

A Selection of MUST-SEE BIRDS IN MANITOBA

Manitoba is a haven for birdwatchers. With a wide variety of habitats and its position along a major migratory flyway, there is a lot to get both new and seasoned birders excited every year. The province is home to over 300 species of breeding birds and several more migrate through during spring and fall.

Here are a few tips how to be the best and most ethical birdwatcher you can be and ensure that we preserve our birds and encourage new birdwatchers for generations to come:

- Stay on trails and observe birds from a distance.
- Do not approach bird nests; use binoculars or long camera lenses to observe their behaviour, and never flush a nesting bird.
- Do not use recordings and bait to lure birds in closer — this distracts them from their regular activities and uses up needed energy. Baited birds can lose their fear of people, which can lead to a dependence, and some times injuries or death.
- Don't chase birds. It can be tempting to want to get a bird to move so you can have a better photo, but this can wear a bird down and use up vital energy stores.
- If you've found a rare or really popular bird, resist posting its exact location. While it can be useful information for researcher, it can also attract a ton of people and potentially harm the bird.
- Respect a bird's space and time. It can be tempting to want to spend hours observing a bird's behaviour and it may seem like the bird is okay with you being there. However, as long as you're there, they are dividing their attention between you and what they need to get done. Only spend a few minutes with your subjects.
- Drive slowly and carefully in top bird habitat to reduce the risk of vehicle collisions.
- Follow all traffic rules and don't park your car in dangerous locations just because you saw a cool bird. You may regret it later.
- Respect property and ask for permission before entering someone's yard or other area in search of your target bird.
- Leave dogs at home, or if you can't, keep them on a leash to protect ground nesting birds and other wildlife.

Above all, have fun. Birding is for everyone and is a wonderful way to learn about and reconnect with our natural world. If you take the time to get to know our birds, how they live and what they need to survive, you will see the world in a whole new way that is richer and always exciting.

Happy birding!

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TRUMPETER SWAN

These big, white birds are elegance incarnate as they glide across the water. The largest of North America's native waterfowl, they have long necks and black bills. If you can get a close enough look with binoculars, you will see a slash of red on their bottom bill, which distinguishes them from the similar tundra swan.

Interesting Facts

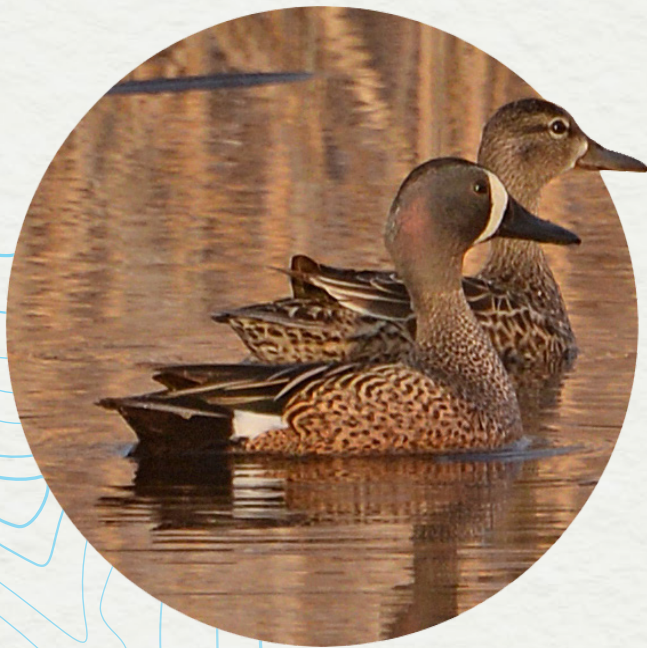
Once on the brink of extinction after being over harvested for their wing feathers, trumpeters are slowly bouncing back.

Habitat

Trumpeters nest on a variety of small lakes, ponds and marshes. They can be found all over the Eastman region, Riding Mountain National Park, as well as in isolated pockets in the Interlake and a few lakes in northern Manitoba. The deciding factor for whether a site is suitable is whether there is enough room for their long running take-offs.



Uncommon



BLUE-WINGED TEAL

One of our most common ducks in Manitoba, blue-winged teals live up to their name. If you catch these smallish ducks in flight, you will be treated to two periwinkle blue patches on the shoulders of their wings. On the water, breeding males are unmistakable with their grey-blue heads and white half-moon in front of their eye. Females are delicate looking, with an overall grey speckled pattern.

