

Central-Massachusetts Field Guide
Common Bird Species

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How to use this Field Guide

A field guide is a bird watcher's most important tool. Field guides are made for many different states, regions, and countries. They contain vital information for identifying birds in the area by providing pictures and descriptions.

This field guide is filled with information about common birds found in Central-Massachusetts. It is organized by type of bird, with categories like "Finches" and "Vultures and Raptors". Each species has a picture and a description that includes certain features of the bird, like color patterns, size, and shape. Species with characteristic differences between males and females will have a picture for each sex. There is a frequency bar graph included for each species. The bar displays the times of year that the species is most frequently seen. The months with no frequency represent periods of migration for the species.

When you see a bird, you can identify it using your field guide. Simply search through the field guide to find a match. While looking for your bird, be sure to keep in mind the 4 steps to identifying a bird:

1. Size and Shape
2. Color
3. Behavior
4. Habitat

When you find your bird in your field guide, make sure all four of these characteristics match with what you saw.

If you are still having trouble identifying a bird through your field guide, it may be worth checking the Internet. You can use the Merlin Bird ID app or website to answer questions about the bird you saw in order to get a list of likely species. A simple Google search is often helpful as well. When searching for your bird online, make sure to include not only what the bird looks like, but where you found it (e.g. Massachusetts).

If you still cannot confidently identify your bird, do not try to guess what the bird was. Instead, you may want to mark down that you saw an unidentified bird. In that case, also be sure to write down a small description including what it looked like, or even draw a sketch.

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*):

Blue Jays measure just under a foot long from beak to tail tip, so they are among the larger backyard birds in Massachusetts. Blue Jays are pugnacious and highly vocal during the breeding season. They'll chase away fellow Blue Jays, other songbirds, hawks, owls, and even family pets, driving intruders from their territory with diving attacks and repeated volleys of their strident *jay! jay!* Call. Blue Jays can even mimic the scream of a Red-tailed Hawk in order to scare other birds! Blue Jays will eat a wide variety of plant and animal foods, but acorns are a particular favorite. They also won't pass up a freshly-stocked bird feeder filled with seeds!



Josh Lovering | 2020



Ian Hearn | Macaulay Library | 2017

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*):

Barn Swallows (6-7") 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. Barn Swallows feed on the wing, snagging insects from just above the ground or water to heights of 100 feet or more. You can find the adaptable Barn Swallow feeding in open habitats from fields, parks, and roadway edges to marshes, meadows, ponds, and coastal waters.¹



Greg Gillson | Macaulay Library | 2010

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*):

Adult males (4.7 - 5.9") 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. 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. 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.¹



Noah Strycker | Macaulay Library | 2013

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*):

Crows (15.8 - 20.9") have long suffered under the reputation of being "bad." Crows raid crops, frequently steal eggs and chicks from other bird nests, and have been known to steal shiny objects such as articles of jewelry from people. Yet, these vocal black birds are among the most intelligent. Crows are said to be able to count (to a point) and they are also known to be very discriminating in their abilities to identify specific objects.

It is found in both urban and forested areas, in fields and pastures, and along coastal beaches. It's a large black bird with long legs and a thick bill. Crows are almost completely omnivorous, meaning they eat a wide variety of food types including fruits, nuts, grains, insects, crustaceans, mollusks, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, birds and their eggs and nestlings, garbage, and carrion (e.g., roadkills, dead fish, etc.).



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2012



Ashley Bradford | Macaulay Library | 2017

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*):

Both males and females are grey above and orange to brick-red below, and are of medium size (about 10" long). Their bills are yellow, and when a robin flies, it shows two small white tips at the corners of its dark tail. Very young robins will show a speckled breast rather than the adult red. During winter and migration especially, robins often travel in flocks, so it's not unusual to see a dozen or more birds foraging on the same lawn or perching in the same tree. During the warm months, a robin with an earthworm in its beak is a familiar sight. In addition to worms, they eat many insects and ground-dwelling larvae, as well as caterpillars, grasshoppers, and beetles.

In winter, robins are nomadic. They fly in flocks and eat the berries of trees and shrubs that hold their fruit through the winter.



