along the coasts of North America, and in the Great Lakes.

Ring-billed Gull, CHARADRIIFORMES, Laridae

Larus delawarensis



Size: The Ring-billed is a medium-sized gull with a fairly short, slim bill.

Colour: Adults are clean gray above, with a white head, body and tail; their black wingtips are spotted with white. They have yellow legs and a yellow bill with a black band around it. Nonbreeding adults have brown-streaked heads. During their first two years, Ring-billed Gulls are a motley brown and gray with a pink bill and legs.

Behaviour: These sociable gulls often fly overhead by the hundreds or feed together at a golf course, beach, or field. Strong, nimble flyers and opportunistic feeders, Ring-billed Gulls circle and hover acrobatically looking for food; they also forage afloat and on foot.

Location: Ring-billed Gulls often congregate around humans, at garbage dumps, parking lots, and freshly plowed fields. While the species is common on coastal beaches, particularly during winter, many Ring-billed Gulls lead inland lives, never setting eyes on the sea.

California Gull, *CHARADRIIFORMES, Laridae*
Larus californicus



Size: A medium-sized gull, often confused with the Ring-billed due to a similar size and colouration.

Colour: The California Gull has a yellow bill with black ring near the tip and red spot on the lower mandible. The head and underparts are white, the back is medium dark gray. Wingtips are black with white spots and the legs are yellow-green (the Ring-billed Gull has yellow legs).

Immature gulls go through many colour changes over the four years it takes to mature, from mottled brown to the adult non-breeding colours. This can confuse identification considerably.

Behaviour: These sociable gulls often fly overhead by the hundreds or feed together at a golf course, beach, or field. The California Gull, like most gulls, is an opportunistic feeder, eating anything it can catch or scavenge.

Location: They often breed on islands in lakes or rivers. They forage along lakes, bogs, farm fields, lawns, pastures, sagebrush, garbage dumps, feedlots, parking lots, ocean beaches, and open ocean.

Common Tern, *CHARADRIIFORMES*, *Laridae*

Sterna hirundo



Size: The Common Tern is the size of a small gull. They are graceful, black-and-white water-birds. The Common Tern is the most widespread tern in North America.

Colour: Breeding adults have light grey upperparts, white to very light grey underparts, a black cap, orange-red legs, and a red, narrow pointed bill. Depending on the subspecies, the bill may be mostly red with a black tip or all black.

Behaviour: The common tern nests on any flat, poorly vegetated surface close to water, including beaches and islands, and it readily adapts to artificial substrates such as floating rafts. The nest may be a bare scrape in sand or gravel, but it is often lined or edged with whatever debris is available. Like most terns, this species feeds by plunge-diving for fish, either in the sea or in freshwater, but shellfish, crustaceans and other invertebrate prey may form a significant part of the diet in some areas.

Location: Big Lake is on the western edge of their breeding distribution. The Common Tern migrates thousands of kilometers to the south of South America.

Forster's Tern, CHARADRIIFORMES, Laridae
Sterna forsteri



Size: Forster's Tern is small as terns go, similar to the Common Tern.

Colour: It has pale grey upperparts and white underparts. Its legs are red and its bill is orange, tipped with black. It is easily confused with the similar Common Tern.

In winter, the forehead becomes white and a characteristic black eye mask remains. Juvenile Forster's terns are similar to the winter adult.

Behaviour: This species breeds in colonies in marshes. It nests in a ground scrape and lays three or more eggs. Like all white terns, it is fiercely defensive of its nest and young. The Forster's tern feeds by plunge-diving for fish, but will also hawk for insects in its breeding marshes. It usually dives directly, and not from the "stepped-hover" favoured by other terns.

Location: It breeds inland in North America; Big Lake is near the northern and western extent of their breeding range. They winter in the Caribbean and northern South America.

Gamebirds
(GALLIFORMES)

Grouse
(Phasianidae)



Ruffed Grouse, *GALLIFORMES, Phasianidae*
Bonasa umbellus



Size: Ruffed Grouse are fairly small grouse with a short, triangular crest and a long, fan-shaped tail. They have short legs and often look slimmer than other grouse species.

Colour: Ruffed Grouse are intricately patterned with dark bars and spots on either a reddish-brown or grayish background. Dark bars down the side of the neck continue and widen on the belly. The tail is finely barred, with one wide, black band near the tip.

Behaviour: Look for Ruffed Grouse foraging on the forest-interior floor for seeds and insects. Displaying males make a deep, airy drumming sound by beating their wings while standing on a log. In spring you'll likely see lone birds; in summer look for females with broods of chicks. Winter birds form flocks and often eat buds of deciduous trees.

Location: Ruffed Grouse usually occupy mixed deciduous and coniferous forest interiors with scattered clearings. They also live along forested streams and in areas growing back from burning or logging.

