

EMERALD NECKLACE BIRDING GUIDE

From the iconic birds you probably already know to that small, brown bird you can't quite place, the Emerald Necklace holds an exciting variety of birds to see, hear, and learn about. Regardless of experience, this birding guide has been put together to help you recognize some of the most common – or eye-catching – feathered residents of these parks. No equipment is needed, especially for beginners. Just watching and listening can give a *lot* of information, and practice improves everyone's birding skills! Simply head outside, and enjoy getting to know the nature around you better.

The information and photos in this guide are from Cornell's All About Birds website (www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/) and a previous birding field guide made by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. For more resources, check out:

- <https://ebird.org/home>
- <https://www.inaturalist.org/>

Large

Great Blue Heron

Length: 46"

Shape: tall and long-legged with a thin, curved neck

Color: blue-grey body; has a dark stripe over the eye and an orange bill

Habitat: often found along riverbanks, in marshy areas, or in other shallow water. They also feed in open fields or meadows

Fun Fact: Great Blue Herons can snap up prey at a distance thanks to their specially-shaped neck vertebrae



© Janis Stone / Macaulay Library



Juvenile

© Ashley Bradford / Macaulay Library

Black-Crowned Night Heron

Length: 24”

Shape: much stockier than other herons, with flatter heads, thick necks, and short legs

Color: adults have a black back, crown, and bill, and are light gray on the rest of their bodies.

Juveniles are brown with white spots and streaks

Habitat: common to wetlands, where they feed at night

Fun Fact: they are the most widespread heron on Earth!



© Melissa James / Macaulay Library



Juvenile

© Evan Lipton / Macaulay Library

Red-Tailed Hawk

Length: 19”

Shape: a large, soaring bird with a hooked beak and powerful claws

Color: speckled brown belly, dark back, wings that are brown on top and cream underneath, rust-colored tail. When perched, show whiter “backpack strap” stripes on their backs

Habitat: often seen soaring in circles, barely flapping their wings, or perched high in trees near fields where they can see far

Fun fact: our most common hawk, Red-tails were much rarer 40 years ago, when pesticides in the food chain made their eggshells too soft to survive.



Photographer Unknown



Adult

© Jonathan Eckerson / Macaulay Library

Mute Swan

Length: 55”

Shape: large, heavy bodies with long s-shaped necks

Color: have bright white plumage, and an orange bill surrounded by black skin on the face

Habitat: urban and suburban lakes and ponds

Fun Fact: Mute Swans are not native to North America - they were brought here from Europe to decorate lakes, estates, and parks



© Jack Bushong / Macaulay Library



Juveniles

© Yves Gauthier / Macaulay Library

Wild Turkey

Length: 44”

Shape: large and round with a small head

Color: mostly dark but iridescent; wings are barred with white, and their head and neck range between red, gray, and blue

Habitat: can be found foraging along forest edges, roadsides, and in fields

Fun Fact: turkey hens and their chicks band into larger groups as the chicks grow older, with winter groups occasionally being made of more than 200 birds!



Male

© Petra DeBruine / Macaulay Library



Female

© Charlotte Farrell / Macaulay Library

Canada Goose

Length: 36"

Shape: have a large body, long neck, webbed feet, and a flat bill

Color: black head with a white chinstrap, brown back, black neck, and a tan breast

Habitat: in or near waterbodies, or grazing in fields or lawns

Fun Fact: the "giant" Canada Goose subspecies was almost driven extinct in the early 1900s, but conservation programs to reestablish it have been very successful



© Max McCarthy / Macaulay Library



Gosling

© Jason B. Bidgood / Macaulay Library

American Herring Gull

Length: 24"

Shape: large and broad-winged

Color: adults are white with gray backs, black wingtips, and yellow beaks

Habitat: can be found in a variety of locations, from shorelines to parking lots

Fun Fact: it takes four years for juveniles to reach adult plumage, and they have different plumage each of these years



Breeding Adult

© Simon Boivin / Macaulay Library



Nonbreeding Adult

© G & B / Macaulay Library

Mallard

Length: 23”

Shape: a relatively large duck, with a round head and a tail that goes above the water when swimming

Color: females are mottled brown with an orange and black bill, while males are mostly brown with an iridescent green head and yellow bill. Both have a blue patch on the tops of their wings

Habitat: ponds and other waterbodies, parks

Fun Fact: only female Mallards have a distinctive quack; males make a “quieter, rasping sound”