Alix d'Entremont | Macaulay Library | 2017

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*):

Eastern bluebirds (6.3 - 8.3") are easy to identify thanks to their bright blue backs and brick-red breasts. Some females may be rather subdued in coloration, to the point where their backs are blue-gray and their breasts only faintly rusty, but the pattern of colors remains the same. Bluebirds are smaller than blue jays, and they lack the pointed crests, black collars, and extensive white on the wings and tail that blue jays show.

In spring and summer, bluebirds nest in holes, either in trees or in birdhouses put up for their use. They mostly forage for insects on the ground, occasionally catching flying bugs on the wing. As the weather gets colder, many bluebirds flock together for migration. Those that remain in

Massachusetts dine primarily on soft fruits, and a pair of bluebirds may remain on or near their breeding territory all through the winter.



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Jay McGowan | Macaulay Library | 2016

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*):

Mockingbirds have slender bodies, long tails, and short, straight bills. Bill to tail tip, an average individual measures 10". Northern mockingbirds are mostly an unremarkable gray, with pale breasts and stomachs and dark wings. When a mockingbird flies, it reveals bright white patterns on the wings and tail that serve as excellent field marks.

During the breeding season, northern mockingbirds are easy to see, whether singing from a prominent perch or pugnaciously chasing off rivals and competitors. Mockingbirds hunting insects will run along the ground, occasionally pausing and half-raising their boldly patterned wings in an effort to startle insects into flight. In the winter, mockingbirds often perch in evergreen shrubs or thick tangles that afford some protection from harsh weather, and their diet shifts to being dominated by berries and fruit.

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*):

A medium-sized (8.3 - 9.4"), slender songbird with a long, rounded, black tail and a narrow, straight bill. Catbirds are fairly long legged and have broad, rounded wings. 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. 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. Look for Gray Catbirds in dense tangles of shrubs, small trees, and vines, along forest edges, streamside thickets, old fields, and fencerows.¹



Bryan Calk | Macaulay Library | 2017

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*):

Black-capped chickadees are small (just over five inches) and often appear large-headed and somewhat “fluffy.” Their black caps and throats make a stark contrast with their white cheeks, forming a distinctive pattern. When feeding, chickadees are curious and active, taking advantage of their strong feet and small size to crawl to the very edges of twigs, sometimes hanging upside down to pick at a promising morsel.



Josh Lovering | 2020



Josh Lovering | 2020

Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*):

From the neck down, tufted titmice look very similar to black-capped chickadees: pale gray above and white below, with rusty flanks. Their heads sport a small crest like a cardinal’s, and their black eyes stand out in their otherwise unmarked pale faces.

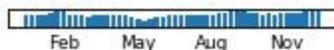
Titmice are noticeably larger than chickadees, with more than an inch’s difference in length between the two on average. Titmice have small but fairly thick bills, and many sport at least a small patch of black “nose” feathers above the maxilla (upper mandible).

**White-Breasted Nuthatches (*Sitta carolinensis*):**

White-breasted Nuthatches are just shy of six inches long. They are bluish-gray above, with black caps on their heads. Their faces, breasts, and bellies are white, with rusty coloration around the bird’s vent. Their bills are fairly long and sharply pointed.

In addition to their distinctive habit of descending trees head-first, nuthatches will crawl all over tree trunks and larger branches, looking for food in the crevices.

Nuthatches tend to be more wary. They may hitch around to the opposite side of a tree to avoid a curious observer. And while they will readily visit feeders, nuthatches tend to collect just one seed at time and carry it off to handle and eat somewhere nearby.



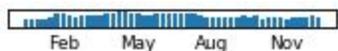
David Turgeon | Macaulay Library | 2016

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*):

The male northern cardinal is unmistakable, thanks to his rose-red plumage, pointed crest, and black mask. The female cardinal has a more subdued fashion sense, preferring pale tan and brown with a few rosy accents on the crest, wing, and tail. Both sexes have the same heavy, bright orange bill.

Rather than walking, cardinals hop, whether on the ground or from branch to branch, and they eat a mixture of insects, plant buds, seeds, and fruits.

Fruit and seeds predominate during fall and winter.



