



Birdlist for Ernest E. Debs Park

AUDUBON CENTER AT DEBS PARK

Acorn Woodpecker

Melanerpes formicivorus

- ▶ A clown-faced western woodpecker with a complicated social structure, living in small colonies. Best known for its habit of hoarding acorns: the birds drill small holes in a dead snag, then harvest acorns in fall and store them in these holes, to be eaten during winter. Such a "granary tree" may be used for generations and may be riddled with up to 50,000 holes. Nesting is a group activity, with several adults (up to 12 or more) taking part in incubating the eggs and feeding the young in a single nest.



Allen's Hummingbird

Selasphorus sasin



- ▶ A close relative of the Rufous Hummingbird, Allen's has a more limited range, nesting mostly in California. This is one of the two common nesting hummingbirds in northern California gardens (Anna's is the other). Females and immatures of Allen's Hummingbird are almost impossible to separate from Rufous females without close examination, so the status of the species in migration is still being worked out by dedicated hummingbird banders.

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

- ▶ Crows are thought to be among our most intelligent birds, and the success of the American Crow in adapting to civilization would seem to confirm this. Despite past attempts to exterminate them, crows are more common than ever in farmlands, towns, and even cities, and their distinctive caw! is a familiar sound over much of the continent. Sociable, especially when not nesting, crows may gather in communal roosts on winter nights, sometimes with thousands or even tens of thousands roosting in one grove.



American Goldfinch

Spinus tristis



A typical summer sight is a male American Goldfinch flying over a meadow, flashing golden in the sun, calling perchickory as it bounds up and down in flight. In winter, when males and females alike are colored in subtler brown, flocks of goldfinches congregate in weedy fields and at feeders, making musical and plaintive calls. In most regions this is a late nester, beginning to nest in mid-summer, perhaps to assure a peak supply of late-summer seeds for feeding its young.

American Kestrel

Falco sparverius

- ▶ Our smallest falcon, the kestrel is also the most familiar and widespread in North America. In open country it is commonly seen perched on roadside wires, or hovering low over a field on rapidly beating wings, waiting to pounce on a grasshopper. Kestrels nest in cavities in trees; in places where there are few large dead snags to provide nest sites, they may rely on nesting boxes put up for them by conservationists.



American Pipit

Anthus rubescens

Nesting in the far north and on mountaintops, American Pipits can be found throughout the continent during migration or winter. At those seasons they are usually in flocks, walking on shores or plowed fields, wagging their tails as they go. Often they are detected first as they fly over high, giving sharp pi-pit calls.



American Robin

Turdus migratorius



A very familiar bird over most of North America, running and hopping on lawns with upright stance, often nesting on porches and windowsills. The Robin's rich caroling is among the earliest bird songs heard at dawn in spring and summer, often beginning just before first light. In fall and winter, robins may gather by the hundreds in roaming flocks, concentrating at sources of food.

American White Pelican

Pelecanus erythrorhynchos

- ▶ One of the largest birds in North America, with a 9-foot wingspan. Similar to Brown Pelican in shape but much larger, and very different in habits: Occurs far inland, feeds cooperatively in shallow lakes, does not dive from the air for fish. Despite its great size, a spectacular flier, with flocks often soaring very high in the air, ponderously wheeling and circling in unison.



Anna's Hummingbird

Calypte anna



- ▶ This hardy little bird is a permanent resident along our Pacific Coast, staying through the winter in many areas where no other hummingbirds are present. More vocal than most hummingbirds, males have a buzzy song, often given while perched. In recent decades the species has expanded its range, probably helped along by flowers and feeders in suburban gardens; it now nests north to British Columbia and east to Arizona.

Ash-throated Flycatcher

Myiarchus cinerascens



This pale flycatcher is common and widespread in arid country of the west. Like its close relatives, it nests in holes in trees. However, because it lives in dry terrain where trees are often small or scarce, it will resort to other sites; nests have been found in such odd places as exhaust pipes, hollow fence posts, mailboxes, and even in trousers hanging on a clothesline.

Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula



One of the most brilliantly colored songbirds in the east, flaming orange and black, sharing the heraldic colors of the coat of arms of 17th-century Lord Baltimore. Widespread east of the Great Plains, Baltimore Orioles are often very common in open woods and groves in summer. Their bag-shaped hanging nests, artfully woven of plant fibers, are familiar sights in the shade trees in towns. This bird was formerly considered to belong to the same species as the western Bullock's Oriole, under the combined name of Northern Oriole.

Band-tailed Pigeon

Patagioenas fasciata

- ▶ This big pigeon, larger than the familiar park pigeon, is common in parts of the west. It lives along much of the Pacific Coast and in the mountains, moving about nomadically to feed on acorns, berries, or other wild food crops. Band-tails are sociable, foraging in flocks at most seasons and often nesting in small colonies. Unlike many doves, they do much of their feeding up in trees, clambering about with surprising agility to pluck berries.



Barn Owl

Tyto alba



With its ghostly appearance, rasping shrieks, and habit of roosting in such places as church belfries, this bird has attracted much superstition. However, it is really a good omen for farmers who find it in their barns, for it preys chiefly on mice and rats. Discovered in its daytime retreat, the Barn Owl bobs its head and weaves back and forth, peering at the intruder. At night it is often heard calling as it flies high over farmland or marshes. One of the most widespread of all landbirds, found on six continents and many islands.

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

One of our most familiar birds in rural areas and semi-open country, this swallow is often seen skimming low over fields with a flowing, graceful flight. It seems to have adopted humans as neighbors, typically placing its nest in barns or garages, or under bridges or wharves; indeed, it is now rare to find a Barn Swallow nest in a site that is not manmade. The species is also common across Europe and Asia, wintering to southern Africa and South America.



Belted Kingfisher

Megaceryle alcyon

The Belted Kingfisher is often first noticed by its wild rattling call as it flies over rivers or lakes. It may be seen perched on a high snag, or hovering on rapidly beating wings, then plunging headfirst into the water to grab a fish. Found almost throughout North America at one season or another, it is the only member of its family to be seen in most areas north of Mexico.



Bewick's Wren

Thryomanes bewickii

- ▶ In dry thickets and open woods of the west, this is often a very common bird. Pairs of Bewick's Wrens (pronounced like "Buick") clamber about actively in the brush, exploring tangles and bark crevices, waving their long tails about, giving harsh scolding notes at any provocation. In the east, this species is far less common, and it has vanished from most of its former range east of the Mississippi River.



Black-chinned Hummingbird

Archilochus alexandri

Over much of the west, this species is widespread in many habitats at low elevations, often coming into suburban gardens and nesting in back yards within its range. Several other western hummingbirds may stay through the winter, at least in small numbers, but the Black-chin is almost entirely absent from the west in winter.



Black-headed Grosbeak

Pheucticus melanocephalus

In foothills and riverside woods of the West, this species is often very common as a nesting bird. In mid-summer, the oak woodlands often resound with the insistent whining whistle of young Black-headed Grosbeaks begging for food. This is among few birds able to eat Monarch butterflies, despite the noxious chemicals those insects contain from eating milkweeds in the larval stage; in Mexico in winter, the grosbeaks eat large numbers of Monarchs.



