

Governors Island Bird Reference Guide (Common Birds Summer: June – September)

ID Info adapted from allaboutbirds.org



Chimney swift

Size & Shape: Small birds with slender bodies and long wings. They have short necks, round heads, and short tails. Their beak is very short and tiny.

Color Pattern: They are dark gray-brown on their entire bodies.

Behavior: Often flying erratically above, with rapid constant wingbeats. They make a high chattering call when flying.

Habitat: They nest in chimneys (how they got their name) and similar dark, enclosed areas like air vents, hollow trees, and caves. They are often found in urban or suburban areas, near rivers, lakes, forests, and fields.

Brown-Headed Cowbird

Size & Shape: Smallish birds (7 - 9 inches) with a short tail and thick head. They have a short pointy beak.

Color Pattern: Most males (pictured above) are glossy black with a rich brown head. Females (pictured below) are plain brown with white streaks on their belly.

Behavior: They feed on the ground. Sometimes found with other blackbirds or starlings. They are noisy making a lot of clicks, whistles, and chatter-like calls.

Habitat: They are often found in open habitats like fields, or lawns. If not feeding they may perch on high tree branches.



Eastern Kingbird

Size & Shape: Medium sized bird (7.5 - 9 inches) with a square tipped tail and a relatively short beak.

Color Pattern: Black on top and white below, their head is a darker color than their back. The tail has a white tip.

Behavior: Often perched in tall trees, on telephone wires, or fences. They usually call while flying making a high pitched cheetering. They hunt by catching flying insects.

Habitat: Kingbirds prefer open habitats like lawns, fields, wetlands, or grassy areas. They are often found on forest edges or near water.

Tree Swallow

Size & Shape: These are small birds with long pointed wings and a short forked tail. Their bills are tiny and flat.

Color Pattern: Males (above) are a beautiful blue on their backs, white on their belly, with blackish feathers and a thin black eye mask. Females (below) look similar but with a much duller blue, almost gray black back.

Behavior: Tree swallows feed on flying insects that they catch while flying. They often perch high on a tree or branch. They gather in large flocks to migrate.

Habitat: They enjoy open habitats like fields or wetlands, usually preferring to be near water. They nest in tree cavities or man-made nest boxes.



Common Grackle

Size & Shape: Large (11-13 inches) lanky birds with long legs and tails. Flat heads with long bills. When flying the wings look shorter than the tail.

Color Pattern: Appear black from a distance, up close you can see their iridescent glossy bodies and purple/blue iridescent heads. They have golden eyes.

Behavior: Grackles are often found in flocks flying or foraging on lawns. Their calls sound almost like a rusty gate, with a “readle-eak” accompanied by high pitched whistles.

Habitat: These birds thrive in fields, cities, parks, or open habitats like woodlands and marshes.