Interesting Facts

Blue-winged teals are dabbling ducks, which means they don't dive fully under the water when feeding. Instead, they tilt forward and stick their tails up in the air while reaching for insects and aquatic vegetation below the surface.

Habitat

Blue-winged teals can be found in marshes, on small lakes and in ponds. While they are most common in the south-western Prairie Pothole region, they can be found through much of the southern part of the province and have even been spotted in Churchill.

Common

COMMON GOLDENEYE

These dapper ducks are fairly easy to recognize from a distance. The males are a striking combination of black and white. The head feathers, in the right light, shimmer with iridescent green and are broken up by a bright white cheek spot. Females have brown heads and both have their namesake golden eye.

Interesting facts

Goldeneyes are cavity-nesting ducks. Females nest in old woodpecker holes and other openings in trees. After the ducklings have all hatched, they take a day to rest then step out of the nest and into the void, tumbling to the ground. Because they're so light, these balls of fluff merely bounce on impact and follow their mother to the nearest pond.

Habitat

Goldeneyes breed in the boreal forest, usually along the shore of cold lakes with lots of invertebrate life. They also nest all along Lake Winnipeg, Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipegosis.

Common



PIED-BILLED GREBE

From a distance, grebes look like ducks, but they're quite different. The smallest of the grebes, pied-billed grebes are little brown birds that sit low in the water. They have thin necks and a short, white bill bisected by a black-stripe.

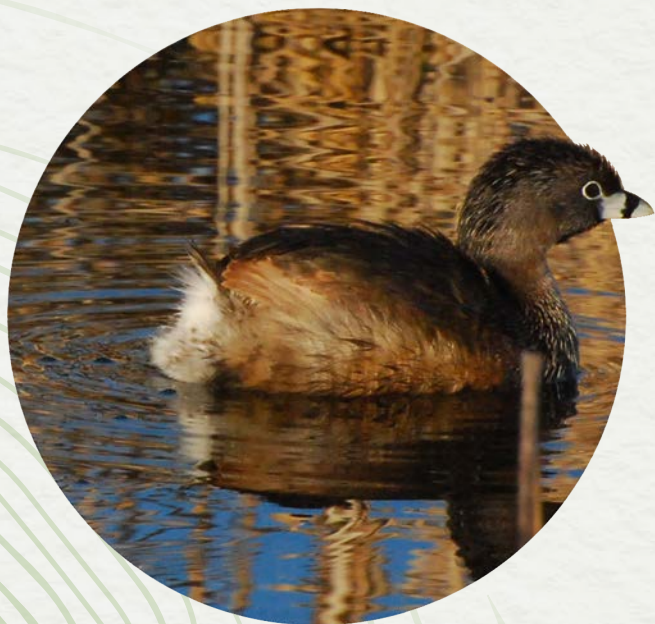
Interesting Facts

Pied-billed grebes are part bird, part submarine. They rarely dive, but instead sink silently below the water when frightened. They accomplish this by flattening their body feathers. This pushes out all of the air trapped within, making them less buoyant.

Habitat

Look for these little birds in ponds, lakes and marshes with lots of cattails and other waterlogged grasses. They can't walk very far on land and will build their nests right near the water's edge on floating vegetation.

Common



AMERICAN COOT

These funny little marsh birds look like black chickens swimming through the water, their white bills standing out like they'd been dipped in paint. You can also see them wading through the shallows with their bright green lobed feet blending in with the vegetation.

Interesting Facts

Baby coots have startlingly red heads and faces. Studies have found that this colour stimulates the parents to feed them.

Habitat

Coots are wetland birds and can be found in marshes, ponds, sloughs and roadside ditches. They are especially abundant in the prairie pothole region, west and south of Winnipeg. They can also be found in the Interlake, especially in places like Oak Hammock Marsh and the Shoal Lakes. Although less common, you can also find them in eastern Manitoba.

Common



SANDHILL CRANE

Cranes are a fun combination of graceful and ungainly, depending on when you happen to catch sight of them. When spotted in flight, these large, grey, long-necked and long-legged birds seem to float through the air. They can often be found in big flocks, circling lazily on thermals, their rattling bugle call carrying across the sky. On the ground, then can sometimes seem a bit clumsy, especially if you find them in the middle of their flailing courtship dance.

Interesting Facts:

Cranes are particularly long-lived and mate for life. Although they can start breeding as early as two years old, some don't get started until their seventh birthday.