Josh Lovering | 2020

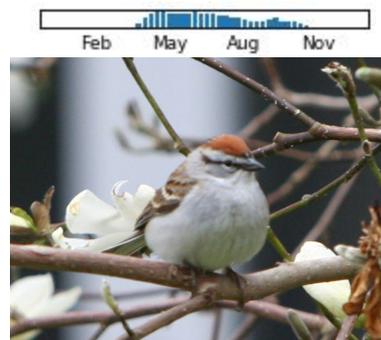


Josh Lovering | 2020

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*):

Chipping sparrows are small sparrows (less than 6" from bill to tail) with chestnut caps and completely unmarked undersides. Their faces are cleanly outlined by a white eyebrow-stripe and a black line through the eye itself. No other sparrow in our area has these characteristics. Young chipping sparrows may have streaky breasts and bellies, but their small size and the frequent presence of nearby adults aid identification.

Like most sparrows, chipping sparrows are ground feeders. Chipping sparrows are often seen pecking through the leaf litter or brush on a road or path at the edge of the woods. If approached, rather than scattering for the trees, "chippies" will sometimes repeatedly fly further along the path and land again.



Charles J. Lovering | 2020



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2017

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*):

Song Sparrows are medium-sized (4.7 - 6.7") 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. 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. 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.¹

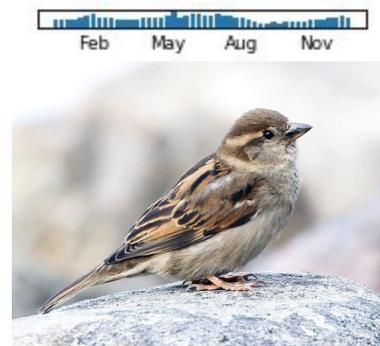
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*):

(6 - 6.7") Male House Sparrows are brightly colored birds with gray heads, white cheeks, a black bib, and rufous neck – although in cities you may see some that are dull and grubby. Females are a plain buffy-brown overall with dingy gray-brown underparts. Their backs are noticeably striped with buff, black, and brown.



Evan Lipton | Macaulay Library | 2015

House Sparrows are noisy sparrows that flutter down from eaves and fencerows to hop and peck at crumbs or birdseed. House Sparrows have lived around humans for centuries. Look for them on city streets, taking handouts in parks and zoos, or cheeping from a perch on your roof or trees in your yard. House Sparrows are absent from undisturbed forests and grasslands, but they're common in countryside around farmsteads.¹



Douglas Faulder | Macaulay Library | 2017



Andrew Spencer | Macaulay Library | 2015

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*):

Scarlet Tanagers are medium-sized (6.4 - 6.7") songbirds with fairly stocky proportions. They have thick, rounded bills suitable both for catching insects and eating fruit. The head is fairly large and the tail is somewhat short and broad. In spring and summer, adult males are an unmistakable, brilliant red with black wings and tails. Females and fall immatures are olive-yellow with darker olive wings and tails. After breeding, adult males molt to female-like plumage, but with black wings and tail. Primarily insectivorous during the summer, Scarlet Tanagers also eat fruit during migration and on the wintering grounds. Scarlet Tanagers breed in deciduous and mixed deciduous-evergreen forests in eastern North

America. They are somewhat sensitive to habitat fragmentation, so look for them in large, undisturbed tracts of forest. During migration, they move through a broader variety of forest and shrubby habitats, as well as backyards.¹



Mike V.A. Burrell | Macaulay Library | 2016

American Redstart (*Steophaga ruticilla*):

Adult male American Redstarts (4-5") are mostly black with bright orange patches on the sides, wings, and tail. The belly is white. Females and immature males replace the orange with yellow or yellow-orange. They have gray head and underparts, with olive back and wings and dark-gray tail.



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American Redstarts are incredibly active insectivores that seem never to stand still. American Redstarts breed in open wooded habitats, particularly those dominated by deciduous trees. In migration, the species can be found in nearly any treed habitats. Its tropical winter habitat is in woodlands and open forest at lower and middle elevations.¹



Jeremiah Trimble | Macaulay Library | 2016

Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora cyanoptera*):

Adult males (4.5") are bright yellow below, yellow-green above, and have two obvious wingbars on blue-gray wings, and a black eyeline. Adult females are paler with a less defined eyeline. The black bill and eyeline contribute to an almost angry-looking expression. From below look for the white undertail coverts on both sexes.

