

A SAMPLER

# The **CROSSLEY**



# **GUIDE**

Eastern Birds

Winner of the 2011 PROSE Award for Excellence in Reference Works, Association of American Publishers  
Richard Crossley  
Winner of the 2012 ABA Robert Ridgway Award for Publications in Field Ornithology, American Birding Association  
2012 Bronze Medal Co-Winner, Independent Publisher Book Awards, Environment/Ecology/Nature Category

This sampler presents the top 25 garden feeder birds in North America. The plates and text come from the popular and award-winning book, *The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*. The complete book features 640 scenes composed from more than 10,000 of the author's images showing birds in a wide range of views--near and far, from different angles, in various plumages and behaviors, including flight, and in the habitat in which they live. These beautiful compositions show how a bird's appearance changes with distance, and give equal emphasis to characteristics experts use to identify birds: size, structure and shape, behavior, probability, and color. Each scene provides a wealth of detailed visual information that invites and rewards careful study, but the most important identification features can be grasped instantly by anyone.

For more information about *The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*, please visit Princeton University Press (<http://press.princeton.edu/titles/9384.html>). The book is also available through all major retailers of books and nature products.

An interactive website--[www.crossleybirds.com](http://www.crossleybirds.com)--includes expanded captions for the plates and species updates.



## **RICHARD CROSSLEY**

is an internationally acclaimed birder and photographer who has been birding since age 7 and who, by age 21, had hitchhiked more than 100,000 miles chasing birds across his native Britain and Europe. His love of the outdoors and his interest in teaching, design, and technology have shaped his unique vision for the future of birding and bird books. He is excited by the prospect of using new technologies to bring “reality birding” to a wide audience through many different media. There are rumored to be multiple other projects in the works. He is a coauthor of *The Shorebird Guide*, and lives with his wife and two daughters in Cape May, New Jersey.

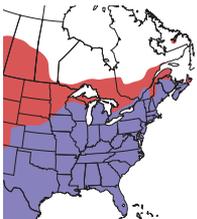
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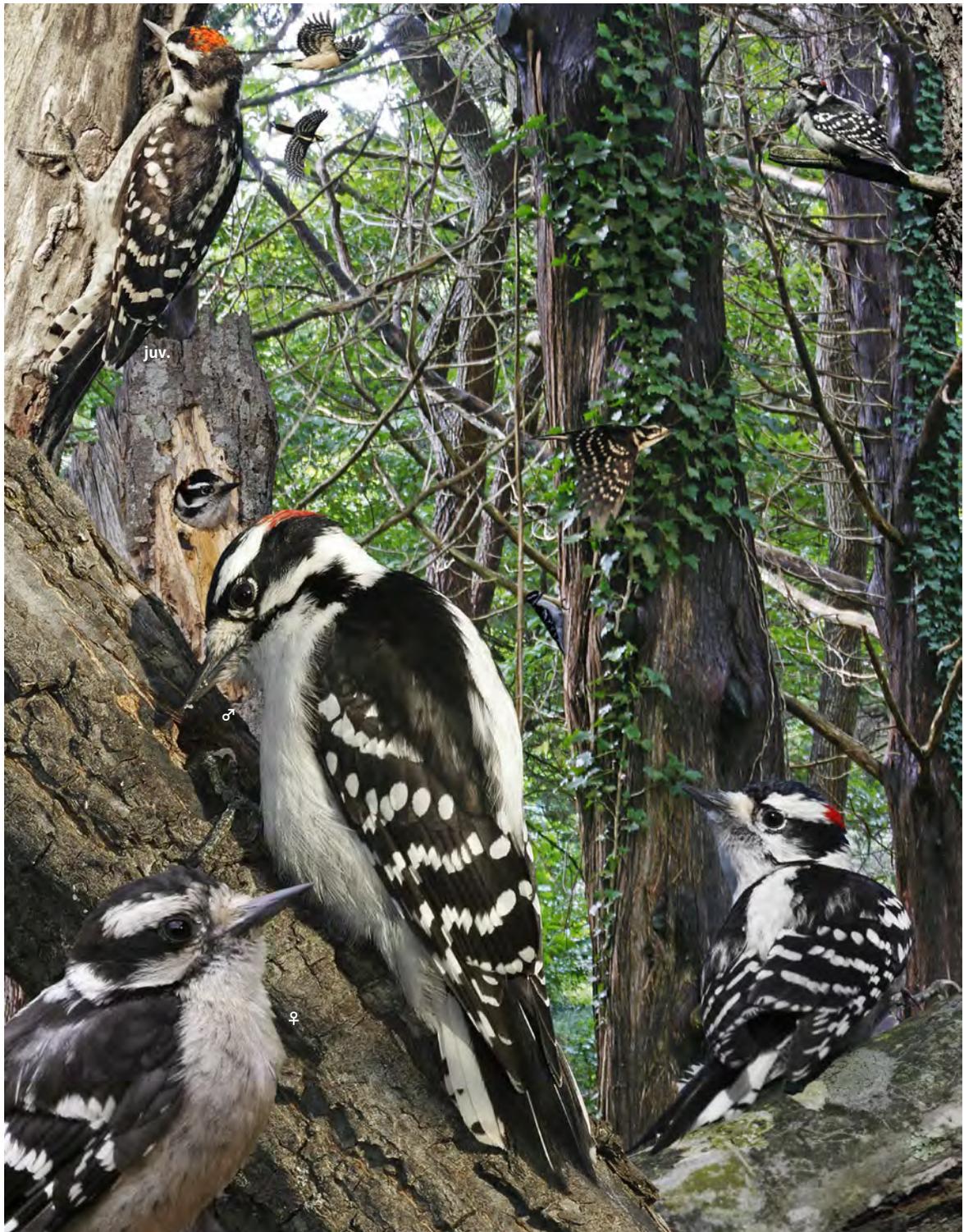


**Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura* **MODO** L 12in



The common and familiar dove in most areas. A regular garden and feeder bird but found almost anywhere except densest forest and mountain tops. Can breed year-round. Sometimes in flocks, but more often in ones and twos, particularly summer when in pairs. Frequently sits on telegraph wires, posts, and other exposed perches; wings make whirring whistle when flying off. Feeds quietly on the ground, soon melting into the background. Jerky yet purposeful walk, head rocking backward and forward. Frequently seen in flight. Distinctive pointed tail, small head, fairly uniform coloration, and narrow-based

pointed wings. Direct steady flight. Display flight is a short descending glides on more rounded wings. Song: a soft *wahoo hoo hoo hoo*. **ID:** A small-headed, slim dove with long pointed tail (some square-tailed birds due to molting or broken tail feathers). Tail has black subterminal and white terminal tips. Black-spotted wing, gray rear neck on otherwise brown bird. Ad ♂: iridescent pink neck patch and warmer underparts. ♀: duller and lacks iridescent neck patch. Juv: stronger face pattern and well-defined pale fringes to upperparts. Molts quickly into adult-like plumage. Extended breeding season.



**Downy Woodpecker** *Picoides pubescens* **DOWO** L 6.75in



The smallest and commonest woodpecker in most areas. Found anywhere with trees, and a regular garden bird, often at feeders where happily mixes with other species. Small enough to feed on larger plant stems and reeds and from the smallest branches, hanging acrobatically. Occasionally in feeding flocks. Reasonably tame and approachable. In flight, look for small size, tiny bill, and narrow-striped head. Compared with HAWO is substantially smaller and less powerful, more compact

and darker-headed and -tailed. Call: a *pik*. **ID**: Small and cute with tiny pointed bill, indeed bill size is the best way to eliminate HAWO. Clean white underparts, black upperparts with white back, spotted coverts, and barred flight feathers—a very fresh look. Striped head pattern. Ad ♂: red nape patch. Ad ♀: white nape. Juv. very similar to adult, but duller; more flecking on underparts, and sometimes red flecking (more on ♂) on crown. W. populations have less white in wing.



**Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus* **RBWO** L 9.25in



The common larger garden woodpecker in most areas, often at feeders. Conspicuous and vocal, it is the woodpecker many nonbirders notice. Prefers open deciduous woodland such as parks, gardens, golf courses as well as larger forest. Poorly named after barely noticeable red on belly. Often mistakenly called 'Red-headed Woodpecker.' A better name would be 'Bar-backed' or 'Red-naped Woodpecker.' In flight, underwing finely patterned black and white, adding to barred appearance. White patch at base of primaries obvious even at distance. Call: a piercing qwe-er, rising at end, a common

sound in e. woodland. **ID:** Medium-sized. Slim head, long bill, and spiked tail give it a slender appearance though it is quite large-bodied. Barred back can look surprisingly uniform but always contrasts with red head. Buff underparts, and white rump with faint black bars. Orange-red on head variable in extent. Birds in S average smaller and darker; with white in tail restricted to rump, but much variation. Ad ♂: red from nape to bill, often paler on forehead. Diffuse red belly patch. Ad ♀: gray crown, pale belly. Juv: limited orange nape and nasal tufts (forehead); quickly molts into adult-like plumage through fall.



**Hairy Woodpecker** *Picoides villosus* **HAWO** L 9.25in

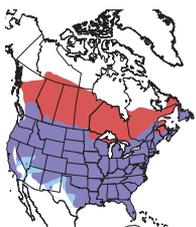


Fairly common in mature woodland with large trees, often in damp areas. Less likely in sparsely wooded areas. Typically feeds on its own fairly high on larger limbs, rarely joining mixed flocks. Visits feeders; it is partial to suet, particularly in colder regions. Quite secretive and shy. Often flies considerable distances between feeding areas with powerful bounding flight, when its larger size than DOWO is apparent. Widespread but nearly always outnumbered by DOWO. Call: a peek, stronger than DOWO—tends to go very quiet for parts of the year.

**ID:** Very similar to DOWO in color pattern. Noticeably larger and more muscular with much larger bill, giving meaner facial expression. White cheek stripe broader at rear, giving overall impression of whiter head. This and its extensive white outer tail stand out in flight. DOWO usually has black spots in tail. Ad ♂: red nape patch. Ad ♀: white nape. W. populations have less white in wing. Briefly held juv plumage has orangy red on crown like juv DOWO.



**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos* **AMCR** L 17.5in

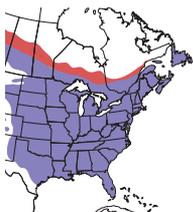


The common crow through most of lowland America. Commonest in agricultural areas. Scavenges on garbage dumps but found just about anywhere. Out of breeding season, often forms huge night roosts in urban areas. In daytime, found alone or in loose groups. Feeds mostly on the ground, walking with a purposeful strut. When necessary, speeds up to a hopping jog. Around food, such as a carcass, numbers will build, birds often having to wait their turn behind vultures. Eats eggs and chicks, so it is always being chased 'out of town.' May show pale patches at base of flight feathers when it is in wing

molt. **ID:** Much individual and regional variation, making ID from similar FICR tricky. Call, a familiar *caw*, is the best way to separate them. AMCR is larger; with longer legs and bill and rangier gait but differences subtle. With good light and views feathers look scaly; freshly molted birds have glossy upperparts and broad, black fringes contrasting with dull nape (FICR unicolored). In flight, longer neck, broader-based and more rounded wings—FICR is smaller; more compact. Juv: uniformly dull brown with pink gape (briefly). 1st-yr: worn juv feathers contrast with newer adult feathers creating a patchwork.



**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata* **BLJA** L 11 in



Common and spectacular; one of our most recognizable birds. Some migratory. Occurs in the deepest forest but just as happy in parks and gardens. Feeds on acorns, robs nests, and is regular at garden feeders, quietly sneaking in, and quick to leave. Raucous array of calls often announces presence but can be quiet and frustratingly difficult to find. Often feeds in treetops but just as happy hopping along on the ground. Some populations migrate. Usually in flocks, sometimes in 100s, as they migrate high overhead, contrasting black-and-white colors standing out. Rounded wings with bold white sec-

ondaries; tail tip and body contrast strongly with black underwing, collar, and base to tail. Bold white secondaries also prominent on upperwing. Does a great RSHA imitation among its many calls. **ID:** Superficially blue and white, but actually a remarkably complex variety of colors and patterns. Crested and thick-set with fairly long, graduated tail. Unique black throat collar. Juv: briefly held plumage, similar to adult but duller with blue or gray lores. Adult-like by fall but retains juv greater primary coverts, and alula lacks black bars.