Black Phoebe

Sayornis nigricans



- ▶ The sharp whistled call of the Black Phoebe is a typical sound along creeks and ponds in the southwest. The birder who explores such areas is likely to see the bird perched low over the water, slowly wagging its tail, then darting out in rapid flight to snap up an insect just above the water's surface. Related to the familiar Eastern Phoebe of eastern North America, this species has a much wider range, living along streams from California to Argentina.

Black-throated Gray Warbler

Setophaga nigrescens



This strikingly patterned warbler is typical of semi-arid country in the West. It is often common in summer in the foothills, in open woods of juniper, pinyon pine, or oak, where its buzzy song carries well across the dry slopes. Of all the western warblers, this is the one that shows up most often in the East, but it is still rare enough there to provide excitement for eastern birders.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Polioptila caerulea



A very small woodland bird with a long tail, usually seen flitting about in the treetops, giving a short whining callnote. Often it darts out in a short, quick flight to snap up a tiny insect in mid-air. Widespread in summer, its breeding range is still expanding toward the north.

Brewer's Blackbird

Euphagus cyanocephalus

This is the common blackbird of open country in the West, often seen walking on the ground with short forward jerks of its head. It adapts well to habitats altered by humans, and in places it may walk about on suburban sidewalks or scavenge for crumbs around beachfront restaurants. In winter, Brewer's Blackbirds gather in large flocks, often with other blackbirds, and may be seen foraging in farmland all across the western and southern states.



Brown Creeper

Certhia americana



Looking like a piece of bark come to life, the Brown Creeper crawls up trunks of trees, ferreting out insect eggs and other morsels missed by more active birds. It is easily overlooked until its thin, reedy call gives it away. Reaching the top of one tree, it flutters down to the base of another to begin spiraling up again. Creepers even place their nests against tree trunks, tucked under loose slabs of bark, where they are very difficult to find.

Brown-headed Cowbird

Molothrus ater

Centuries ago this bird probably followed bison herds on the Great Plains, feeding on insects flushed from the grass by the grazers. Today it follows cattle, and occurs abundantly from coast to coast. Its spread has represented bad news for other songbirds: Cowbirds lay their eggs in nests of other birds. Heavy parasitism by cowbirds has pushed some species to the status of "endangered" and has probably hurt populations of some others.



Bullock's Oriole

Icterus bullockii

In the west, this oriole is common in summer in forest edge, farmyards, leafy suburbs, isolated groves, and streamside woods, especially in cottonwood trees. For several years it was considered to belong to the same species as the eastern Baltimore Oriole (with the two combined under the name Northern Oriole), because the two often interbreed where their ranges come in contact on the western Great Plains. The habits of the two are similar.



Bushtit

Psaltriparus minimus

- ▶ Tiny, drab birds with light ticking and lisping callnotes, Bushtits are common in woods and mountains of the west, but they are often inconspicuous. A flock feeding in a tree may go almost unnoticed until the birds fly out, perhaps twenty or thirty of them, in a straggling single file to the next tree. They are very sociable at most seasons, and groups will roost huddled close together in a tight mass on cold nights.



California Gull

Larus californicus

- ▶ Part of a complex of similar gulls, this bird closely resembles the Herring Gull or Ring-billed Gull, and is intermediate between those two in size. It nests around lakes in the interior of the west, and winters commonly along the Pacific Coast, including offshore waters. This was the species that came to the rescue of the Mormon settlers whose crops were threatened by a grasshopper plague in 1848, inspiring the seagull monument in Salt Lake City.



California Scrub-Jay

Aphelocoma californica



- ▶ This is the “blue jay” of parks, neighborhoods, and riverside woods near the Pacific Coast. Pairs of California Scrub-Jays are often seen swooping across clearings, giving harsh calls, with their long tails flopping in flight. They readily come to backyard bird feeders. Until recently, this jay was considered part of the same species as the Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay; the two were officially “split” in July 2016.

California Towhee

Melospiza crissalis

- ▶ Along the Pacific seaboard from southern Oregon to Baja, this plain brown bird is a common denizen of brushy places, from wild chaparral hillsides to the borders of gardens and city parks. California Towhees sometimes hide in the shrubbery, where they may be noticed mainly by their sharp callnotes and the squealing duets of mated pairs. At other times they come out on open ground, to scratch in the leaf-litter with both feet as they search for food.



California Thrasher

Toxostoma redivivum



- ▶ Several kinds of dull gray-brown thrashers occur in the West, but this is the only one along the California coast. The bird's normal range is limited to California and a corner of Baja, but within that range it is quite common in the chaparral, even coming into brushy suburbs. It spends most of its time on the ground, walking and running with its tail often held high, stopping to dig in the dirt with its sickle-shaped bill.

Cassin's Kingbird

Tyrannus vociferans

- ▶ As suggested by its scientific name *vociferans*, Cassin's is our noisiest kingbird (except for the very localized Thick-billed). Possibly it has more need for vocal communication because it lives in denser habitat than most. Males have a strident "dawn song," a rising berg-berg-berg-BERG, often heard at first light but rarely later in the day, sometimes confused with song of Buff-collared Nightjar. Where present in numbers (as on wintering grounds in Mexico), flocks may gather to roost in large concentrations.



Cassin's Vireo

Vireo cassinii

In the Pacific states and parts of the northern Rockies, this vireo is common in summer. When feeding, it works rather deliberately along branches, searching for insects. Its nest, suspended in the fork of a twig, is often easy to find. This bird was formerly lumped with the Blue-headed and Plumbeous vireos under the name Solitary Vireo.



Cedar Waxwing

Bombycilla cedrorum



- ▶ With thin, lisping cries, flocks of Cedar Waxwings descend on berry-laden trees and hedges, to flutter among the branches as they feast. These birds are sociable at all seasons, and it is rare to see just one waxwing. Occasionally a line of waxwings perched on a branch will pass a berry back and forth, from bill to bill, until one of them swallows it. This species has a more southerly range than the Bohemian Waxwing, and is a familiar visitor to most parts of this continent south of the Arctic.

Chipping Sparrow

Spizella passerina



Common over much of the continent is the little Chipping Sparrow. Originally a bird of open pine woods and edges, it has adapted well to altered landscapes. It now nests in gardens and parks in many areas, its tame behavior making it well-known and popular. Evidently it was even more common in towns in the 19th century; but then the House Sparrow, introduced from Europe, took over its place as our number one city "sparrow."

Cliff Swallow

Petrochelidon pyrrhonota



This swallow is probably far more common today than when the Pilgrims landed. Originally it built its jug-shaped mud nests on the sides of cliffs. However, the sides of barns and the supports of bridges provided sheltered sites that were far more widespread than the natural ones. Taking advantage of these artificial locations, the species has invaded many areas where it never nested before. Although it is continuing to spread in the east, it is still more common in the west, where practically every culvert and highway bridge seems to have its own Cliff Swallow colony.

