

Governor's Island Common Birds Reference Guide (All Seasons: May- October)

ID Info adapted from allaboutbirds.org

Canada Goose

Size & Shape: Large birds with long necks. They can be anywhere from 2.5 – 3.5 feet long and can weigh between 6 and 14 pounds.

Color Pattern: Black head with white cheeks and chinstrap, a black neck, tan breast, and brown back.

Behavior: They can be found feeding in water – dabbling, grazing in fields, or flying in pairs or flocks (usually in a V formation).

Habitat: Anywhere near lakes, rivers, ponds, or bodies of water. They also prefer large fields, lawns, or open grassy areas.



Mallard

Size & Shape: Large ducks with round heads and wide flat bills. They can be anywhere from 1 – 2 feet long and can weigh between 1.5 – 3.5 pounds.

Color Pattern: Males (below) have an iridescent dark green head with a bright yellow bill. Males have a grey body with brown breast and black rear. Females (above) and juveniles are mottled brown with orange and brown bills. Both genders have a white-bordered blue patch on the wing.

Behavior: These ducks feed by dabbling in the water, they graze on underwater plants. You might find them floating on the surface of a pond or relaxing by the shore. They are often found in groups with other Mallards.

Habitat: They can usually be found in ponds, on wetlands, rivers, marshes, estuaries, or coastal habitats. They can live in any wet habitat (natural or artificial) and are often found in city parks or suburban backyards.



Herring Gull

Size & Shape: These birds are large, barrel-chested, and broad-winged. They are about 2 feet long and weigh anywhere from 1.5 to 3.5 pounds.



Color Pattern: Adults have light-grey backs, black wingtips, white heads and bellies, and orange beaks. However, they take four years to reach this stage. Juveniles start as a mottled brown color and every year get a little greyer and whiter until they reach their adult plumage.

Behavior: Gull's can often be found among boats or near trash. They are often found searching for food, and perch near food sources.

Habitat: These gulls prefer shorelines and open ocean. They can be found along coasts, near lakes, or major rivers. They also like garbage dumps or any open area they can find food.



Red-tailed Hawk

Size & Shape: These hawks have broad rounded wings, and a short wide tail. They are very large – 1.5 to 2 feet long with wingspans 3.5 – 4.5 feet long!

Color Pattern: Most of these hawks are brown on top and white underneath. They also have their signature reddish-brown tail!

Behavior: Red-tail hawks are often found soaring in wide circles high above searching for food. You can tell a red tail hawk is around because all of the other birds will start calling to

warn their neighbors of the threat.

Habitat: They like open fields, and can often be found perched high on poles, fence posts, or tall trees.

Double-crested Cormorant

Size & Shape: 2.5 – 3 feet long, these are very large birds. They have small heads on long, slender necks.

Color Pattern: They are brown-black with a small patch of yellow-orange skin on their face.

Behavior: These are water birds! Often found floating on the surface of the water and diving down to catch fish. When flying, they often travel together in a V formation.

Habitat: Frequently found near freshwater. They like coasts and large lakes.





Blue Jay

Size & Shape: These are medium birds (10-12 inches) with broad rounded tails. They have a signature little spiked crown/tuft almost like a Mohawk.

Color Pattern: They are white or light grey underneath, and shades of blue, black, and white above. Males (right) have brighter colors, females (left) while still appearing blue have muted colors.

Behavior: These birds make a variety of (very loud annoying) calls that sound like a jeering “jaay”. They

often call when perched in trees, and are silent when they fly.

Habitat: Blue Jay’s are forest edge birds, often found near towns, cities, and parks.

American Crow

Size & Shape: Crows are fairly large, about 1.5 feet long. They have a thick neck and a straight bill.

Color Pattern: These birds are completely black.

Behavior: Crows are very social! Often forming large flocks. Crows are very smart and mischievous (there is even research that suggests they have a sense of humor!) They are often found near trash, raiding garbage for food.

Habitat: These are common birds found in fields, woodlands, forests. They thrive around people and are often in cities.



European Starling

Size & Shape: These birds are 7-9 inches long, with short tails and slender beaks. Their wings are pointed in flight which makes them look like small 4-point stars (which is how they got their name!)

Color Pattern: They look black with purple-green iridescent bits. They have yellow beaks and are sometimes covered in white-ish spots.

Behavior: These are loud birds that travel in

groups. They make lots of noise that sounds like a variety of rattles, whirrs, and whistles. They sit on wires or trees.

