



Environmental Stewardship

Common Winter Birds of Indiana



Center for Earth and Environmental Science



IUPUI SCHOOL OF SCIENCE



Common Winter Birds of Central Indiana: Birds of Forests and Forest Edges

by

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The following is a guide to some of the more common forest birds that can be found in winter in central Indiana.

As such, it includes species that are likely (or reasonably likely) to be seen at parks, nature preserves, and other wooded green spaces in Indianapolis and surrounding areas – it is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all species found in the region.

Birds typical of mature forests are covered, as well as birds common to more open woodlands, forest edges, and hedgerows.

The guide covers species present during the winter months (November through March) – both year-round residents and winter-only residents are included. A few birds that are summer residents, but migrate early, are also included.

Water fowl, waders, and shorebirds are not included, though these types of birds can be found along forest edges.

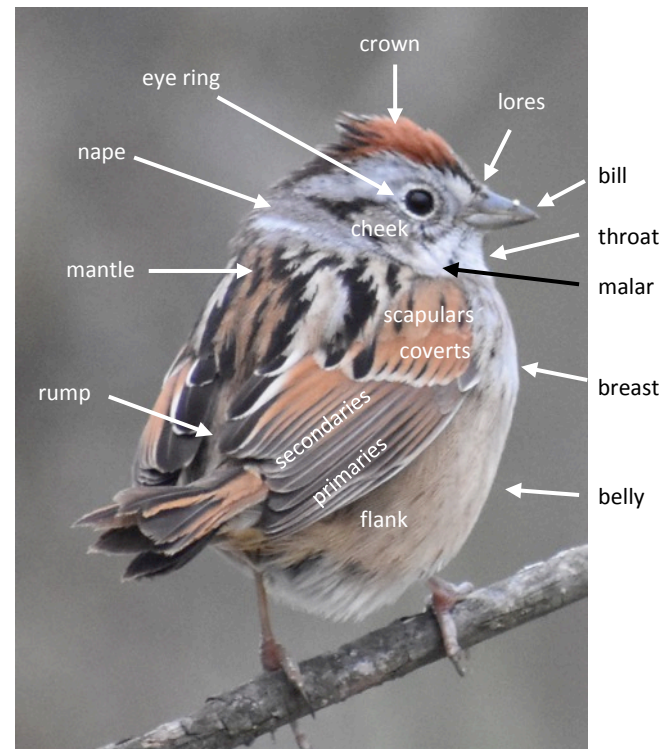
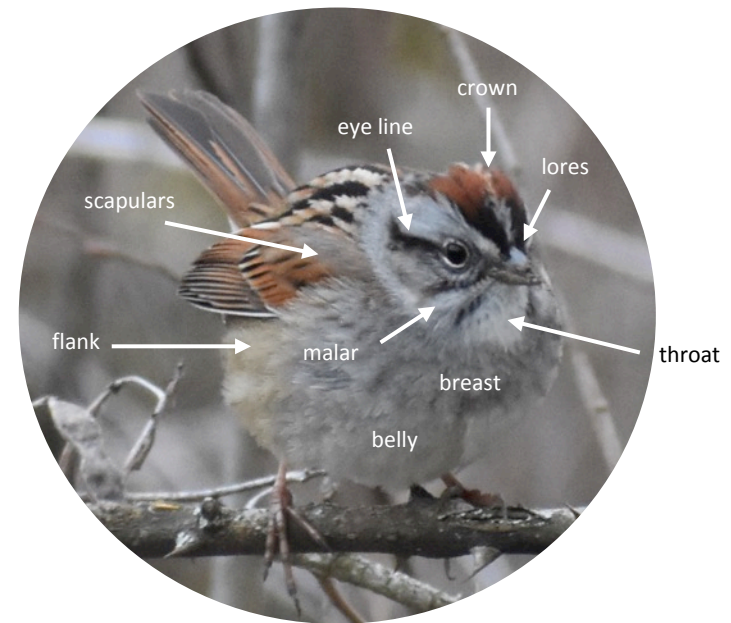
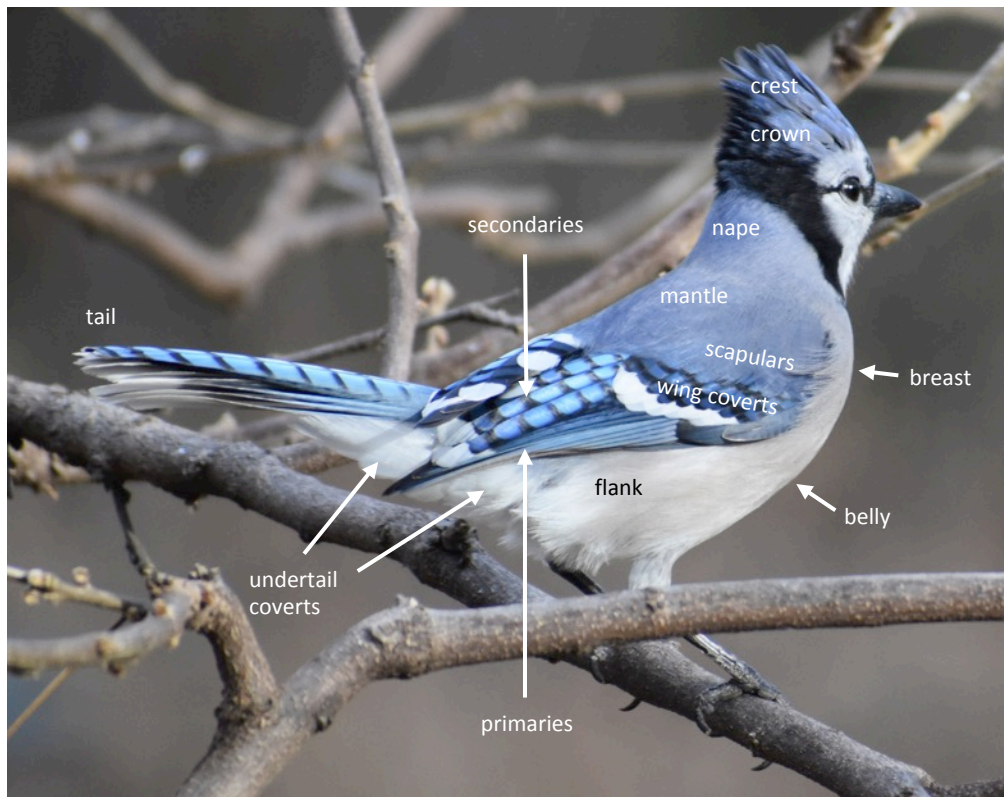
- VR Schmalhofer, February 2021

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Bird Anatomy



primary flight feathers = primaries

secondary flight feathers = secondaries

scapulars = "shoulder" feathers

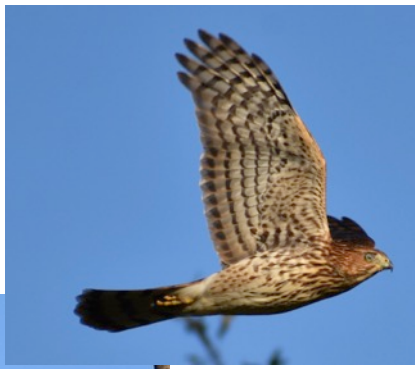
coverts = cover the base of other feathers

lores = feathers on head at base of bill

Hawks & Owls



juvenile



adult

Cooper's hawks
are present year
round in Indiana.

Accipiter cooperii

Cooper's Hawk

Medium-sized hawk (16 in.) – both adults and juveniles – look like larger versions of a Sharp-shinned Hawk (11 in.)

Adults: bluish-gray above, pale below with reddish barring; eyes red.

Juveniles: brown above, pale below with dark streaks; eyes yellow, changing to brownish-orange, then red in adulthood.

Relatively long tail with wide banding pattern; tail rounded when spread in flight.

Head relatively large, extending beyond edge of wings in flight.



Adults: dark cap separated from
dark shoulders/back by pale neck
region.



Accipiter striatus

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Sharp-shinned Hawk (11 in.) – both adults and juveniles – look like smaller versions of a Cooper's Hawk (16 in.)

size reference: Mourning Dove is 12 in.

size reference: American Crow is 17.5 in.

Color and general appearance nearly identical to Cooper's Hawk.



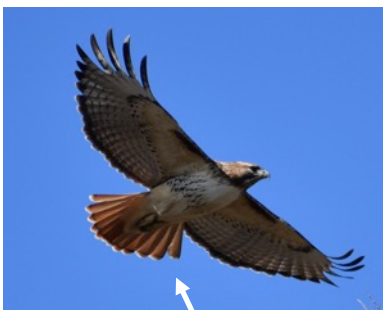
Distinguishing Features (other than body size):

Dark cap merges with dark shoulders/back: there is no separation (as in Cooper's Hawks).

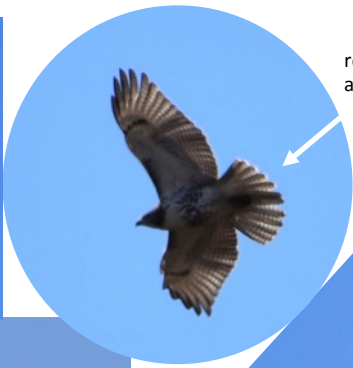
Head is relatively small and does not extend much beyond edge of wings in flight.

Eyes appear large relative to small head size.

Tail shorter (relative to bird's body size) and squared; tail of Cooper's Hawk is relatively longer and rounded.



red tail
apparent



red tail not
apparent



Buteo jamaicensis

Red-tailed Hawk

A large hawk (19 in.); stocky and broad with a short tail; the most common hawk in our area.