Habitat

These big birds nest on the ground in open marshes, fens, bogs and wet meadows. They are especially common in the Interlake, the southeastern portion of the province and along the Hudson Bay coast.

Common



AMERICAN AVOCET

Avocets are large, elegant shorebirds, with a thin, upturned bill and delicate peachy blush. They wade through wetlands on long, sky-blue legs. Their black and white-wings stand out sharply against the sky when they take off.

Interesting Facts

Avocets nest on the ground, often in places with no shade. To keep eggs cool on hot days, the incubating parent will dip their belly feathers in water before settling back on the nest.

Habitat

Avocets nest in small colonies in open marshes and mudflats. You can find them throughout the Prairie Pothole region in southwestern Manitoba and up into the Interlake at Oak Hammock Marsh and the Shoal Lakes.

Uncommon



KILLDEER

The killdeer's unmistakable name-calling cry is often one of the first bird calls people learn. They're also pretty easily recognized shorebirds. They're a smallish, brown bird, with white belly and two stark black rings around their neck. Up close, you can see a red ring around their eyes.

Interesting Facts

Killdeer are excellent actors. When a predator or unsuspecting birdwatcher stumbles too close to their nest, the parents jump up and start pretending to be injured. Their flailing broken wing act lures the predator away from their carefully camouflaged eggs.

Habitat

They are probably our most adaptable shorebird. If they can find a stretch of gravel or rocky ground to nest on, they'll be there, from marshes and mudflats, to road shoulders and parking lots. They can be found all over Manitoba, all the way north to Churchill.

Common



WILSON'S SNIPE

These cryptic, medium-sized shorebirds are more often heard than seen. If you're out in the evening or early morning, you can often hear their winnowing sound as they fly through the air. If you manage to spot one, you'll find they are a plump bird, with a very long beak and heavy-patterned sandy brown feathers.

Interesting Facts

The winnowing sound that you hear when they fly overhead is not a vocalization. It's caused air rushing over the outer two tail feathers as they dive at high speeds.

Habitat

Despite the term 'snipe hunt' meaning a fruitless search, Wilson's Snipe are very common across all of Manitoba. They can be found in wetlands all over the province from the prairie potholes into the boreal forest and up to Churchill.

Common



FRANKLIN'S GULL

When most people think of gulls, white birds with grey backs and yellow bills often come to mind. While that describes the very common ring-billed gull, Franklin's gulls are a little different. They are one of two black-headed gulls commonly found in Manitoba. They're a slight bird, with a steel grey back and black head. Their eyes are set off by white eye-liner and their red bill is what distinguishes them from the similar looking Bonaparte's gull (black bill). Early in the breeding season, they can sometimes have a rosy glow to their white belly and breast feathers.

Interesting Facts

Franklin's gulls are long-distance migrants, winging their way to southern Peru and Chile. Some have strayed very far from their usual route and have ended up in Australia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Habitat

Like most gulls, Franklin's gulls nest in colonies. They build their nest in marshes, creating floating mats of vegetation. As the nest materials decay, they start to sink. Both parents and older chicks keep themselves afloat by adding new material. They are most commonly found in the Prairie Pothole region of southwestern Manitoba, though large flocks can also be seen on the big lakes foraging for food.

Common



ARCTIC TERN

Terns are kind of like extra pointy gulls. They are a slender bird with a grey back, black cap, red bill and pale undersides. They look very similar to the Common and Forester's terns that are often seen in southern Manitoba, but Arctic terns are only found in the north, making them easier to identify.

Interesting Facts

Arctic terns migrate farther than any other bird in the world. They travel from the North Pole to the South Pole and back every year, covering up to 40,000 km.

Habitat

Arctic terns are a northern Manitoba bird. They are abundant along the Hudson Bay Coast, where they nest in large colonies on coastal islands or on islands within lakes. You can find them floating over the bay, scanning the water for fish.

Rare province-wide

Common in Churchill



COMMON LOON

The quintessential Canadian bird, common loons are large, heavy waterbirds. They're easily distinguished by their shiny black head and back, the latter dotted with dozens of white speckles. The black neck is broken up by a white 'necklace' and the whole thing is offset by a bright, white belly. Their iconic yodel and mournful cry is often the first alert that you're near a breeding pair.