Hawks, Eagles, and Osprey (ACCIPITRIFORMES)



Hawks and Eagles (Accipitridae)



Bald Eagle, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Haliaeetus leucocephalus



Size: The Bald Eagle dwarfs most other raptors, including the Red-tailed Hawk. It has a heavy body, large head, and long, hooked bill. In flight, a Bald Eagle holds its broad wings flat like a board. The only other raptor in Alberta near to the Bald Eagle in size is the Golden Eagle.

Colour: Adult Bald Eagles have white heads and tails with dark brown bodies and wings. Their legs and bills are bright yellow. Immature birds have mostly dark heads and tails; their brown wings and bodies are mottled with white in varying amounts. Young birds attain adult plumage in about five years.

Behaviour: You'll find Bald Eagles soaring high in the sky, flapping low over treetops with slow wingbeats, or perched in trees or on the ground. Bald Eagles scavenge many meals by harassing other birds or by eating carrion or garbage. They eat mainly fish, but also hunt mammals, gulls, and waterfowl.

Location: Look for Bald Eagles near lakes, reservoirs, rivers, and marshes. They typically roost and nest in large trees overlooking a body of water.

Red-tailed Hawk, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Buteo jamaicensis



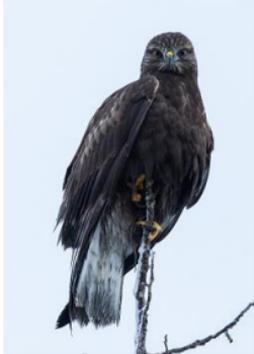
Size: Red-tailed Hawks are large hawks with typical *Buteo* proportions: very broad, rounded wings and a short, wide tail. Large females seen from a distance might fool you into thinking you're seeing an eagle. (Until an actual eagle comes along.)

Colour: Most Red-tailed Hawks are rich brown above and pale below, with a streaked belly and, on the wing underside, a dark bar between shoulder and wrist. The tail is usually pale below and cinnamon-red above, though in young birds it's brown and banded. "Dark-morph" birds are all chocolate-brown with a warm red tail. "Rufous-morph" birds are reddish-brown on the chest with a dark belly.

Behaviour: Red-tailed Hawks soar above open fields, slowly turning circles on their broad, rounded wings. They also perch high, atop telephone poles or trees, eyes fixed on the ground to catch the movements of a mouse or a rabbit.

Location: The Red-tailed Hawk is a bird of open country. Look for it along fields and perched on telephone poles, light poles, fenceposts, or trees standing alone or along edges of fields.

Rough-legged Hawk, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Buteo lagopus



Size: Rough-legged Hawks are fairly large broad-winged hawks that have relatively, long and narrow wings. The tail is also longer than in many other broad-winged hawks. The wingtips are broad and often swept back slightly from the wrist, giving a hint of an M shape to the wing. The bill is fairly small. Its feet are feathered to the toes as an adaptation to its Arctic home range.

Colour: These are boldly patterned hawks with tails that are dark at the tip and pale at the base. Like many hawks they occur in light and dark morphs. Light morphs have pale underwings with dark patches at the bend of the wing. Females have pale heads and dark belly patches; on males the pattern is more mottled. Dark morphs are mostly dark brown but show pale trailing edges to the underwing.

Behaviour: When hunting, Rough-legged Hawks often face into the wind and hover, scanning the ground below for small mammal prey. They often perch on fence posts, utility poles and trees.

Location: They breed in the arctic. In winter they occur in southern Alberta.

Northern Harrier, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Buteo jamaicensis



Size: Northern Harriers are slender, medium-sized raptors with long, fairly broad wings and a long, rounded tail. They have a flat, owl-like face and a small, sharply hooked bill. Harriers often fly with their wings held in a V-shape above the horizontal.

Colour: Males are gray above and whitish below with black wingtips, a dark trailing edge to the wing, and a black-banded tail. Females and immatures are brown, with black bands on the tail. Adult females have whitish undersides with brown streaks, whereas immatures are buffy, with less streaking. All Northern Harriers have a white rump patch that is obvious in flight.

Behaviour: Northern Harriers fly low over the ground when hunting, weaving back and forth over fields and marshes as they watch and listen for small animals. They eat on the ground, and they perch on low posts or trees. On the breeding grounds, males perform elaborate flying barrel rolls to court females.

Location: Northern Harriers breed in wide-open habitats ranging from Arctic tundra to prairie grasslands to fields and marshes. Their nests are concealed on the ground in grasses or wetland vegetation. They winter in most of the USA.

Swainson's Hawk, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Buteo swainsoni



Size: Swainson's Hawks are large hawks with fairly broad wings and short tails (buteo's). However, Swainson's Hawks are less hefty than many other buteos. They are slimmer and longer-winged, with their wings typically held in a shallow V when soaring.

Colour: Though they can be quite variable, most Swainson's Hawks are light-bellied birds with a dark or reddish-brown chest and brown or gray upperparts. They have distinctive underwings with white wing linings that contrast strongly with blackish flight feathers. Most males have gray heads; females tend to have brown heads.

Behaviour: Swainson's Hawks are social, nearly always being found in groups outside the breeding season. You may see them soaring in a kettle of migrating birds; strung out on the ground, fence posts, and utility poles when foraging on grasshoppers.