Adult Male

© Greg Gillson / Macaulay Library



Female with Ducklings

© Bruce Gates / Macaulay Library

American Black Duck

Length: 22”

Shape: rounded heads and bodies, and their tail stays above the water while swimming

Color: very similar to female Mallards, American Black Ducks have dark brown bodies, yellow-green bills, and an iridescent blue patch on each wing

Habitat: fresh or saltwater areas, often mixing with Mallards

Fun Fact: fossils of American Black ducks at least 11,00 years old have been found in Florida and Georgia



Male

© Evan Lipton / Macaulay Library



Female

© Chris Wood / Macaulay Library

Wood Duck

Length: 20"

Shape: have a crested head, long tail, and thin neck

Color: females are brown with a lighter, grayer head and a ring of white around the eye. Males have a green crest, red eyes, a speckled, chestnut breast, white band markings, and a dark back.

Habitat: can be found in the vegetation of marshy areas

Fun Fact: Wood Ducks nest in trees, and ducklings will jump down from the tree after hatching. They can fall from over 50 feet without being hurt



Male

© Ryan Schain / Macaulay Library



Female

© Epi Shemming / Macaulay Library

Ring-Necked Duck

Length: 17"

Shape: a bird with a compact body and peaked back of the head

Color: males are mostly black with gray sides and white markings on their bills, and females are brown with a paler head and a white ring around the eyes

Habitat: small, shallow wetlands

Fun Fact: their name refers to the chestnut band around their necks, but this is very difficult to see, and isn't a useful indicator for recognizing a bird in the field



Male

© Dorian Anderson / Macaulay Library



Female

© Dorian Anderson / Macaulay Library

Hooded Merganser

Length: 17”

Shape: small and thin-billed, with a collapsible, fan-shaped crest

Color: males are black on top with a white crest patch and breast, and brown sides. Females are gray-brown, with a brown crest

Habitat: streams and small ponds

Fun Fact: Hooded Mergansers can change how their eyes refract light in order to see better underwater, helping them to spot fish and other food



Male

© Allan Bigras / Macaulay Library



Female

© Bill Thompson / Macaulay Library

Medium

Rock Pigeon

Length: 13”

Shape: stout birds with pointed wings and a rounded tail

Color: their colors vary, but they are usually gray with a dark tail, black-banded wings, and colorful, iridescent necks

Habitat: found in urban areas, cliffs, or other areas with vertical features

Fun Fact: Pigeons have such a long history of domestication that their original range is unknown



© Christine Sheridan / Macaulay Library

Blue Jay

Length: 11”

Shape: have a triangular crest and a rounded tail

Color: bright blue on top and white underneath, with barred wings and tail

Habitat: woodland areas, especially near oaks

Fun Fact: intelligent birds, Blue Jays often mimic hawk calls, but it’s unknown exactly why they do this



© Scott Martin / Macaulay Library

Northern Cardinal

Length: 9”

Shape: a large, crested bird

Color: males are bright red with a black mask and bright red beaks; females are reddish brown.

Both have a large crest of head feathers

Habitat: woodland edges, parks, backyards, dense cover

Fun fact: our only red-crested birds have a loud call that can sound like *cheer, cheer* and then a trill



Male (left) and Female (right)

Photographer Unknown

Red-Winged Blackbird

Length: 9”

Shape: stocky, short wings, short tail

Color: males are all black with bright red and yellow shoulder patches, females are dark and speckled

Habitat: any wet areas with tall grass and cattails - marshes, ponds, lakes, riversides

Fun fact: males like to show off by spreading their wings to show their red and yellow, and making a loud call: *conk-a-reeee*



Female

© Richard Trinkner / Macaulay Library



Male

Photographer Unknown

Gray Catbird

Length: 8”

Shape: slender, long

Color: gray with a black cap

Habitat: prefers to be near the ground or perched in thick shrubs

Fun fact: named for its loud, mewing call, Catbirds (like Mockingbirds) imitate the sounds of many other birds and are often heard before seen. Extremely abundant in shrubby areas!