Interesting Facts

Loons are wholly adapted for diving. Unlike most other birds, they don't have hollow bones. This makes them less buoyant so they can sink beneath the water more easily. This adaptation, along with having their legs so far back on their bodies, makes it harder for them to take off. They need a long water runway to get airborne.

Habitat

Common Loons are birds of the boreal lakes. They can be found throughout the Canadian Shield, in the lakes of Riding Mountain National Park and up north along the Manitoba Escarpment. They are also increasingly common along Lake Winnipeg and can be found on some Interlake lakes.

Uncommon



AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN

Sometimes referred to as Manitoba's Air Force, the American white pelican is truly a master of water and air. They have the largest wingspan of any bird in the province and use it to glide effortlessly in formation through the sky. Pelicans are very large white birds with black wing-tips and an unmistakable long, orange bill that extends into a pouch.

Interesting Facts

Pelicans hunt cooperatively. They will swim together in groups and herd fish into a circle, before plunging their bills into the water all at once to scoop up their catch.

Habitat

Pelicans are primarily big water birds. You can find them on Lakes Winnipeg, Manitoba and Winnipegosis, the Shoal Lakes, and other larger bodies of water throughout the province. They can also be found fishing along boreal rivers. Their breeding sites, however, are hidden away on remote islands in the middle of the large lakes, away from predators. Adult pelicans can travel hundreds of kilometres a day between their nest and feeding locations.

Common



GREAT BLUE HERON

These regal wading birds can be seen along many of Manitoba's waterways. Their greyish-blue body is perched atop long legs. While they have long necks and a blade-like bill, herons sometimes hold their heads close to their body, giving them a neckless appearance.

Interesting Facts

Despite being one of Manitoba's tallest birds, Great blue herons only weigh about 2.5 kg, thanks to their long, hollow bones.

Habitat

Herons are colonial nesters and create rookeries in large trees. If you're lucky, you might find their messy collection of stick nests high up along a waterway. They can be found feeding along most rivers, lakes, ponds and marshes. Your best places to spot them are throughout the Prairie Pothole region in the southwest, up through the Manitoba Escarpment, throughout the Interlake and in the southeastern corner of the province.

Uncommon



TURKEY VULTURE

Turkey vultures are masters of the air. You can often find them on the wing, soaring on thermals. You can tell them apart from other large birds of prey using two things: they hold their wings up in a V, and the lack of feathers on their head make it look unusually small relatively to the size of the bird. Up close, they can be a bit alarming; the red skin of their head is a stark contrast against the dark brown feathers of their body.

Interesting Facts

The featherless head of the turkey vulture is an adaptation to their diet and their habit of sticking their heads into decomposing carcasses. Vultures are a crucial component of their ecosystems, cleaning up the dead and cycling nutrients back into the system.

Habitat

Although they can be seen throughout southern Manitoba, turkey vultures are especially common along the eastern side of the province. Watch for them perched on abandoned buildings, where they often nest, and along hydro poles and fence posts. In more wild areas, they can be seen perched high up in dead tree or circling overhead.

Uncommon



BALD EAGLE

Although a symbol of the United States, bald eagles are common raptor in Manitoba. The adults can be easily distinguished by their large, dark brown bodies, capped with a white head and tipped with a white tail. However, it takes five years for eagles to look like that. Young of the year birds are entirely dark brown, while subadults go through a predictable pattern of white and brown mottling over their four years of maturation.

Interesting Facts

Bald eagles in movies often get a voice over. For some reason, filmmakers decided that the harsh cry of a red-tailed hawk was more eagle-like than the high-pitched twitter sound they actually make.

Habitat

Bald eagles are tied to water. They can be found nesting along lakes and rivers throughout most of Manitoba, especially in the northern two thirds of the province. They are especially common around the shore of Lake Winnipeg, and to a lesser extent, Lake Manitoba.

Uncommon



BROAD-WINGED HAWK

One of our smallest hawks, broad-winged hawks are especially easy to recognize in flight. Stark alternating bars of black and white make their fanned tails stand out sharply against the sky. Their wing feathers are also tipped in black, giving them a heavily outlined appearance. Perched, they are a little less dramatic. They are a small, brown hawk with a mottled white breast and piercing yellow eyes.

Interesting Facts

During the fall migration, you can sometimes see hundreds of broad-winged hawks 'kettling' high overhead, using thermals to gain altitude so they can fly long distances without a lot of effort.