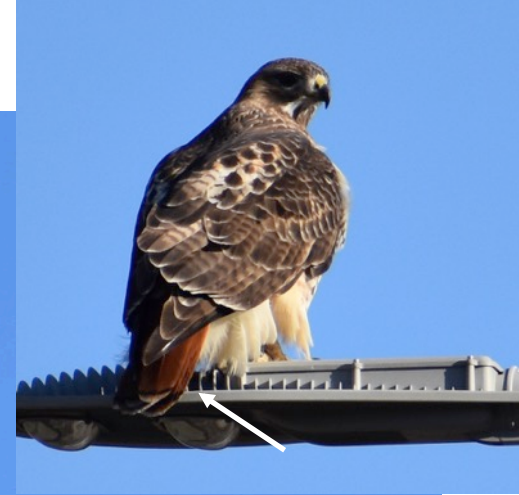
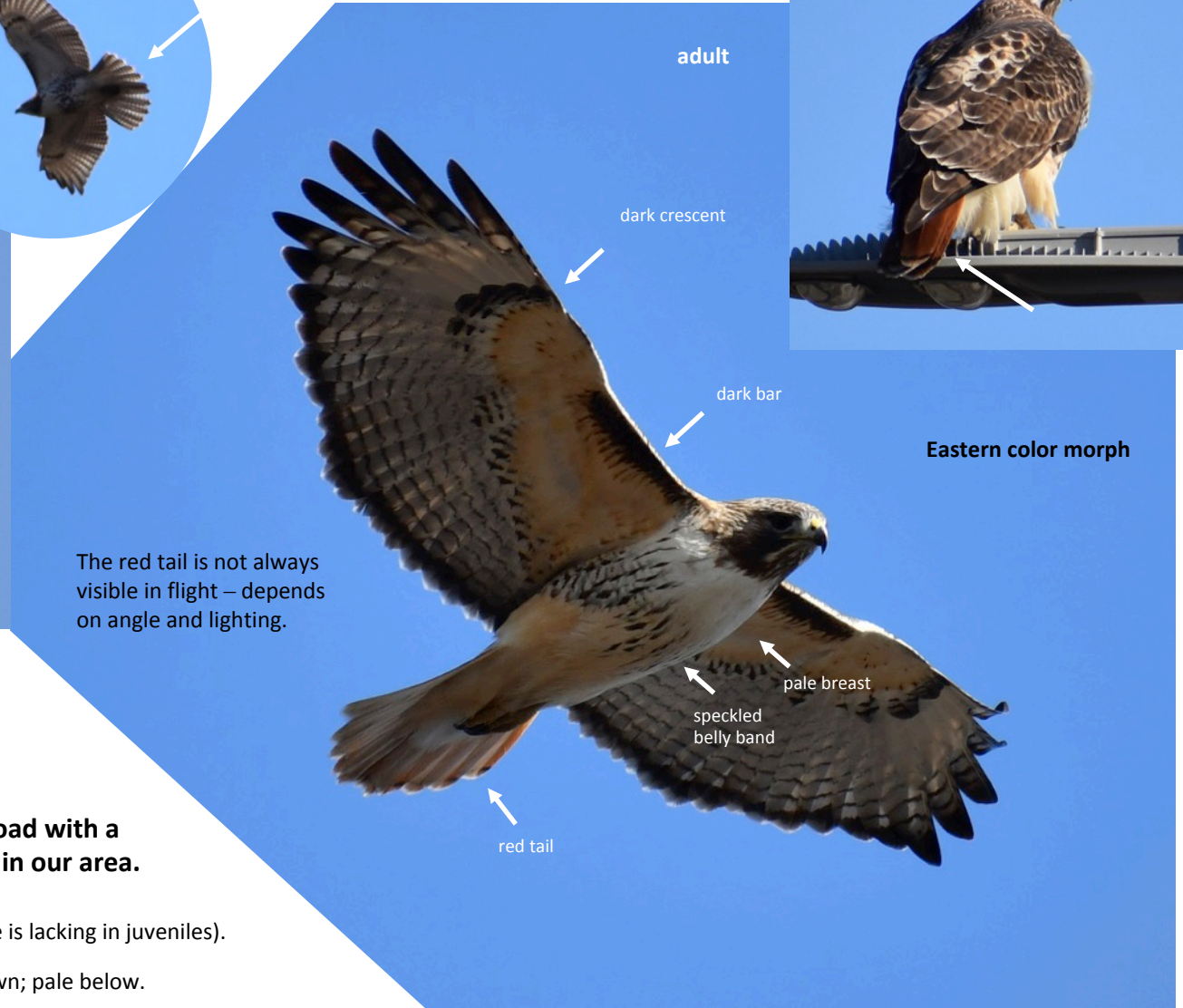
Adults have distinctive red tail (this feature is lacking in juveniles).

Head and back reddish-brown to dark brown; pale below.

Distinctive band of dark streaks/speckles on belly.

In flight, dark crescent visible on underside of wing.

In flight, dark bar on leading edge of wing visible from below.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Tremendous color variation among populations throughout North America.

Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Vocalization distinctive, fierce.

Fun fact: vocalizations of red-tailed hawks are the standard “voice” used for raptors in movies – no matter what species of raptor actually appears in the film.

breast typically unmarked

streaked/speckled belly band

adult

red

juvenile

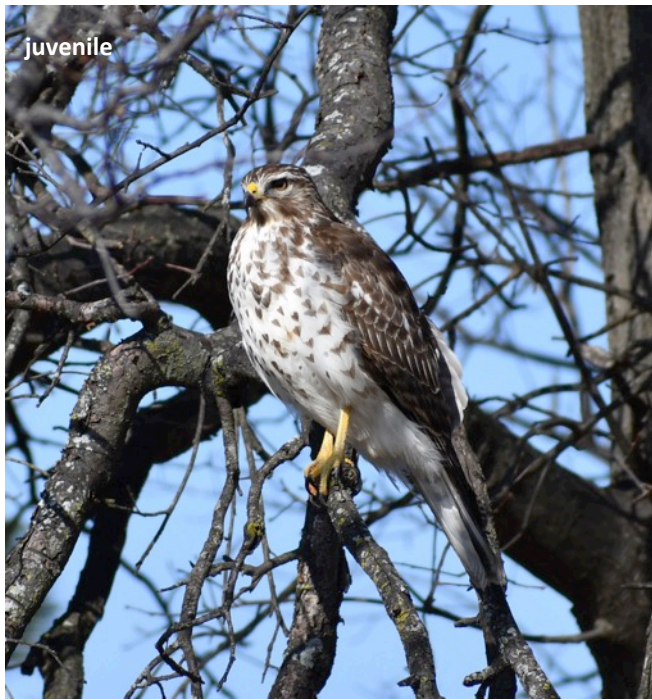
breast mostly white/pale with some lateral streaks and speckles

streaked/speckled of belly band may extend to partially cover the legs

not red

Juveniles have some brown speckles and streaks on the sides of the breast.

The tail of a juvenile is brown with narrow light and dark bands. The distinctive red tail develops with maturity.



juvenile

Year-round resident of Indiana.



adult pair

Eastern color morph

Red-shouldered Hawks have 3 color morphs in North America: California, Florida, and Eastern.

The Eastern color morph is found in Indiana.

Buteo lineatus

Red-shouldered Hawk

A large hawk (17 in.); slimmer than Red-tailed Hawk and has a relatively longer tail.

Dark reddish shoulder region (also seen in juveniles).

Head and back dark reddish/brown; paler below.

Adult: breast and belly with rusty orange barring.

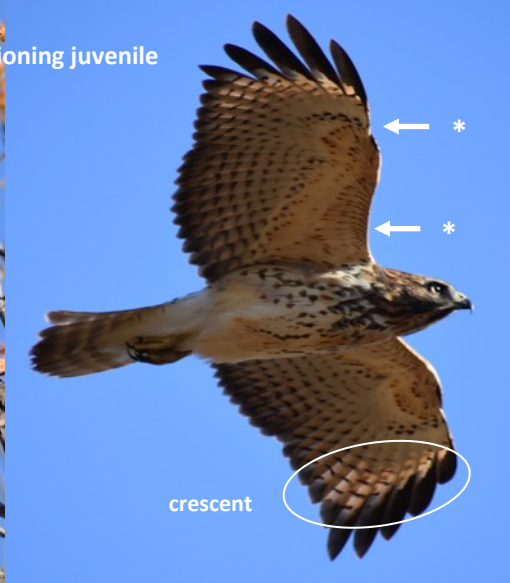
Juvenile: breast and belly with even, dark streaks/speckles.

In flight, broad, translucent crescent visible across the outer primaries.



red shoulder

adult dorsal view



* Red-shouldered Hawks lack the dark wing edge and heavy dark crescent seen in Red-tailed Hawks.



Red-shouldered Hawk

Buteo lineatus

The vocalization of a Red-shouldered Hawk sounds similar to that of a sea gull.

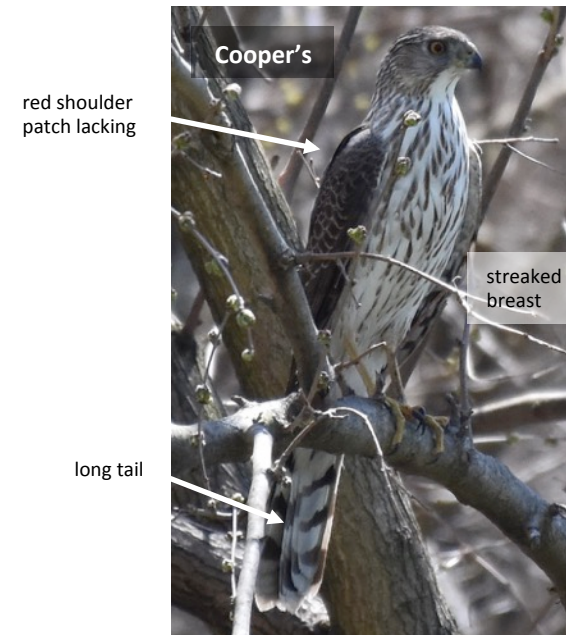
Juvenile Hawks

Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, or Cooper's?

Coopers have a much longer tail than the other two.

From the back or side, the reddish shoulder patch of a Red-shouldered Hawk is apparent. Red-tails and Coopers lack this feature.

From the front, observe the hawk's breast. If it has a large unmarked central area, the bird is a Red-tail. If the breast is covered in brown speckles, it is a Red-shoulder. If it has brown streaks, it is a Coopers.





Year-round resident
of Indiana.



Strix varia

Barred Owl

Stocky, medium-sized owl (21 in.).

Distinctive dark eyes.

Medium/dark brown above, pale below; dark streaks on breast and belly.

Lacks ear tufts.

Call: hoo-hoo-ho-hoooo ("who-cooks-for-you")



Bubo virginianus



Great Horned Owl by Andrew Hudnut



Great Horned Owl

Large owl (22 in.), bulky.

Grayish above, barred below, face tawny-orange.

Eyes yellow; conspicuous ear tufts.

White “bib” on the breast varies in prominence: very apparent on some individuals, less so on others.

Year-round resident of Indiana.

Breeds in January or early February.

Young hatch in March.

Owlets extremely fuzzy.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Megascops asio

Eastern Screech-Owl

Small owl (8.5 in.); stocky, short-tailed.

Color varies from gray to reddish; dark streaks with cross-bars on breast/belly.

Eyes yellow (when open) – typically found sleeping during the day.