Location: These hawks spend summers in the wide-open spaces of the prairies. They are the typical nesting hawk of grasslands, sage flats and even swaths of agriculture. Nests are placed in trees, often in the only tree visible for miles.

Goshawk, ACCIPITRIFORMES, Accipitridae
Accipiter gentilis



Size: Northern Goshawk are large hawks and the largest and bulkiest of the accipiters. They have broad, rounded wings and long tails. Relatively long secondary flight feathers give the trailing edge of the wing a curved or bulging look; the wingtips can look pointed in flight.

Colour: Adult goshawks are dark slate gray above with pale gray barred underparts. They have a dark head with a wide white stripe over the eye; the eye is orange to red. Immatures are brown and streaky, with narrow dark bands in the tail. They have an indistinct pale eyebrow stripe and yellow eyes. Females are larger than males.

Behaviour: Goshawks are stealthy predators that watch for prey on high perches and then attack with quick, agile flight, even through dense trees or cluttered understory. They fly with a few relatively slow wingbeats interspersed with short glides.

Location: Goshawks are birds of wild forests and tend to occur in large tracts. Across much of their range they live mainly in coniferous forests, but they may occur in deciduous hardwood forest as well (such as in the northeastern U.S.).

Osprey
(Pandionidae)



Osprey, ACCIPITRIFORMES, *Pandionidae*
Pandion haliaetus



Size: Ospreys are very large, distinctively shaped hawks. Despite their size, their bodies are slender, with long, narrow wings and long legs. Ospreys fly with a marked kink in their wings, making an M-shape when seen from below

Colour: Ospreys are brown above and white below, and overall they are whiter than most raptors. From below, the wings are mostly white with a prominent dark patch at the wrists. The head is white with a broad brown stripe through the eye. Juveniles have white spots on the back and buffy shading on the breast.

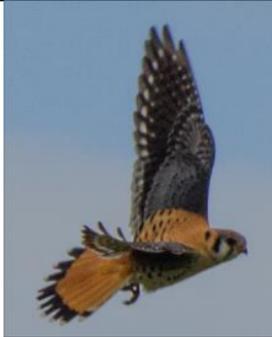
Behaviour: Ospreys live solely on live fish. They search for fish by flying on steady wingbeats and bowed wings or circling high in the sky over relatively shallow water. They often hover briefly before diving, feet first, to grab a fish.

Location: Look for Ospreys around nearly any body of water in Alberta: rivers, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. Their conspicuous stick nests are placed in the open on poles, channel markers, and dead trees, often over water. They winter in the southern USA, Mexico and South America.

Falcons
(FALCONIFORMES)
(Falconidae)



American Kestrel, *FALCONIFORMES*, *Falconidae*
Falco sparverius



Size: The American Kestrel is the smallest falcon, roughly the size and shape of a Mourning Dove, although it has a larger head; longer, narrow wings; and long, square-tipped tail. In flight, the wings are often bent and the wingtips swept back.

Colour: American Kestrels are pale when seen from below and warm, rusty brown spotted with black above, with a black band near the tip of the tail. Males have slate-blue wings; females' wings are reddish brown. Both sexes have pairs of black vertical slashes on the sides of their pale faces—sometimes called a “mustache” and a “sideburn.”

Behaviour: American Kestrels usually snatch their victims from the ground, though some catch quarry on the wing. They are gracefully buoyant in flight, and are small enough to get tossed around in the wind. When perched, kestrels often pump their tails as if they are trying to balance.

Location: American Kestrels occupy habitats ranging from deserts and grasslands to alpine meadows. You're most likely to see them perching on telephone wires along roadsides, in open country with short vegetation and few trees. They winter throughout the USA.

Merlin, *FALCONIFORMES*, *Falconidae*

Falco columbarius



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Size: Merlins are small falcons with a powerful build that is broader and stockier than the smaller American Kestrel. Merlins have sharply pointed wings, a broad chest, and a medium length tail.

Colour: Merlins are generally dark and streaky, though their coloration varies geographically and by gender. Adult male Merlins are slaty gray to dark gray; females and immatures are browner. The chest is usually heavily streaked and the underwings are dark. The dark tail has narrow white bands, and the face often lacks a prominent malar or “mustache” stripe.

Behaviour: Merlins are energetic predators that patrol shorelines and open areas looking for their prey of small birds and dragonflies. They fly powerfully, with quick wingbeats, pausing to glide only rarely. They also spend long periods perched in open areas, scanning for prey.

Location: Merlins nest in forested openings, edges, and along rivers across northern North America. They have also begun nesting in towns and cities.

Owls
(STRIGIFORMES)
(Strigidae)



Great Horned Owl, *STRIGIFORMES, Strigidae*
Bubo virginianus



Size: These are large, thick-bodied owls with two prominent feathered tufts on the head. The wings are broad and rounded. In flight, the rounded head and short bill combine to create a blunt-headed silhouette.