Habitat

Broad-winged hawks are a forest bird. They are especially common in the transition zone between the aspen parkland to the south and boreal forest to the north. Frogs make up a large part of their diet, so they prefer mature forests interspersed with ponds. The best places to look for them include the Interlake, Eastman and northern Parkland regions.

Uncommon



OSPREY

Looking a bit like a smaller, punk-rock eagle, osprey are the quintessential fish hunters. Their white heads are broken up with a dark brown mask and their heavily-hooked beak is dark grey instead of the eagle's yellow. In flight, they are easily distinguished from eagles by their smaller size, narrower wings and white undersides.

Interesting Facts

Unlike most other hawks, osprey have a reversible outer toe. This allows them to get a second claw in the back to keep a firmer grip on their slippery prey. Once they get a fish out of the water, they will spin it around in their grip so that the head is facing into the wind. This reduces drag through the air, making it easier for the bird to fly back to the nest with its catch.

Habitat

Osprey are very much associated with water, nesting along lakes and rivers that can sustain their fishing needs. They are scattered through much of Manitoba, but they are not as abundant as eagles. Look for them along Lake Winnipeg, where they will use artificial nest structures, and throughout the Manitoba Escarpment and into the north.

Uncommon



GREAT HORNED OWL

A denizen of the dark, great horned owls are Manitoba's most commonly-encountered owl. These large birds are often seen in low light and appear like a roundish lump with little pointy ears. If you can get a look at them in better light, you'll see a fierce-looking bird with rusty facial discs outlined in black, surrounding piercing yellow eyes. The ear tufts are three or four feathers that stick up and help break up the owl's silhouette so they can blend into the background better. Most Manitoba great horned owls are pretty pale and have finely lined belly feathers, contrasting with a mottled brown back.

Interesting Facts

Like all birds, owls' eyes are fixed in their sockets so they can't shift from side to side. To make up for this, owls have the ability to turn their heads 270 degrees so they can detect prey all around them. They can also hear in three dimensions. Their ears (hidden under the facial disc) are placed asymmetrically so sound hits them at different times. Their brain can calculate that difference and use it to triangulate the location of their prey.

Habitat

Great horned owls are forest birds, but are also extremely adaptable. They nest in old stick nests left behind by crows, ravens and magpies, but will also use old buildings and other structures. While they are most abundant in the Prairie Pothole region, you can find great horned owls all over the southern half of the province, including many within Winnipeg and other communities.

Uncommon



PILEATED WOODPECKER

These year-round residents make an impression. They are the largest and the loudest of Manitoba's woodpeckers. You'll often hear their raucous, high piping call ringing through the forest. Watch for a crow-sized bird with a black body. Their black and white striped face is capped with a brilliant red crest.

Interesting Facts

Woodpeckers have super tongues. They are rooted near their nostrils and curl around the back of the head, cushioning the brain when the bird pounds their beak into trees. They use these long tongues to reach deep into the holes they've dug to lap up insects.

Habitat

While you can find pileated woodpeckers in the forests of Winnipeg and west into the pothole region, they're most abundant in the transition zone between the aspen parkland and the boreal forest to the north. Good places to look for them include Nopiming, Whiteshell and Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Parks, along with Riding Mountain National Park and up north through the Manitoba Escarpment.

Uncommon



NORTHERN FLICKER

Flickers are a strange sort of woodpecker. You often see them foraging on the ground. Unlike our other woodpecker species, they are mostly brown with a black scalloped pattern. Their wing and tail feathers flash yellow when they fly.

Interesting Facts

Like most woodpeckers, flickers like to drum on trees and other objects to announce their territory. Though they often choose hollow trees for their resonance, flickers will also drum on chimneys and other metal objects to make as much noise as possible.

Habitat

Northern flickers can be found throughout much of Manitoba. An adaptable species, they will take up residence anywhere they can find trees to nest in. They are especially abundant in Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park and throughout the Eastman region.

Common



RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

Our tiniest bird, ruby-throated hummingbirds are like little, feisty jewels. They're almost more like insects than birds as they buzz through the air on impossibly fast wings, their iridescent green plumage sparkling in the sunshine. Hummingbirds have long, thin beaks that they use to probe flowers for nectar. Male ruby throats live up to their name with shiny red gorgets.

Interesting Facts

Hummingbirds are the only group of birds that can fly backwards. They flap their wings in a figure-eight pattern faster than the eyes can see, creating a motion similar to the rotors of a helicopter.