These warblers dangle from shrubs much like a chickadee, often foraging upside down and picking insects from dead leaves. Blue-winged Warbler is a shrubland specialist, and are found in brushy fields, thickets, and forest edges.¹



Joseph Pescatore | Macaulay Library | 2015

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*):

Common Yellowthroats are between 4 and 5 inches long. Adult males are bright yellow below, with a sharp black face mask and olive upperparts. A thin whitish line sets off the black mask from the head and neck. Immature males



David Turgeon | Macaulay Library | 2017

show traces of the full mask of adult males.

Females are a plain olive brown, usually with yellow brightening the throat and under the tail. They lack the black mask.

Common Yellowthroats spend much of their time skulking low to the ground in dense thickets and fields, searching for small insects and spiders.

Yellowthroats live in open areas with thick, low vegetation, ranging from marsh to grassland to open pine forest.¹



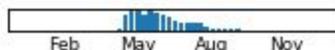
David Turgeon | Macaulay Library | 2017

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*):

In summer, both sexes (4.5-5.5") are a smart 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. Winter birds are paler brown, with bright yellow rump and usually some yellow on the sides. Yellow-rumped Warblers typically forage 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. In winter they spend lots of time eating berries from shrubs, and they often travel in large flocks.¹



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2010



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2011

Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*):

Yellow Warblers are small (4.7 - 5.1"), evenly proportioned songbirds with medium-length tails and rounded heads. For a warbler, the straight, thin bill is relatively large. Yellow Warblers are uniformly yellow birds. Males are a bright, egg-yolk yellow with reddish streaks on the underparts. Both sexes flash yellow patches in the tail. The face is unmarked, accentuating the large black eye. 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. 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.¹

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*):

Ovenbirds (4-5.5") are olive-green above and spotted below, with bold black-and-orange crown stripes. A white eyering gives it a somewhat surprised expression. Like several other terrestrial, or near-terrestrial, warblers, Ovenbirds have pink legs.

Ovenbirds spend much of their time foraging on the ground, often walking with a herky-jerky, wandering stroll that is unlike most terrestrial songbirds. Ovenbirds breed in closed-canopy forests, particularly deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous woods. You may find them in most forest types, from rich oak or maple woods to dry pine forest, although they avoid wet or swampy areas.¹



Don Blecha | Macaulay Library | 2016



Suzanne Labbé | Macaulay Library | 2017

House Finch (*Haemorhous mexicanus*):

(5.1 - 5.5") Adult males are rosy red around the face and upper breast, with streaky brown back, belly and tail. In flight, the red rump is conspicuous. Adult females aren't red; they are plain grayish-brown with thick, blurry streaks and an indistinctly marked face. House Finches are gregarious birds that collect at feeders or perch high in nearby trees. When they're not at feeders, they feed on the ground, on weed stalks, or in trees.

House Finches frequent city parks, backyards, urban centers, farms, and forest edges across the continent. In the western U.S., you'll also find House Finches in their native habitats of deserts, grassland, chaparral, and open woods.¹



Dave Spier | Macaulay Library | 2008

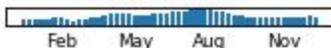


Adam Jackson | Macaulay Library | 2016

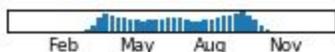
American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*):

Called sometimes the "wild canary" of the Americas, the American goldfinch's distinctive sunshine-yellow plumage (feathers) fades in winter to an understated palette of gray, brown, and buff. Regardless of season, several traits about goldfinches remain constant. American goldfinches are small (5") seed-eating birds with short, pointed, conical bills and wings that are noticeably darker than their bodies. Goldfinches often travel in flocks, and they have a recognizable "bouncing" style of flight,

resulting from their tendency to hold their wings tight against their body for a second or two between bouts of flapping.



Jay McGowan | Macaulay Library | 2016



Epi Shemming | Macaulay Library | 2017

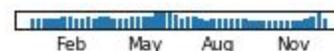
Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*):

The Eastern Phoebe (5.5 - 6.7") 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. 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. The Eastern Phoebe generally perches low in trees or on fencelines. 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.¹

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*):

At more than eight inches from bill to tail tip, starlings are noticeably larger than sparrows but don't quite measure up to robins or blue jays. Starlings have short, stubby tails, and their fairly long, straight bills are banana yellow during the breeding season and gray-black at other times of the year. Adult European starlings show glossy black plumage with numerous light spangles during the winter, but these wear off by the time breeding begins, and the iridescent black feathers reflect shades of green and violet. Juvenile starlings are a uniform drab brown.