Habitat: Starlings are often found near people in towns or cities. They can often be found on the streets of NYC snacking on bits of food on the sidewalk.

Northern Mockingbird

Size & Shape: Medium birds (8-10 inches long) with round bellies, slender long tails, and small heads with thin beaks.

Color Pattern: They are mostly grey-brown with a paler belly. They have two distinctive white wing bars that can be seen when they are flying (pictured above) and resembles a small white spot when perched (pictured below). Their tails are black/grey with a white outer edge.

Behavior: These birds often perch up high and can be found alone or in pairs. They are territorial and chase other birds away. They are known for making a variety of noises copying other birds (how they got their name). In the city you can even hear them imitating car alarms or other city noises.

Habitat: Mockingbirds live in towns, parks, forest edges, and cities. They like open land at low elevations.



American Robin

Size & Shape: Medium large (8-11 inches) songbirds with large round bellies and long legs and tails.

Color Pattern: They are grey-brown with warm orange-red underbellies. When flying you may see a white patch under their tail and on their lower belly.

Behavior: These birds are often

found hopping on the floor or lounging in a tree.

Habitat: They are found across the US in gardens, parks, fields, or forests.

House Sparrow

Size & Shape: There are many types of sparrows and they all look somewhat similar.



House sparrows are chunkier and fuller than most sparrows. They are all fairly small (6-7 inches) with round heads, short tails, and pointy small beaks.

Color Pattern: House sparrows have gray underbellies and heads with brown and black striped patterns on their backs and wings.

Behavior: House sparrows often hop around from the ground to a perch on a structure or tree. Sparrows in general are especially prevalent in NYC and are often found munching on crumbs on the sidewalk.

Habitat: Sparrows live around humans in parks, cities, or backyards.



Red-winged Blackbird

Size & Shape: At 7-9 inches these are medium sized birds with broad shoulders and a flat tail.

Color Pattern: They are completely black with a beautiful red and yellow wing badge. Females are streaked dark brown with no red badge and look similar to starlings but are a lighter shade of brown.

Behavior: Male birds like to be noticed, perching up high and calling loudly (sounds like “conk-la-ree”). Females are less noticeable, staying closer to the ground.

Habitat: These birds are especially common on Governors Island and are often found in marshes or near water.



Northern Cardinal

Size & Shape: Medium large birds (8-9 inches) with a long tail and a short, thick beak. They have a tufted, pointy crown similar to a blue jay or tufted titmouse.

Color Pattern: Males are a bright brilliant red all over. Females are pale brown with warm reddish tinges on their wings, tail, and chest. Both genders have a black face and red-orange bill.

Behavior: They often sit hunched over with their tail pointed down. They sit in low shrubs and trees or on the ground. Their song is a loud string of two-part whistles (with a down-slur) followed by a slow trill. It almost sounds like “cheer cheer cheer” or “birdie birdie birdie”

Habitat: They are often found in inhabited areas like backyards, parks, or shrubby forest edges.





Rock Pigeon

Size & Shape: Large and plump birds with small heads and short legs. Their wings are broad and pointed while the tail is rounded.

Color Pattern: Pigeons vary in color. Most are bluish-grey with two black bands on their wing and a black tip on the tail. Most have iridescent throat feathers. They may (or may not) have wing patterns including bars and spots. Some pigeons may be white, brown, blue-black, or ash-red.

Behavior: Pigeons often gather in flocks, walking or running on the ground pecking for food. They may suddenly fly up when frightened but will return back to the ground shortly after.

Habitat: Pigeons often inhabit cities and towns. They are a very common bird in NYC.

Killdeer

Size & Shape: Killdeer have a large round head, large eyes, and a short bill (like all plovers which is their bird family). They are slender with long lanky legs and a pointed tail.

Color Pattern: They are brownish-tan on their back and white on their underbelly. They have distinctive black bands around their necks like necklaces. They have white and black patches on their face and an orange rump you can only see while they are flying.



Behavior: Killdeer are often found walking (or running) on the ground. When disturbed or threatened they fly in circles calling repeatedly. Their call is an incredibly distinctive sharp high-pitched “dee” that intensifies into a nervous bubbling trill. Some describe their call as “kill-deer” which is how they got their name. When threatened around her nest or newly laid eggs a killdeer will sacrifice herself for her babies! They will leave the nest to distract the predator, calling loudly and flailing one wing out to appear injured.

Habitat: Killdeer are shore birds but are often found slightly further away from water. They nest in open ground with low (or no) vegetation, like golf courses, driveways, parking lots, and the flower garden in the Teaching Garden!