Common Poorwill

Phalaenoptilus nuttallii



In dry hills of the west, a soft whistled poor-will carries across the slopes on moonlit nights. Drivers may spot the Poorwill itself sitting on a dirt road, its eyes reflecting orange in the headlights, before it flits off into the darkness. This species is famous as the first known hibernating bird: In cool weather it may enter a torpid state, with lowered body temperature, heartbeat, and rate of breathing, for days or even weeks at a time. Science discovered this in the 1940s, but apparently the Hopi people knew it long before that: their name for the Poorwill means "the sleeping one."

Common Raven

Corvus corax



- ▶ Of the birds classified as perching birds or "songbirds," the Common Raven is the largest, the size of a hawk. Often its deep croaking call will alert the observer to a pair of ravens soaring high overhead. An intelligent and remarkably adaptable bird, living as a scavenger and predator, it can survive at all seasons in surroundings as different as hot desert and high Arctic tundra. Once driven from much of its eastern range, the raven is now making a comeback.

Common Yellowthroat

Geothlypis trichas

Abundant and well-known, the Common Yellowthroat has succeeded by being a nonconformist. As the only one of our warblers that will nest in open marshes, it is found in practically every reed-bed and patch of cattails from coast to coast. Although it sometimes hides in the marsh, its low rough callnote will reveal its presence. The male often perches atop a tall stalk to rap out his distinctive song, wichity-wichity-wichity.



Cooper's Hawk

Accipiter cooperii

A medium-sized hawk of the woodlands. Feeding mostly on birds and small mammals, it hunts by stealth, approaching its prey through dense cover and then pouncing with a rapid, powerful flight. Of the three bird-eating Accipiter hawks, Cooper's is the mid-sized species and the most widespread as a nesting bird south of Canada.



Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis



- ▶ In winter over much of the continent, flocks of Juncos can be found around woodland edges and suburban yards, feeding on the ground, making ticking calls as they fly up into the bushes. East of the plains the Juncos are all gray and white, but in the West they come in various color patterns, with reddish-brown on the back or sides or both; some of these were once regarded as different species. The forms have separate ranges in summer, but in winter several types may occur in the same flock in parts of the West.

Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus



This dark, long-bodied diving bird floats low in the water with its thin neck and bill raised; perches upright near water with wings half-spread to dry. The Double-crested (which rarely looks noticeably crested in the field) is the most generally distributed cormorant in North America, and the only one likely to be seen inland in most areas.

Downy Woodpecker

Picoides pubescens

- ▶ The smallest woodpecker in North America, common and widespread, although it avoids the arid southwest. In the east this is the most familiar member of the family, readily entering towns and city parks, coming to backyard bird feeders. Its small size makes it versatile, and it may forage on weed stalks as well as in large trees. In winter it often joins roving mixed flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, and other birds in the woods.



European Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

- ▶ Often regarded as a pest, the Starling wins our grudging admiration for its adaptability, toughness, and seeming intelligence. Brought to North America in 1890, it has spread to occupy most of the continent, and is now abundant in many areas. Sociable at most seasons, Starlings may gather in immense flocks in fall and winter. When the flocks break up for the breeding season, males reveal a skill for mimicry, interrupting their wheezing and sputtering songs with perfect imitations of other birds.



Flammulated Owl

Psiloscopus flammeolus

The soft, low-pitched hoots of this little owl can be heard (if one listens carefully) in mountain pine forests over much of the west. Seeing the bird is another matter; its variegated pattern of brown and rust makes perfect camouflage when it perches close to a pine trunk. Because it is so inconspicuous, the Flammulated Owl was long overlooked in many areas, and was considered rare until recently.



Fox Sparrow

Passerella iliaca

This big chunky sparrow nests in the far north and in western mountains, and many birders know it only as a migrant or winter visitor. It is usually found on the ground under dense thickets, scratching busily in the leaf-litter with both feet. On its breeding grounds, it gives a beautifully clear whistled song. The bird's name refers to the bright foxy-red color of the most eastern and northern populations, but many Fox Sparrows in the West are predominantly gray or sooty brown.



Golden-crowned Kinglet

Regulus satrapa

One of our tiniest birds, the Golden-crowned Kinglet is remarkable in its ability to survive in cold climates. Nesting in northern forest, wintering throughout much of the continent, it is usually in dense conifers which undoubtedly help provide shelter from the cold. This choice of habitat also makes the Golden-crown hard to see, but it may be detected by its high thin callnotes, and then glimpsed as it flits about high in the spruce trees.



Golden-crowned Sparrow

Zonotrichia atricapilla

- ▶ A specialty of the far West is this big sparrow. Golden-crowned Sparrows nest in Alaska and western Canada; in summer, open scrubby areas near treeline there may resound with their sad, minor-key whistles. In fall, the birds move south along the Pacific slope. They are common in winter from Vancouver to San Diego, with flocks foraging on the ground under dense thickets, often mixed with equal numbers of White-crowned Sparrows.



Gray Flycatcher

Empidonax wrightii



The high desert of the Great Basin is the summer stronghold of this pale little bird. The Gray Flycatcher nests in sagebrush country and in open woods of juniper and pinyon pine, in drier territory than most of its relatives. It also regularly winters farther north than any other Empidonax flycatcher: it is common in winter in the mesquite thickets and streamside groves of southern Arizona.

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias



- ▶ Widespread and familiar (though often called "crane"), the largest heron in North America. Often seen standing silently along inland rivers or lakeshores, or flying high overhead, with slow wingbeats, its head hunched back onto its shoulders. Highly adaptable, it thrives around all kinds of waters from subtropical mangrove swamps to desert rivers to the coastline of southern Alaska. With its variable diet it is able to spend the winter farther north than most herons, even in areas where most waters freeze. A form in southern Florida (called "Great White Heron") is slightly larger and entirely white.

Great Egret

Ardea alba

A tall, stately white wader of quiet waters. Common, especially in the south, it may wander far to the north in late summer. Nearly wiped out in the United States in the late 1800s, when its plumes were sought for use in fashion, the Great Egret made a comeback after early conservationists put a stop to the slaughter and protected its colonies; as a result, this bird became the symbol of the National Audubon Society.



Great Horned Owl

Bubo virginianus

Found almost throughout North America and much of South America is this big owl. Aggressive and powerful in its hunting (sometimes known by nicknames such as "tiger owl"), it takes prey as varied as rabbits, hawks, snakes, and even skunks, and will even attack porcupines, often with fatal results for both prey and predator. Great Horned Owls begin nesting very early in the north, and their deep hoots may be heard rolling across the forest on mid-winter nights.



Greater Yellowlegs

Tringa melanoleuca



At ponds and tidal creeks, this trim and elegant wader draws attention to itself by bobbing its head and calling loudly when an observer approaches. In migration, the Greater Yellowlegs is common from coast to coast. Sometimes it may annoy the birder by spooking the other shorebirds with its alarm calls; usually it is a pleasure to watch as it feeds actively in the shallows, running about on trademark yellow legs.