Starlings are exceptionally gregarious, flocking (often in great numbers) at all times of the year. When feeding, starlings often rove across the ground with determined steps, using their long, strong bills to probe and pry at the soil for invertebrate prey. They will also consume seeds.



Dan Vickers | Macaulay Library | 2017



Evan Lipton | Macaulay Library | 2014

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*):

Like most wrens, Carolina wrens are small (5.5") brown birds with fairly short tails that they often hold cocked upward. Their bills are well-suited for probing for insects, being long, pointed, and slightly decurved.

Although they do not flock, Carolina wrens have strong pair-bonds, and a mated pair will often remain together on the same territory year-round. They do take fruits and weed seeds (from plants like smartweeds and sumacs) in winter, though they seldom come to bird feeders.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*):

Small and compact (4.3 - 5.1"), with a flat head and fairly long, curved beak. Short-winged, often keeping its longish tail either cocked above the line of the body or slightly drooped. Smaller than a Carolina Wren; chickadee-sized. Subdued brown overall with darker barring on the wings and tail. The pale eyebrow that is characteristic of so many wren species is much fainter in House Wrens. 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. 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. In winter they become more secretive, preferring brushy tangles, thickets, and hedgerows.¹



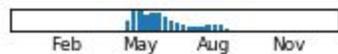
Andy Witchger | Macaulay Library | 2017



Jim Hully | Macaulay Library | 2016

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*):

Red-eyed Vireos (4.7 - 5.1") 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. Slightly larger than a Yellow Warbler; slightly smaller than a Tufted Titmouse. 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. Large expanses of deciduous forest, particularly deciduous trees with large leaves (such as maples), typify Red-eyed Vireo habitat during the breeding season. On migration, look for them in nearly any type of forest, woodland, or woodlot (particularly in deciduous stands). It is often the commonest of vireo migrants.¹



Jack & Holly Bartholmai | Macaulay Library | 2011

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*):

Smaller and more slender than an American Robin, Baltimore Orioles (4.7 - 7.5") 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. 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. Baltimore Orioles are more often heard than seen as they feed high in trees, searching leaves and small branches for insects, flowers, and fruit. Look for Baltimore



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2011

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.¹

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*):

The male brown-headed cowbird is shiny black all over, save for his head, which is (as might be expected) chocolate brown. The female is drab gray-brown all over, with faint or no streaking. She can be recognized by her stout build, strong, pointed bill, and slightly notched tail. This species is a nest parasite—female cowbirds never build nests of their own, instead laying their eggs in the nests of other species such as finches and warblers. These "host" birds may eject the cowbird egg, abandon the nest, or raise it as their own. A baby cowbird often grows more quickly than its nestmates, crowding them out of the nest and eventually dwarfing its adoptive parent.



Brian Sullivan | Macaulay Library | 2008



Arlene Ripley | Macaulay Library | 2017

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*):

This species is the largest member of the blackbird clan that regularly occurs in Massachusetts. Grackles of both sexes are entirely shiny black, with patches of green and purple gloss. Their slightly-downcurved bills are long and dark, and their pale eyes stand out at quite some distance. The best field mark for separating grackles from other blackbirds and similar species like starlings is the tail. Grackles have long, wedge-shaped tails that are especially visible in flight. Grackles are also quite large, exceeding a foot in length from bill to tail.



T I | Macaulay Library | 2017



Evan Lipton | Macaulay Library | 2015



Phil Kahler | Macaulay Library | 2017

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*):

Red-winged blackbirds are smaller than robins but larger than sparrows, coming in at just below 9" in length. Both sexes have sharp black bills, but their plumages are quite distinct.

Males are solid black with red shoulder patches. The shoulder patches are bordered with a line of yellow at the bottom, and the birds can conceal the shoulder patches when they wish, leaving only the thin line visible. Females resemble large sparrows, but can be recognized as this species by their sharp bills,

orange-washed faces, and heavy, regular streaking below.

