

Governors Island Bird Reference Guide (Common Birds Fall: September – November)

ID Info adapted from allaboutbirds.org



Eastern Phoebe

Size & Shape: Phoebe's are tiny plump songbirds. Their tails are relatively long compared to the shape of their body, and they have a big round head. They have a short, thin, bill used for catching insects.

Color Pattern: These birds are brownish-gray on their backs and off-white underneath. Their head is usually the darkest part of their body.

Behavior: Phoebe's often perch in low trees or on fences. They have active, short flights where they catch insects, and often return to their same perch when finished. They

make sharp “peep” noises in addition to their classic “phoebe” noise which gave them their name. When perched they wag their tails up and down frequently.

Habitat: They prefer open woods like lawns, parks, and woodland edges. They usually breed around buildings or bridges constructing their nests in a safe place under a ledge.

American Goldfinch

Size & Shape: A small bird with a short, cone shaped bill. They have small heads, long wings, and short notched tails.

Color Pattern: Males are bright yellow on their back and bellies, with a black spot on their forehead. They have white patches on their wings and above and below their tails. Females are a duller yellow underneath and an olive color on their backs.

Behavior: Active little birds that cling to weeds. They fly with a bouncy, undulating pattern and often call in flight. Their calls are a series of short high pitched tones that have been described as sounding like “po-ta-to-chip”.

Habitat: Goldfinches prefer weedy fields. They are also found in cultivated areas like roadsides or backyards.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Size & Shape: These warblers are fairly large with a sturdy bill and long narrow tail. They have a flat large head.

Color Pattern: Both genders are gray with spots of white on their wings, and spots of yellow on their face, sides, and rump.



Males (above) display brighter colors, while females (below) are more dull sometimes showing brown spots.

Behavior: These birds typically forage in tree canopies. They are active, and often catch insects in mid air.

Habitat: They can be found on forest edges and shrubby habitats including coastal areas, parks, and residential areas.

Eastern Towhee

Size & Shape: Towhees are similar shaped to sparrows (they are in the same family), but a little bit bigger with a small round body and a thick triangular beak.

Color Pattern: Males (pictured below) have a sooty black on their back and head, a rusty red under-wing, and a white belly. Females (pictured above) are the same pattern but brown where males are black.

Behavior: Towhees spend most of their time on the ground, scratching leaves with both feet looking for worms or other tasty bugs. They spend time hiding in underbrush, or climbing into shrubs or low trees to sing. Their song sounds like “drink-your-teaaaaa!” The first note (drink) is sharp and metallic, while the final note (tea) is a musical trill.

Habitat: They can be found in forest edges where there is lots of leaves on the ground to forage in.



American Kestrel

Size & Shape: Kestrels are medium - large (9 - 12 inches) birds with a large head, and long narrow wings. They have a long square-tipped tail. In flight their wings are often bent, wingtips pointed back.

Color Pattern: They are pale from below, and a warm rusty brown with black spots on their backs. They have a black band near the tip of their tail. Males' wings are slate blue, while females are reddish brown. Both genders have vertical black stripes on their faces sometimes referred to as a mustache or a sideburn.

Behavior: Kestrels often pump their tails when perched as if trying to balance.

Habitat: These birds live in grasslands, deserts, and meadows. You are likely to see them perched on a telephone wire along roadsides, in places where there is short vegetation and few trees.