Hammond's Flycatcher

Empidonax hammondii



The first claim to fame of Hammond's Flycatcher is that it is hard to tell apart from its relatives, especially the Dusky Flycatcher. However, although its range overlaps with that of the Dusky, Hammond's seems to prefer cooler surroundings at all seasons. It nests higher in the mountains and farther north; even on its main wintering grounds south of the border, it is usually in the mountains, not the hot lowlands.

Hermit Thrush

Catharus guttatus



- ▶ A more hardy bird than the other brown-backed thrushes, the Hermit migrates north earlier in spring and lingers later in fall than the others; it is the only one likely to be seen in winter in North America. If startled from the ground in the forest interior it often perches low and stares at the observer, flicking its wings nervously and slowly raising and lowering its tail. In summer, its clear, pensive song is heard in forests of the mountains and the north.

Hermit Warbler

Setophaga occidentalis

This warbler nests in forests of fir, hemlock, and other conifers, in the mountains and along the coast, from California north to Washington. It also winters locally on the California coast, almost always in conifers. No more of a "hermit" than other warblers, it often joins mixed flocks of birds in the mountain pine forests during migration. This species is closely related to Townsend's Warbler, and the two often interbreed where their ranges meet in Washington and Oregon.



Hooded Oriole

Icterus cucullatus



In the hot lowlands of the Southwest, this slim oriole is often common in the trees along streams and in suburbs. It is especially likely to be seen around palms, frequently attaching its hanging nest to the underside of a palm frond. In yards and gardens it often visits hummingbird feeders to drink the sugar-water. The jumbled, musical song of the male sometimes includes imitations of other birds.

Horned Lark

Eremophila alpestris



On open fields in winter, flocks of Horned Larks walk and run on the ground, examining the soil and stubble in search of seeds. If disturbed, the flock makes away in swift, twisting flight, making soft lispings callnotes. This species, the only native lark in North America, begins nesting very early in spring in those same barren fields, and the tinkling songs of the males come from high overhead as they perform their flight-song display. The "horns" of the Horned Lark are little tufts of feathers, visible only at close range.

House Finch

Haemorhous mexicanus



- ▶ Adaptable, colorful, and cheery-voiced, House Finches are common from coast to coast today, familiar visitors to backyard feeders. Native to the Southwest, they are recent arrivals in the East. New York pet shop owners, who had been selling the finches illegally, released their birds in 1940 to escape prosecution; the finches survived, and began to colonize the New York suburbs. By 50 years later they had advanced halfway across the continent, meeting their western kin on the Great Plains.

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus

One of the most widespread and abundant songbirds in the world today, the House Sparrow has a simple success formula: it associates with humans. Native to Eurasia and northern Africa, it has succeeded in urban and farming areas all over the world -- including North America, where it was first released at New York in 1851. Tough, adaptable, aggressive, it survives on city sidewalks where few birds can make a living; in rural areas, it may evict native birds from their nests.



House Wren

Troglodytes aedon

- ▶ A familiar backyard bird, the House Wren was named long ago for its tendency to nest around human homes or in birdhouses. Very active and inquisitive, bouncing about with its short tail held up in the air, pausing to sing a rich bubbling song, it adds a lively spark to gardens and city parks despite its lack of bright colors. Various forms of this wren are found from central Canada to southern South America.



Hutton's Vireo

Vireo huttoni



In woods of the Pacific Coast and the Southwest, this little vireo hops about actively in the oaks. The bird bears a surprising resemblance to the Ruby-crowned Kinglet (which is often more common in the same woods in winter); it even twitches its wings in kinglet style when it is excited. Hutton's has the most monotonous song of all the vireos, a single note repeated over and over.

Lark Sparrow

Chondestes grammacus



- ▶ Many sparrows are challenging to identify, but this one is a striking exception, with its bold face pattern and broad, white-edged tail. Lark Sparrows favor areas with bare open ground and scattered bushes, habitats that are more common in the West and Midwest than in the East; they often forage conspicuously out in the open. When going from place to place, they tend to fly higher than most sparrows, giving a sharp callnote as they pass overhead.

Lawrence's Goldfinch

Spinus lawrencei

Uncommon and somewhat mysterious is this little finch of the far West. It nests very locally in the foothills of California and Baja, often near streams in fairly dry country. Its winter range varies: in some years, flocks spread well eastward across the southwestern deserts, but the reasons for these "invasions" are not well understood. The twittering song of the male Lawrence's Goldfinch often includes brief imitations of the voices of other birds.



Lazuli Bunting

Passerina amoena



Around thickets and streamside trees of the West, this sky-blue bunting is common in summer. Males are conspicuous in summer, singing in the open, but the plainer brown females are far more elusive as they tend their nests in the thick bushes. During migration, flocks are more easily observed as they forage in brushy fields. Where Lazuli and Indigo buntings overlap in breeding range, on the Great Plains and parts of the Southwest, they often interbreed.

Lesser Goldfinch

Spinus psaltria

- ▶ Very common in parts of the West, this tiny finch is easy to overlook until one learns its chiming and twittering callnotes. Small flocks of Lesser Goldfinches are often found feeding in weedy fields or in streamside trees. Two color patterns occur in the United States, and males in some areas may be either green-backed or black-backed. The complicated song of the male usually includes short imitations of the voices of other birds.



Loggerhead Shrike

Lanius ludovicianus



In open terrain, this predatory songbird watches from a wire or other high perch, then pounces on its prey: often a large insect, sometimes a small bird or a rodent. The Loggerhead is gradually disappearing from many areas, for reasons that are poorly understood.

Lincoln's Sparrow

Melospiza lincolni

- ▶ Generally a skulker in dense low cover, this sparrow often goes unnoticed during migration and winter -- especially in the East, where it is quite uncommon. In the West, birders soon learn to find it by its hard chep callnote in the bushes. Even where they are common, Lincoln's Sparrows tend to be solitary, not joining flocks. The musical song of the males is heard in summer in willow thickets of the North and the Mountain West.



MacGillivray's Warbler

Geothlypis tolmiei



A skulker in dense western brush, sometimes hard to see but readily located by its hurried song and its hard chip callnote. A close relative of the Mourning Warbler of the East, replacing it from the Rockies westward. Unlike the Mourning, this species is often seen in substantial numbers during migration -- especially in early fall, when practically every thicket in the Southwest seems to have one (but only one) MacGillivray's Warbler.

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Abundant over most of the northern hemisphere, the Mallard is the most familiar wild duck to many people, and the ancestor of most strains of domesticated ducks. In many places this species has managed to domesticate itself, relying on handouts in city parks. Although barnyard and feral ducks may be dumpy and ungainly creatures, the ancestral wild Mallard is a trim, elegant, wary, fast-flying bird.



Merlin

Falco columbarius



A rather small falcon, compact and fast-flying, the Merlin is a common breeder across the northern forests of North America and Eurasia. It feeds mostly on small birds, capturing them in mid-air in rapid pursuit. The Merlin is generally found in wild places, but since about 1960 it has become a common urban bird in several towns on the northern prairies; there it nests and remains to winter, relying on a steady supply of House Sparrows as prey.