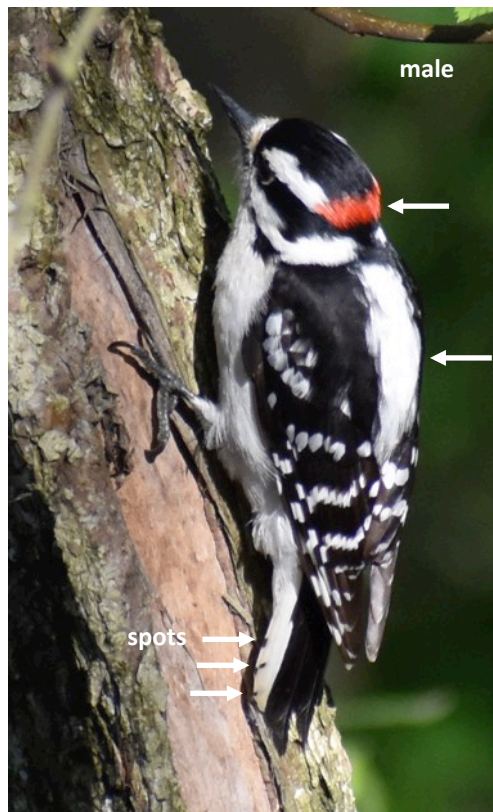
Conspicuous ear tufts.

Often uses woodpecker tree-holes.

Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are known for drilling in trees to feed on insects tunneling beneath the bark (or deeper in the heartwood). Woodpeckers also cache seeds and nuts in crevices in the bark of trees. Seeds stored this way are used later when other resources are more scarce.

Woodpeckers nest in cavities that they excavate in a tree's trunk. They create their own nesting cavities from scratch or enlarge existing tree-holes.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Picoides pubescens

Males and females are identical except for the red patch on the back of a male's head.

Downy Woodpecker

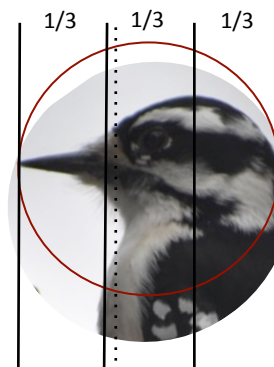
Our smallest woodpecker (6.75 in.); smaller and daintier compared to Hairy Woodpecker.

White below with small dark speckles on the flanks and undertail coverts; black above with white spots/barring on wings; large, central white patch on the back.

Black spots/bars on some tail feathers (clearly seen from below) appear as black spots along the edge of the tail from above (not always obvious; may be obscured by other white tail feathers).

Conspicuous tuft at base of bill.

Bill is $\sim 1/3$ of total head length.

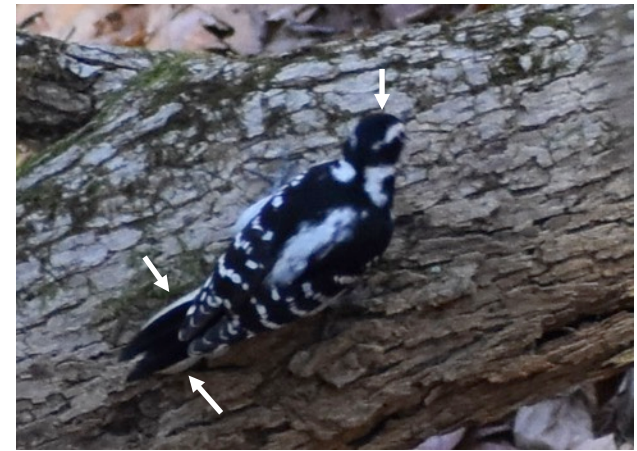




female



male



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Males are distinguished by red markings on the back of the head.

Picoides villosus

The large white patch in the middle of the back distinguishes Downies and Hairies from all other woodpeckers.

Hairy Woodpecker

Medium-sized woodpecker (9.25 in.); larger and more robust than Downy Woodpecker.

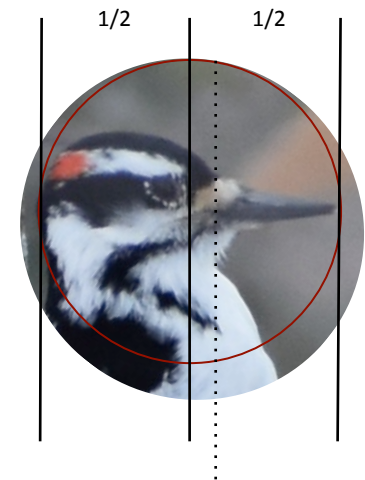
White below and black above with white spots/barring on wings; central white patch on the back.

Lacks black tail spots.

Bill robust; tuft at base of bill inconspicuous.

White (female) or red (male) patch on back of head bisected by extension of black crown – forms a black cross on back of head.

Bill is ~ 1/2 of total head length.



Hairy Woodpecker vs Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpeckers

Bill stout, approx. 1/2 the length of the head.

Tuft at base of bill less conspicuous.

White tail feathers without black spots/bars.

Hairies are similar in size to Red-bellied Woodpeckers and American Robins.



Photograph by Marie Read.

Obtained from: Kaufman, K & Kaufman K. "How to Tell the Difference: Downy vs. Hairy Woodpeckers." Birds & Blooms. 21 October 2020; updated 16 February 2021, www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/bird-species/tell-difference-downy-hairy-woodpeckers/

Size is the best feature to use to distinguish Hairies from Downies; size is not always obvious at a distance.

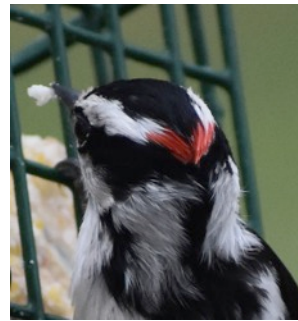
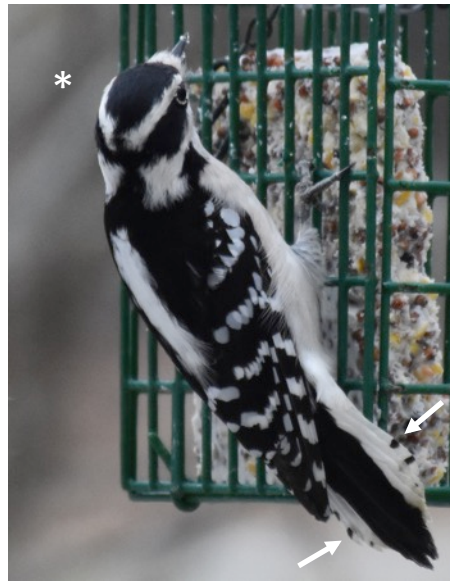
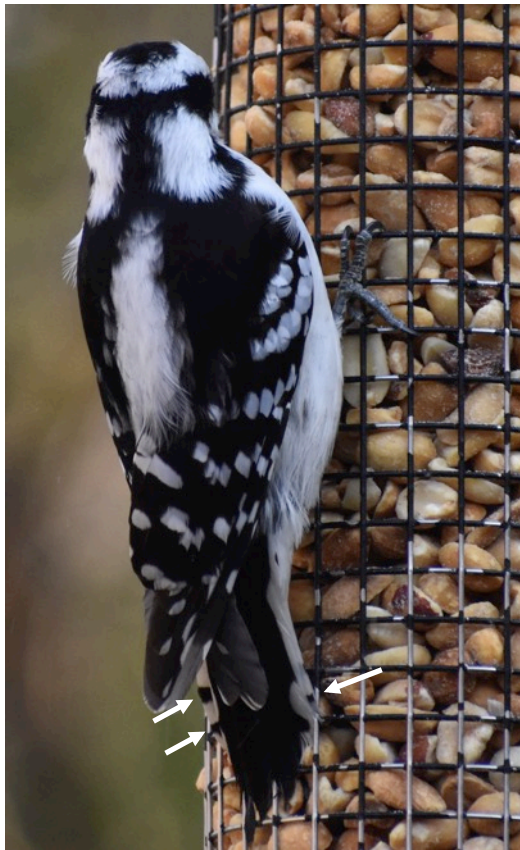
Downy Woodpeckers

Bill dainty, approx. 1/3 the length of the head.

Tuft at base of bill more conspicuous.

Some white tail feathers with black spots/bars.

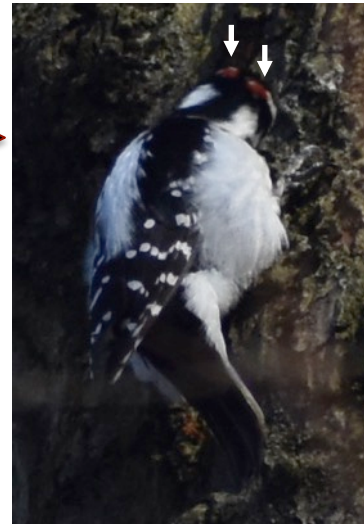
Downies are similar in size to Juncos and House Sparrows.



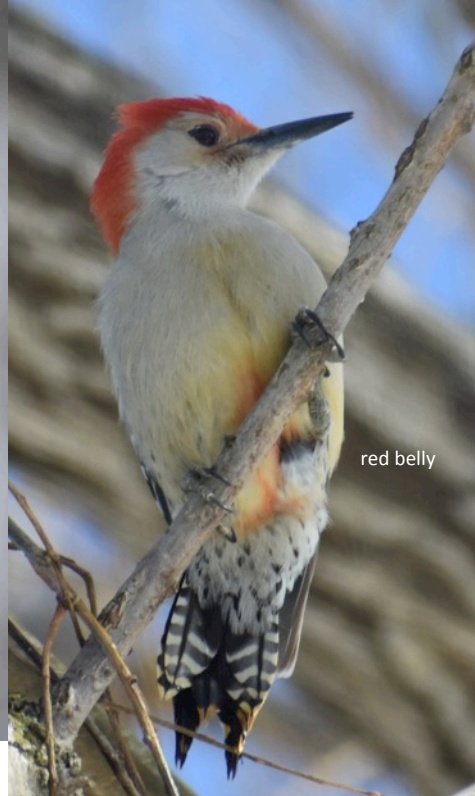
Downies generally do not have a vertical black band bisecting the patch on the back of the head, but sometimes they do*.

Hairies always have a vertical black band bisecting the patch on the back of the head, so they appear to have two back-of-head patches.

Presence (Downies) or absence (Hairies) of black spots on the white tail feathers, and bill size relative to total head size, are better diagnostic features – if the overall size of the bird is not obvious.



Downy Woodpecker vs Hairy Woodpecker



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Melanerpes carolinus

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Medium-sized woodpecker (9.25 in.).

