

BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS

BIRD FAMILIES OF THE NORTHERN CATSKILLS

(Common Representative Species)



- Hawks and falcons--sizeable birds of prey, seen perched or soaring; look for body and wing shape, also flight pattern. Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel.
- Pigeons and doves--only two species in the Northeast. Both have small heads relative to their bodies and are often seen on the ground. Rock Dove (Pigeon), Mourning Dove.
- Kingfishers--large head with crest; good identifying markings. Belted Kingfisher.
- Woodpeckers--seen clinging to tree trunks or branches; sharp "chisel" bills; most species are black and white with some red and have an undulating flight. Common Flicker.
- Flycatchers--best identified as a group by their erect posture and habit of choosing a perch with a wide view which they leave to capture flying insects, often returning to the same perch. Several species are very difficult to separate by sight. Eastern Kingbird.
- Swallows--small birds which appear larger because of their long pointed wings. Graceful, swooping flight is distinctive. Barn Swallow, Tree Swallow.
- Jays and Crows--large birds with "all-purpose" bills. Wide-ranging and varied habitat. American Crow.
- Titmice--tiny, very active, with short pointed bills. Almost constantly calling with high-pitched "location" notes. Black-capped Chickadee.
- Wrens--as small as Chickadees, with longer bills and shorter tails; active; tail is often upraised. House Wren.
- Mimics--Robin-sized, with long tails; prefer shrubby growth. All have distinctive voices. Gray Catbird.
- Thrushes--plump perching birds; feed on or near the ground, hopping rather than walking. With the exception of Bluebirds and Robins, all are basically brown with varying degrees of spotting on the breast. Good singers. Hermit Thrush, Veery.

- Vireos--sparrow-sized birds seen almost exclusively in woodlands. Active insect gleaners from leaves and branches. Slender bills, slightly hooked at the end. Red-eyed Vireo.
- Warblers--Chickadee-sized; woodland or brush habitat; needle bills. Similar to vireos, but more active and brighter colored. Most species have some yellow and show distinctive markings if they stay still long enough to see! Chestnut-sided Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird.
- Blackbirds--birds of open and shrubby areas or woodland edges. Size and coloration vary with the species. All-purpose bills. Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole.
- Tanagers--Red-winged Blackbird-sized with heavy bills. Found in woodlands only. A brightly colored tropical family. Scarlet Tanager.
- Finches--a large group of birds which can be further broken down into grosbeaks, sparrows, buntings and others. The only common characteristic is a strong, cone-shaped bill for cracking seeds. Many are ground inhabitants. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, Song Sparrow.