Colour: Great Horned Owls are mottled gray-brown, with reddish brown faces and a neat white patch on the throat. Their overall color tone varies regionally from sooty to pale.

Behaviour: Great Horned Owls are nocturnal. You may see them at dusk sitting on fence posts or tree limbs at the edges of open areas, or flying across roads or fields with stiff, deep beats of their rounded wings. Their call is a deep, stuttering series of four to five hoots.

Location: Look for this widespread owl in woods, particularly young woods interspersed with fields or other open areas. The broad range of habitats they use includes deciduous and evergreen forests, swamps, desert, tundra edges, and tropical rainforest, as well as cities, orchards, suburbs, and parks.

Barred Owl, *STRIGIFORMES, Strigidae*
Strix varia



Size: Barred Owls are large, stocky owls with rounded heads, no ear tufts, and medium length, rounded tails

Colour: Barred Owls are mottled brown and white overall, with dark brown, almost black, eyes. The underparts are mostly marked with vertical brown bars on a white background, while the upper breast is crossed with horizontal brown bars. The wings and tail are barred brown and white.

Behaviour: Barred Owls roost quietly in forest trees during the day, though they can occasionally be heard calling in daylight hours. At night they hunt small animals, especially rodents, and give an instantly recognizable “Who cooks for you?” call.

Location: Barred Owls live in large, mature forests made up of both deciduous trees and evergreens, often near water. They nest in tree cavities. In the Pacific Northwest region of British Columbia/Washington, Barred Owls have moved into old-growth coniferous forest, where they compete with the threatened Spotted Owl.

Great Gray Owl, *STRIGIFORMES, Strigidae*
Strix nebulosa



Size: The great gray owl is a very large owl; however, it is mostly feathers. Their bodies are actually quite small, but they have large heads and long tails making them appear huge.

Colour: Adults have a large rounded head with a grey face and yellow eyes with darker circles around them. The underparts are light with dark streaks; the upper parts are grey with pale bars. This owl does not have ear tufts and has a large facial disc. There is a white collar just below the beak.

Behaviour: Great gray owls use nests of other large birds, or broken-topped trees or tree cavities. These birds wait, listen, and watch for prey, then swoop down; they also may fly low through open areas in search of prey. They frequently hunt from a low listening post which can be a stump, low tree limb, fence post, or road sign.

Location: They breed in North America from Quebec to the Pacific coast and Alaska. They are permanent residents, although northerly populations may move south and southeast when food is scarce.

Northern Saw-whet Owl, *STRIGIFORMES*, *Strigidae*
Aegolius acadicus



Size: These are very small owls with large, rounded heads that lack ear tufts.

Colour: Northern Saw-whet Owls are mottled brown birds with a whitish facial disk and white-spotted head. Their eyes are yellow. Juveniles are dark brown with creamy yellow breast and belly.

Behaviour: They are nocturnal and hard to see, but they have a shrill, penetrating call that they give many times in succession. During daylight they roost in dense vegetation, typically just above eye level and near the trunk in evergreen trees.

Location: Northern Saw-whet Owls are forest birds. They breed in extensive forests across northern North America, also sometimes using more open habitats such as the western prairies as long as there are nest sites available. They winter in dense forests across the central and southern U.S.

Waterfowl
Geese, Swans and Ducks
(ANSERIFORMES)

Geese and Swans
(Anatidae)

Canada Goose, ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae
Branta canadensis



Size: Canada Geese are big waterbirds with a long neck, large body, large webbed feet, and wide, flat bill. Males and females have similar colouration.

Colour: A familiar goose with a black head and neck, white chinstrap, light tan to cream breast and brown back.

Behaviour: They aggressively defend their nests, in spring fights often erupt between competing pairs for nest sites. Canada Geese feed by dabbling in the water or grazing in fields and lawns, they especially appreciate the high quality grass on golf courses. They are often seen in flight moving in pairs or flocks; flocks often assume a V formation.

Location: Just about anywhere near lakes, rivers, ponds, or other small or large bodies of water, and in yards, park lawns, and farm fields. They nest along the edges of Big Lake when water is deep; if the water is low they will nest in reed beds some distance from shore. They feed on vegetation and insects all over the lake and on the golf courses that line the lake.

Snow Goose, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Chen caerulescens



Size: A medium-sized goose with a hefty bill and long, thick neck. Juveniles are slightly smaller than adults in the fall, and this can be noticeable in flocks during fall and early winter.

Colour: The Snow Goose is a white-bodied goose with black wingtips that are barely visible on the ground but noticeable in flight. The pink bill has a dark line along it, often called a "grinning patch" or "black lips." You may also see dark morph Snow Geese, or "Blue Geese," with a white face, dark brown body, and white under the tail.

Behaviour: Snow Geese typically travel in the company of other geese and can form flocks of several hundred thousand. Family groups forage together on wintering grounds, digging up roots and tubers from muddy fields and marshes. In flight, they are steady on the wing with even wingbeats.