Photographer Unknown

American Robin

Length: 9”

Shape: have a large round body and a relatively long tail and legs

Color: gray-brown on top and orange below, with white on the underside of the tail and around the eye

Habitat: open woodlands, lawns, and parks

Fun Fact: even though they live year-round in most of the U.S., Robins are considered a sign of spring, since they spend more time hidden in trees during cold weather



© Alex Eberts / Macaulay Library

Mourning Dove

Length: 12”

Shape: a slender, brown bird with a long, pointed tail

Color: rusty brown, with some black speckles on wings

Habitat: fields, lawns, perched in trees

Fun fact: often travel in pairs, with the cooing song: ah-ooh! whoo-who-who



Photographer Unknown

European Starling

Length: 8”

Shape: stocky, with short tails and wings

Color: black or brown with purple and green iridescence, with white, ‘starry’ spots in the winter

Habitat: common in urban areas and fields

Fun Fact: European Starlings form murmurations, or very large flocks, in the fall and winter, known for moving in mesmerizing and highly synchronized ways



Adult

© Ryan Schain / Macaulay Library



Juvenile

© Emily Turteltaub Nelson / Macaulay Library

Common Grackle

Length: 12”

Shape: these birds have long legs and tails, and a fairly flat head

Color: very dark brown; males have a more noticeable blue head and glossier feathers

Habitat: open woodlands, marshes, and parks

Fun Fact: Grackles are one of the bird species that will engage in anting: letting ants crawl on them so that the formic acid from their stings will kill parasites



© TI / Macaulay Library

American Crow

Length: 18”

Shape: a large bird with broad, rounded wings and a heavy bill

Color: all black

Habitat: most common in open areas near woods, and in human-designed landscapes

Fun Fact: Crows are known to be social and highly intelligent. They will sometimes make and use tools, steal food from other animals, and young typically stay to help their parents raise new chicks for a few years, leading to large family groups



Adult

© Henry Burton / Macaulay Library

Northern Mockingbird

Length: 9”

Shape: a long, slender bird

Color: gray and brown on top, and white underneath

Habitat: loves large open areas surrounded by shrubby undergrowth

Fun fact: have been known to make up to 200 different sounds - from the songs of other birds to car alarms



Photographer Unknown

Northern Flicker

Length: 12”

Shape: large, with a rounded head and a long tail

Color: brown with black spots and crescents, and in eastern birds, yellow on the undersides of their wings and tails

Habitat: open forests and woodland edges

Fun Fact: Northern Flickers, like other woodpeckers, communicate and defend their territory by drumming on objects, with the goal of making as much noise as possible!



Adult Male (Yellow-shafted)
© Warren Lynn / Macaulay Library



Adult Female (Yellow-shafted)
© Michael O'Brien / Macaulay Library

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Length: 9”

Shape: relatively slim and round-headed

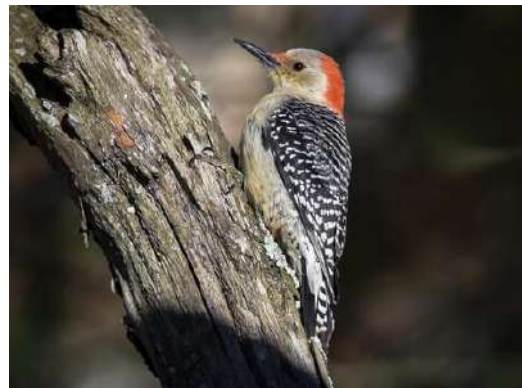
Color: pale underneath, with a black-and-white striped back. Males have a red cap and nape, while females only have a red nape

Habitat: woodlands, especially on tree trunks and branches

Fun Fact: this bird can stick their tongue out almost 2 inches past the end of their beak, helping them to forage for food in hard-to-reach places



Male
© Carl Giometti / Macaulay Library



Female
© Scott Martin / Macaulay Library

Hairy Woodpecker

Length: 9”

Shape: has long tail feathers and a straight, pointed beak

Color: are white underneath and have white stripes on their head and wings. Males have a small red patch on the back of their heads

Habitat: forests

Fun Fact: in addition to eating insects, Hairy Woodpeckers will sometimes drink the tree sap from the wells that sapsuckers make



Male

© Matthew Plante / Macaulay Library



Female

© Dominique Genna / Macaulay Library

Downy Woodpecker

Length: 6”

Shape: have the straight bill and posture of other woodpeckers, but are smaller than their Hairy look-alikes

Color: black back with white stripes, black-and-white striped head, and white underneath. Males have a small red patch on the backs of their heads

Habitat: woods, parks, and residential areas

Fun Fact: Downy Woodpeckers use their smaller size to feed on insects and seeds that larger woodpeckers can't reach, like insects living in the stems of weeds