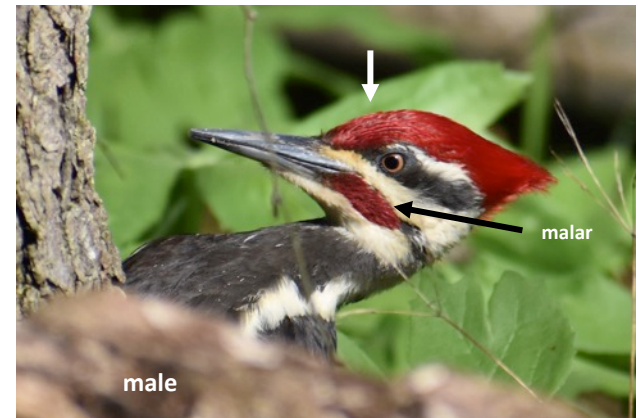
Dark and uniformly barred above across back and wings; pale below; rump white with dark speckles.

Faint wash of red on belly (often not visible); belly and undertail coverts speckled.

Distinctive red nape.

On males, the red color extends across the crown and to the base of the bill; females have a pale gray crown.





Year-round resident of Indiana.

Dryocopus pileatus

Pileated Woodpecker

Largest woodpecker (16.5 in.); distinctive crest unique among woodpeckers.

Unmistakable, crow-sized, long-necked woodpecker with a red crest.

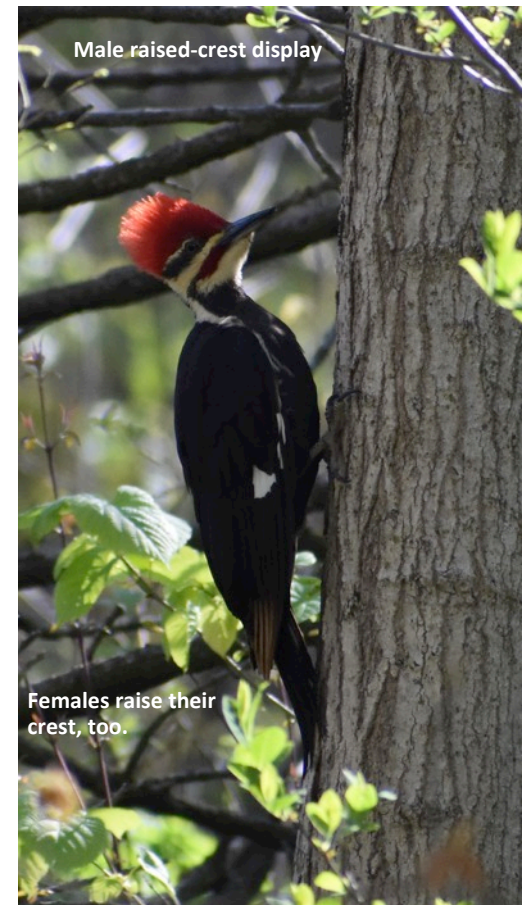
Overall black with white on cheek, chin, and neck; white line above eye.

Wings black above with distinctive white wing patch; white more extensive on underside of wings.

Female has gray crown, red crest, and black malar; male has red crown, crest, and malar.

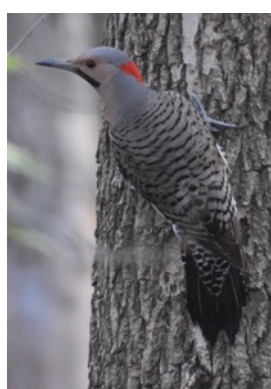
Call sounds like maniacal laughter.

Drum loud, resonant and trailing off at the end.





female



black malar



male



Colaptes auratus

Northern Flicker

Large woodpecker (12.5 in.); gray and brown coloration sets it apart from the black-and-white woodpeckers.

Brown above with black barring; paler below with black spots; head gray; black bib on breast; red triangle (or Y-shape) on back of head; distinctive white rump patch visible in flight.

Bill stout with slight downward curve.

Tail feathers black above, yellow below; wings also yellow below; primary flight feathers and tail feathers with conspicuous yellow shafts.

Males and females identical except for black malars in male.

Year-round resident of Indiana.

female

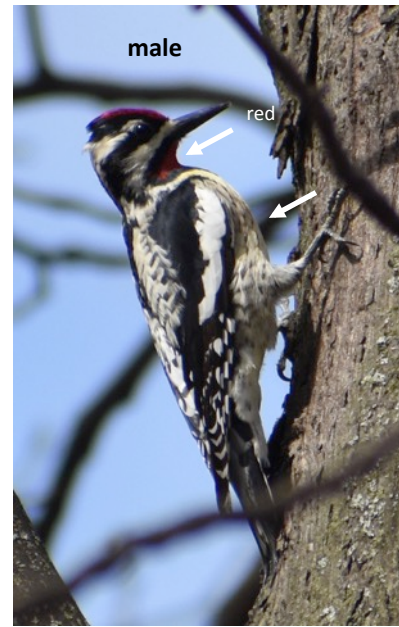


Males and females are distinguished by the color of their throat.

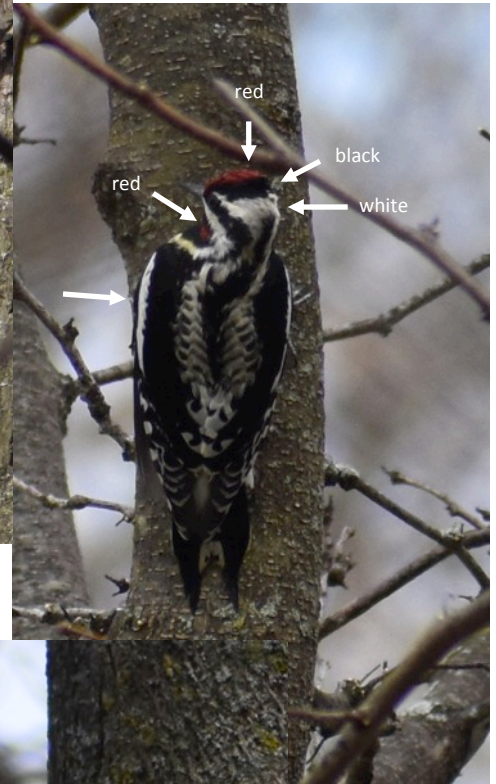
Females have a white throat.



male



Males have a red throat.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Sphyrapicus varius

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

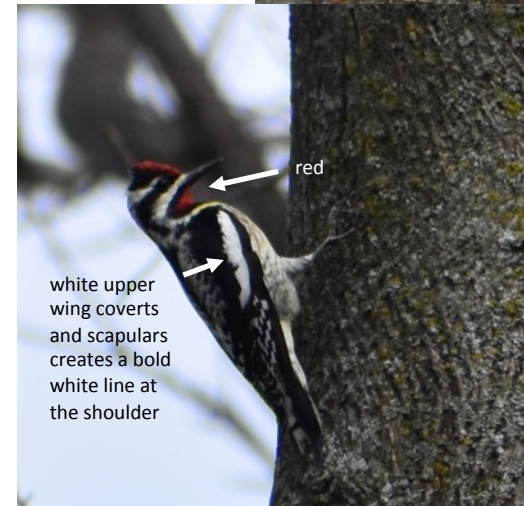
Medium-sized woodpecker (8.5 in.); less common than other woodpeckers.

Dark (black) above with prominent black-and-white speckled/barred region mid-back; pale below; breast and belly pale creamy yellow with grayish speckles and bars.

Bold white upper wing coverts and scapulars.

Red, black, and white crown.

Black line across eye; black malar.

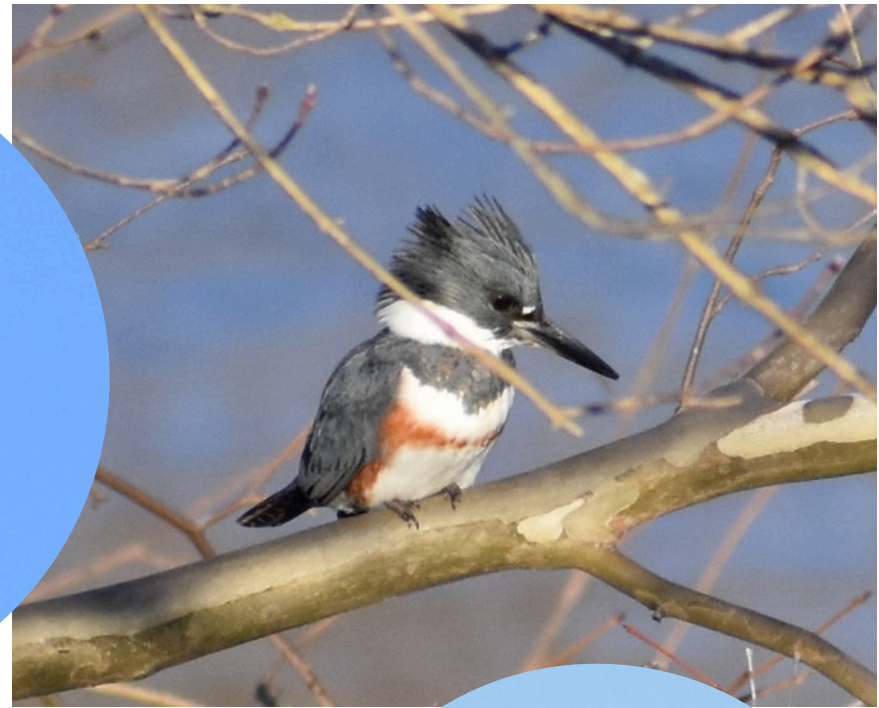


Kingfishers

Kingfishers are fish-eating birds that dive for their prey. They are found along streams and rivers in forests.



male



female



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Megaceryle alcyon

Belted Kingfisher

Medium-large bird (13 in.); shaggy crest and large, streamlined bill make a kingfisher's head appear oversized for its body.

Dark blue-gray above; mostly white below; white throat and nape; breast white with a blue-gray collar; white belly.

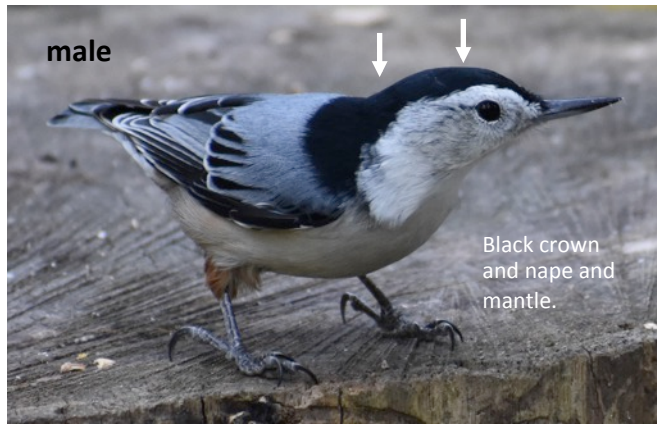
Wings dark blue-gray above and lighter below; white patch on wings and translucent spots on flight feathers are evident in flight.

