

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES



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Mammals



Trees



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Birds



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Birds



Birds are common visitors to schools, neighborhoods, parks, and other public places. Their diversity, bright colors, cheerful songs, and daytime habits make them great for engaging children and adults in nature study.

Birds are unique among animals. All birds have feathers, wings, and beaks. They are found around the world, from ice-covered Antarctica to steamy jungles, from dry deserts to windy mountaintops, and from freshwater rivers to salty oceans.

This booklet shares some information on just a few of the nearly 10,000 bird species that can be found worldwide. How many of these birds can you find in your part of the planet?



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Northern Cardinal

(*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other names: redbird, common cardinal
- Medium-sized songbird in the cardinal family
- Males: bright red feathers, black face masks
- Females: light brown feathers, gray face masks
- Males and females: reddish-orange bills
- Length: 8¾ inches; wingspan: 12 inches

HABITAT

The **northern cardinal** can be found throughout the eastern U.S. This native species favors open areas with brushy habitat, including neighborhoods and suburban areas.

FUN FACT

Northern cardinals mate for life. When courting, the male feeds the female beak-to-beak.



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House Finch

(*Haemorhous mexicanus*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other name: rosefinch
- Length: 6 inches; wingspan: 9½ inches
- Males: bright, orange-red face and breast; streaky, gray-brown wings and tail
- Females: overall gray-brown; no bright red color

HABITAT

The **house finch** is not native to the southeastern U.S. Because it can live in many habitats, it has quickly expanded its range. This bird is now found most commonly in urban and suburban areas.

FUN FACT

New York City vendors were selling "Hollywood finches" (house finches) in the 1940s. Facing prosecution for violating a law that prohibits the sale of wild birds, the vendors released the birds. Their descendants now live across the U.S.



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Blue Jay

(*Cyanocitta cristata*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other names: jaybird, jay
- Member of the crow family
- Length: 11 inches; wingspan: 16 inches
- Males and females: blue head crest; pale blue back with white markings; striped tail; white breast feathers
- Distinctive dark “scarf” around the head

HABITAT

The **blue jay** is native to the U.S. and can be found in many habitat types, including pastureland, woodlands, and suburban areas. It is social and often found in groups.

FUN FACT

The **blue jay** will sound its loud call—“Jay! Jay!”—to alert other birds if there is a predator such as an owl or hawk in the area.



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Tufted Titmouse

(*Baeolophus bicolor*)

DESCRIPTION

- Larger member of the chickadee family
- Length: 6½ inches; wingspan: 9¾ inches
- Males and females: gray crest; gray upper feathers and white underparts; pale orange flanks; black bills, foreheads, and eyes

HABITAT

A common visitor to residential bird feeders, the **tufted titmouse** is native to the eastern U.S. It prefers forests of broadleaf trees, such as oaks, hickories, and maples.

FUN FACT

The **tufted titmouse** makes its nest in a hole in a tree, which it lines with soft materials such as dog hair or shed snake skin.



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House Sparrow

(*Passer domesticus*)

DESCRIPTION

- Length: 6–7 inches; wingspan: 7–9 inches
- Males: brown head and back; gray breast with a black breast patch
- Females: dull-brown upper feathers with gray breast; no black breast patch

HABITAT

The **house sparrow** was brought to North America from England in 1851. It prefers to live in urban habitats.

FUN FACT

House sparrows are commonly seen nesting in building signs, flying through stores, and feeding on insects stuck to parked cars.



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Mourning Dove

(*Zenaida macroura*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other names: turtledove
- Length: 12 inches; wingspan: 18 inches
- Males and females: gray-brown upper plumage with scattered black spots and whitish-gray lower plumage
- Males: rosy cast; blue-tinted nape during the breeding season

HABITAT

A frequent visitor to bird feeders, the **mourning dove** is native to open habitats with brushy cover, including agricultural and suburban landscapes.

FUN FACT

The **mourning dove** gets its common name from its call—because it is pitched in a minor key, it sounded sad to early scientists.



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Eurasian Collared Dove

(*Streptopelia decaocto*)

DESCRIPTION

- Larger member of the dove family
- Length: 13 inches; wingspan: 22 inches
- Males and females: overall gray-buff to pinkish-gray; black nape collar; black bill; short red legs

HABITAT

The **Eurasian collared dove** is not native to the U.S. It was first introduced to the Bahamas in the 1970s, and it spread to Florida and later inward. It can be found in open habitats, particularly suburban areas.

FUN FACTS

- Scientists are concerned this larger, exotic species will displace the smaller, native mourning dove.
- Male and female **Eurasian collared doves** take turns incubating their eggs.



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Northern Mockingbird

(*Mimus polyglottos*)

DESCRIPTION

- Medium-sized member of the Mimidae family
- Length: 10 inches; wingspan: 14 inches
- Males and females: dark gray upper feathers; whitish gray on belly; two bright white bars across dark gray wings

HABITAT

The **northern mockingbird**, a species native to the southeastern U.S., prefers open areas interspersed with dense brush for nesting. It is common in suburban areas.

FUN FACT

The **northern mockingbird's** Latin name, *Mimus polyglottos*, means "many-tongued mimic" because this species mimics the songs of other birds.



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Carolina Chickadee

(*Poecile carolinensis*)

DESCRIPTION

- Small member of the chickadee family
- Length: 4¾ inches; wingspan: 7½ inches
- Males and females: gray upper feathers with white lower plumage; distinctive black cap and bib with white cheeks

HABITAT

The **Carolina chickadee** is native to wooded habitats in the southeastern U.S.

FUN FACTS

- During extremely cold winters, the **Carolina chickadee** can lower its body temperature until it reaches a state of hypothermia called torpor. Like hibernation, this is a strategy for conserving energy.
- The **Carolina chickadee** gets its name from its distinctive call—"chick-a-dee-dee-dee."



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Red-Headed Woodpecker

(*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other names: flag bird, jellycoat
- Length: 9¼ inches; wingspan: 17 inches
- Males and females: black back and tail; white wing feathers; white belly; bright red head and neck; males have more pronounced head coloring

HABITAT

The **red-headed woodpecker**, native to the eastern U.S., prefers open forests and can be found in orchards and suburban areas.

FUN FACT

The **red-headed woodpecker** can catch flying insects midair, as well as hammer them out of decaying wood.



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American Robin

(*Turdus migratorius*)

DESCRIPTION

- Other names: robin redbreast, robin
- Widely distributed member of the thrush family
- Length: 10 inches; wingspan: 17 inches
- Males and females: brown backs and heads; reddish-orange breast (see photo)
- Females: coloration is more muted

HABITAT

The **American robin** is native to the U.S. While most frequently seen on grassy, suburban lawns, it uses diverse habitats across North America from Alaska to Mexico to Maine.

FUN FACT

"Robin's egg blue" is a color named for the blue color of the **American robin's** eggs.

For more information on common wildlife and plants or incorporating nature into the classroom, please contact Leslie.Burger@msstate.edu or (662) 325-6686.

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Birds

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