Mitred Parakeet

Aratinga mitrata

This long-tailed green parakeet, marked with red on the face, is native to the eastern foothills of the Andes in southern South America. Bird escaped from captivity have established feral populations around Los Angeles and San Francisco, California, and locally in southeastern Florida. Often they are in mixed flocks with the similar Red-masked Parakeet, native to northwestern South America. In the United States, these birds live mostly in parks and suburbs with extensive exotic plantings, not in natural wild habitats.



Mountain Chickadee

Poecile gambeli

- ▶ Almost throughout the higher mountains of the West, this chickadee is common in the conifer forests. It is not always easy to see, because it often feeds very high in the trees. However, except during the nesting season, any mixed flock of small birds moving through the highland pines is likely to include a nucleus of Mountain Chickadees.



Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura



- ▶ The mournful cooing of the Mourning Dove is one of our most familiar bird sounds. From southern Canada to central Mexico, this is one of our most common birds, often abundant in open country and along roadsides. European settlement of the continent, with its opening of the forest, probably helped this species to increase. It also helps itself, by breeding prolifically: in warm climates, Mourning Doves may raise up to six broods per year, more than any other native bird

Nashville Warbler

Oreothlypis ruficapilla



Pioneer birdman Alexander Wilson encountered this bird first near Nashville, Tennessee, and it has been called Nashville Warbler ever since -- even though Wilson's birds were just passing through in migration, and the species does not nest anywhere near Tennessee. This small warbler is fairly common in both the east and the west, often seen foraging in thickets and young trees, flicking its short tail frequently as it seeks insects among the foliage.

Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus



- ▶ This brown woodpecker flashes bright colors under the wings and tail when it flies. Its ringing calls and short bursts of drumming can be heard in spring almost throughout North America. Two very different-looking forms -- Yellow-shafted Flicker in the east and north, and Red-shafted Flicker in the west -- were once considered separate species. They interbreed wherever their ranges come in contact. On the western Great Plains, there is a broad zone where all the flickers are intergrades between Red-shafted and Yellow-shafted.

Northern Harrier

Circus cyaneus

Parts of Europe and Asia have several kinds of harriers, but North America has only one. Harriers are very distinctive hawks, long-winged and long-tailed, usually seen quartering low over the ground in open country. At close range, the face of our Northern Harrier looks rather like that of an owl; like an owl (and unlike most other hawks) it may rely on its keen hearing to help it locate prey as it courses low over the fields.



Northern Mockingbird

Mimus polyglottos

- ▶ This bird's famous song, with its varied repetitions and artful imitations, is heard all day during nesting season (and often all night as well). Very common in towns and cities, especially in southern areas, the Mockingbird often seeks insects on open lawns. When running in the open it may stop every few feet and partly spread its wings, flashing the white wing patches. Mockingbirds are bold in defense of their nests, attacking cats and even humans that venture too close.



Northern Pintail

Anas acuta



Widespread across North America, Europe, and Asia, the Northern Pintail is probably one of the most numerous duck species in the world (although outnumbered by the omnipresent Mallard). Slim and long-necked, it has an elegant appearance both on the water and in flight. Pintails are wary at all seasons, and become very secretive during the flightless stage of their molt in late summer.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow

Stelgidopteryx serripennis

Two kinds of brown-backed swallows nest in holes in dirt banks. The Rough-wing is the solitary one, not nesting in colonies like the Bank Swallow. It is usually seen singly or in small groups, even during migration, in rapid low flight over rivers or fields. The name "Rough-winged" comes from small serrations on the outermost wing feathers. The function of these is unknown, but they may produce sounds during courtship flights.



Nuttall's Woodpecker

Picoides nuttallii

- ▶ A California specialty, Nuttall's Woodpecker extends only a short distance into Baja and rarely strays to Oregon. Within its limited range, it is often common wherever oak trees grow. It may go unseen at times because of its habit of foraging among densely foliated oaks, but it frequently announces itself with sharp calls. Despite its close association with oaks, it tends to dig its nesting holes in other kinds of trees, and it eats only small numbers of acorns.



Oak Titmouse

Baeolophus inornatus



- ▶ As plain as a bird can be, marked only by a short crest, the Oak Titmouse nonetheless has personality. Pairs or family parties travel about the woods together, exploring the twigs for insects and calling to each other frequently. Until recently, this bird and the Juniper Titmouse were regarded as one species under the name of Plain Titmouse.

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Contopus cooperi

This compact, big-headed flycatcher sits bolt upright on top of the highest dead branch of a tree, calling pip-pip at intervals, as if to ensure that birders notice it. A long-distance migrant, the Olive-sided Flycatcher breeds mostly in northern coniferous forest and winters in the tropics. It has become noticeably less common in recent years, perhaps because of a loss of habitat on the wintering grounds.



Orange-crowned Warbler

Oreothlypis celata



One of the plainest of warblers, the orange feathers on its head almost never visible, this species is also among the most hardy. In winter, when most warblers are deep in the tropics, Orange-crowns are common in the southern states. They are usually seen singly, sometimes loosely associated with flocks of other birds. At all seasons they tend to stay fairly low, in bushes or small trees, flicking their tails frequently as they search among the foliage for insects.

Pacific-slope Flycatcher

Empidonax difficilis

In humid woods along the Pacific Coast, this little flycatcher is very common in summer. It favors deep shade, often in the groves along streams; it often places its beautiful mossy nest under a bridge or under the eaves of a cabin in the woods. This species and the Cordilleran Flycatcher are almost identical except for callnotes and range, and were regarded as one species (called "Western Flycatcher") until the late 1980s.



Palm Warbler

Setophaga palmarum



A bird of thickets and open areas, usually seen low or on the ground. Birds from the easternmost part of the range ("Yellow Palm Warblers") are rather colorful, but most others are quite drab; however, they can be recognized by the constant bobbing of their tails. Many Palm Warblers spend the winter in the southeastern United States, especially in Florida, where they may be seen near palm groves but not up in the palms themselves.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

One of the world's fastest birds; in power-diving from great heights to strike prey, the Peregrine may possibly reach 200 miles per hour. Regarded by falconers and biologists alike as one of the noblest and most spectacular of all birds of prey. Although it is found on six continents, the Peregrine is uncommon in most areas; it was seriously endangered in the mid-20th century because of the effects of DDT and other persistent pesticides.



Phainopepla

Phainopepla nitens

- ▶ In the desert southwest, Phainopeplas and mistletoe rely on each other. Phainopeplas feed heavily on berries of this parasitic plant; after the berries pass through the bird's digestive tract, the seeds often stick to branches of mesquite or other trees, where they can sprout new mistletoe clumps. Flocks of these slim and elegant birds may gather to feed on seasonally abundant crops such as elderberries. At other times, Phainopeplas are solitary, each bird defending a few small trees with several large clumps of mistletoe, and attempting to drive away any other fruit-eating birds that come close.



