




# IN YOUR BACK YARD

A guide to spotting common (and some uncommon)  
birds in your neighborhood and beyond.



BIRDS OF  
CENTRAL  
& EAST  
TEXAS

SWCA

## COMMON SPECIES

MOST LIKELY FOUND IN YOUR BACKYARD AND NEIGHBORHOOD

### WHITE-WINGED DOVE

A chunky, soft-brown dove with bold white wing patches best seen when birds are flying. Can be seen in trees, on telephone wires, or on the ground. In fall, often in the street under pecan trees eating nuts crushed open by cars. Will visit bird feeders, sometimes bullying other birds out of the way.

#### VOICE:

They call frequently during the spring, even at night. Two primary calls are a cooing "who cooks for you" and "whooo, hoo-uh, whooo, hoo-uh."



## THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO GET TO KNOW THE BIRDS THAT VISIT YOUR WINDOW, BACKYARD, AND NEIGHBORHOOD.

Even when we can't venture far from home, birds come to us! Anyone at any age can become an expert backyard birder. To help you get started, SWCA's natural resource experts compiled this guide to birds in your region. We've included various species from common to not so common, so that you can build your bird detective skills over time. Grab your camera or binoculars and start watching.

Check off any species you find, and let us know how you did at [BackyardBirds@swca.com](mailto:BackyardBirds@swca.com)!



CHECK IF SPOTTED!



### CHIMNEY SWIFT

Almost always seen flying overhead, either alone or in small flocks, sometimes like squadrons in fighter pilot formations. Like flying cigars with very rapid wingbeats, they utter high twittering calls. Will nest inside dormant chimneys, with their twittering able to be heard inside a house.

### AMERICAN CROW

A large black bird known for its "caw," American Crows usually occur in pairs or small flocks and are often found in areas with at least a few trees.





## RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

Often first detected by its call or by its drumming on a tree, the Red-bellied Woodpecker has a black-and-white striped back and buffy-gray face and underparts, with red on the top and back of the head (females only on the back). Usually in trees or on a telephone pole. Will eat suet and peanut butter, and raid hummingbird feeders.

### VOICE:

Calls are varied, but include a loud, bleating "whaaaaa" and a mildly complaining "chow, chow, chow," both often repeated.



## DOWNY WOODPECKER

A small black-and-white woodpecker, males have a small red patch on the back of the head. Usually on the trunks and branches of trees but will visit telephone poles for drumming. Less conspicuous than the larger Red-bellied Woodpecker. Also will visit suet and peanut butter feeders.

### VOICE:

Calls include a sharp "pik" and a high whinny.

## BLUE JAY

A familiar bird, Blue Jays make a variety of raucous shrieks and cries, also squeaky calls and impressive imitations of hawks. May be alone or in groups, often very active. Will band together to harass an owl, snake, or cat, so if a gang of Blue Jays is persistently complaining outside your window, see if you can find the source of their displeasure!



## BLACK VULTURE

A large blackish bird usually seen flying overhead, but also may be seen roosting on transmission line structures or standing on the side of a road. In flight, note the very short tail and broad black wings with whitish ends, but especially the flight style – several flaps of the wings alternating with a glide.



## TURKEY VULTURE

Named for its bald red head, this large blackish bird is also usually seen flying overhead, but can be seen perched or standing on the ground as well. When in flight, note the long, two-toned wings. Turkey Vultures will soar without beating their wings for long periods of time, often while rocking a bit side to side.

## CAROLINA WREN

An exuberant bird, the Carolina Wren eats insects and often stays in or under bushes, where they will flip through leaf litter, but may also visit home windows, porches, and even car bumpers looking for bugs. Will readily nest in bird houses or even in potted plants and mailboxes!

### VOICE:

The Carolina Wren frequently belts out a loud, rolling song sounding like "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle" or a "cheery, cheery, cheery."





## CAROLINA CHICKADEE

Seemingly happy birds, Carolina Chickadees are small with a distinctive white cheek set between a pitch black cap and throat. Usually seen flitting about the mid-levels of trees, where they move from branch to branch looking for insects to eat, sometimes even hanging upside down while they inspect a leaf cluster. Often in family groups and will travel with Tufted Titmice. Will visit bird feeders and nest in birdhouses.

