

# Northern VA Backyard Bird Identification Guide and Checklist



May 2020

# Introduction

This online Bird Guide and Checklist was created to provide a meaningful activity for kids and adults of all ages to do right in their yard or while out on a walk in nature (ex: wooded trail, park). Use your observation skills to look and listen for birds, refer to this Bird Guide to identify them, and record your findings on the Bird Checklist. Think of it as a living matching game.

Detailed instructions are given below. But first, here are some tips that will enhance your enjoyment of this activity. You can attract birds to your yard by [providing food that they like](#). A bird feeder filled with [high quality food](#) is a great way to bring the birds close enough for you to see them from a window, deck or porch. If you don't have a bird feeder and want to make one, [instructions](#) on how to make one are available online. Another tool that would be helpful to have available are binoculars. Binoculars are especially useful when trying to identify birds that are high in the trees, but they're also helpful for seeing details of birds that are close.

I hope you enjoy connecting with nature through this activity. May it bring you a sense of adventure or perhaps a sense of peace. Either way, may it bring you joy!

Happy Birding,  
Linda Colucci, DVM

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** My lifelong love of animals and nature led me to a career in small animal veterinary medicine, and later broadened to caring for all of nature. After completing the Lady Bird Johnson "Landscape for Life" course and participating in the Audubon-at-Home program, I learned ways I could support local wildlife by restoring natural habitat right in my own backyard. I became a member of Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, attend many of their programs and periodically volunteer. My current job at Wild Birds Unlimited has taught me much about local backyard birds and has provided a platform for sharing my passion with others.

# Instructions

1. Choose a place where you're going to look for birds. This may be a window facing your yard or bird feeders, or it might be a place outside where you can sit far enough from the birds that they won't be alarmed and fly away. Another option is to take a walk in a public park or wooded trail and look for birds from the path.
2. Print a copy of this Bird Guide and Checklist and have it with you along with a pen or pencil. If you have a mobile device, you can simply have this Bird Guide and Checklist open.
3. Use your eyes and ears to find a bird. It might be high in a tree, on the ground or flitting in a bush. Once you locate it, study it carefully. What color(s) are the feathers, beak and legs? What size is it? Is it bigger or smaller than a robin? Look for a picture in this guide that matches the bird that you see. Once you find it, record the requested information about the bird in the Bird Checklist.
4. To learn more about the bird you saw, click on the name of the bird below its photo in this Bird Guide. It will take you to a page at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website that has lots of information about that bird. For example, if you click the "**Listen**" tab you can hear what the bird sounds like. If you scroll down to the **Backyard Tips** section and click the "**Common Feeder Birds bird list**" link you can learn what kind of food that bird likes to eat.
5. Repeat Steps 3 and 4 for each bird you see.
6. Have fun!

## Online Resources

[Make Your Own Feeder](#)

[Food and Feeder Preferences of Common Feeder Birds](#)

[Science and Nature Activities for Cooped Up Kids](#)

[K-12 Education—Family Nature Quest](#)

[K-12 Education—Explorer's Guidebook](#)

[K-12 Education—Feathered Friends Lesson](#)

[K-12 Education—By Science Theme](#)

[K-12 Education—Resources in Spanish](#)

[Audubon Adventures for Young Nature-Lovers](#)

[Bird Feeding Supplies and Advice](#)



# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Amy Eberling for providing the seed with her *Salish Sea Bird ID Guide* and Cathy Norman for planting the seed. They were the inspiration for this online bird guide and checklist. Many thanks to Kim Strader, Naturing Way LLC, for the design layout. Special thanks to Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, Joe Coleman, BJ Lecrone, Spring Ligi and Michael Myers.

Note: Although the links to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon websites are included in this guide, neither organization helped to develop this guide and checklist nor are they endorsing this guide and checklist.

## Photo Credits

**Cover photo: Northern Cardinal by Linda Colucci**

**Dave Boltz:** Common Grackle, Tufted Titmouse

**Linda Colucci:** American Goldfinch, Eastern Bluebird, House Finch, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal (male & female), Ruby-throated Hummingbird

**Katherine Daniels:** European Starling

**Michael Myers:** American Crow, Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Flicker, Northern Mockingbird, White-breasted Nuthatch, Woodpeckers—Downy & Hairy, Pileated, Red-bellied

**Ian Richardson:** American Robin, Carolina Chickadee, House Sparrow



American Crow

**Fun Fact:** In winter, they gather in large numbers (a few hundred to 2 million!) to sleep in communal roosts.



American Goldfinch

**Fun Fact:** Males only have their bright yellow feathers in spring and summer.



American Robin

**Fun Fact:** Find worms by sight, not sound. They stare, motionless, at the ground with head cocked to one side looking, not listening, for worms.