Location: Snow Geese adapted quickly to use agricultural fields, which is one reason their populations are doing so well. During winter and migration, look for them in plowed fields or wetlands. Also check lakes, ponds, and marshes where they roost and bathe along shorelines and in open water. Snow Geese breed on Arctic tundra.

Trumpeter Swan, *ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae*
Cygnus buccinator



Size: Trumpeter Swans are immense waterfowl with heavy bodies and long necks typically held straight both on the water and in flight. The large bill slopes gradually down from the forehead.

Colour: Adult Trumpeter Swans are entirely white with a black bill and black legs. Immatures are gray-brown.

Behaviour: Trumpeter Swans forage in fairly shallow water, reaching under the surface to eat aquatic vegetation and at times tipping up in the manner of a dabbling duck. They also visit agricultural fields to eat spilled or leftover grains and crops.

Location: Trumpeter Swans breed in open habitats near shallow water bodies. They winter on estuaries, large lakes, and rivers that remain at least partially ice-free year-round. They sometimes forage in fields.

Tundra Swan, ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae
Cygnus columbianus



Size: Tundra Swans are very large waterfowl with heavy bodies and long necks. The bill slopes gently away from the head. They can be confused with Trumpeter Swans, especially at a distance.

Colour: Tundra Swans have entirely white plumage. The bill is mostly black and usually has a yellow spot at the base. The legs and feet are black. Immature birds are gray-tinged on the wings, head, and neck.

Behaviour: On the water, Tundra Swans keep their necks straight, and in the air they fly with their necks outstretched. On the water, they often tip up to forage in the manner of dabbling ducks. They form large flocks. A characteristic whistling in their wings led Meriwether Lewis to call them “whistling swans,” a name still in use.

Location: Tundra Swans nest on arctic tundra, so they are in Alberta only during migration in spring and fall. During migration they may leave the water to feed in agricultural fields.

Ducks
(Anatidae)

Blue-winged Teal, *ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae*

Anas discors



M

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Size: A small dabbling duck, a Blue-winged Teal is dwarfed by a Mallard. Head is rounded and bill is on the large side.

Colour: Breeding males are brown-bodied with dark speckling on the breast, slaty-blue head with a white crescent behind the bill, and a small white flank patch in front of their black rear. Females and eclipse males are a cold, patterned brown. In flight, they reveal a bold powder-blue patch on their upperwing coverts.

Behaviour: Pairs and small groups dabble and up-end to reach submerged vegetation. You'll often find Blue-winged Teal with other species of dabbling ducks. They are often around the edges of ponds under vegetation, choosing a concealed spot to forage or rest.

Location: Look for Blue-winged Teal on calm bodies of water from marshes to small lakes. The prairie-pothole region is the heart of their breeding range, where they thrive in grassy habitats intermixed with wetlands.

Green-winged Teal, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Anas crecca



Size: Green-winged Teal are very small ducks. They have short, blocky bodies and their tails sit high out of the water. The head is large, the neck is short, and the bill is relatively small.

Colour: Adult males have grayish bodies with a narrow white vertical stripe extending from the waterline to the shoulder. In good light, their dark heads are cinnamon with a wide green swoop from the eye to the back of the neck. Females are brown with a yellowish streak along the tail. Both sexes have green wing patches in the secondaries (speculum), but these may be hidden when not in flight.

Behaviour: Green-winged Teal are dabbling ducks that feed on vegetation by tipping up in shallow water or by picking at food items while standing in puddles, flooded fields, and margins of wetlands.

Location: Green-winged Teal feed on shallow bodies of water and in flooded fields by dabbling, tipping up to reach vegetation. They breed in dense vegetation along river margins.

Cinnamon Teal, *ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae*
Anas cyanoptera



Size: The Cinnamon Teal is a small duck, typical of Teals. They have large, light blue patches on the front of the wing that is visible in flight. The male has bright cinnamon red head and body,

Colour: Breeding Plumage: The male has a bright cinnamon head and body plumage, with a dark rump, tail, and undertail. His upper wing has a light-blue patch with white rear border. The back of the wing is iridescent green. Eyes are red.

Eclipse Plumage: Gray-brown overall, with a rusty wash. Small white area at base of bill. Eyes red. The female is dappled brown and tan with a dark eye.

Behaviour: Like all Teal, Cinnamons are dabbling ducks that feed on vegetation by tipping up in shallow water or by picking at food items while standing in puddles, flooded fields, and margins of wetlands.

Location: Big Lake is at the northern extent of their breeding range.

Mallard, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Anas platyrhynchos



M



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Size: Mallards are large ducks with hefty bodies, rounded heads, and wide, flat bills. Like many “dabbling ducks” the body is long and the tail rides high out of the water, giving a blunt shape. In flight their wings are broad and set back toward the rear.

Colour: Male Mallards have a dark, iridescent-green head and bright yellow bill. The gray body is sandwiched between a brown breast and black rear. Females and juveniles are mottled brown with orange-and-brown bills. Both sexes have a white-bordered, blue “speculum” patch in the wing.