### VOICE:

Namesake call is a raspy “*chick-a-dee-dee-dee*” but will sing a “*fee-bee, fee-bay*” and make little squeaks.

## TUFTED TITMOUSE

A small, gray bird with a pointy crest, black forehead, and a beady black eye, Tufted Titmice usually occur in small groups and often in the company of Carolina Chickadees. Will visit bird feeders for sunflower seeds and nest in birdhouses.

### VOICE:

Often in the mid-levels of trees, the birds are active and call frequently. They sing “*peter, peter, peter*” and make a scolding “*whah, whah, whah*” call.



## AMERICAN ROBIN

At home in a tree or on a lawn, the American Robin is known for its rusty orange breast. They eat worms, bugs, and fruit and do not usually visit feeders, but will happily build a nest in a sheltered place on a house, like under an eave.

### VOICE:

A pleasant, clear, whistling song that sounds like “*cheery, cheer-up, cheer-io.*” They also make a chicken-like “*tut, tut, tut*” call.



## NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

The State Bird of Texas, the Northern Mockingbird occurs in almost every neighborhood and any woody habitat, except heavy forest. A robin-sized gray bird with patches of white in the wings and tail, the Northern Mockingbird sings a loud song consisting of varying phrases, often including the calls and songs of other birds. Not afraid to divebomb a cat when defending a nest!



## EUROPEAN STARLING

Almost always found near people, European Starlings can be seen hunting on lawns or perched on a telephone wire or on a bare branch. They are stocky and short-tailed, with black plumage that has an oily purple-green sheen and is speckled white for part of the year. Their bill is spiky and yellow during the nesting season, but dark during the winter. They nest in cavities, whether in a tree, street light, or birdhouse.



## GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

The bane of many an outdoor diner, the Great-tailed Grackle is larger than most other urban and suburban birds and likes to throw its weight around. Bold birds, they will take food on a patio from an unguarded plate and even follow a person pushing a lawnmower in hopes of being able to snatch a flushed bug. The male is glossy black with a long, creased tail and a yellow eye. The female is slightly smaller and brownish, but with the same long tail. May be alone or in small groups by day, but will gather together at night to roost in large flocks, sometimes numbering in the thousands.

### VOICE:

These birds are loud and make a variety of screeches, chatters, and whistles, including a call that sounds like ripping paper.





FEMALE FINCH



MALE FINCH

## HOUSE FINCH

Originally a native of the western U.S., this bird was introduced to New York, where it then spread across the eastern states to reach eastern Texas. Often occurring together or in small groups, the male House Finch is brownish above, with a face, breast, and rump that are usually red but sometimes orange, and a pale belly streaked with brown. The female is brownish and streaked, with a plain face. When feeding, they may be in bushes or on the ground.

### VOICE:

You may find them perched on a telephone wire, roof top, or top of a tree, where the male sings a warbling song composed of short phrases and some buzzy notes.



MALE SPARROW



FEMALE SPARROW

## HOUSE SPARROW

Introduced to the U.S. from Europe, House Sparrows are closely tied to the presence of humans. The male is a snappy-looking brown bird with a gray cap, black face and bib, and a white cheek. The bill is usually dark, but may show some yellow during the winter. The female is rather plain, but has a light line behind the eye. The birds often occur in small groups on or near the ground, and can often be heard calling while hidden inside a shrub or hedgerow.

### VOICE:

The birds do not sing, but make a one- or two-note chirp, often repeated.



FEMALE CARDINAL



MALE CARDINAL

## NORTHERN CARDINAL

Needing no introduction, the bright red male Northern Cardinal is readily identified by its pointy crest and black face. The female has that same pointy crest, but is browner and tinged with red in the wings and tail. Will readily visit birdfeeders, but does not nest in birdhouses.

### VOICE:

Both males and females will sing, with the song a bright "what cheer, cheer, cheer" sometimes followed by a "whoit, whoit, whoit" or "chewy, chewy, chewy."



Source: <https://naturetourism.tamu.edu/traveler/texas-trivia/>

# BEYOND YOUR BACKYARD

YOU'LL FIND THESE BIRDS NEAR PARKS, PONDS, AND LAKES

WANT A LITTLE MORE CHALLENGE?



## RED-SHOULDERED HAWK

A beautiful hawk with robin-red underparts and barred black-and-white wings and tail, this bird often occurs near water. Might be seen perched on a telephone wire, in a tree along the side of a road, or flying overhead. In flight, the barred tail is evident and light can be seen shining through "windows" out near the tips of the wings.

### VOICE:

Relatively quiet for much of the year, Red-shouldered Hawks can be noisy when setting up their territories, screaming out a loud "kee-yah, kee-yah" that is often imitated by Blue Jays.

### HABITAT:

Greenbelts, bayous, parks, wooded neighborhoods, woodlands.



## KILLDEER

One of the few shorebirds that will occur away from water, the Killdeer is highly tolerant of humans and their environs. Will nest on the ground or even on flat rooftops. Killdeer usually occur singly or in pairs, although they will form flocks outside of the nesting season. Their eggs are well camouflaged and if a person gets too close, the female Killdeer will feign having a broken wing and attempt to draw the person and their attention away from the nest.

### VOICE:

Named for their call, the Killdeer cries out "kill-deer! kill-deer!" when disturbed, or sometimes just when flying past overhead.

### HABITAT:

Large open lawns, ball fields, golf courses, ponds, wetlands, fields.

## EASTERN KINGBIRD

A two-toned bird that is blackish above and white below, the Eastern Kingbird can be readily identified by the broad white band at the end of its tail. Seemingly quick to get riled up, these birds often chatter and twitter noisily. These birds perch in trees, bushes, on fences, or on wires, but are usually in the open and stay fairly close to the ground. They eat insects that they fly after to catch on the wing after having spotted them from their perch. Fearless, Eastern Kingbirds will noisily chase after crows and hawks to drive them from their nesting territory.

### HABITAT:

Open woodlands, parks, school yards, meadows, golf courses.



## SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER

A beautiful pearly gray, white, and black bird with a long, forked tail and patches of salmon orange on the flanks and corners of the wings, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is hard to mistake. Usually alone or in pairs, these birds often utter an excited "pip-pip" and a longer call that consists of a series of squeaky "pip" notes that accelerate and rise in pitch toward the end. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers chase after flying insect prey that they spy from their perches on trees, fences, or wires. During the nesting season when there are extra mouths to feed, these birds will even be active at night, and might be seen chasing after moths under the floodlights of a parking lot.

### HABITAT:

Open woodlands, parks, school yards, meadows, golf courses.

## YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON

A medium-sized, short-necked heron with a gray body, a dapper black and pale-yellow head, and a striking red eye, this bird is active both day and night. Young birds are brown and slightly spotted with white. Usually seen standing quietly in or near the edge of a body of water, Yellow-crowned Night-Herons roost and nest in trees, including within residential yards. Typically quiet, the birds will utter a complaining loud squawk if flushed.

### HABITAT:

Quiet waters, including ponds, bayous, canals, marshes, swamps.





## QUESTIONS ON THOSE FEATHERED FRIENDS?

Contact us at  
[BACKYARDBIRDS@SWCA.COM](mailto:BACKYARDBIRDS@SWCA.COM)

**Note:** Many more species of birds can occur in your neighborhood, especially during spring and fall migration.

## ADDITIONAL BIRDING RESOURCES

### ONLINE FIELD GUIDES FOR BIRD IDENTIFICATION

- [Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) (app)
- [Thayer Birding Software](#) (free)
- [National Audubon Society](#)
- [Song Sleuth](#) - Song Sleuth is a fun and easy way to learn birding by ear

### BOOKS

- [Basic Texas Birds](#) by Mark Lockwood
- [The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America](#)  
by David Allen Sibley

### CITIZEN SCIENCE APPS

- [eBird](#) by Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- [iNaturalist](#) - Contribute to science!

### DIY BIRD FEEDERS

- [Make a DIY Bird Feeder From Recycled Materials](#)

**Photo credits:** Black Vulture in Flight - Mike Carlo/USFWS; Turkey Vulture - Brad Sutton ; Chimney Swift- Steven Kersting; Black Vulture - Bill Dickinson; Downy Woodpecker - C Watts; American Crow - Warren Bielenberg; Carolina Wren - © Glenn Price 2010; Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal - Male & Female - Neal Lewis/NPS ; Female House Finch - 2019 Richard Keller - withmephography.com; Northern Mockingbird - Michael Hogan; Eastern Kingbird - Grayson Smith/USFWS; Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher - JFMoreno Photography