

I NY

I Bird New York: A Beginner's Guide to Birding



NEW YORK STATE
Department of
Environmental
Conservation

We'll introduce you to some of the birds you'll see around New York. Some people watch birds at feeders or birdhouses they put up in their yard. Others look for birds in wild areas. Keep a record of what you see and hear as you try the activities associated with *I Bird New York*.



Get outdoors and get connected with nature!

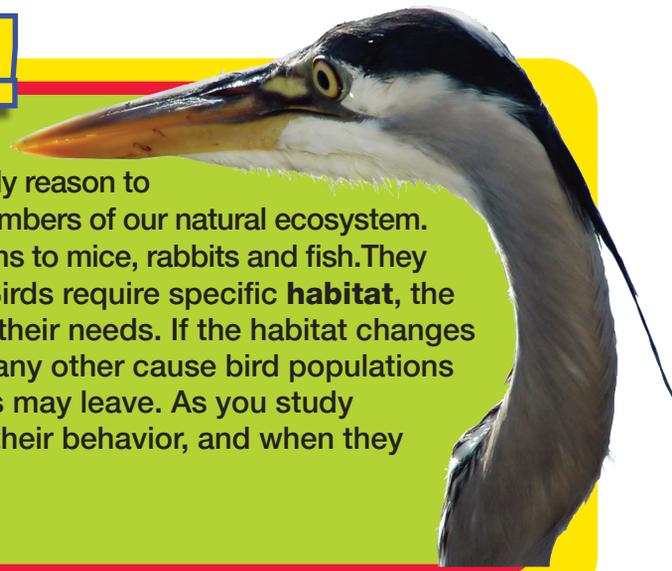
Keep a Life List

A life list is record a birder keeps of all the birds he or she has seen or heard. Each time you identify a new kind of bird, add it to your list. When you start a life list, it grows quickly; a dozen or more birds 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 try 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 find, but other interesting observations you make, such as birds building a nest. (A sample of a blank field journal page can be printed from www.dec.ny.gov. Search for: "My Field Journal")

For more information visit: ibirdny.org

WILD about Birds!

It's fun to watch birds. They're bright and cheery, even on the grayest day. But that's not the only reason to keep an eye on our feathered friends. Birds are important members of our 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 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, and when they migrate and nest.

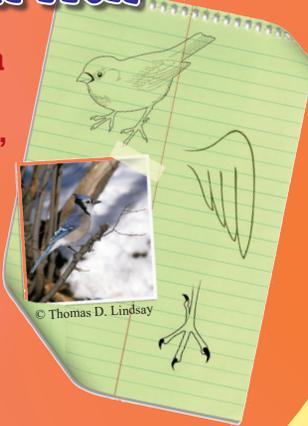


Be a BIRD-BRAIN

You can get started watching and enjoying birds without any special equipment at all! Just go outside and keep your eyes or 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 or hear.



Field Guide

There are many different **field guides** (books with information on identifying natural objects), just on birds. Look through some to find one that is easy 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.



Photos & bird songs

Photos can be saved in your journal. (Remember, don't remove natural items from the wild.) You can also use your camera or smartphone to record audio clips of bird songs. You can even tag a location if you download some apps.





A Beginner's Guide to



Watching Birds

Watching 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. The birds will come to you. During 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 a 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.

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.

9 BIRDING BASICS

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 its flight pattern?

Straight?
Up and down like a roller coaster?

What is it doing?

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

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 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. Or 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/30935.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 **community scientists**.