During spring and summer especially, red-winged blackbirds are quintessential marsh birds. Even small ponds and wet culverts may host a pair or two nesting in the reedy growth. In fall, like most blackbirds, red-wings gather into large flocks and forage for grain and insects across open areas.



David Trescak | Macaulay Library | 2017



Deborah Bifulco | Macaulay Library | 2017

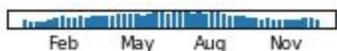
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*):

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (7.1 - 8.3") are stocky, medium-sized songbirds with very large triangular bills. They are broad-chested, with a short neck and a medium-length, squared tail. Smaller than an American Robin; larger than a House Finch. Adult males are black-and-white birds with a brilliant red chevron extending from the black throat down the middle of the breast. Females and immatures are brown and heavily streaked, with a bold whitish stripe over the eye. Males flash pink-red under the wings; females flash yellowish. Both sexes show white patches in the wings and tail. These chunky birds use their stout bills to eat seeds, fruit, and insects. They are also frequent visitors to backyard bird feeders, where they

eat sunflower seeds with abandon. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks breed in eastern forests; you can find them among both deciduous trees and conifers. They are most common in regenerating woodlands and often concentrate along forest edges and in parks. During migration, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks frequent fruiting trees to help fuel their flights to Central and South America.¹



James Kinderman | Macaulay Library | 2017



Josh Lovering | 2020

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*):

Mourning doves of both sexes are cleanly attired in soft browns and grays. Their wings bear a few black spots, and most show a small gray or black dash on their cheeks. They are larger than most backyard birds, measuring a foot from bill to tail tip. The bill is small and straight; the tail long and pointed. Their white outer tail feathers are clearly visible from behind when the birds take wing.

Flocks of doves are often seen during the fall migration and through the winter, foraging for seeds below bird feeders or in agricultural fields. They also often perch in dead trees or on telephone wires.

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*):

They have plump bodies, short legs, and thin, relatively short beaks. Their tails are fan-shaped and their wings are pointed. Through selective breeding, people have developed domestic pigeon varieties with many interesting patterns and colors, much like domestic dog or horse breeds. This is why the descendants of these birds, the feral pigeons, can be found in many shades of brown, gray, black, and white. However, most flocks contain individuals with the typical wild “blue” form: a blue-gray body, lighter blue-gray wings marked by two black bands, a wide black tail band, and a white rump. The neck often shimmers with purple and green iridescent feathers. Pigeons are flocking birds, and they are among the strongest and swiftest of avian fliers. Their flight muscles make up about one-third of the total body weight. Some birds are raised for racing; they may fly more than 500 miles in a single day and have been clocked at speeds in excess of 94 miles per hour.



Luke Seitz | Macaulay Library | 2014

Downy woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*):

Downy woodpeckers are small for woodpeckers but medium-sized as backyard birds go (just under 7” long, on average). Their backs have a broad white stripe down the center, and their black wings are marked with white horizontal bars. Their faces are also striped black-and-white, and males show a bright red dot at the backs of their heads.

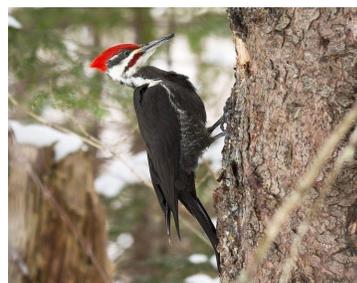
Downy woodpecker bills are small but sharp and stout, like the point of a chisel. Their cousins, the hairy woodpeckers, look almost identical, but they are larger, with longer bills that are easily the length of their heads.

Downies will pick and peck at tree bark in search of insects, and they will often crawl out to the tips of smaller branches that larger woodpeckers can’t access.

They will eagerly visit feeders for both seeds and suet. In winter, they join large flocks of chickadees and nuthatches to search the landscape for food. In spring and summer, they nest in tree cavities, especially in soft or rotting wood that their small bills can excavate.



Charles J. Lovering | 2020

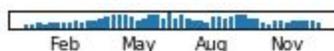


David Turgeon | Macaulay Library | 2017

Pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*):

The energetic, crow-sized pileated woodpecker is always a remarkable sight. It has a bright red crest and a black body with white patches on its wings. Look for the large rectangular holes that it excavates in trees to find carpenter ants, its preferred food.