Females have a rusty orange band across belly (the "belt") and rusty flanks; males lack these features.

Often seen perched in trees alongside streams looking down into the water; may hover over water before diving.

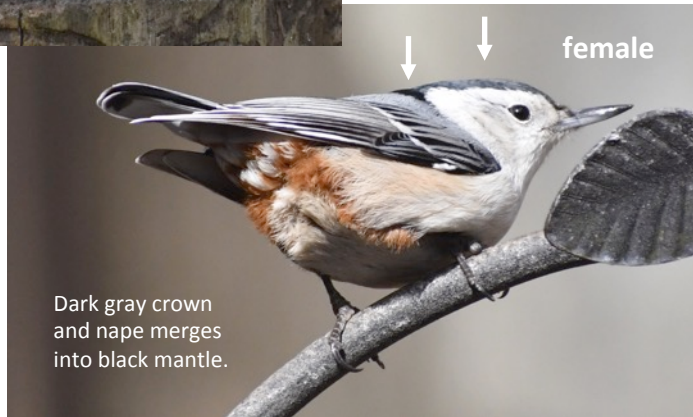
Nuthatches & Creepers

Nuthatches are seed eaters. Like woodpeckers, nuthatches cache seeds in crevices in the bark of trees. Stored food is used later when other resources are scarce.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Nearly impossible to distinguish between males and females. The dark gray crown and nape of the female appears black under most lighting conditions.



Sitta carolinensis

White-breasted Nuthatch

Small bird (5.75 in.); often seen moving head-first down tree trunks.

Bluish-gray above, contrasting black markings on wings; pale below.

Dark crown and nape; white cheeks, throat, breast, belly; flanks white with buffy/rusty orange.

Bill long and pointed, curved slightly upward.

Call a nasal, repetitive *whi whi whi*.

Sometimes looks like the bird is wearing buffy/rusty orange pantaloons.



Classic Nuthatch posture.





Seen in Indiana only in winters when the cone crop further north is insufficient to support the birds.

Sitta canadensis

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Small bird (4.5 in.); often seen moving head-first down tree trunks.

Bluish-gray above, pale below; bill long and pointed.

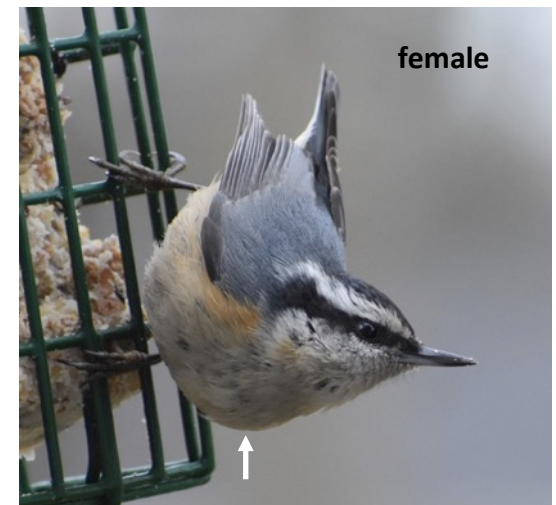
Dark crown and nape; white cheeks and throat; distinctive black line across eye and white line above eye.

Breast, belly, and flanks a buffy/rusty orange.



Males with black crown; crown of females is extremely dark gray (can be difficult to distinguish between the two).

Orange coloration paler in females than in males.





Overwinters in Indiana.

Certhia americana

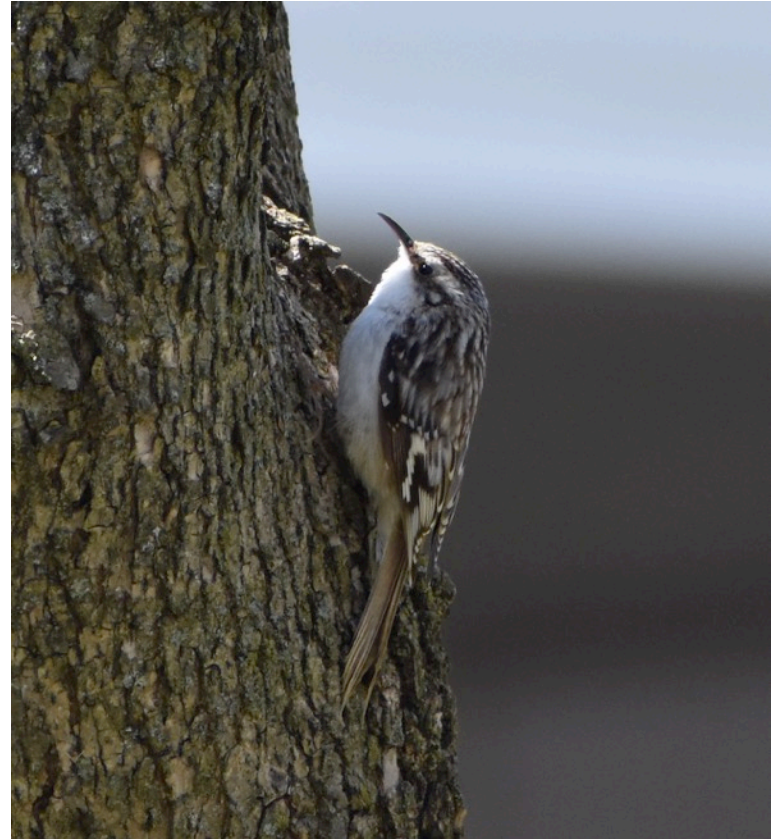
Brown Creeper

Small, delicate bird (5.25 in.); starts low on a tree trunk and moves head-first up the trunk, then flies to a new tree and begins again low on the trunk.

Mottled brown and gray above, pale below; bill long, slender, pointed, and curved downward.

Tail long and distinctly notched (has a defined V-shape).

Wings dark mottled brown above with conspicuous buffy band (visible in flight); wings paler below.



Thrushes

Overwinters in southern Indiana.



Tail flicking sequence.

Catharus guttatus

Hermit Thrush

Medium-small bird (6.75 in.); flute-like, melodic song.

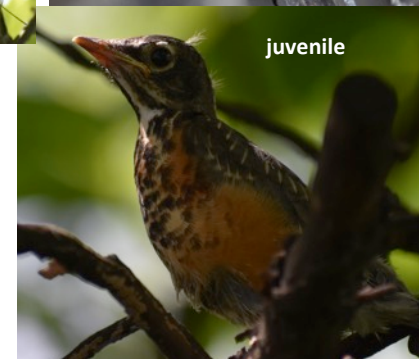
Brown to gray-brown above, paler below; distinct white eye ring.

Throat white with thin black lateral stripes; breast white with dark spots; belly white; flanks white to buffy.

Tail reddish; often flicks tail.

Hermit Thrushes migrate early and are most likely to be seen in the Indianapolis area in late March/April as the birds begin to move north to their breeding range.





Year-round resident of Indiana.

Turdus migratorius

American Robin

Medium-sized bird (10 in.); extremely common.

Uniform dark gray above; rusty orange below; white markings around eye.

Males with darker head; females with paler orange underside.

Juveniles with spotted breast and belly.

Nest a bowl-shaped cup of mud and grass – one of the most commonly seen nests.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Sialia sialis

Eastern Bluebird

Medium-sized bird (7 in.); often travels in small groups.

Males brilliant blue above; throat, breast, and flanks rusty orange; belly white.

Females similar to males except color is duller/paler: blue-gray above, buffy orange and white below.

Tree-hole nester (also uses bluebird boxes).

Use forest interiors, but more commonly seen along forest borders or along tree lines with open fields adjacent.

Cardinals & Jays



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Cardinalis cardinalis

Northern Cardinal

Medium-sized bird (8.75 in.) with distinctive crest.

Males brilliant red with black throat and eye mask; red brighter below than above; red bill.

Females olive with red highlights on wings and tail; black face mask; red bill.

Vocal bird with multiple songs and calls.

Song: [woit woit woit chew chew chew chew](#)

Song: [pichew pichew tiw tiw tiw tiw tiw](#)

State bird of Indiana . . . and numerous other states.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Cyanocitta cristata

Blue Jay

Medium-sized bird (11 in.) with distinctive crest.

Blue above, paler below; black barring on wings and tail; white marks on wings and tail tip.

Gray breast, flanks, and belly with central white region.

Distinctive blue crown with crest; pale gray cheeks; black collar wraps to crest; black line through eye; black markings at base of bill (black lores).

Blue Jays cache seeds and nuts.

Mockingbirds & Starlings



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Mimus polyglottos

Northern Mockingbird

Medium-sized bird (10 in.); vocal mimic.

Darker gray above, paler below; wings and tail somewhat darker than head and back.

Large white wing patch evident in flight; white wing bars at rest; tail with white border.

Song a series of phrases that include snippets of other birds' songs.

More commonly found on woodland borders.





Year-round resident of Indiana.

Sturnus vulgaris

European Starling

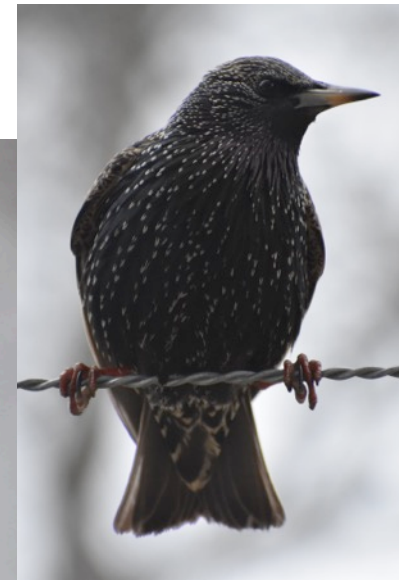
Medium-sized bird (8.5 in.); extremely short-tailed.

Uniformly dark with intricate pattern of pale spots; degree of spotting varies.

Gold edging on wing feathers; feathers have an oily, iridescent purple or green sheen.

Bill long and pointed; bill color transitions from dark at tip to pale at base.

Typically travels in large flocks; a large group flying in synchrony is called a *murmuration*.



INVASIVE SPECIES

Doves



Year-round resident of Indiana.



Zenaida macroura

Mourning Dove

Medium-sized bird (12 in.); stout, somewhat clumsy flier.

Brown and gray above and below, slightly paler below; black spots on wings.

Blue ring around eye.