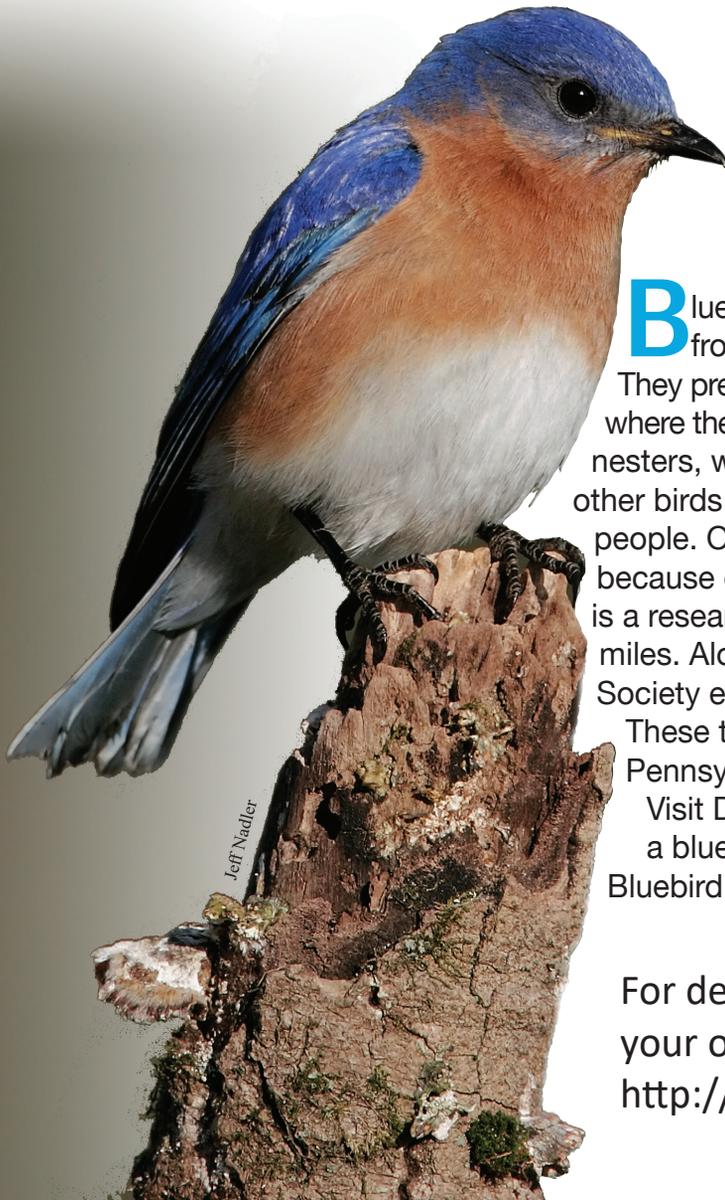
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology uses information from scientists and community scientists. Through Project FeederWatch, you can keep track of the birds that visit your feeder and send the information to the researchers. Participants help in the understanding of the distribution (where they are) and abundance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

Participants in other community 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**. You can even view videos of birds on their nests, caring for their young!

FOCUS on the

EASTERN BLUEBIRD

New York's State Bird



Bluebirds are among the first birds to return in the spring from southern wintering areas, and some overwinter.

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 established an education trail of bluebird boxes.

These two "trails" run from the Massachusetts border to Pennsylvania and from Canada to Pennsylvania.

Visit DEC's website for instructions to make and care for a bluebird nest box and for links to the New York State Bluebird Society and the North American Bluebird Society.

For detailed plans on building your own bluebird boxes visit:
<http://nysbs.org>



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: Approx. 7"
Habitat: open country with scattered trees, farmland, roadsides