Behaviour: Mallards are “dabbling ducks”—they feed in the water by tipping forward and grazing on underwater plants. They almost never dive. They can be very tame ducks especially in city ponds, and often group together with other Mallards and other species of dabbling ducks.

Location: Mallards can live in almost any wetland habitat, natural or artificial. Look for them on lakes, ponds, marshes, rivers, and coastal habitats, as well as city and suburban parks and residential backyards.

Gadwall, ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae

Anas strepera



Size: Gadwall are about the same size as Mallards. They have a fairly large, square head with a steep forehead. The bill is noticeably thinner than a Mallard's. In flight, the neck is slightly thinner and the wings slightly more slender than a Mallard's.

Colour: Male Gadwall are gray-brown with a black patch at the tail. Females are patterned with brown and buff. Females have a thin orange edge to their dark bills. In flight, both sexes have a white wing patch that is sometimes visible while swimming or resting.

Behaviour: Gadwall feed with other dabbling ducks, tipping forward to feed on submerged vegetation without diving. They sometimes steal food from flocks of diving ducks or coots. You'll often see these ducks in pairs through the winter, because they select their mates for the breeding season as early as late fall.

Location: Gadwall breed mainly in the Great Plains and prairies through to southern Ontario. They winter throughout the southern USA and Mexico.

Northern Shoveler, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Anas clypeata



M

F

Size: A medium-sized duck with a very long bill, wider at tip than at base.

Colour: The male has an iridescent green head, white chest, and rusty sides. In flight, pale blue forewing feathers are revealed, separated from the green speculum by a white border. The female is a drab mottled brown like other dabblers, with plumage much like a female mallard, but easily distinguished by the long broad bill.

Behaviour: Northern shovelers feed by dabbling for plant food, often by swinging its bill from side to side and using the bill to strain food from the water. They also use their highly specialized bill to forage for aquatic invertebrates. The shoveler prefers to nest in grassy areas away from open water. Their nest is a shallow depression on the ground, lined with plant material and down. Hens typically lay about nine eggs.

Location: This is a bird of open wetlands, such as wet grassland or marshes with some emergent vegetation. They winter in the southern USA.

Northern Pintail, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*

Anas acuta



Size: Northern Pintail are Medium-sized ducks with long, thin necks and pointed tails, which is extremely long in males.

Colour: When breeding males have chocolate-brown heads, white neck and underparts, and white extending up the back of neck in a thin line. They have very long black central tail feathers. Black rear end bordered by yellowish tan patch. Sides and upper back gray. When not breeding the males are duller: overall brownish.

Females are generally tan, with a whitish chin. Their lower breast and belly are white. The tail is pointed, with the central tail feathers longest, but not as long as the male.

Behaviour: These are dabbling ducks and can be found with other groups of dabblers, tipping up to get at vegetation and aquatic insects.

Location: They breed throughout most of western Canada and the marine shores of eastern Canada. They winter throughout most of the USA and Mexico.

American Wigeon, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Anas americana



Size: The American Wigeon is a medium sized duck with a small bill and a rounded head.

Colour: In breeding season the male has a white or cream-colored forehead and forecrown and broad dark-green patch extending from behind the eye to the nape. His bill is bluish-gray with a black tip. The cheeks and chin are grayish. His breast, sides, and back are pinkish-brown, while the tail is black. The female appears grayish overall, with finely-blended white and dusky streaks. Her breast and flanks are pale reddish-brown.

Behaviour: These are dabbling ducks so they up-end to feed on water plants and insects. They nest in reeds and grasses along rivers, lakes and marshes.

Location: A common and increasingly abundant duck, the American Wigeon breeds in northwestern North America and is found throughout the rest of the continent in migration and in winter.

Ruddy Duck, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*

Oxyura jamaicensis



M



F

Size: These are small, compact ducks with stout, scoop-shaped bills, and long, stiff tails they often hold cocked upward. They have slightly peaked heads and fairly short, thick necks.

Colour: Male Ruddy Ducks have blackish caps that contrast with bright white cheeks. In summer, they have rich chestnut bodies with bright blue bills. In winter, they are dull gray-brown above and paler below with dull gray bills. Females and first-year males are brownish, somewhat like winter males but with a blurry stripe across the pale cheek patch. In flight, Ruddy Ducks show solidly dark tops of the wings.

Behaviour: Ruddy Ducks dive to feed on aquatic invertebrates, especially midge larvae. They feed most actively at night, so you'll often see Ruddy Ducks sleeping during the day, head tucked under a wing and tail cocked up.

Location: They nest in marshes adjacent to lakes and ponds, primarily in the Prairie Potholes region. In migration, they flock to large rivers, ponds, and lakes, and also gather in coastal estuaries.

Canvasback, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Aythya valisineria



M



F

Size: A large, sleek diving duck with a long sloping profile that distinguishes it from other ducks.

Colour: The male has a rusty red head, red eye, white body, and black chest and rear end. The female is generally tan to brown over all with a dark eye.