**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis* **NOCA** L 8.75in



The most popular bird in N America. Common and widespread in woodland edges, hedges, and suburban gardens. A frequent visitor to feeders. Sits in the open, in ones or twos, rarely moving quickly. Very vocal, sings much of the year; often with raised crest. Will hop around on the ground looking for seeds or fruit, which it picks up with its incredibly powerful bill. Often chase each other in flight, which is direct with very rounded wings and obvious long tail. Call: a metallic *chip*. Song:

a series of 3–6, slightly descending, clear-whistled *whits*. **ID:** Large-bodied with a long rounded tail and large red conical bill. Ad ♂: all-red with gray fringes to upperparts and flanks. Black face and bib. Ad ♀: gray bird with varying amounts of buff on underparts. Restricted black on face. Red in crest, tail, and wings always stands out. Juv: similar to a dull ♀, but note black bill. Juv becomes adult-like through summer and most easily aged in fall by any retained black in bill.



**Black-capped Chickadee** *Poecile atricapillus* **BCCH** L 5.25in



The common and familiar n. chickadee, in gardens, parks, forest, and just about anywhere there are trees. Although primarily resident, occasionally wanders s. in winter; particularly when food shortages occur. A hardy and spunky bird, like CACH, it hangs upside down and flits from tree to tree, usually in small flocks, sometimes with other species. Friendly, at times tame but easily agitated, particularly by owls, and is a common feeder bird. Song: a *fee bee ey*. Named after its call, a familiar *chickadee-dee-dee*, averages coarser and slower than

CACH, but there is overlap. **ID**: Like CACH but larger and chunkier with a big head and longer tail. Dark bib, black cap, and buffy flanks. Marked ssp variation but always strikingly frosty due to dark wing and tail feathers with broad white fringes. If in doubt always look for dark-centered greater coverts. By late summer, adults are very worn and can look scruffy. Tail often flared at tip. Range barely overlaps with CACH. Hybrids are reported where it does.



**Carolina Chickadee** *Poecile carolinensis* **CACH** L 4.75in



Common and familiar: The s. counterpart of BCCH with ranges barely overlapping. Resident, almost never moves. Behavior and habits are the same as BCCH, though stays away from higher altitudes. Song: usually 4-note fee bee fee bee. *Chika-dee-dee-dee* similar to BCCH, averaging higher-pitched, sweeter, and slightly faster. Juv often slower and burrier like BCCH. **ID:** From BCCH with care, though most can safely be separated by range. Not so large, thick-necked, 'fluffed-up' or rotund. Shorter tail is usually held narrower at tip. Bill

slightly shorter. Noticeably less frosty and contrasty than BCCH. Most importantly, if in doubt, centers of greater coverts are gray, not black, contrasting less with narrow pale fringes. Pattern of reduced contrast is also similar in the tertials and outer tail feathers but is not so easy to determine. Flanks average less buff, rear cheek grayer, and lower border to bib neater; but there is large variation and overlap in these features. Hybridizes with BCCH.



**Pink-sided Junco**



**Oregon Junco**



**Gray-headed Junco**



**Dark-eyed Junco** *Junco hyemalis* **DEJU (SCJU/ORJU/PSJU/GHJU)** L 6.25in

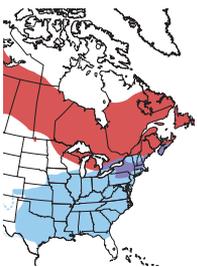


Distinct populations: Slate-colored, Oregon, Pink-sided, and Gray-headed. Slate-colored is a common breeder in mixed and evergreen forest, often at edges. In winter, forms large flocks, sometimes with other sparrows, warblers, or bluebirds, in areas with short grass and trees. Feeds mostly on the ground, moving slowly, usually in tight groups. Easily flushed, usually into trees—always shows striking white outer tail feathers in flight. Gives a quiet but hard tik call. Song: usually given from a tree, is a trill, like CHSP, but softer and more mu-

sical. **ID:** Round-bodied, neckless, small-headed with a gentle expression. Obvious long tail emphasized by bold white outer tail feathers. Ad ♂: striking. 1st-yr ♀: brownest and palest. Ad ♀, 1st-yr ♂, intermediate: often difficult to age and sex. Some have narrow white wing bars. PSJU and ORJU, scarce winter visitors in the W, rare in the E. GHJU very rare. PSJU from 1st-yr ♀ DEJU by defined lower border to hood, dark lores, pink flanks. ORJU dark hooded, also with well-defined lower border; brown back, salmon flanks. Races interbreed.



**White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis* **WTSP** L 6.75in

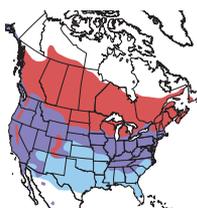


Breeds in mixed forest and bogs. Common winter visitor to parks, gardens, and woodland edges with undergrowth. Like other *Zonotrichia*, can sing in winter; slow clear whistles: so wee wee wee wee. Call: a sharp *chink*. Found in flocks, often at feeders. Feeds on the ground or low in the undergrowth, and quick to move to denser cover. **ID:** A heavy-bellied sparrow with a thick neck, domed crown, and fairly long tail. Upperparts appear mostly rufous-brown with large black smudgy streaks but has a uniform rump. 2 wing bars. Underparts are always browner on the flanks, palest on belly,

and grayer across breast, often with smudgy streaks. The throat ranges from striking white to dingy buff and usually has a black border. Supercilium varies from dark tan to gleaming white, variably yellow above the lores. Color patterns are highly variable. Usually treated as 2 morphs: white-striped and tan-striped, however; better thought of as clinal with many intermediate. Further complicated by ♂ averaging brighter than ♀. Nonbr: duller, with white-striped birds becoming more like tan-striped. Brighter after spring molt. 1st-w: dull and similar to dull nonbr but usually with heavier streaking on underparts.



**Song Sparrow** *Melospiza melodia* **SOSP** L 6.75in



The common streaked sparrow in many areas. Occurs in a variety of habitats from gardens and forest edges to weedy fields. A familiar bird for most of us and often approachable. Sits on posts or bushes as it sings, a cheery range of up-and-down trills. Never flies far, seeming to move slowly and methodically through vegetation or on the ground, often giving its *chimp* note. On migration, will form groups with other sparrows. It is then that you can see the great variation within the many populations. **ID:** A large sparrow with a fairly long tail that is rounded

at the tip. Not so potbellied as some, the chest seems to melt into the neck. All plumages have thick streaks, usually a warm brown matched by the upperpart color. The dark malar and central breast spot stand out. Head is rounded and quite small, an array of lines; the gray supercilium is the one that stands out. Often appears brown-capped. Upperparts have broader and more diffuse streaks than similar sparrows. Wings and tail sometimes more rufous. LISP is smaller, slimmer, grayer and with finer streaking.



**White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis* **WBNU** L 5.75in



Quite common but sometimes elusive. Local migrant. Found primarily in deciduous forest, but also where evergreens, particularly in the W. Most often heard before seen. Noisy with distinctive *mee-mee-mee*, nasal but not so deep as RBNU, and slower and louder. Call: a *yenk*, also nasal. Regular at feeders. Often in mixed flocks with chickadees, warblers, and RBNU. Walks down tree trunks just as often as up, stopping to put head up to check what's going on. Movements are slower than other nuthatches, but tends to go in a straighter line, and its larger size means it covers more ground. Shape

and bold pattern distinctive in flight. **ID:** A large, sturdily built nuthatch. White face, outlined by black, stands out a mile away. Clean-cut whites, grays, and blacks always give it a sharp spiffy look. Long, thin, dagger-like bill slightly upturned. Underparts appear strikingly white, but are actually gray on belly with rufous vent area. Back blue-gray. ♂ has black cap, ♀'s cap is grayer; darkest at sides so can look black. 1st-yr: as adult but subtly duller with wing feathers browner and with less contrasting fringes. Birds on e. edge of range are darker gray; ♀ has darker crown and calls a little differently.



**Tufted Titmouse** *Baeolophus bicolor* **TUTI** L 6.5in



Very common and familiar bird in woods, parks, and gardens and at feeders. Usually in ones and twos, often with chickadees and other species when not breeding, and can be quite tame. A heavy-set bird but very agile, hanging from all angles. Its movements are slower than in chickadees. Hardy, able to find food anywhere, and has no problem chiseling at trunks or holding nuts with its feet while it smacks them open with its bill: not everything that sounds like a woodpecker is one. It has

a surprisingly weak and undulating flight for such a muscular bird. Typical song is a loud *peter, peter, peter*, but has quite an amazing range of calls. Often the first to scold owls. **ID:** Quite large and bulky, noticeably bigger than a chickadee with a long tail and distinctive crest. Gray above, pale below with markedly buff flanks and with a big, black, beady eye that stares at you. Juv: paler; lacking buff flanks and black forehead, these molted in through fall.



**American Goldfinch** *Spinus tristis* **AMGO** L 5in



Common, familiar, and beloved bird, found at feeders, on thistles, sunflowers, and hedgerows, at roadsides, on farmland, and in weedy fields. Feeds quietly, often hidden in tall grasses or on the ground, before suddenly flying off, usually a short distance away, always twittering as it goes with its characteristic, exaggeratedly bouncy flight. Mostly found in pairs or small groups. In late fall many n. populations move s., traveling during the day in compact flocks. Small broad wings and forked tail, combined with undulating flight, make it distinctive at long range. Song:

a long fast ramble of jumbled sweet twitters. Call: a choo lee. Flight call: a te de de. **ID:** A small neat-looking bird. Plump with a short forked tail and triangular bill. Bold wing bars. Ad ♂ br: familiar black and yellow. Wing feathers fade quickly and wing bars become worn. Molts in fall into a very different-looking plumage with duller bill. Nonbr ♂: broad wing bars, brown back, pale yellow on head and underparts. Ad ♀ br: pale yellow below and variably brown or green above with an orange bill. Nonbr ♀: similar to nonbr ♂ but lacks yellow head.



**House Finch** *Carpodacus mexicanus* **HOFI** L 6in



The common and familiar finch in most areas. A sw. species. E. birds derive from released NY pet trade stock; population then spread like wildfire. Found just about anywhere, suburbs, feeders, wooded and scrubby areas, usually around humans. One of the most common feeder birds. Conjunctivitis, most easily seen as swelling around the eyes, drastically reduced numbers in the 1990s, but populations now recovering. Often in small groups feeding on seed heads on the ground or in tangled vegetation. Easy to see flying overhead. Diurnal migrant in flocks late fall. Call: a qwee-er. Song: 3 loud

warbled phrases, fastest at the start. **ID:** Much slimmer and longer-tailed (square-ended) than other *Carpodacus* finches, and lacks strong contrast of other species. Edges to bill noticeably curved. Plumages show a lot of variation, but all have extensive blurry streaking on flanks and diffusely marked upperparts. Ad ♂: red (not pink) usually restricted to head, breast, and rump. Red occasionally shows as yellow or orange where diet is atypical. Ad ♀: relatively dull and nondescript; underparts diffusely streaked on white or buff. Weak face pattern. 1st-yr: similar. The commonest 'unknown' feeder bird!



**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* **HOSP** L 6.75in



Very common and familiar bird around humans as its scientific name suggests. A European import, unpopular in the farmyard, the mall parking lot, nesting in the eaves of the nearby building (any cavity), or at your feeder. Often tame, usually in small groups feeding on the ground or sunning themselves on a hedge. Several chirping notes, sometimes repeated constantly. Flight powerful and straight with fast steady wingbeats. **ID**: Robust and thick-set with a broad tail. Dull unstreaked underparts,

boldly streaked upperparts, and short wing bars. Sexes different. Ad ♂ br: nicely marked with gray crown, black bill, mostly brown upperparts (including wing coverts), pale cheeks, and black bib. Nonbr ♂: a much duller version of same pattern with paler bill. ♀: pale dingy brown, indistinct supercilium contrasts with darker cap and eyestripe. Pale bill. Juv: as ♀ with buffier underparts and fringes to coverts, soft-textured feathers, and rounded tips to flight feathers. Ist-w: molts into adult-like plumage through fall.



**Carolina Wren** *Thryothorus ludovicianus* **CARW** L 5.5in



Common and would be very familiar if it allowed itself to be seen. Usually found in dense tangled vegetation and trees, particularly near homes, but also more extensive woodlands. It's amazing how something so small can make so much noise: you are sure to have heard it. A large repertoire of songs, calls, and scolds, *cheery cheery cheery* perhaps the best known. If you are not sure of a sound, it's probably this species. Skulks around, on or near the ground, tail nearly always cocked (straight when singing). Climbs trees nuthatch-like, often hanging upside down and entering holes. Inquisitive, it goes to odd

places—garages, through the open window, under the car, in plant pots, and just about any nook it can get into: perhaps you have found one stuck somewhere. Sometimes bobs up and down. Hops rather than walks. Very aggressive, the yard boss. **ID**: Fairly large and chunky with a medium-length tail. Brown above and variably buff below with a large and bold supercilium. Bold triangular spots are suggestive of juv. Ageing difficult: juv averages duller with fluffy undertail coverts. Sometimes occurs out of range. Only BEWR is similar but is slighter with a longer tail and more subdued colors.



**American Robin** *Turdus migratorius* **AMRO** L 10in



Very common and familiar in gardens, fields, and just about anywhere with trees or bushes. Often tame and approachable. Takes a few hops and stops to pull out a worm. Sometimes will stay motionless for a while with head tilted as if looking with one eye. Follow it and it will often go to its nest, usually just above head height in the fork of 2 branches. In fall, migrates s., often in waves of hundreds or thousands in evenly spaced flight, which is strong and direct, when it gives its thin tsee call. They will suddenly descend on trees laden with fruit or berries and glut themselves. Newly cultivated or flooded fields

are also favorites. Musical song; cheerily *cher-up cheerio*. Several different calls. **ID:** Powerfully built *Turdus* with a fairly long tail and legs. Ad ♂: gray upperparts. Black head with bold eyelids, bright burnt-orange underparts. Ad ♀/imm ♂: all colors duller; underparts pale-tipped. Imm ♀: dullest with brown rather than gray back, extending onto head, and with indistinct supercilium. Pale orange underparts. Juv: dark-spotted underparts, pale-spotted upperparts with variable amounts of orange. Plumage molted out in a few weeks, though remnants can often be seen through fall—these birds can usually be aged and sexed.



**European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* **EUST** L 8.5in



Very common and familiar: Despite its bad reputation, EUST has a subtle beauty. Nests in man-made cavities but also competes for natural holes, often kicking out woodpeckers and other species. Forms large waxwing-like flocks in winter; flying around in tight balls, often with a confused raptor nearby. Stomps around, sometimes inquisitively, at other times marches in a hurry, grabbing food with a big open mouth. Song: a mishmash of whines, whistles, and imitations all wrapped into one. **ID:** Stumpy with a short square tail. Distinctive profile in

flight with broad-based triangular wings. Flight is a series of rapid flaps, followed by short glides. Bill fairly long, straight and pointed. Adult: brightest in fall/winter; fresh feathers with large white spots on iridescent purple and green, though often looks black. Dark lores give mean look. By spring, spots are worn and iridescence becomes more obvious; bill turns yellow. Juv: brown, palest on throat, dark lores, and striking pale fringes to wing feathers. Molts through summer to very different adult-like feathers, giving a pied appearance.



**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula* **COGR** L 12.5in



Very common and widespread in open areas: agricultural fields, cattle lots, marshes, but also your garden feeders and suburban areas. Nests in trees and will stalk around in wet woods like RUBL. In fall and winter; forms flocks, creating lines or 'clouds' of birds. Often dominates feeders or patrols grassy areas such as lawns. Size, color, facial expression, and pale iris result in 'bad boy' look. Closer views reveal a bird of stunning iridescent colors (♂). In flight, large size, slender build, and long, flared tail help it stand out in blackbird flocks. Song: a variety of

forced wheezy notes. Call: a hard flat *chek*. **ID:** Large and slim with long, graduated tail. Sturdy all-dark bill. Colors vary across populations. ♂ (e. population): variably blue/purple. Interior birds have brown body with green/blue head and neck. In FL, green-and-bronze body with purple-and-blue head and neck. ♀: slightly smaller and shorter-tailed than ♂. Generally brown with bluish head, lacking strong iridescence of ♂. Juv: dull brown, often darker-tailed. Iris darker and bill often paler than in adult.



**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater* **BHCO** L 7.5in



Very common in open areas near woodland edges. Feeds on the ground in short-grass areas. Tail often distinctively cocked high in the air as it feeds, and sometimes points bill skyward as if sniffing the air. Joins other blackbird flocks in winter. Frequently around animals, often walks near hooves, looking for insects or catching a ride. Not liked for its nest-parasite behavior: Newly hatched chicks are demanding and take full attention of host parent. Song: gurgles followed by thin whistles. Long, drawn-out, high tseeeee—a common flight call. **ID:** Noticeably small, chunky, and big-headed. Seems

short-tailed though not so. Pointed wings in flight. Ad ♂: body often appears black, though is actually green/blue. Head and neck brown, creating a distinctive hood. ♀: dull pale brown with gray tinges. Slightly darker on upperparts with barely visible diffuse streaking on underparts. Head appears paler than body with indistinct supercilium and weak malar stripe on throat. Juv: brown with pale-fringed upperparts giving scaly effect. Underparts have well-defined streaks. Starts molting adult-type feathers through fall. Imm ♂: a patchwork of dark grayish and brown feathers.



**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus* **RWBL** L 8.75in

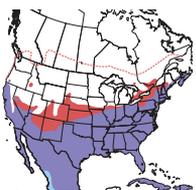


Abundant just about everywhere. Breeds in marshes and wet, scrubby areas. In winter, forms large, sometimes massive, flocks, often with other blackbirds and EUST, in agricultural areas, gardens, and at feeders. They spend most of the time feeding on the ground, doddering along on short legs. Common summer sight singing on bulrushes. Leans forward precariously with tail spread and wings half open, as if to show off its mind-blowing headlights—the red-and-yellow wing patch. Song: a whistled *get-me-teeee*. **ID:** Stocky with a head that looks too small and pointed for the body. Pointed

bill an extension of head shape. Medium-long tail. Ad ♂ br: jet-black with stunning red-and-yellow coverts. Ad ♂ nonbr: muted version of breeding ♂ with pale fringes. Imm ♂: highly variable, most as nonbr ♂ but with rustier fringes and paler underwing coverts. Ad ♀: strikingly different from ♂. Dark brown upperparts and underparts completely streaked brown; buff face. Imm ♀: similar to ad ♀ but whiter around face; paler underwing coverts. ♀-type RWBLs are source of much confusion for inexperienced birders. Learn the bill shape, and you will be halfway there!



**Northern Mockingbird** *Mimus polyglottos* **NOMO** L 10in



Common in ones and twos just about anywhere, from desert to open woodland, but particularly around gardens. Sits on posts, mailboxes; hops on the ground and chases anything that dares come into its territory. Is just as happy in denser vegetation nabbing berries and insects. Gray and relatively nondescript, in flight large white wing patches bring it alive. Flight is direct but with very deep languid wingbeats. Often feeds on the ground by jerkily opening its wings, like images from an old movie, perhaps confusing its potential prey. A singer with a big voice that has driven my wife mad (and I'm sure

many other people) as it endlessly goes on at any time of night or day. A great mimic of local birds, notes are usually in batches of 2–4. Call: a *chak*. In summer 'sky-larks' from high perches as it sings, returning to same perch. **ID:** AMRO-length with a long tail and smaller rounded body. Head seems disproportionately small. Pale gray upperparts with off-white underparts, it can look brownish. Black eyeline, white wing bars, and white outer tail feathers stand out on an otherwise bland bird. Juv: plumage held briefly, duller and browner with spots on breast.



**American Tree Sparrow** *Spizella arborea* **ATSP** L 6.25in



Fairly common. Breeds in scrub. A tough sparrow with many wintering in snowy landscapes in weedy fields, hedges, and roadsides and at feeders. Found on or close to the ground in small flocks. In areas of deep snow, concentrations occur wherever they can find grass heads and other food. Often jumps off ground to grab seeds from overhanging grasses. In some locations it is the only regular sparrow. Call: a *teedle eet*. **ID:** Large-bodied with a long tail and rounded head. It has a cute friendly expression. Gray-headed with bold chest-

nut cap and eyeline. Boldly patterned upperparts with 2 wing bars. Underparts strongly buff in breast sides with a rufous patch near elbow, but it is the dark spot in the center of the breast that is distinctive. Bicolored bill. FISP can cause confusion where range overlaps, but latter shows less contrasting plumage, has all-pink bill, and lacks breast spot. CHSP is duller brown above with different head pattern and grayer breast lacking breast spot.