Great Blue Heron

Length: 42-52"
Habitat: marshes, swamps, shores, tidflats



American Robin

Length: 9-11"
Habitat: urban, suburban, farmland, forest areas



Blue Jay

Length: 11-12.5"
Habitat: forests, suburban areas



Northern Cardinal

Length: 7.5-9"
Habitat: woodland edges, thickets, suburbs



Killdeer

Length: 9-11"
Habitat: fields, lawns, airports, riverbanks, shores

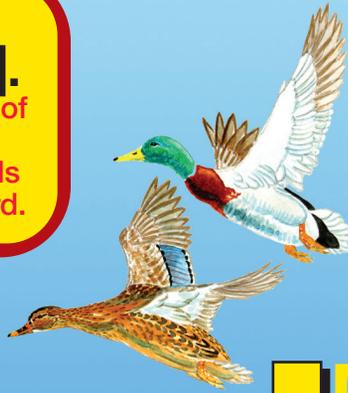
Black-capped Chickadee

Length: 4.5-5.5"
Habitat: Woodlands, thickets, Forests



As you see each bird,
CHECK IT OFF

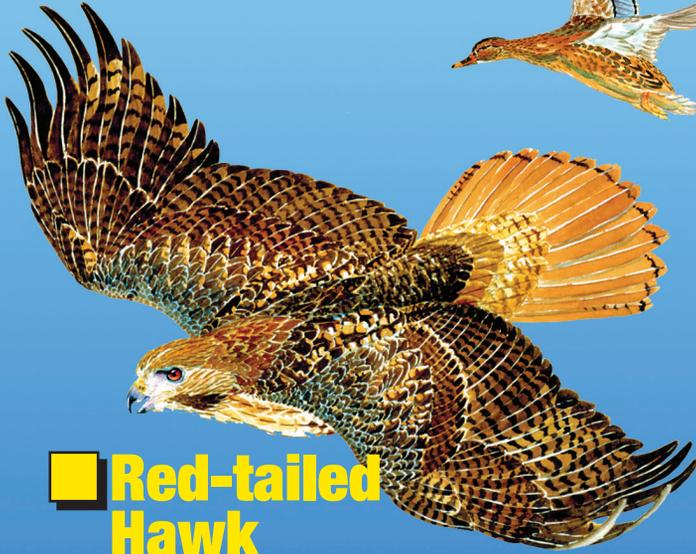
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your life list, a record a
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he or she has seen or heard.



Herring Gull

Length: 23-26"

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



Red-tailed Hawk

Length: 19-25"

Habitat: open country, woodlands,
mountains

Mallard

Length: 20-23"

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



Great Horned Owl

Length: 18-25"

Habitat: forests, woodland
edges, thickets,
streamsides



Ruffed Grouse

Length: 16-19"

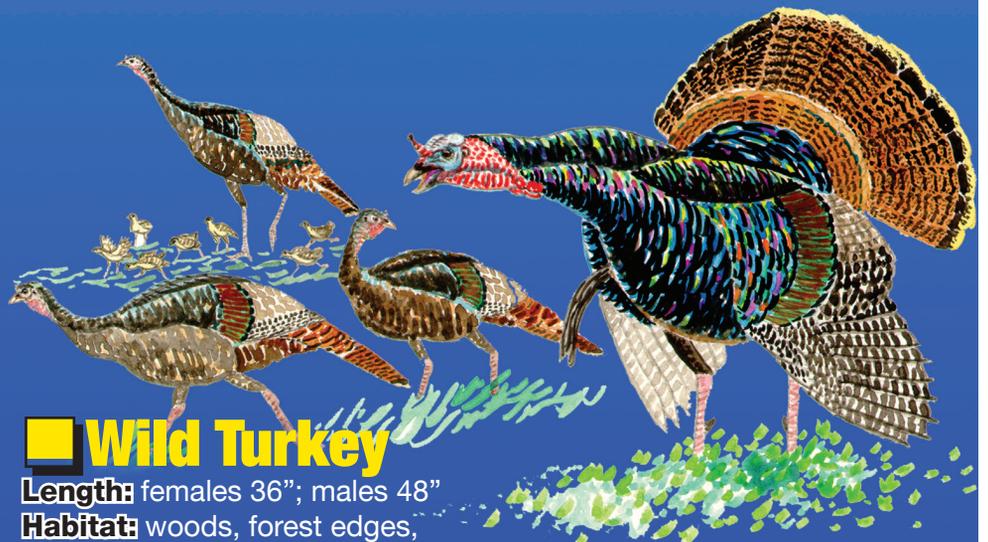
Habitat: ground & understory of
woodlands, forests



Canada Goose

Length: 25-43"

Habitat: lakes, ponds, bays, marshes, fields



Wild Turkey

Length: females 36"; males 48"

Habitat: woods, forest edges,
wooded swamps,
farmland

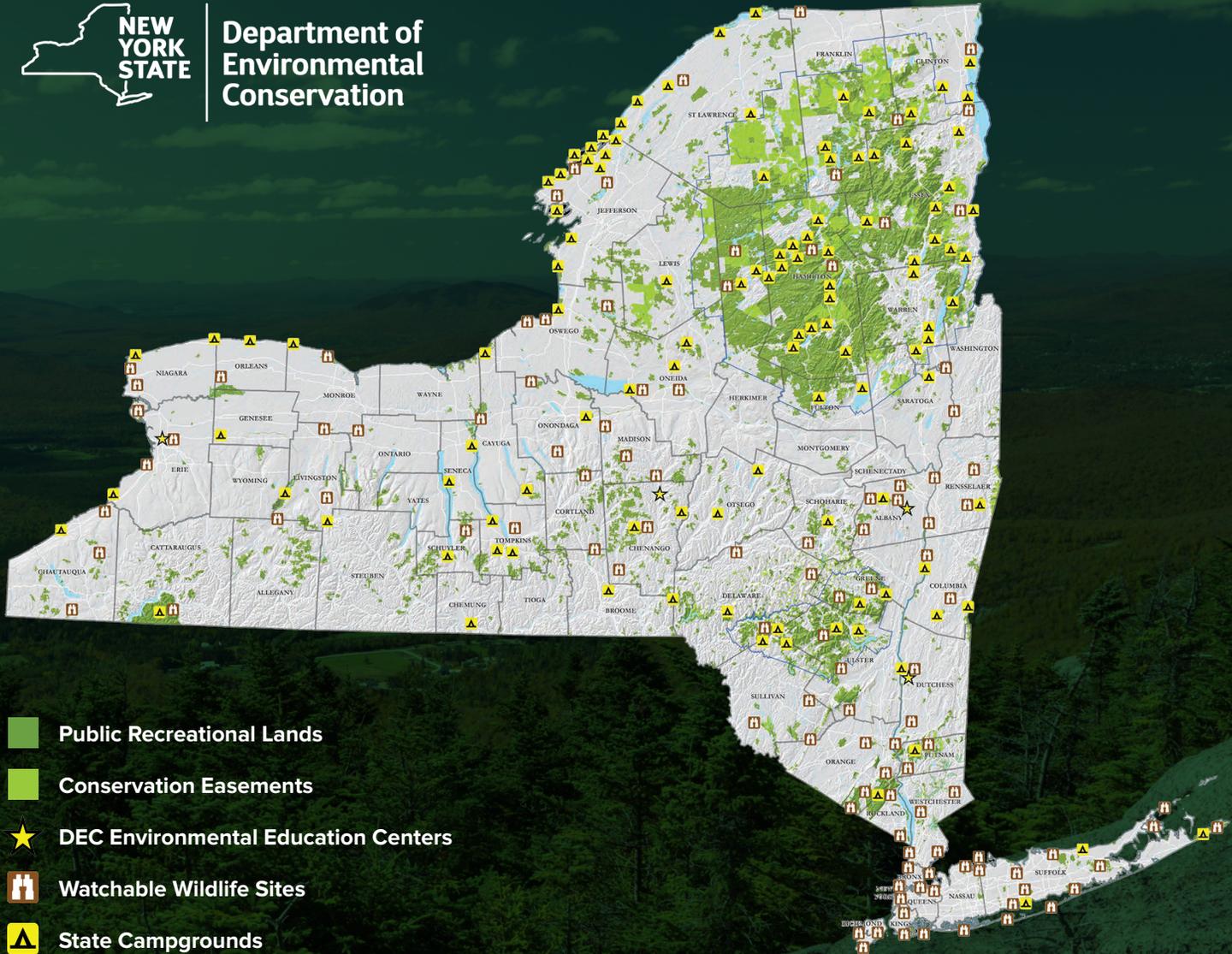
You will soon begin
to recognize birds not
just by how they look,
but also by their **voice**,
their **behavior**, and their
flight pattern.

Illustrations by Jean Gawalt

MORE ADVENTURE IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER



Department of Environmental Conservation



- Public Recreational Lands
- Conservation Easements
- ★ DEC Environmental Education Centers
- Watchable Wildlife Sites
- State Campgrounds

Maximize your outdoor adventure and find everything you want to know about birds, wildlife and great locations near you right in the palm of your hand.

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