Male

© Evan Lipton / Macaulay Library



Female

© Scott Martin / Macaulay Library

Small

Black-Capped Chickadee

Length: 5”

Shape: a small, chunky bird

Color: black cap, white cheeks, short beak, gray wings, pale yellow belly

Habitat: woodlands, bird feeders

Fun fact: Have a couple of distinctive songs - the alarm *chickadee-dee-dee*, where the more *dee* notes indicate a larger threat, and *fee-bee-bee*, which is what one usually hears



Photographer Unknown

Song Sparrow

Length: 6”

Shape: a small, compact bird

Color: classic “little brown bird”, brown with dusty white streaks

Habitat: found almost everywhere, but prefers dense field edges, hedges, backyards and parks

Fun fact: has a wide variety of songs, often jumbled together. Sometimes travel in small flocks.

Similarly to other sparrows, likes to take “dirt baths”, fluffing their feathers in a patch of dirt.



Photographer Unknown

House Sparrow

Length: 6”

Shape: small and round, stocky

Color: brown backs and heads with black and brown stripes, lighter underneath. Males have a black bib and a gray crown, while females do not

Habitat: urban areas or around built structures

Fun Fact: House Sparrows aggressively defend their nests, and are generally known for a lack of fear. They are native to Eurasia and Northern Africa



Male

© Evan Lipton / Macaulay Library



Female

© Adam Jackson / Macaulay Library

Chipping Sparrow

Length: 5”

Shape: slender with a relatively long tail

Color: light gray stomach, neck, and face, with striped, brown wings, a red-brown cap, and a dark line through each eye

Habitat: woodlands and open ground near trees

Fun Fact: they usually build their nests in shrubs or trees, but have a reputation for flimsy nests, occasionally in odd areas



Breeding Adult

© Evan Lipton / Macaulay Library



Nonbreeding Adult

© Brian Sullivan / Macaulay Library

American Goldfinch

Length: 5”

Shape: a small, compact bird

Color: males are bright yellow with a black mask in spring and summer, very plain in winter.

Females are a plainer, dusty lime-yellow

Habitat: brushy woodland edges, overgrown meadows, backyard bird feeders if given their favorite thistle seeds

Fun Fact: Goldfinches are some of the strictest vegetarians among birds



Adult Male

Photographer Unknown



Adult Female

Photo by Frank Leung, from Audubon.org

House Finch

Length: 5”

Shape: small, with rather large beaks and flat heads

Color: females are brown with streaks underneath, while males also have red plumage on their face and upper breast

Habitat: forest edges and urban/suburban areas

Fun Fact: the more pigment in the food that a male House Finch eats, the redder he will be, which female House Finches prefer



Male (left) and Female (right)

© Jim Merritt / Macaulay Library

Tufted Titmouse

Length: 6”

Shape: have round bodies, a large head, and a thick neck, as well as a pointed crest on top of their heads

Color: soft gray on top and white below, with a small black patch right above the beak

Habitat: woods, parks, and backyards

Fun Fact: these birds nest in tree holes left behind by woodpeckers, since they can't make their own nest cavities, and they depend on the presence of dead trees



© Ben McGann / Macaulay Library

Chimney Swift

Length: 5”

Shape: have small, tapered bodies and long, curved, narrow wings

Color: dark gray-brown with slightly paler throats

Habitat: often forage near lakes and rivers, and roost in chimneys, caves, or hollow trees

Fun Fact: Chimney Swifts fly almost constantly, stopping only to roost during the night and while nesting. They also can't perch, instead gripping onto vertical surfaces with their claws



© Peter F / Macaulay Library

Red-Breasted Nuthatch

Length: 4”

Shape: compact, with a pointed beak and a very short tail

Color: have blue-gray backs, black-and-white striped heads, and are red-orange underneath

Habitat: forests

Fun Fact: the Red-Breasted Nuthatch collects globs of resin from coniferous trees to place around the entrance of their nest cavity



© Cal Gesmundo / Macaulay Library

Dark-Eyed Junco

Length: 6”

Shape: a sparrow with a rounded head and long tail

Color: brown or dark gray with a white stomach and light-colored beak, although there is significant regional variation

Habitat: forests

Fun Fact: in most of the Eastern U.S., Dark-Eyed Juncos appear at the beginning of winter, and leave when spring arrives



Adult Male

© Scott Martin / Macaulay Library



Female or Immature

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