Pine Siskin

Spinus pinus



Although it is patterned like a sparrow, its shape, actions, and callnotes all reveal that this bird is really a goldfinch in disguise. After nesting in the conifer woods, Pine Siskins move out into semi-open country, where they roam in twittering flocks. They often descend on fields of thistles or wild sunflowers, where they cling to the dried flower heads, eating seeds. In winter they sometimes invade southward in big numbers, with flocks coming to feeders along with American Goldfinches.

Plumbeous Vireo

Vireo plumbeus



This is a common summer bird in the Rocky Mountain region, nesting in middle-elevation woodlands, often among oaks. When feeding, it works rather deliberately along branches, searching for insects. Its nest, a bulky cup suspended in the fork of a twig, is often easy to find. This bird was formerly lumped with the Blue-headed and Cassin's vireos under the name Solitary Vireo.

Purple Finch

Haemorhous purpureus



- ▶ Not really purple, more of an old-rose color is the male Purple Finch. This species is common in the North and East, and along the Pacific seaboard, but it is very rare in much of the Rocky Mountains region. Purple Finches feed up in trees and on the ground in open woods. They readily come to bird feeders; but they have become less numerous as feeder visitors in the Northeast, where competition with introduced House Sparrows and then House Finches may have driven them back into the woods

Purple Martin

Progne subis



Graceful in flight, musical in its pre-dawn singing, this big swallow is one of our most popular birds. Almost all Purple Martins in the east now nest in birdhouses put up especially for them. Martin housing has a long history: some Native American tribes reportedly hung up hollow gourds around their villages to attract these birds. Purple Martins migrate to South America for the winter, but before leaving, they may gather to roost in groups of thousands in late summer.

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta canadensis



With its quiet calls and dense coniferous forest habitat, this nuthatch may be overlooked until it wanders down a tree toward the ground. It often shows little fear of humans, and may come very close to a person standing quietly in a conifer grove. Red-breasted Nuthatches nest farther north and higher in the mountains than their relatives; when winter food crops fail in these boreal forests, they may migrate hundreds of miles to the south.

Red-breasted Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus ruber



A very close relative of the Yellow-bellied and Red-naped sapsuckers, replacing them on the Pacific slope. It was considered to belong to the same species for some time, so differences in behavior have not been studied much until recently.

Red-crowned Parrot

Amazona viridigenalis

- ▶ When these stocky parrots fly overhead, they may be recognized by their loud cries of heeeyo, cra-cra-cra. Birds escaped from captivity are free-flying (and sometimes nesting) locally in Florida and California; those seen in southern Texas include escapees and possibly also wild strays from Mexico. Ironically, on its limited native range in northeastern Mexico, the species has declined seriously and might even be considered threatened.



Red-eyed Vireo

Vireo olivaceus

One of the most numerous summer birds in eastern woods. It is not the most often seen, because it tends to stay out of sight in the leafy treetops, searching methodically among the foliage for insects. However, its song - a series of short, monotonous phrases, as if it were endlessly asking and answering the same question -- can be heard constantly during the nesting season, even on hot summer afternoons.



Red-shouldered Hawk

Buteo lineatus

- ▶ A hawk of the woodlands, often heard before it is seen. The clear whistled calls of this hawk are conspicuous, especially in spring; in the east, Blue Jays often give a near-perfect imitation of this call. Over much of eastern North America the Red-shoulder has become uncommon, sticking closely to the remaining forests. Populations in Florida and California are often more visible, perhaps adapting better to open habitats.



Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

- ▶ This is the most widespread and familiar large hawk in North America, bulky and broad-winged, designed for effortless soaring. An inhabitant of open country, it is commonly seen perched on roadside poles or sailing over fields and woods. Although adults usually can be recognized by the trademark reddish-brown tail, the rest of their plumage can be quite variable, especially west of the Mississippi: Western Red-tails can range from blackish to rufous-brown to nearly white.



Red-whiskered Bulbul

Pycnonotus jocosus



When a few Red-whiskered Bulbuls escaped from an aviary in the Miami area in 1960, they found an environment perfectly suited to their needs. The climate was not too different from that of eastern India, where they had originated; and the suburb of Kendall, Florida, was heavily planted with exotic trees and shrubs, providing the bulbuls with abundant berries throughout the year. The birds quickly became established, but they have not spread much beyond Kendall. Another introduced population is common around Honolulu, Hawaii.

Red-winged Blackbird

Agelaius phoeniceus



Among our most familiar birds, Red-wings seem to sing their nasal songs in every marsh and wet field from coast to coast. They are notably bold, and several will often attack a larger bird, such as a hawk or crow, that flies over their nesting area. The red shoulder patches of the male, hidden under body feathers much of the time, are brilliantly displayed when he is singing. Outside the nesting season, Red-wings sometimes roost in huge concentrations.

Rock Pigeon

Columba livia



- ▶ Few birds have been associated with humans so closely as the Rock Pigeon, better known as the common city pigeon. It has been domesticated and taken around the world, raised for food, trained for homing, racing, and carrying messages, and used in research. Originally native from Europe to North Africa and India, it now lives in a wild or semi-wild condition in cities all over the world, including most of North America. In places it has reverted to wild habits, nesting on cliffs far from cities.

Rock Wren

Salpinctes obsoletus



Arid rocky canyons and seemingly barren piles of boulders are home to this active little bird, the palest of our wrens. Birders who explore such places may spot the Rock Wren bouncing up and down on its short legs, as if on springs, while it gives a metallic callnote that echoes among the rocks. The nest of this wren can sometimes be located by its curious "front porch," a paving of small pebbles on the ground in front of the nest entrance.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Regulus calendula



This tiny bird is often hard to see in summer, when it lives high in tall conifers. In migration and winter, however, it often flits about low in woods and thickets, flicking its wings nervously as it approaches the observer. When it is truly excited (by a potential mate, rival, or predator), the male may erect his ruby-red crown feathers, hidden at other times. The song of the Ruby-crown is jumbled and loud, all out of proportion to the size of the bird.

Rufous-crowned Sparrow

Aimophila ruficeps

In dry southwestern hills and canyons, where sparse brush covers the rocky slopes, pairs of Rufous-crowned Sparrows lurk in the thickets. Usually they are easy to overlook; but if they are alarmed, or if members of a pair become separated, they reveal their presence with a harsh nasal call, dear-dear-dear. Although they live in dense cover they are not especially shy if undisturbed, and a birder who sits quietly in their habitat may be able to observe them closely.



Rufous Hummingbird

Selasphorus rufus



Although it is one of the smaller members in a family of midgets, this species is notably pugnacious. The male Rufous, glowing like new copper penny, often defends a patch of flowers in a mountain meadow, vigorously chasing away all intruders (including larger birds). The Rufous also nests farther north than any other hummingbird: up to south-central Alaska. Of the various typically western hummingbirds, this is the one that wanders most often to eastern North America, with many now found east of the Mississippi every fall and winter.