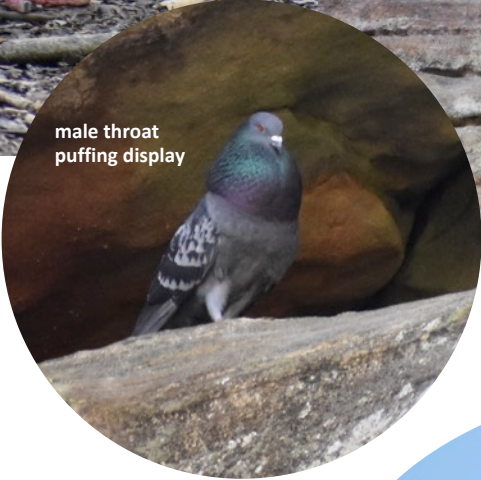
Long, pointed tail with white tips (evident when flying).

In breeding season, males pinker below, females grayer.

Call distinctive and mournful: oohAAH coooo coo coo.



Pink and gold iridescence visible on neck under certain light conditions



Males and females identical. When courting, males can be distinguished by their throat puffing display.

Year-round resident of Indiana.

Columbia livia

Rock Dove (Pigeon)

Medium-sized bird (12.5 in.); typically travels in large flocks.

Color of plumage extremely variable due to breeding for color variants.

Natural type: gray above and below; head and neck darker with iridescent green and purple tones; wing and tail feathers with black tips; eye red.

More common in open areas than in woodlands; frequently seen in cities.

Nest and roost in rock/cliff faces in natural areas and on buildings and under overpasses and bridges in urban environments.





Year-round resident of Indiana.

Columbia livia

Rock Dove (Pigeon)

Medium-sized bird (12.5 in.); typically travels in large flocks.

Color of plumage extremely variable due to breeding for color variants.

Natural type: gray above and below; head and neck darker with iridescent green and purple tones; wing and tail feathers with black tips; eye red.

More common in open areas than in woodlands; frequently seen in cities.



Males and females identical.

Crows

Year-round resident of Indiana.



Corvus brachyrhynchos

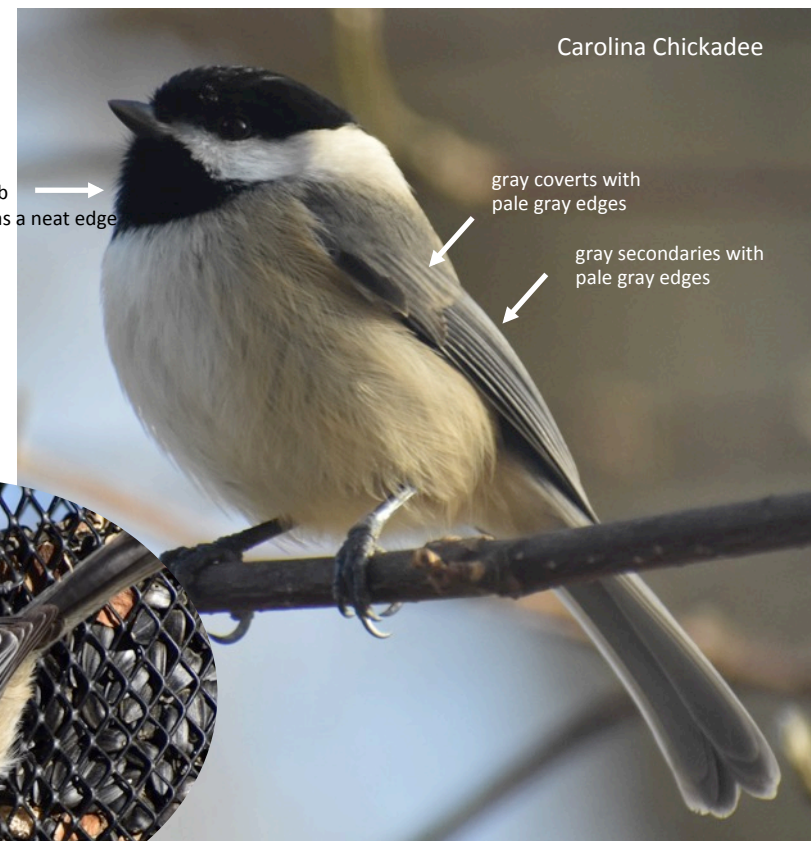
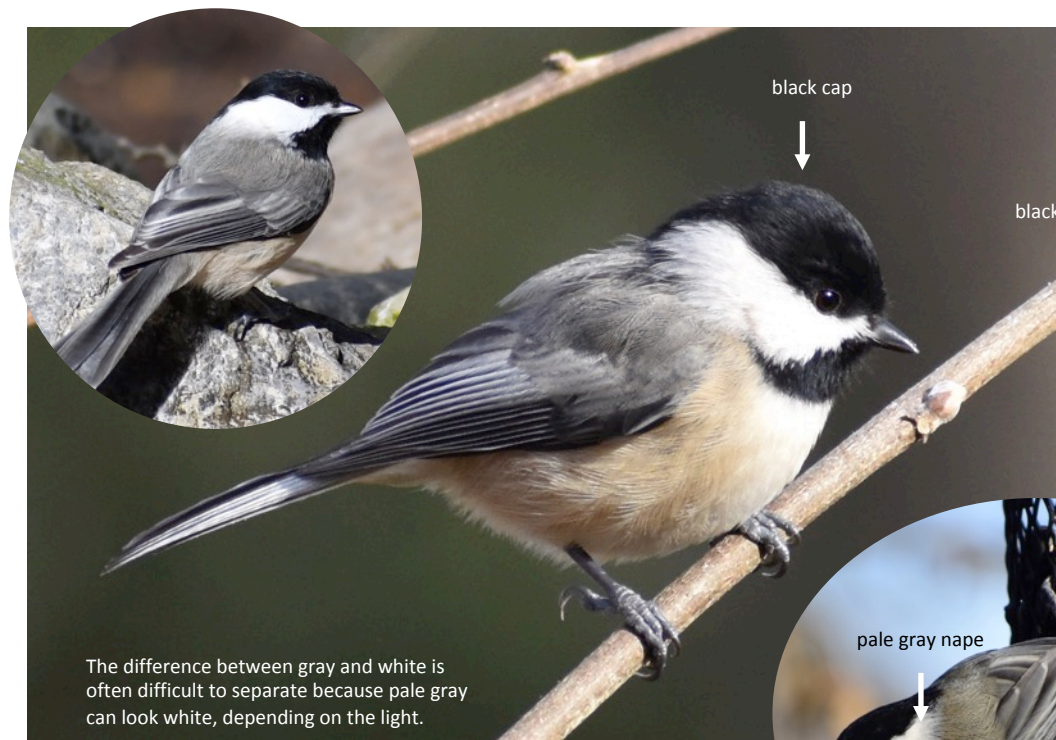
American Crow

Large bird (17.5 in.).

Uniformly black.

Vocalization a distinctive, repetitive caw caw caw.

Chickadees, Titmice & Juncos



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Commonly heard call: *chick-a-dee dee dee*

Poecile carolinensis

Carolina Chickadee

Small bird (4.75 in.); extremely vocal.

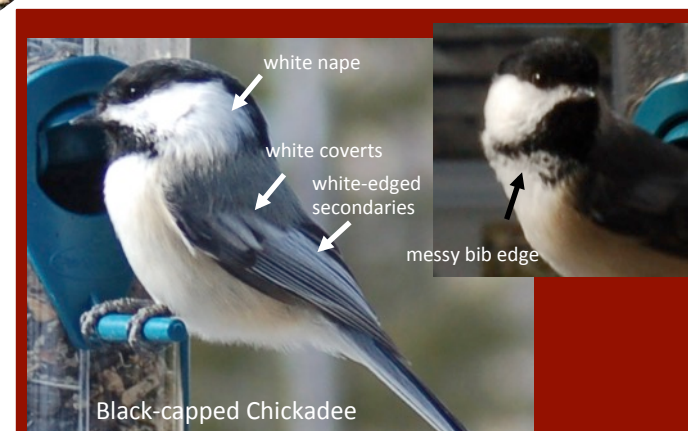
Gray above; pale buffy to buffy-gray to white below.

Distinctive feature: on head, black of crown extends down to eyes and center of nape, forming a “cap” that is strikingly offset by white cheeks.

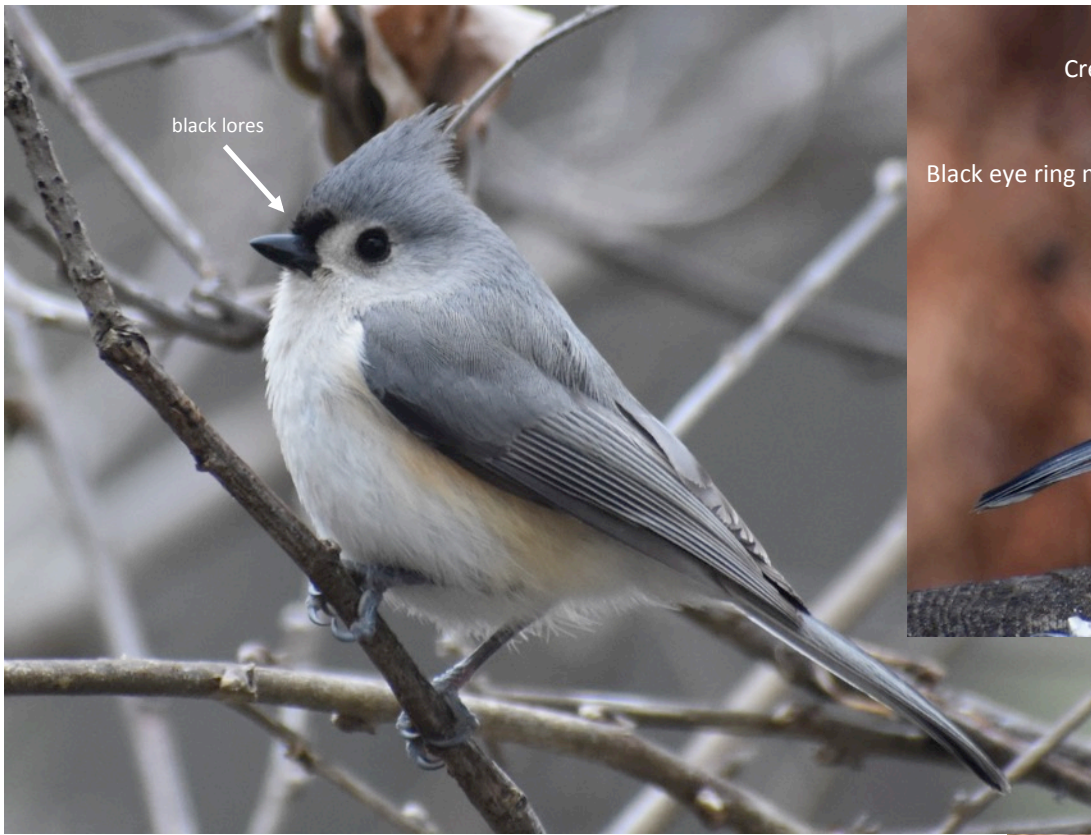
Distinctive feature: black throat “bib” offset by white cheeks and breast.