Habitat

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are fairly abundant throughout the southern half of the province. Many people attract them to their yard using nectar feeders, making them a great bird to introduce to new birdwatchers. They can be hard to spot away from feeders and flower gardens, but they are especially numerous in the boreal transition zone.

Uncommon



BELTED KINGFISHER

Anyone who has ever been on a waterway in Manitoba has probably heard the angry-sounding rattle of the belted kingfisher. They rarely hold still for long but they're interesting-looking birds. Somewhat top-heavy in appearance, they have blue back and head feathers, contrasting with white undersides. Females have a rusty 'belt' on their belly feathers that give the species its name.

Interesting Facts

Kingfisher nestlings have very acidic stomachs. It allows them to digest their diet of fish and insects more efficiently. As they get older, the chemistry changes and they start coughing up pellets made up of fish bones and arthropod shells.

Habitat

Kingfishers are very much tied to water. They nest in burrows dug into the soft banks of rivers and lakes. They fish from exposed branches along the shore, flashing out and diving head-first into the water to spear their prey. In Manitoba, they are most abundant in the boreal forest and most easily seen throughout the Escarpment and along Lake Winnipeg.

Uncommon



WESTERN KINGBIRD

Western kingbirds are a handsome species. Both males and females have soft grey heads that grade into a greenish back and brown wing feathers. This contrasts with a bright yellow belly. They can usually be seen on fences, darting out to snag insects on the wing.

Interesting Facts

Once known as the Arkansas Bird, biologists changed the name to western kingbird to reflect their much larger range.

Habitat

As the name suggests, they tend to be more common in western Manitoba. An open-country bird, they can be commonly seen in farmland along the southwest shore of Lake Winnipeg and south along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. They're also especially abundant in the southwest corner of the province, near Melita and surrounding areas. The similar-sized but black and white Eastern Kingbird ranges over much of southern Manitoba.

Common



EASTERN PHOEBE

Phoebes are one of those birds that say their name. In spring and early summer, you can often hear their buzzy 'fee-bee' in the forest. Part of the flycatcher family, phoebes are unassuming little birds. They have olive-grey head and back feathers and creamy undersides that are sometimes tinged with a bit of yellow. The easiest way to recognize a phoebe is to watch for their endlessly bobbing tail.

Interesting Facts

Phoebes are loners. They rarely come into contact with other phoebes. Even mated pairs don't spend much time together.

Habitat

Eastern phoebes are a common bird in the southern quarter of Manitoba. They often nest near lakeshores and rivers, but will also make use of buildings and rock faces for their mossy nests. They're most abundant in the transition zone between the boreal forest and aspen parkland.

Uncommon



RED-EYED VIREO

One of Manitoba's most common and most vocal songbirds, red-eyed vireos provide the soundtrack for much of our summer. Their cheerful 'vireo' song fills the forest throughout the day in June and July. While they're easy to hear, they can be hard to spot. They're small and greenish, blending in to the foliage. They have cream-coloured breast and belly feathers and their dark red eye is set into a grey mask.

Interesting Facts

The red eye for which they are named doesn't develop until the end of their first winter. So, you will likely see some first year brown-eyed vireos in late summer.

Habitat

Red-eyed vireos range from the U.S. border all the way up to the Nelson River. However, they are most common in an arc that starts around Sprague and runs diagonally up to around Swan River. That line corresponds roughly with the transition between the boreal forest and aspen parkland. They nest in deciduous and mixed wood forests, especially in places where the undergrowth is fairly thick.

Common



TREE SWALLOW

This shimmering electric blue aerialist is often one of our first insectivores to return in the spring. They are built for fast flying with narrow, black wings and a forked tail. Their head and back feathers are iridescent blue, contrasting with a white underside. You can often find them in small groups, floating over fields and water bodies, snagging insects out of the air.

Interesting Facts

Tree swallows can return much earlier in spring than other aerial insectivores because they will switch their diet to berries and seeds when there aren't any flying insects available.

Habitat

Tree swallows are cavity nesters and are attracted to areas with open woodlands with fields or water bodies to forage over. They are often associated with forest edges. While they can be found all the way up to Churchill, they're most common in the southern Interlake and Prairie Pothole region in the southwest of the province. They will also readily use nest boxes and can be easily observed at Oak Hammock Marsh, where a nest box population has been established.