Savannah Sparrow

Passerculus sandwichensis



A small, streaky bird of open fields, the Savannah Sparrow often causes confusion for birders because it is so variable. Some of its well-marked local forms, such as the pale "Ipswich" Sparrow of Atlantic beaches and the blackish "Belding's" Sparrow of western salt marshes, were once regarded as separate species. Unlike many grassland sparrows, Savannahs are not particularly shy; they often perch up on weeds or fence wires, and their small winter flocks usually can be observed with ease.

Say's Phoebe

Sayornis saya



This soft-voiced flycatcher of the west is like the other two phoebes in its tail-wagging habit; but unlike them, it often lives in very dry country, far from water. It is typical of prairies, badlands, and ranch country, often placing its nest under the eaves of a porch or barn. In open terrain where there are few high perches, Say's Phoebe may watch for insects in the grass by hovering low over the fields.

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus

The smallest of our bird-hunting Accipiter hawks, this one is also the most migratory, breeding north to treeline in Alaska and Canada and wintering south to Panama. It is during migration that the Sharp-shin is most likely to be seen in numbers, with dozens or even hundreds passing at some favored points on coastlines, lake shores, and mountain ridges. At other seasons the hawks lurk in the woods, ambushing songbirds and generally staying out of sight.



Short-eared Owl

Asio flammeus



Easier to see than most owls, the Short-ear lives in open terrain, such as prairies and marshes. It is often active during daylight, especially in the evening. When hunting it flies low over the fields, with buoyant, floppy wingbeats, looking rather like a giant moth. Aside from its North American range, it also nests in South America and Eurasia, and on many oceanic islands, including Hawaii.

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula



A beautiful, graceful small egret, very active in its feeding behavior in shallow waters. Known by its contrasting yellow feet, could be said to dance in the shallows on golden slippers. The species was slaughtered for its plumes in the 19th century, but protection brought a rapid recovery of numbers, and the Snowy Egret is now more widespread and common than ever. Its delicate appearance is belied by its harsh and raucous calls around its nesting colonies.

Song Sparrow

Melospiza melodia



Very widespread in North America, this melodious sparrow is among the most familiar birds in some areas, such as the Northeast and Midwest. At times it is rather skulking in behavior, hiding in the thickets, seen only when it flies from bush to bush with a typical pumping motion of its tail. Usually, however, sheer numbers make it conspicuous. Song Sparrows vary in appearance over their wide range, from large dark birds on the Aleutians to small pale ones in the desert Southwest.

Spotted Dove

Streptopelia chinensis

Native to southern Asia, this dove was introduced into the Los Angeles area of California around 1917. Since then it has gradually spread, occupying areas north to Santa Barbara and Bakersfield and south to San Diego. Living mostly in residential areas, it is usually rather tame, feeding on the ground on lawns and gardens. When disturbed, it flies almost straight up from the ground with noisy flapping of its wings.



Spotted Towhee

Pipilo maculatus

A widespread towhee of the West, sometimes abundant in chaparral and on brushy mountain slopes. For many years it was considered to belong to the same species as the unspotted Eastern Towhees found east of the Great Plains, under the name of Rufous-sided Towhee. The Spotted Towhee differs in the heavy white spotting on its upperparts, and its songs and callnotes are more variable and much harsher in tone. It often is first noticed because of the sound of its industrious scratching in the leaf-litter under dense thickets.



Swainson's Hawk

Buteo swainsoni



This slim and graceful hawk is a common sight over grasslands of the Great Plains and the west, but only in summer: every autumn, most individuals migrate to southern South America. Although Swainson's Hawk is big enough to prey on rodents, snakes, and birds (and does so, while it is raising young), at most seasons it feeds heavily on large insects instead. Flocks are often seen sitting on the ground in fields where there are many grasshoppers or caterpillars.

Swainson's Thrush

Catharus ustulatus

During the peak of migration, Swainson's Thrushes are often very common in woodlots and parks, lurking in the thickets, slipping into fruiting trees to pluck berries. Although they tend to stay out of sight, the patient birder eventually can see them well enough to discern the bold buffy eye-rings that give these birds their alert or startled look. Like the other brown thrushes, Swainson's migrate mostly at night, and their distinctive callnotes can be heard from overhead on clear nights during spring and fall.



Tree Swallow

Tachycineta bicolor

The popularity of the bluebird has been a boon to the Tree Swallow, which nests in holes of exactly the same size, and has taken advantage of bluebird houses over much of North America. In regions with no such ready supply of artificial nest sites, the swallows must compete with other cavity-nesting birds, arriving early in spring to stake out territories. Unlike other swallows, Tree Swallows eat many berries (especially bayberries), allowing them to survive through wintry spells when other insect-eaters might starve.



Townsend's Warbler

Setophaga townsendi



The coniferous forest of the Pacific Northwest is the summer home of Townsend's Warbler. There the sharply marked males sing from high in the spruces and hemlocks; their buzzy songs are quite variable, and some are similar to those of the Black-throated Green Warbler, an eastern relative. Most Townsend's go to Mexico or Central America for the winter, but small numbers remain along the coast north to Oregon, Washington, and even Vancouver Island.

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura



A familiar sight in the sky over much of North America is the dark, long-winged form of the Turkey Vulture, soaring high over the landscape. Most birds are believed to have a very poor sense of smell, but the Turkey Vulture is an exception, apparently able to find carrion by odor.

Virginia's Warbler

Oreothlypis virginiae

A rather plain warbler that spends the summer in brush and chaparral on dry mountainsides in the West. The dense low nature of its habitat often makes Virginia's Warbler hard to observe, but its presence is revealed by its simple trilled song and by its hard callnote, tsick. Although it is common over much of the West, its nesting behavior remains poorly known, partly because its nest is extremely difficult to find.



Warbling Vireo

Vireo gilvus



Rather plain, but with a cheery warbled song, the Warbling Vireo is a common summer bird in leafy groves and open woods from coast to coast. Because it avoids solid tracts of mature, unbroken forest, it is probably more common and widespread today than it was when the Pilgrims landed. Some scientists believe that eastern and western Warbling Vireos may represent two different species; if that is true, then the two are very difficult to tell apart in the wild.

Western Bluebird

Sialia mexicana



In partly open terrain of the west, from valley farms and orchards to clearings in mountain pine forest, this bluebird is often common. In summer it is often seen perching alone on fence wires by open meadows, fluttering down to pluck insects from the grass. In winter, small flocks of Western Bluebirds are often heard flying overhead or seen feeding on berries in trees. Sometimes, as when juniper woods have heavy berry crops, the bluebirds may gather by the hundreds.

Western Gull

Larus occidentalis



The only gull nesting along most of the Pacific Coast from Washington to Baja, this large species is common at all seasons. An opportunist, it often nests around colonies of other seabirds, where it can steal unguarded eggs or chicks. It will also nest near colonies of California sea lions, scavenging any sea lion pups that die of natural causes. At the northern end of its range it hybridizes with Glaucous-winged Gull, and many intermediate birds are seen.