White cheeks blend with pale gray nape.

Carolinas and Black-caps hybridize where their ranges overlap in central Indiana. Hybrids have intermediate characteristics.



Black-capped Chickadees occur in northern Indiana. Black-caps are nearly identical to Carolinas. Black-caps are distinguished by white coverts (wing feathers near the shoulder), white edges on the secondary wing feathers, a messy demarcation between bib and breast, and a white nape (no gray). Under good lighting conditions, the white edging is bold – but can look pale gray in shadow.



Crest can be held flat against the head.

Black eye ring makes eye look extremely large.

Year-round resident of Indiana.

Baeolophus bicolor

Tufted Titmouse

Distinctive call: *peter peter peter*

Small bird (6.5 in.); distinctive crest; extremely vocal.

Uniform light gray above; paler below with buffy to rusty orange flanks.

Short, pointed crest; black lores; black eye ring; black bill.

Nests in tree-holes; caches seeds in crevices among/under bark similar to woodpeckers and nuthatches.





male



female



Slate-colored type

Overwinters in Indiana.

Junco hyemalis

Dark-eyed Junco

Small bird (6.25 in.); a type of sparrow.

Males are dark slate gray above; breast gray; belly white; tail with lateral white feathers; bill pale.

Females similar to males, but a lighter shade of gray with distinct brownish tone.



Rocky Mountain type

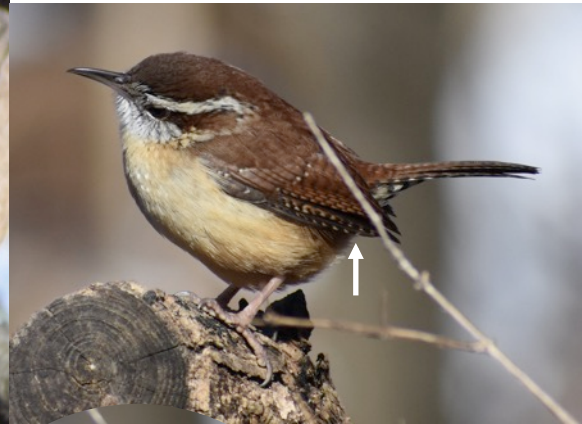
Juncos have six regional color variants. The variant normally seen in Indiana is called **Slate-colored**. Occasionally, individuals of the **Rocky Mountain** type are observed here (brown tone overall, rather than gray; head and neck are black – gives the bird the appearance of being hooded).

Sparrows, Wrens & Finches

Little Brown Birds



"Nike swoosh" posture common to wrens.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Thryothorus ludovicianus

Carolina Wren

Small bird (5.5 in.); bold and vocal.

Reddish-brown above, paler, orange-buffy below; bill long and pointed, curves downward.

Dark barring on tail and wings; white throat; breast and belly relatively uniform, unmarked buffy orange.

Distinctive feature: bold white stripe above eye.

Distinctive wren posture: frequently holds tail upright.

Winter Wrens also occur in Indiana during the winter. They are similar in appearance to Carolina Wrens, except the Winter Wren's "eyebrow" is pale brown, the breast and belly are brownish, rather than pale orange-buffy, and Winter Wren's have dark barring on the belly and flanks.

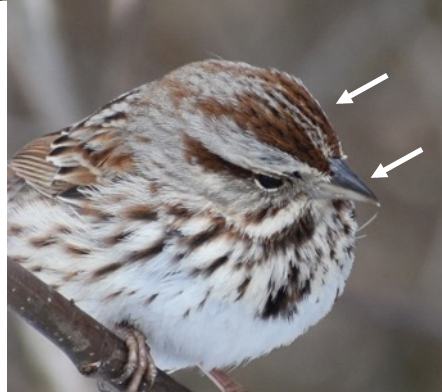
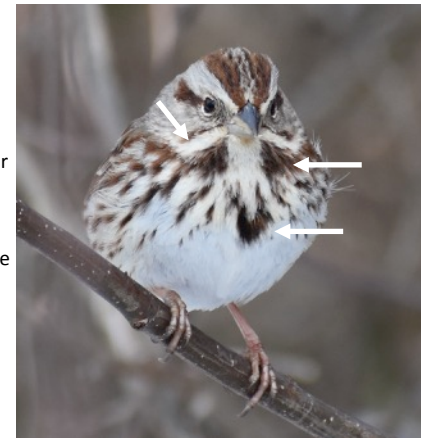


Winter Wren belly view.

Year-round resident of Indiana.



white malar
dark lateral
throat stripe
breast spot



Melospiza melodia

Song Sparrow

Small bird (6.25 in.); common and vocal.

Reddish-brown and gray patterned above, pale below; breast and flanks with coarse brown streaks/spots.

Distinctive feature: central, dark, messy breast-spot; size of breast spot and thickness of breast/flank spots and streaks and degree of streaking variable.

Stout gray bill is darker above than below, sometimes giving it a two-toned appearance.

Crown with central gray stripe bordered by brown lateral stripes – stripes contain narrow black lines.

Cheek gray; broad gray stripe above eye; brown line behind eye; pale yellow-white malars; throat white with broad dark-brown lateral throat stripes.





Zonotrichia albicollis

White-throated Sparrow

Vocalization: *oh sweet Canada Canada Canada.*

Small bird (6.75 in.); stocky sparrow with distinctive vocalization.

Dark (reddish, brown, and black) above, paler (gray) below; black and brown striped pattern on back across shoulders (mantle); gray breast/belly unstreaked, but with faint dark mottling; white wing bars.

Distinctive feature: white throat patch contrasts sharply with gray breast.

Distinctive feature: white stripe above eye is yellow at base of bill (yellow lores) – this stripe is tan in some birds.

Cheek gray; black line through eye; crown with central gray stripe and lateral black stripes.





Overwinters in Indiana.

Spizella arborea

American Tree Sparrow

Small bird (6.25 in.); bicolored bill.

More frequently found along forest edges and in fields along forest borders.

Darker above, paler below; reddish-brown back with dark and light stripes; white wing bar; breast pale gray/white; white belly; buffy flanks.

Crown reddish-brown with broad gray lateral stripes; reddish-brown line behind eye; gray cheek and nape.

Distinctive features: central dark spot on breast; yellow legs, black feet; bicolored bill black above, yellow below.



Year-round resident of Indiana.



Melospiza georgiana

Swamp Sparrow

Small bird (5.75 in.); found in swamps and marshes.

Dark brown/black, reddish-brown, and light-buffy patterned across upper back; reddish-brown wings lack white wing bars.

Flanks buffy; breast and belly pale gray; breast and flanks without streaks or streaks faint and blurry.

Crown with narrow central gray stripe bordered by broad reddish-brown lateral stripes that become black near bill.

Head gray to olive toned; dark triangular mark behind eye; white throat; malars white with narrow black or gray borders.





Year-round resident of Indiana.

Fox Sparrows have four regional color variants.
The **Red (Taiga)** variant is found in Indiana.

Passerella iliaca

Fox Sparrow

Medium-small bird (7 in.); relatively large, stout sparrow.

Reddish-brown and gray above, pale below; breast and flanks with thick, coarse reddish-brown streaks; narrow white eye ring; stout yellow and gray bill.

Crown with narrow central gray stripe bordered by broad reddish-brown lateral stripes; gray stripe above eye.

Nape gray; throat white with heavy reddish-brown lateral stripes; malars white; cheek reddish-brown and gray.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Zonotrichia leucophrys

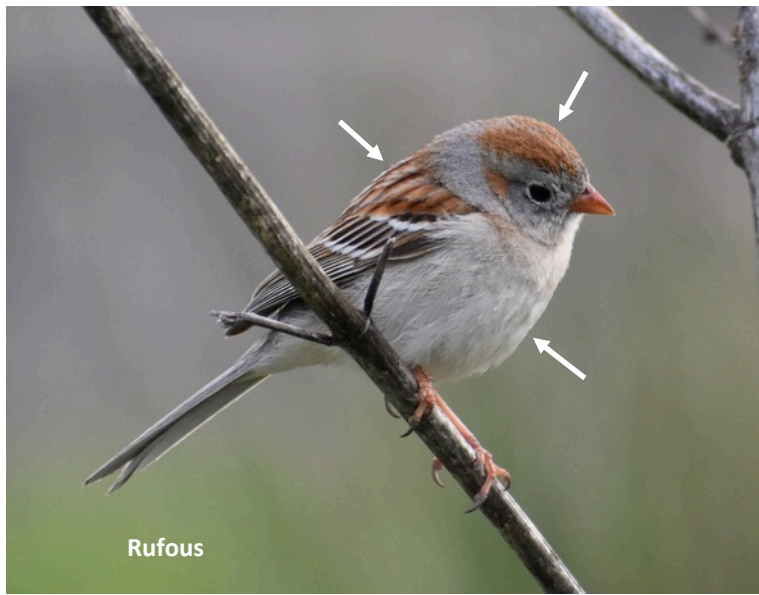
White-crowned Sparrow

Medium-small bird (7 in.); relatively large sparrow.

Brown and gray above, paler below; gray breast and belly are unmarked; dark brown and white pattern on back at shoulders (mantle); white wing bars; orange-pink bill.

Distinctive feature: crown with central white stripe bordered by black lateral stripes; broad white stripe above eye.

Cheek gray; strong black line through eye; indistinct paler throat patch does not contrast strongly with breast.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Overwinters in the southern half of the state.

Spizella pusilla

Field Sparrow

Small bird (5.75 in.); more common in open fields, but found along forest edges.

Overall buffy brown, reddish brown, and gray; darker above, paler below; breast and belly unmarked; white wing bars; stout orange-pink bill.

Two color variants: **rufous** (reddish tone predominant) and **gray** (gray color predominant): reddish-brown and black pattern (**rufous**) or gray, black, and brown pattern (**gray**) across back and shoulders (mantle); breast and belly white-to buffy (**rufous**) or pale gray (**gray**).

Crown with gray central stripe bordered by wide reddish-brown lateral stripes; nape gray; face gray with reddish-brown patch behind eye; white eye ring.





Summer resident of Indiana.

Spizella passerina

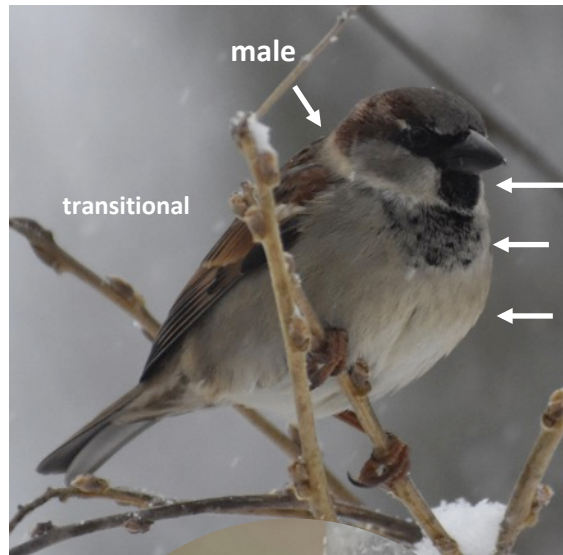
Chipping Sparrow

Small bird (5.5 in.); early spring migrant.

Darker above, paler below; brown and black pattern across back and shoulders (mantle); gray breast and belly unmarked; gray lower back; white wing bars; black bill.

Crown reddish-brown with black and white regions at base of bill; white stripe above eye; black eye line; broken white eye ring.

White throat patch and malars give the bird a “beard and mustache” appearance.



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Passer domesticus

House Sparrow

Small bird (6.25 in.); typically found in groups.

Brown above, paler gray-brown below; dark and light stripes down back.

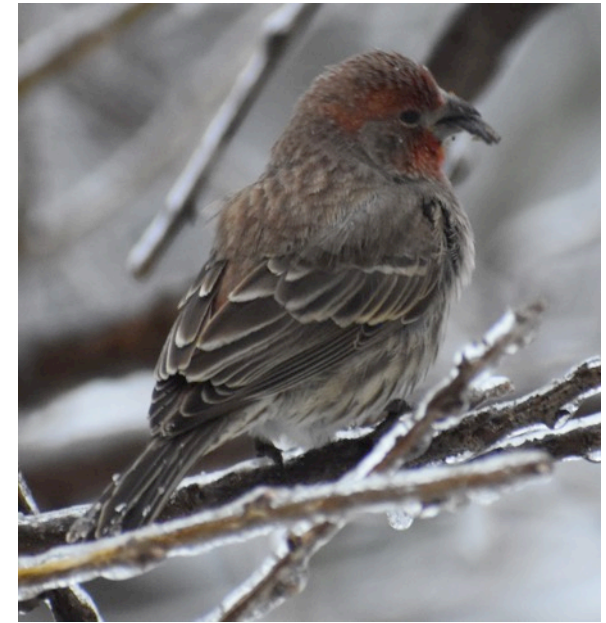
Male: gray crown; throat black; warm reddish-brown above; breast gray with black bib (in breeding season); white collar; silvery gray cheek; black lores; two white spots above eye; broad white wing bar.

Female: overall a dingy gray-brown; pale gold stripe above eye; pale brown bill.

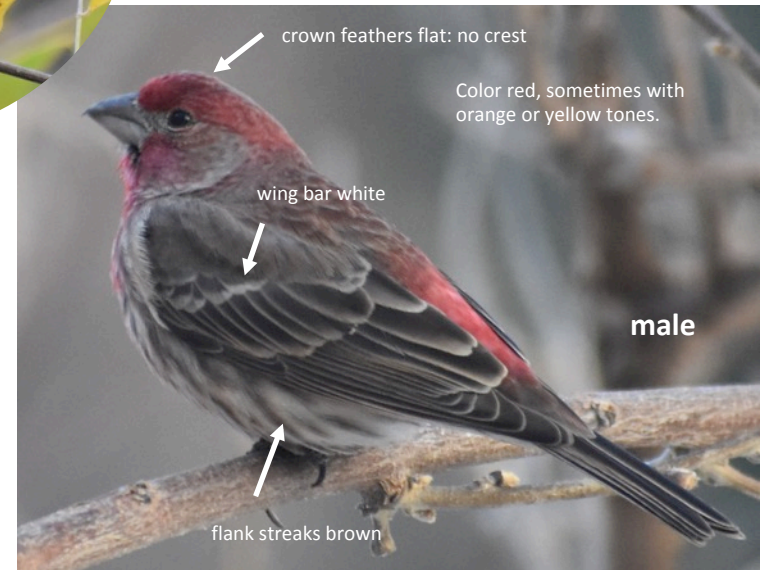


female

Year-round resident of Indiana.



Red coloration of males is highly variable. Some males (usually younger ones) have little red, while in others the red coloration is so extensive that they can be confused with Purple Finches. Look at the flank, head, and wing bar to identify male finches.



crown feathers flat: no crest

Color red, sometimes with orange or yellow tones.

wing bar white

male

flank streaks brown

Haemorhous mexicanus

House Finch

Small bird (5.7 in.); typically travels in small to large groups.

Brownish above, pale below; underside with brownish streaks.

Male with red head, throat, breast, and rump patch; red color varies from pinkish-red to orange-red to cherry red; extent of red coloration varies and in some males extends to the upper back and shoulder region (mantle); brown streaks on breast, belly and flanks.

Female a more drab gray-brown; extensive streaking on breast, belly, and flanks.



House Finch or Purple Finch?

Head: Purple Finches (both males and females) tend to carry their crown feathers upraised in a small crest.

Males: Purple Finch males have more extensive red coloration that includes the entire head and wings. The wing bar of a Purple Finch is pinkish (not white), and the flank streaks are indistinct and pinkish (not brown). The color of the body is purplish in hue: Purple Finch males are a “darker” purplish, raspberry red, while House Finch males are a “brighter” rosy red.

Females: Purple Finch females are darker brown than House Finches and have a distinctive white line above the eye (House Finch females lack this white line).

House Finch or Purple Finch?

Unlike House Finches, Purple Finches are not year-round residents - they only overwinter in Indiana.

Overwinters in Indiana.

Haemorhous purpureus

Purple Finch

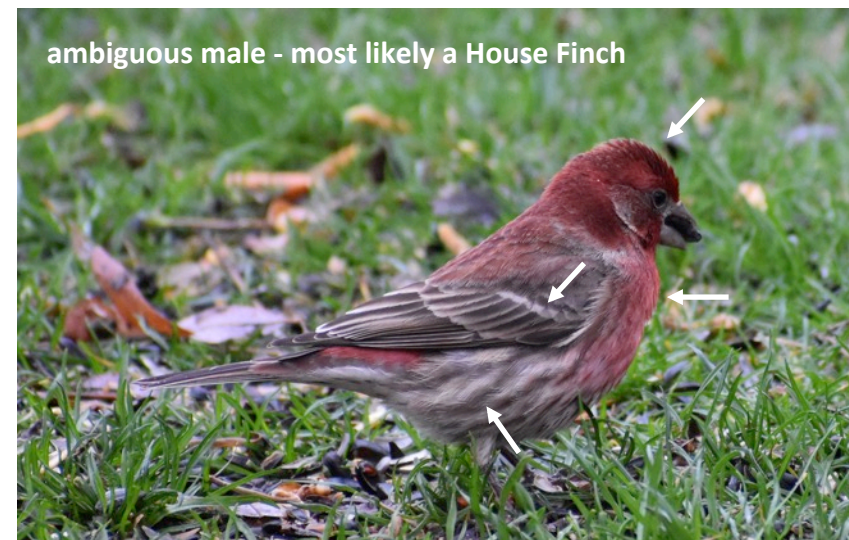
Small bird (5.7 in.); typically travels in small to large groups.

Brownish above, pale below; underside with streaks (brown in females, pinkish in males).

Male with red head, throat, breast, and rump patch; red color has purplish tone; red coloration extends to the upper back and shoulder region (mantle); purplish-pink streaks on breast, belly and flanks.

Female a brown; extensive streaking on breast, belly, and flanks; distinctive white line above eye.

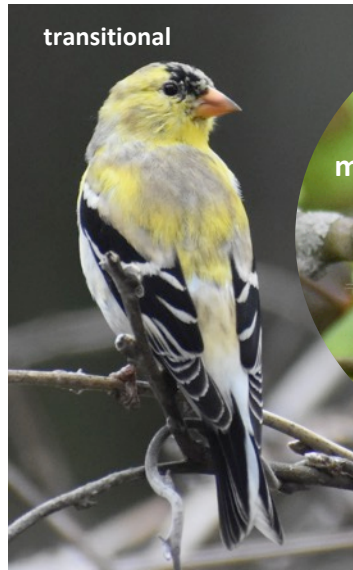
Red coloration on some male House Finches is so extensive that they can be confused with Purple Finches: look at the streaks on the flank and the covert wing bar: flank streaks are pinkish-red in Purple Finches and brown in House Finches; wing bar is white in House Finches and pinkish in Purple Finches.



winter condition



transitional



breeding

male



Year-round resident of Indiana.

Spinus tristis

American Goldfinch

Small bird (5 in.); color changes drastically through the spring.

Winter condition: gray-brown above, paler below; wings black with white markings; hints of yellow on head and neck; bill gray-yellowish.

Males: bright yellow with black crown; wings black with white markings; bill orange.

Females: gray-brown to yellow; darker above, more yellow below; black wings with white markings; bill gray-orange.

transitional



breeding



female



Overwinters in Indiana.

Spinus pinus

Pine Siskin

Small bird (5 in.); prefers areas with conifers.

Resembles a goldfinch with brown streaks and more slender, pointed bill.

Darker brown above, paler below; darker streaks on back and underside; dark bill.

Wings black with white markings; yellow bar on wing; strongly notched tail.

Information Sources and Photo Credits

Sibley, DA. 2014. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. 2nd Edition. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

Sibley's guide is the source of information concerning bird size and field marks.

Photo Credits:

Great Horned Owl:

Hudnut, A. 2023. Great Horned Owl.

Downy Woodpecker & hairy Woodpecker Comparison:

Read, M. "Hairy woodpecker and downy woodpecker at the same feeder." *Found*, Birds & Blooms, 26 February 2021. www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/bird-species/tell-difference-downy-hairy-woodpeckers/

Photograph was included in the article:

Kaufman, K & Kaufman K. "How to Tell the Difference: Downy vs. Hairy Woodpeckers." *Birds & Blooms*, 21 October 2020; updated 16 February 2021, www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/bird-species/tell-difference-downy-hairy-woodpeckers/ Accessed 26 February 2021.

All other photographs: Victoria R. Schmalhofer