Listen for a powerful drumming that is slow at first, then speeds up, and then slows again.



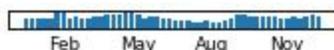
Dan Vickers | Macaulay Library | 2017



Carl Giometti | Macaulay Library | 2017

Red-Bellied woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*):

This bird has only become common in Massachusetts during the past two decades. Despite the name, the most visible area of red on this bird can be found on its head and nape. It’s slightly larger than a downy woodpecker and has beige underparts and a black and white barred back. This bird inhabits many types of forests and will visit feeders. Listen for a variety of sounds, from trills to loud chuckles to a steady drumming.



Barred Owl (*Strix varia*):

Barred Owls (16.9 - 19.7") are large, stocky owls with rounded heads, no ear tufts, and medium length, rounded tails. Smaller than a Great Horned Owl; larger than a Barn Owl. 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. 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. 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 Northwest, Barred Owls have moved into old-growth coniferous forest, where they compete with the threatened Spotted Owl.¹



Frank Lovering | 2020



Steven Mlodinow | Macaulay Library | 2017

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*):

Despite Benjamin Franklin's insistence that the Wild Turkey would have been a more appropriate choice, the Bald Eagle has been the symbol of the United States of America since its inception and it has symbolized courage, strength, ferocity, and freedom through the years. In reality, though, Bald Eagles often prefer to scavenge carrion when it is available rather than catch their own prey. What they cannot scavenge, they may steal from other birds. When they cannot scavenge or steal, eagles hunt for live prey, most often fish, but they will also feed on a wide variety of other animals as well.

**Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*):**

In spring, as hopeful little creatures emerge from their winter haunts to forage on the new greenery, some will inevitably be eaten in their turn by Red-shouldered Hawks. Red-shouldered Hawks are among the earliest of our migrant species to return to New England in the spring; in fact, some of them remain with us all winter long. They are not as ubiquitous as their Red-tailed cousins, but there are still many that call the Bay State home. Usually encountered near areas of wet woods, Red-shouldered Hawks readily take fish and amphibians in addition to more typical hawk fare such as small mammals and occasionally birds.



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Jonathan Eckerson | Macaulay Library | 2017

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*):

With their broad wings, stocky build, and high-soaring habits, Red-tailed Hawks are very much the archetypal buteos. No hawk is more familiar to the casual birder in Massachusetts than this species, which can be found all across the Commonwealth.

Red-tailed Hawks are masters of soaring, and, consequently, they make countless, slow, spiral circles in search of prey, in defense of territory, and during courtship. When courting, the birds sometimes dive and swoop at each other, or even grapple in midair with a grace that seemingly is impossible for so large a bird.



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*):

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.

Ospreys 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. Look for Ospreys around nearly any body of water: saltmarshes, rivers, ponds, reservoirs, estuaries, and even coral reefs.

Their conspicuous stick nests are placed in the open on poles, channel markers, and dead trees, often over water.¹



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Jay McGowan | Macaulay Library | 2015



Matt Davis | Macaulay Library | 2017

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*):

Turkey vultures are large birds with nearly 6-foot wingspans. In flight, they look very dark, and their wings are two-toned, with a pale gray trailing edge. To distinguish turkey vultures from other soaring birds such as eagles or hawks, look for their relatively tiny heads, and note that they hold their wings above their bodies in a shallow “V”. They also have a distinctive wobbly soaring style.

Turkey vultures are named for their resemblance to wild turkeys. When you encounter perching vultures, you can see why: like turkeys, their bodies are bulky, and their small heads are featherless and bright pink-red.

Dozens of birds may roost together. Turkey vultures specialize in eating carrion (dead animals). They have a well-developed sense of smell that they use to find food. Their heads are naked so that they can reach inside a carcass without contaminating their feathers.



Brian McKenny | Macaulay Library | 2017

Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*):

A Wild Turkey can stand four feet tall, with a large, bulky body covered with bronzy, iridescent feathers. The tom (male) has a reddish blue head and a hair-like “beard” protruding from the breast. The smaller female is duller in coloration than the male.