Behaviour: These are diving ducks that will often duck under the water for long periods, appearing elsewhere. They feed on vegetation and insects on the bottom of ponds and lakes. They often congregate together in large groups on lakes and rivers.

Location: The Canvasback breeds in prairie potholes across prairie Canada and the USA, it winters on ocean bays.

Redhead, ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae

Aythya americana



F

M

Size: Redheads are medium-sized diving ducks with a smoothly rounded head and a moderately large bill.

Colour: Male Redheads are a dapper mixture of cinnamon head, black breast and tail, and neat gray body. Females and immatures are a plain, mostly uniform brown. Redheads have black-tipped, gray bills, and in flight they show gray flight feathers.

Behaviour: In migration, look for Redheads in large rafts, often with other species including Canvasbacks, scaup, wigeon, and American Coots. They usually dive for their food, although they use shallower water than other diving ducks and may feed by tipping up, like a dabbling duck.

Redhead nests are built with thick and strong plant material in emergent vegetation, such as cattails and sedges, over or near standing water. Some redhead females lay their eggs in the nests of other, related duck species.

Location: Redheads breed mainly in seasonal wetlands such as the prairie pothole region. They winter in the southern USA.

Bufflehead, ANSERIFORMES, Anatidae

Bucephala albeola



M



F

Size: Bufflehead are very small, compact ducks with large, rounded heads and short, wide bills.

Colour: Adult male Bufflehead have a white body, black back, and a dark head with a large white patch that wraps around the back of the head. Females and first-year males are gray-brown overall with an oval, white cheek patch. In flight adult males have a large white patch on the upperwing; females and first-year males have a smaller white wing patch.

Behaviour: Bufflehead dive underwater to catch aquatic invertebrates. When courting females, male Buffleheads swim in front of them, rapidly bobbing their heads up and down. In flight, you can identify Bufflehead by noting their small size, fast wingbeats, and pattern of rocking side-to side as they fly.

Location: They breed near lakes in northern forests where conifers mix with poplars or aspens. Bufflehead nest in tree cavities, especially old Northern Flicker holes. Bufflehead are most widespread in migration and winter, when they move south to coasts and large bodies of water, particularly shallow saltwater bays.

Common Goldeneye, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Bucephala clangula



M

F

Size: Common Goldeneye are medium sized ducks with large heads. The bill is fairly small and narrow. It slopes smoothly downward from the face, giving the head an overall triangular shape. Goldeneyes are diving ducks with streamlined bodies and short tails.

Colour: Adult males appear mostly black and white: the head is mostly black with a round white spot near the bill and a bright yellow eye. The back is black but the sides are white, making the body appear mostly white. Females have brown heads and gray back and wings. The bill is black with variable amounts of yellow at the tip. In flight, both sexes have large white patches in the wings.

Behaviour: These are diving ducks that often forage in flocks and dive simultaneously. They tend to forage in fairly shallow waters (up to 20 feet deep). They are fast fliers; their wings make a distinctive whistling sound in flight.

Location: They nest in tree cavities in the boreal forest of northern North America. They spend winters mainly in protected coastal waters as well as on large inland lakes and rivers.

Hooded Merganser, *ANSERIFORMES*, *Anatidae*
Lophodytes cucullatus



M



F

Size: Hooded Mergansers are small ducks with a thin bill and a fan-shaped, collapsible crest that makes the head look oversized and oblong. In flight, the wings are thin and the tail is relatively long and rounded.

Colour: Adult male Hooded Mergansers are black above, with a white breast and rich chestnut flanks. The black head has a large white patch that varies in size when the crest is raised or lowered, but is always prominent. Females and immatures are gray and brown, with warm tawny-cinnamon tones on the head.

Behaviour: Hooded Mergansers dive to catch aquatic insects, crayfish, and small fish. Males court females by expanding their white, sail-like crests and making very low, gravelly, groaning calls. Hooded Mergansers fly distinctively, with shallow, very rapid wingbeats.

Location: In summer, these small ducks nest in holes in trees, often near freshwater ponds or rivers. Big Lake and central Alberta are not in their typical breeding range, yet they are here. They winter in southern B.C., the SW and SE USA.

Grebes
(PODICIPEDIFORMES)
(Podicipedidae)



Eared Grebe, *PODICIPEDIFORMES*, *Podicipedidae*
Podiceps nigricollis



Size: Grebes are typically small waterbirds, the Eared Grebe is the size of a small duck.

Colour: The Eared Grebe has a thin, dark bill, often appearing tilted slightly upward. They sport red eyes and in summer they have a black body and head with with golden ear tufts. Their side feathers are a rusty red colour.

Behaviour: The Eared Grebe is an excellent swimmer and diver, and pursues its prey underwater, eating mostly fish as well as small crustaceans, aquatic insects and larvae. It prefers to escape danger by diving rather than flying, although it can easily rise from the water.

Like all grebes, the Eared Grebe nests on the water's edge, since its legs are set very far back and it cannot walk well. Usually two eggs are laid, and the striped young are sometimes carried on the adult's back.

Location: The most abundant grebe in the world, the Eared Grebe breeds in shallow wetlands in western North America. They winter in Mexico.

Horned Grebe, *PODICIPEDIFORMES, Podicipedidae*
Podiceps auritus



Size: The Horned Grebe is a small grebe, being the size of a small duck like a teal.

Colour: Unmistakable in summer, the plumage of both male and female includes a black head with brown puffy earlike tufts along the sides of its face. It shows a deep red neck, scarlet eyes, and a small, straight black bill tipped with white. It rides high in the water. Its "horns" are yellowish patches of feathers behind its eyes that it can raise and lower at will.

Behaviour: Like all grebes, it builds a nest on the water's edge, since its legs are set very far back and it cannot walk well. Usually two eggs are laid, and the striped young are sometimes carried on the adult's back.

Location: Horned grebes breed in vegetated areas of freshwater lakes across the United States and much of Canada. Most birds migrate in winter to the coast. During this time, this small grebe is mainly white with a sharply defined black cap.

Pied-billed Grebe, *PODICIPEDIFORMES*, *Podicipedidae*
Podilymbus podiceps



Size: Pied-billed Grebes are small, chunky swimming birds. They have compact bodies and slender necks, with relatively large, blocky heads and short, thick bills. They have virtually no tail.

Colour: These are brown birds, slightly darker above and more tawny-brown on the underparts. During spring and summer, the crown and nape are dark and the throat is black. While breeding, the bill is whitish with a black band (“pied”), but otherwise is yellow-brown. Juveniles have striped faces.

Behaviour: Pied-billed Grebes can adjust their buoyancy and often use this ability to float with just the upper half of the head above the water. They use their chunky bills to kill and eat large crustaceans along with a great variety of fish, amphibians, insects, and other invertebrates.

Location: The Pied-billed Grebe is common across much of North America. These expert divers inhabit sluggish rivers, freshwater marshes, lakes, and estuaries.

Red-necked Grebe, *PODICIPEDIFORMES*, *Podicipedidae*
Podiceps grisegena



Size: The Red-necked Grebe is large, as grebes go, with a body about the size of a female mallard duck.

Colour: The Red-necked Grebe is a nondescript dusky-grey bird in winter. In breeding plumage, it has a black cap that extends below the eye, very pale grey cheeks and throat, a rusty red neck, dark grey back and flanks, and white underparts. The eyes are dark brown and the long, pointed bill is black with a yellow base. It also has an elaborate courtship display and a variety of loud mating calls.

Behaviour: Like all grebes, the Red-necked is a good swimmer, a particularly swift diver, and responds to danger by diving rather than flying. The feet are positioned far back on the body, near the tail, which makes the bird ungainly on land. It dives for fish or picks insects off vegetation. Once paired, it builds a nest from water plants on top of floating vegetation in a shallow lake or bog.

Location: Grebes prefer shallow bodies of fresh water such as lakes, marshes or fish-ponds as breeding sites. They are found across most of western Canada and Alaska. They winter at sea on both coasts.

Western Grebe, *PODICIPEDIFORMES*, *Podicipedidae*
Aechmophorus occidentalis



Size: The western grebe is the largest North American grebe. It is 55–75 cm (22–30 in) long (larger than a male mallard duck).

Colour: It has a distinctive black-and-white head and neck, with a long, slender, swan-like neck, a long yellowish beak, gray body, and red eyes.

Behaviour: Like all grebes they are strong swimmers and poor walkers. They will dive if startled or threatened. Western grebes nest in colonies of hundreds on large inland lakes, sometimes using coastal marshes, in western North America. It has a spectacular courtship display; two birds will rear up and patter across the water's surface. This bird dives for carp, herring, mollusks, crabs, and salamanders.

Location: They nest in the central plains of Canada and the USA. They winter at sea on the Pacific coast.

Loons
(GAVIIFORMES)
(Gavidae)



Common Loon, GAVIIFORMES, *Gaviidae*
Gavia immer



Size: Common Loons are large, diving waterbirds with rounded heads and dagger-like bills. They have long bodies and short tails that are usually not visible. In flight, they look stretched out, with a long, flat body and long neck and bill. Their feet stick out beyond the tail (unlike ducks and cormorants), looking like wedges.

Colour: In summer, adults have a black head and bill, a black-and-white spotted back, and a white breast. From September to March, adults are plain gray on the back and head with a white throat. The bill also fades to gray. Juveniles look similar, but with more pronounced scalloping on the back.

Behaviour: Common Loons are stealthy divers, submerging without a splash to catch fish, crayfish, frogs or salamanders. Pairs and groups often call to each other at night.

Location: Common Loons breed on quiet, remote freshwater lakes of the northern U.S. and Canada, and they are sensitive to human disturbance. In winter and during migration, look for them on lakes, rivers, estuaries, and coastlines.

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P.O. Box 65053

St. Albert, Ab T8N 5Y3

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\$10 by donation, all proceeds go to BLESS programs.

Printed by

College Copy Shop

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Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1N2