Western Kingbird

Tyrannus verticalis

In open country of the west, the Western Kingbird is often seen perched on roadside fences and wires, flying out to snap up insects -- or to harass ravens, hawks, or other large birds that stray too close to the kingbird's nest. Spunky and adaptable, this flycatcher has adjusted well to advancing civilization within its range. It frequently builds its nest where wires attach to utility poles, and may be seen tending its young there even along busy city streets.



Western Meadowlark

Sturnella neglecta

Remarkably similar to the Eastern Meadowlark in colors and pattern, this bird is recognized by its very different song and callnotes. The two species of meadowlarks evidently can easily recognize their own kind the same way; even where their ranges overlap in the Midwest and Southwest, they almost never interbreed. However, the two species do seem to see each other as potential rivals, and they actively defend territories against each other.



Western Screech-Owl

Megascops kennicottii



Inconspicuous but locally very common is this little owl. In the varied terrain of the west, its haunts range from coastal forests in southeastern Alaska to cactus groves in the Arizona desert, and it is often found in suburban areas. Until the 1980s, Western and Eastern screech-owls were considered to belong to the same species because they look so similar; however, their voices differ, and they apparently recognize their own kind by sound.

Western Tanager

Piranga ludoviciana



A western counterpart to the Scarlet Tanager, this species occurs in summer farther north than any other tanager -- far up into northwestern Canada. Western Tanagers nest in coniferous forests of the north and the high mountains, but during migration they may show up in any habitat, including grassland and desert; the bright males often draw attention by pausing in suburban yards in late spring.

Western Wood-Pewee

Contopus sordidulus

Small and plain, but often very common, this flycatcher of western woodlands is best known by its voice. Its burry, descending whistle has a hazy sound, well suited to hot summer afternoons. The bird also sings at dawn and dusk, including late in the evening when most other songbirds are quiet. This species and the Eastern Wood-Pewee look almost exactly alike; however, like some other small flycatchers, they evidently recognize their own kind primarily by voice.



White-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta carolinensis

Readily attracted to bird feeders for sunflower seeds or suet, the White-breasted Nuthatch may spend much of its time industriously carrying seeds away to hide them in crevices. Its nasal calls are typical and familiar sounds of winter mornings in deciduous woods over much of North America.



White-crowned Sparrow

Zonotrichia leucophrys



In most parts of the West, the smartly patterned White-crown is very common at one season or another: summering in the mountains and the north, wintering in the southwestern lowlands, present all year along the coast. Winter birds usually live in flocks, rummaging on the ground near brushy thickets, perching in the tops of bushes when a birder approaches too closely. In the East, the White-crowned Sparrow is generally an uncommon migrant or wintering bird. Different populations of White-crowns often have local "dialects" in their songs, and these have been intensively studied by scientists in some regions.

White-tailed Kite

Elanus leucurus



As recently as the 1940s, this graceful hawk was considered rare and endangered in North America, restricted to a few sites in California and Texas. In recent decades, it has increased greatly in numbers and spread into many new areas. It is often seen hovering on rapidly beating wings over open fields, looking for small rodents, its main food source. The introduction of the house mouse from Europe may have played a part in its increase; formerly, the kite fed almost entirely on voles.

White-throated Swift

Aeronautes saxatalis



Around rocky cliffs and canyon edges in the west, little groups of these elegant swifts go hurtling past the crags, calling in shrill voices. This species has been claimed to be one of our fastest flying birds, and any observer who has seen them pass at close range will believe it. White-throated Swifts are very wide-ranging, probably foraging in the air many miles from their nesting sites at times.

Willow Flycatcher

Empidonax traillii



Until the 1970s, this bird and the Alder Flycatcher masqueraded as just one species under the name "Traill's Flycatcher." They are essentially identical in looks, but their voices are different. Either kind may be found in thickets of either willow or alder shrubs, but their ranges are largely separate: Alder Flycatchers spend the summer mostly in Canada and Alaska, while Willow Flycatchers nest mostly south of the Canadian border.

Wilson's Warbler

Cardellina pusilla

A small and spritely warbler that moves actively in bushes and trees, often flipping its longish tail about as it hops from branch to branch. Typically stays low in semi-open areas, avoiding the interior of dense forest. Although it nests from coast to coast across Canada, Wilson's Warbler is far more common farther west. In the East it is seen in small numbers, but in the Rockies and westward it is often the most abundant migrant in late spring.



Winter Wren

Troglodytes hiemalis

A secretive little bird of dense woods. It often creeps about among fallen logs and dense tangles, behaving more like a mouse than a bird, remaining out of sight but giving an occasional kimp-kimp callnote. Usually Winter Wrens live close to the ground; but in spring in the northern woods, males ascend to high perches in the conifers to give voice to a beautiful song of long-running musical trills.



Wrentit

Chamaea fasciata

In the chaparral, the dense low brush that grows along the Pacific seaboard, Wrentits are often heard and seldom seen. Pairs of these long-tailed little birds move about actively in the depths of the thickets, rarely perching in the open or flying across small clearings. They are remarkably sedentary; a bird may spend its entire adult life in an area of just a couple of acres.



Vaux's Swift

Chaetura vauxi

A small, dark aerialist of the west, often overlooked as it flight high over northwestern forests or low over lakes and rivers with stiff, rapid wingbeats. Similar to the well-known Chimney Swift of the east, but only occasionally nests in chimneys. Because of its reliance on large hollow trees for nest sites, it has become scarce as old-growth forest in the northwest has been destroyed.



Violet-green Swallow

Tachycineta thalassina



A small swallow of the west, nesting from Alaska to central Mexico. Similar to the Tree Swallow in appearance and also in behavior, nesting in tree cavities and in birdhouses; it also will nest in rock crevices of cliffs in rugged terrain. Flocks are often seen flying high over mountain pine forests or over steep canyons.

Yellow-chevroned Parakeet

Brotogeris chiriri

10" (25 cm). A brighter green than most parakeets with a yellow wing bar on the "wrist" when perched. In flight the bar opens up and is visible from above as bright yellow greater coverts (upper surface only). The outer primaries are darker green. Brown iris. Pinkish gray feet.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Setophaga coronata

Flashing its trademark yellow rump patch as it flies away, calling check for confirmation, this is one of our best-known warblers. While most of its relatives migrate to the tropics in fall, the Yellow-rump, able to live on berries, commonly remains as far north as New England and Seattle; it is the main winter warbler in North America. Included in this species are two different-looking forms, the eastern "Myrtle" Warbler and western "Audubon's" Warbler.



Yellow Warbler

Setophaga petechia



The bright, sweet song of the Yellow Warbler is a familiar sound in streamside willows and woodland edges. This is one of our most widely distributed warblers, nesting from the Arctic Circle to Mexico, with closely related forms along tropical coastlines. Their open, cuplike nests are easy to find, and cowbirds often lay eggs in them. Yellow Warblers in some areas thwart these parasites by building a new floor over the cowbird eggs and laying a new clutch of their own. In one case, persistent cowbirds returned five times to lay more eggs in one nest, and an even more persistent warbler built six layers of nest floors to cover up the cowbird eggs.