Adults feed largely on plant material, including nuts, berries, grains, seeds, grass, roots, and bulbs, but they will also supplement their diet with small invertebrates. The young feed mainly on insects.

In the spring, tom turkeys make their famous gobble in order to lure in females. Courtship begins when the tom

spreads its tail, fluffs out its feathers, swells out the facial wattles, and struts in front of the females. Males are polygamous, and will mate with several females if given the opportunity.

Wild Turkeys can fly for short distances up to 55 miles per hour. Not only can turkeys fly, they also roost in trees at night!



D. Bruce Yolton | Macaulay Library | 2017



Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*):

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (2.5 - 3.5") are bright emerald or golden-green on the back and crown, with gray-white underparts. Males have a brilliant iridescent red throat that looks dark when it's not in good light.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds fly straight and fast but can stop instantly, hover, and adjust their position up, down, or backwards with exquisite control.



Ian Davies | Macaulay Library | 2015

They often visit hummingbird feeders and tube-shaped flowers and defend these food sources against others. You may also see them plucking tiny insects from the air or from spider webs.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds live in open woodlands, forest edges, meadows, grasslands, and in parks, gardens, and backyards.¹



Cathy Pondelicek | Macaulay Library | 2015

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*):

Killdeer (7.9 - 11.0") 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. 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. Look for Killdeer on open ground with low vegetation (or no vegetation at all), including lawns, golf courses, driveways, parking lots, and gravel-covered roofs, as well as pastures, fields, sandbars and mudflats. This species is one of the least water-associated of all shorebirds.¹



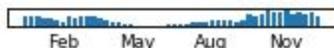
Davey Walters | Macaulay Library | 2016



Jeremy Collison | Macaulay Library | 2017

Ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*):

The smallest of our common gulls (17.5"), the ring-billed gull has a gray back, gray wings with black tips, and white head, yellowish legs, and bill with a dark band near the tip. Ring-billed gulls, which are most commonly seen in central Massachusetts, have never successfully bred in Massachusetts. Gulls are opportunistic feeders, exploiting virtually any food source they can find.



Liron Gertsman | Macaulay Library | 2015

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*):

Male Mallards are easily identified by the lustrous green head, while the more demure female is brown. They can be seen in parks and ponds in large numbers in fall and winter, but will break off into pairs when breeding season comes.

A Mallard's primary diet consists of vegetable matter such as grains, acorns, and aquatic vegetation. But in the

breeding season, their diet shifts to encompass more animal matter such as insects, snails, minnows, and shrimp.



Steeve R. Baker | Macaulay Library | 2017



Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*):

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.



Ryan Schain | Macaulay Library | 2017

Hooded Mergansers dive to catch aquatic insects, crayfish, and small fish. Look for Hooded Mergansers on small bodies of freshwater. In summer, these small ducks nest in holes in trees, often near freshwater ponds or rivers. For winter, they move to larger bodies of freshwater, marshes, and protected saltwater bays.¹



Jay McGowan | Macaulay Library | 2017



Janis Stone | Macaulay Library | 2017

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*):

Great Blue Herons (roughly 40") 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. A pure white subspecies occurs in coastal southern Florida. Hunting Great Blue Herons wade slowly or stand statue-like, stalking fish and other prey in shallow water or open fields.

Look for Great Blue Herons in saltwater and freshwater habitats, from open coasts, 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.



Happy Birding!

This field guide was produced in coordination with Mass Audubon. Many of the species descriptions were reproduced, from their website, with their permission. All of the species descriptions in this field guide were taken from the following sources:

- **Cornell Lab of Ornithology** - [Allaboutbirds.org](https://www.allaboutbirds.org)
 - A majority of the bird descriptions were quoted from this resource.
- **Mass Audubon** - <https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/nature-wildlife/birds>
 - Mass Audubon sponsored the creation of this field guide and permitted the reproduction of many of the bird descriptions included.
- **Ebird** - <https://ebird.org/barchart?r=US-MA-027&yr=all&m=>
 - The data used to create the frequency bars is an accumulation of user sightings posted data downloaded from the Ebird website.

¹ The Cornell Lab of Ornithology. (n.d). *Welcome to Our Bird Guide*. All About Birds. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide>