

NEW YORK STATE  
**Conservationist**

APRIL 2008

for  
**Kids!**



**BIRDS!**



# NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

**IN  
THIS  
ISSUE...**

**for  
Kids!**

We'll introduce you to some of the birds you'll see around New York. Some people watch birds at feeders or bird-houses they put up in their yard. Others look for birds in wild areas. Keep a record of what you see as you try the activities in this issue of *Conservationist for Kids*. You can even share your observations with scientists who study birds. Get outdoors, and get connected with nature!



In these pages you'll learn about nature and the environment in New York State and what kids just like you can do to help the environment.

Cover: original photo © Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Isidor Jeklin; montage by DEC

Unless otherwise indicated, all photos by DEC photographers Susan Shafer and Jim Clayton.

**Take a look at the page numbers of this magazine.  
Do you recognize anyone?**

**They're all kids from New York State, enjoying the outdoors. Send us a photo of you and your friends outdoors, and we may include it in a future issue of *Conservationist for Kids*. We can't return photos, so please only send us a copy, or send it as an e-mail attachment. We need permission from the parent/guardian of each child in the photo to print it in the magazine or use it on our website. Please visit our website for a permission form you can print and mail in.**

**Send your photo and permission form to  
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1

Visit  
[www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)  
There are links to lots of  
information for kids interested  
in the environment.  
Tell us what you're doing.

# Wild about Birds!

It's fun to watch birds. They're bright and **cheery, even** on the greyest day. But that's not the only reason to keep an eye on our feathered friends. Birds are important members of the natural ecosystem. They are **predators**, eating everything from insects and worms to mice, rabbits and fish. They may also be **prey**, eaten by other birds, foxes and weasels. Birds are helpful to people too, as many of the insects and rodents they eat are considered to be pests.

Birds require specific **habitat**, the combination of food, water, shelter and space that meets their needs. If the habitat changes—due to urban encroachment, pollution, climate change or any other cause—bird populations will be affected. Some may move into an area while others may leave. As you study birds, look for the types and numbers of birds in an area, their behavior, when they migrate and nest.



## Becoming a

# BIRD-BRAIN

You can get started watching and enjoying birds without any special equipment at all! Just go outside and keep your eyes and ears open to the world around you. As you get better at spotting birds, you'll want to keep a record of the birds you see and what they're doing. You may find these items helpful.

## Field Journal

A **field journal** is a notebook you write your observations in, or a binder you add new pages to each time you go out. You can include drawings, photos, or a list of all the birds you see.



## Field Guide

There are many different **field guides** (books with information on identifying natural objects), just on birds. Look through some to see which is easiest for you to use. Some have drawings of birds, while others have photos.

Your public or school library is a good place to start.



## Binoculars

Binoculars make things that are far away appear closer. Find a pair that are easy for you to focus and light enough for you to carry when you go outdoors. Many nature centers have binoculars you can borrow during your visit.



## Take photos



of the birds, nests and other things you see. Photos can be saved in your journal. (Remember, don't remove natural items from the wild.)







## A Beginner's Guide to



# Watching Birds

**W**atching birds is fun any time of year, and they don't usually move too far away when people are nearby, like other wild animals do. Setting out a feeder is an easy way to get started since the birds come to you. During the fall and spring migrations, the variety of birds you will see increases as birds pass through on the way to their winter or summer habitats. You can also put out

nest boxes or nesting materials, such as hair from your dog's brush or lint from the clothes dryer.

Most bird field guides have a section explaining how to look up birds quickly and easily. If you can't figure out what kind of bird you see when you're outdoors, write down as much as you can in your field journal or take a photograph. Then, you can look it up when you're back inside.

## 9 BIRDING BASICS

To identify birds more easily, ask yourself these questions. It will also help to get to know a few birds really well, and use that knowledge to compare birds you see to ones you already know.

What shape is it?

Are its wings pointed or rounded?

Is it alone or in a flock?

What shape is its bill?

What are its field marks?

Colors? Stripes? Patterns? Patches?

How big is the bird?

What is it doing?

Flying, perching, wading, hopping, swimming, walking, climbing?

What is its flight pattern?

Straight?  
Up and down like a roller coaster?

Where is it?

In an open area? In the woods? At a shoreline? In the water?

## Finding FEATHERED FRIENDS

You can find birds almost anywhere, from the cities to the countryside. What you find depends upon where you are. Environmental education centers and parks around the state are wonderful places to start watching birds. If you want to encourage birds to visit your home, set up a bird feeder or just scatter some birdseed on the ground. Within a few days, the birds will find the seeds and may become regular visitors.

**(NOTE: If you are in an area with bears, only feed the birds in the winter. Bird feeders may attract bears when they are active.)**

Across New York State there are special places known as Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs). They are created to protect and enhance bird populations and their habitats on State lands and waters. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/25341.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/25341.html) to learn more about BCAs, including which ones are near you.



# BIRD SCIENCE!

You don't have to be an **ornithologist**, a scientist who studies birds, to contribute to important research about birds. Since scientists can't be everywhere birds are, individuals, families and other groups can help them gather information. These helpers are called **citizen scientists**.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology uses information from scientists and from citizen scientists. Through Project FeederWatch, you can keep track of the birds which visit your feeder and send the information to the researchers. Participants help in the understanding of the distribution (where they are) and abundance (how many there are) of birds. Participants in other citizen science programs collect

data on urban birds and nesting birds. To learn more about how you can contribute

to these and other programs at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, visit **[www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu)** You can even view video of birds on their nests, caring for their young!

Contributors to New York's Breeding Bird Atlas project look for signs of birds nesting and raising young in the wild. To learn about the Breeding Bird Atlas project and to see distribution maps of breeding birds in New York, visit **[www.dec.ny.gov/public/7312.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/7312.html)**.



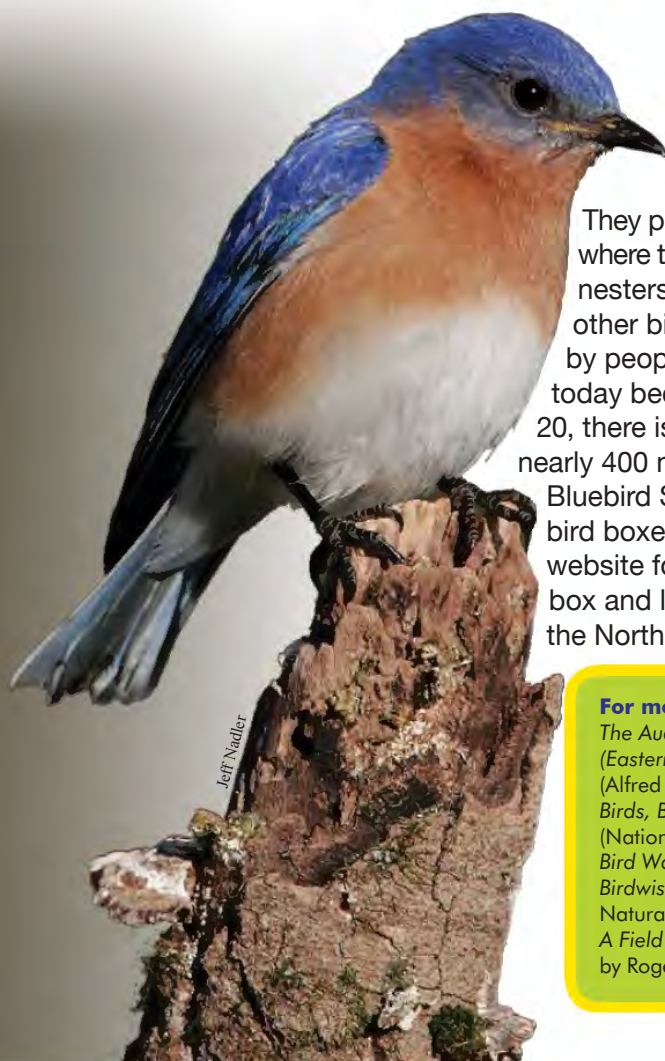
FOCUS on the

## EASTERN BLUEBIRD

New York's State Bird

**B**luebirds are among the first birds to return in the spring from southern wintering areas.

They prefer open habitats like fields, orchards and gardens, where they find plenty of insects to eat. Bluebirds are cavity nesters, which means they nest in holes in trees made by other birds like woodpeckers or in bird boxes provided by people. Once considered rare, they are more common today because of conservation efforts. Along U.S. Route 20, there is a research trail of bluebird boxes that stretches nearly 400 miles. Along U.S. Route 11, the New York State Bluebird Society is establishing an education trail of bluebird boxes, to be monitored by schools in the area. Visit our website for instructions to make and care for a bluebird nest box and links to the New York State Bluebird Society and the North American Bluebird Society.



### For more information:

*The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds (Eastern Region)* by John Bull & John Farrant, Jr., (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. New York, 1977)

*Birds, Birds, Birds!* (Ranger Rick's NatureScope) by Judy Braus, ed. (National Wildlife Federation, Washington, DC, 1989)

*Bird Watch* by Mary MacPherson (Summerhill Press, Toronto, 1988)

*Birdwise* by Pamela M. Hickman for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (Kids Can Press Ltd., Toronto, 1988)

*A Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America* by Roger Tory Peterson (Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston, 1980)





The birds shown here can be found in different regions across New York State. Some will be easy to spot, others less so. The more time you spend watching birds, the better you will get at identifying them.

# BIRDS

## of New York State



### ■ Eastern Bluebird

**Length:** 7"

**Habitat:** open country with scattered trees, farmland, roadsides



### ■ Great Blue Heron

**Length:** 42-52"

**Habitat:** marshes, swamps, shores, tideflats



### ■ American Robin

**Length:** 9-11"

**Habitat:** urban, suburban, farm, forest areas



### ■ Blue Jay

**Length:** 11-12.5"

**Habitat:** oak & pine woods, suburban areas



### ■ Northern Cardinal

**Length:** 7.5-9"

**Habitat:** woodland edges, thickets, suburbs, towns



### ■ Killdeer

**Length:** 9-11"

**Habitat:** fields, lawns, airports, riverbanks, shores

### ■ Black-capped Chickadee

**Length:** 4.5-5.5"

**Habitat:** mixed & deciduous woods, thickets, bird feeders





As you see each bird,

## CHECK IT OFF

This can be the beginning of your life list, a record a birder keeps of all the birds he or she has seen.



## Herring Gull

**Length:** 23-26"

**Habitat:** coastal areas, bays, beaches, lakes, piers, farmland, dumps

## Mallard

**Length:** 20-23"

**Habitat:** marshes, wooded swamps, bays, ponds, rivers, lakes



## Red-tailed Hawk

**Length:** 19-25"

**Habitat:** open country, woodlands, mountains, plains



## Great Horned Owl

**Length:** 18-25"

**Habitat:** forests, woodlands, thickets, streamsides, open country



## Canada Goose

**Length:** 25-43"

**Habitat:** lakes, ponds, bays, marshes, fields



## Ruffed Grouse

**Length:** 16-19"

**Habitat:** ground & understory of deciduous & mixed woodland

You will soon begin to recognize birds not just by how they look, but also by their **voice**, their **behavior**, and their **flight pattern**.



## Wild Turkey

**Length:** females 36"; males 48"

**Habitat:** woods, forests, wooded swamps

Illustrations by Jean Gawalt



# The **OUTSIDE** Ideas for Exploring Outdoors! Page **Feeding Birds!**

Feeding birds can be as simple as tossing some mixed bird seed on the ground or setting out some cut up fruit. Seeds are enjoyed by chickadees, nut-hatches, cardinals and blue jays. Orange halves may attract orioles, tanagers and grosbeaks. You can make a simple seed feeder by cutting openings in the sides of a milk carton or a plastic milk jug (be sure to clean it well first), leaving the bottom intact as a tray to hold the seeds. Attach a wire to the top and hang the feeder outdoors. Fill the bottom with bird seed then watch to see who visits. During the summer, hummingbirds are attracted by special feeders which dispense sugar-water.



## Keep a Life List

A **Life List** is a record a birder keeps of all the birds he or she has seen. Each time you see a new kind of bird, add it to your list. When you start a life list it grows quickly; a dozen or more may visit your backyard feeder! After a while you will have seen many of the birds in your area and won't be adding new birds as often. It will become a fun challenge to add to your list. A life list can be part of a field journal you keep, with not just the names of the birds you see, but other interesting observations you make as well. (A sample of a blank field journal page can be printed from [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov).)



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## ***Conservationist for Kids***

Supplement for Classroom Teachers  
"Birds!" – April 2008

One of the priorities of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is to connect New Yorkers to nature. Research has demonstrated a spectrum of developmental, health, performance and social benefits of children's experiences with nature. *Conservationist for Kids* has been created as one aspect of DEC's *Leave No Child Inside* program. Our goal is to encourage children in New York State to go outdoors and explore natural areas, and to develop an interest in environmental stewardship.

*Conservationist for Kids*, and an accompanying teacher supplement, is distributed to public school fourth grade classes three times each school year (fall, winter, spring). These materials are also available at **www.dec.ny.gov** in both HTML and PDF formats. Teachers and students may e-mail questions and suggestions to us at **cforkids@gw.dec.state.ny.us**.

### **Using *Conservationist for Kids* in the Classroom**

Information and activities in *Conservationist for Kids* encourage readers to explore outdoors. You may wish to read together as a class activity or have your students read the magazine independently. The activities in the magazine may be completed by your students at school or at home. Additional activities and resources can be found in this Teacher Supplement and on DEC's website at **www.dec.ny.gov** (Look for *Conservationist for Kids* under the Education heading.) If you receive more copies of *Conservationist for Kids* than you require for your students, please share the extras with your school library and curriculum resource specialists.

### **MST Curriculum Connections**

The activities in this issue of *Conservationist for Kids* have been correlated to the New York State Math, Science and Technology Learning Standards for 4<sup>th</sup> grade, below. Connections to other learning standards may also be valid.

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Feed the Birds:   | MST4. <i>The Living Environment</i> 1-7<br>MST5. <i>Engineering Design</i> 1, 2 |
| Keep a Life List: | MST1. <i>Scientific Enquiry</i> 1-3<br>MST4. <i>The Living Environment</i> 1-7  |

### **Supplemental Activities for the Classroom**

#### Make Your Own Field Guide

*Materials needed for each student:* blank "bird profile" page (found at **www.dec.ny.gov**)

*Shared materials:* resource books, photos, etc.  
coloring pencils/crayons

*Instructions:* Have each student in the class research a different species of bird and create a one-page profile of that bird. Assemble the pages from the class into a book. A sample page for students to complete is available at the "For Teachers" section of the *Conservationist for Kids* webpage, along with a list of birds commonly found in New York State. You may wish to make copies of your class "field guide" for each student.



## Build a Bird Nest

*Shared materials:* photos of different bird nests, bird nest field guides  
assorted nest-building materials:

|           |          |                          |
|-----------|----------|--------------------------|
| twigs     | moss     | dryer lint & other fluff |
| dry grass | feathers | hair (human, dog)        |
| mud       | leaves   | yarn, cut into pieces    |

*Instructions:* In small groups or individually, have students look at photos of bird nests to determine what they're made of and how they have been constructed. Take a walk outdoors and look for nests in your neighborhood. (Do not disturb nests.) Back in the classroom, provide a collection of nest-building materials and ask the students to build a nest they think a bird might use. (*Things they could consider:* What kind of bird are they building for? How big does the nest need to be? What building materials does their bird prefer?) Once the student-made nests are finished, compare and contrast them with those made by birds. Whose are sturdier? Finish the activity by taking your nesting materials outdoors and spreading them around for the birds to pick up and incorporate into their own nests.

Mission: Migration (Audubon NY internet game)

*Materials needed for each student:* internet access

*Instructions:* Log on to **ny.audubon.org** to play *Mission: Migration*, a web-based flash game that teaches about bird migration. *Mission: Migration* teaches children about the difficulties birds face during migration and how children can make their backyards healthier for birds.

## Teacher Workshops

For teachers who have participated in a Project WILD or Flying WILD workshop, the following activities complement the current issue of *Conservationist for Kids*. For information about workshops to obtain these curriculum and activity guides, visit **www.dec.ny.gov/education/2035.html**

### Project WILD Activities

Color Crazy

Learning to Look, Looking to See

### Flying WILD Activities

Bird Behavior Scavenger Hunt

Who Was That Masked Bird?

## More Great Stuff

Printable activity sheets and links to other resources can be found on our website, including instructions for building a bluebird nest box. Go to **www.dec.ny.gov** and look for *Conservationist for Kids* under the Education heading.

## **Recommended Resources (additional resources are listed in *Conservationist for Kids*):**

*Birdwatching for All Ages* by Jorie Hunken (The Globe Pequot Press, Chester, CT, 1992)

*Birdwise* by Pamela M. Hickman for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (Kids Can Press, Toronto, Ontario, 1988)

*A Field Guide to the Birds' Nests: United States east of the Mississippi River* by Hal H. Harrison (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1975)

*National Audubon Society North American Bird Feeder Handbook* by Robert Burton (Dorling Kindersley, New York, 1995)

*Flute's Journey* by Lynne Cherry (Harcourt, Brace & Company, Orlando, Florida, 1997)

*Hawk Hill* by Suzie Gilbert (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1996)

PDF versions of DEC bird-related posters available at **www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/4791.html**