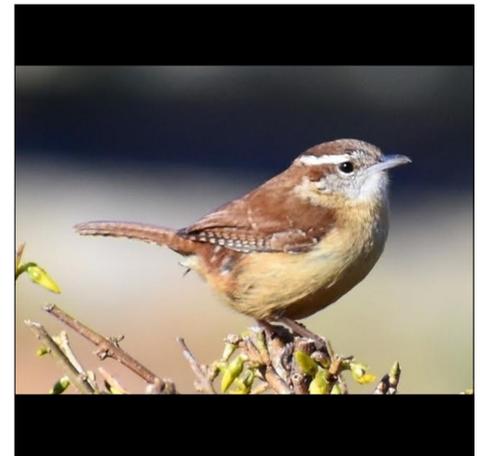
Blue Jay

**Fun Fact:** Mimics a hawk call to warn other jays or to deceive and scatter birds at a feeder.



Carolina Chickadee

**Fun Fact:** Eats the heart of the seed by holding the seed with its feet and hammering the shell with its beak.



Carolina Wren

**Fun Fact:** In addition to birdhouses, will nest in odd places such as door wreaths, flower pots or mailboxes.



Common Grackle

**Fun Fact:** Grackles, not crows, are the #1 threat to corn crops.



Eastern Bluebird

**Fun Fact:** Have 1-3 broods each year. Young of 1st brood often help raise young of 2nd brood.



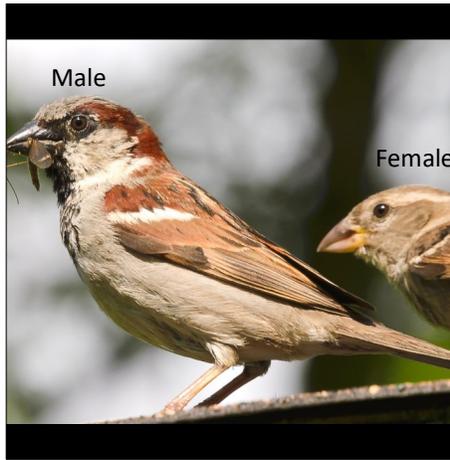
European Starling

**Fun Fact:** Not native to the U.S. It can mimic calls of other bird species.



### House Finch

**Fun Fact:** One of very few birds that feed their nestlings strictly plant foods (no insects).



### House Sparrow

**Fun Fact:** Not native to the U.S. Takes frequent dust baths to absorb excess preen oil and help remove debris.



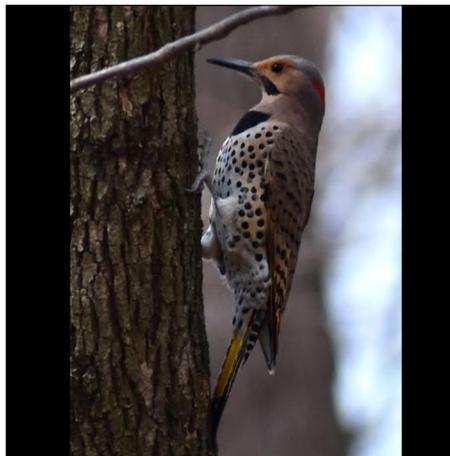
### Mourning Dove

**Fun Fact:** Swallows seeds whole and stores them in an enlargement of the esophagus called a crop, to be digested later.



### Northern Cardinal

**Fun Fact:** One of the few female North American songbirds that sing.



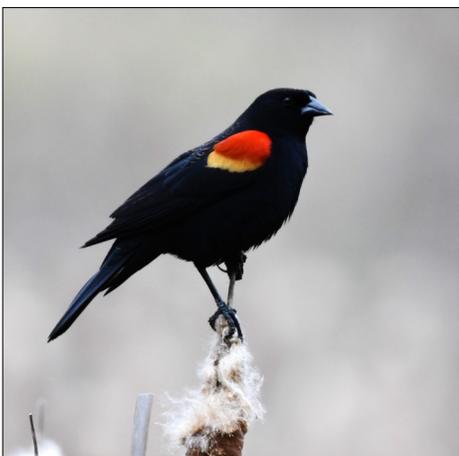
### Northern Flicker

**Fun Fact:** Unlike other woodpeckers, Northern Flicker prefers to find food on the ground, especially ants.



### Northern Mockingbird

**Fun Fact:** Sings during the day and often at night, especially during the full moon.



### Red-winged Blackbird

**Fun Fact:** Like crows, they roost in large flocks. Winter flocks can be mixed with other blackbird species and number in the millions.



### Ruby-throated Hummingbird

**Fun Fact:** Beats its wings about 53 times a second. Only bird that can fly backwards.



### Tufted Titmouse

**Fun Fact:** Known to pluck hair from other animals, including pets and squirrels, to line their nest.



### White-breasted Nuthatch

**Fun Fact:** Often search for food by starting high in a tree and hopping down the tree trunk headfirst.



### Downy Woodpecker

**Fun Fact:** Male has a red spot on the back of his head; female does not.

### Hairy Woodpecker

**Fun Fact:** Looks similar to Downy except Hairy is larger and its bill is longer.



### Pileated Woodpecker

**Fun Fact:** Very large woodpecker that digs rectangular holes in trees to find carpenter ants.



### Red-bellied Woodpecker

**Fun Fact:** Despite its red "mohawk," it is not a Red-headed Woodpecker (a different species). It has a pale rosy belly.

# Bird Checklist

For each bird species you see, write down the following information on your checklist:

**Date Observed:** the date that you saw the bird

**General Location:** the general place where you saw the bird and the town (Examples: my backyard, Ashburn; Trailside Park, Ashburn)

**Specific Location:** a description of the exact spot you saw the bird (Examples: on a tree branch, on a tree trunk, on the ground, on a bird feeder)

**Behavior:** What was the bird doing when you saw it? (Examples: eating at a bird feeder, sitting on a tree branch, flying, bringing nesting material to a birdhouse, preening, singing).

Bird Common Name	Date Observed	General Location	Specific Location	Behavior
American Crow				
American Goldfinch				
American Robin				
Blue Jay				
Carolina Chickadee				
Carolina Wren				
Common Grackle				
Eastern Bluebird				
European Starling				

Bird Common Name	Date Observed	General Location	Specific Location	Behavior
House Finch				
House Sparrow				
Mourning Dove				
Northern Cardinal				
Northern Flicker				
Northern Mockingbird				
Red-winged Blackbird				
Ruby-throated Hummingbird				
Tufted Titmouse				
White-breasted Nuthatch				
Woodpecker, Downy				
Woodpecker, Hairy				
Woodpecker, Pileated				
Woodpecker, Red-Bellied				