Common



HOUSE WREN

They may not be very flashy, but the bubbly and loud song of the house wren is a cheerful addition to backyards and forests alike. Like most of our local wrens, house wrens are small brown birds, with a tail that sticks up and a bill that curves down, giving them a perpetually perturbed look.

Interesting Facts

House wrens have one of the largest breeding ranges of any songbird in the western hemisphere. While our population migrates south for the winter, there are resident breeders all throughout Central and South America.

Habitat

While they are most common in the southwestern portion of the province, house wrens range through much of the southern third of Manitoba. They like open or patchy deciduous forest, but can also be found in boreal mixed wood and city backyards. They are cavity nesters and will lay their pink jellybean-looking eggs in both natural holes and in nest boxes.

Common



RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

Teeny but fierce, these little birds are seven grams of feathers and attitude. While they can be hard to spot flitting among the branches, their loud, very high, complex song is commonly heard in the boreal forest in early summer. Both males and females have grey head and back feathers and yellowish undersides. Their wings have white bars and yellow edges to the flight feathers. The males have a tiny red crown that is often hidden, but when exposed, stands out like a beacon among the foliage.

Interesting Facts

Despite being a tiny bird, they lay an enormous clutch of eggs. There can be upwards of 12 tiny eggs in a nest, though the average clutch size is closer to eight.

Habitat

Ruby-crowned kinglets are predominantly boreal birds. They are most abundant throughout the Canadian Shield, but can also be found in Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park, though the Manitoba Escarpment and in Riding Mountain. They prefer to nest in black spruce and tamarack forest, especially in moist areas with a patchy canopy.

Common



SWAINSON'S THRUSH

Swainson's thrushes bring an air of magic to the forest. Their song sounds like a beautiful combination of a flute and a music box and can be heard both in the early morning and in the evening. The birds are the colour of dead leaves on top, contrasting with a heavily speckled white undersides and their eyes have a distinct cream-coloured ring.

Interesting Facts

Swainson's thrushes are sometimes called 'mosquito thrushes' because they have a habit of hawking flying insects like flycatchers.

Habitat

These thrushes are a boreal species. You can find them throughout the Canadian Shield, Manitoba Escarpment and as far north as the tree line. They prefer to nest in dense, dark conifer and boreal mixed wood forests.

Common



GRAY CATBIRD

Gray catbirds really live up to their name. If you hear a garble of different birdsong followed by a cat-like mew, you've found a catbird. Slightly smaller and slimmer than a robin, catbirds are mimics and develop a whole repertoire of pilfered songs. However, they almost always give themselves away with their little meow. The bird itself is a sleek grey, with a black cap and snazzy, rust-coloured patch under the tail.

Interesting Facts

Catbirds are marathon singers. Their songs can last up to ten minutes and are filled with apparently improvised notes and whatever collection of other species' songs its picked up over its lifetime.

Habitat

Their genus name, *Dumetella*, means small thicket, which gives you a clue where to look for them. They range throughout the southern quarter of the province. You can find them in hedgerows and shelter belts, people's gardens and in dense deciduous forest with lots of understory.

Common



CEDAR WAXWING

Cedar Waxwings are one of our most elegant songbirds. These sleek birds are easily recognized by their black masks sent into a tawny brown face with a small crest. The brown bleeds into a grey tail, tipped in bright yellow. This breast and belly feathers are creamy white.

Interesting Facts

The name 'waxwing' comes from the red waxy secretions on their secondary feathers. While their function is still uncertain, older birds usually have more of them.

Habitat

While they will catch and eat insects, waxwings are one of the only North American songbirds to specialize on fruit. They even feed it to their young, so they live in places where fruit trees, like choke-cherry and saskatoon, are common. They prefer open woodlands and will also nest in shelterbelts and backyards. They range throughout most of Manitoba, almost to the border with Nunavut, but are most common through the Manitoba Escarpment as well as the Interlake and Eastman regions.

Uncommon



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

These brilliant yellow birds are a welcome regular at bird feeders across the province. The males are unmistakable with their bright yellow bodies contrasting with a black cap and wings. Females are a little more subtle, but no less beautiful. Their yellow is a bit more muted and they lack the black cap.

Interesting Facts

Unlike most songbirds, goldfinches are strict vegetarians. They subsist solely on seeds and other vegetation. If they eat an insect, it's by accident. They'll even eat maple sap and green algae.

Habitat

Goldfinch are common across the southern third of Manitoba. They're especially abundant in the southern Interlake and Parkland regions. They live quite happily around humans, especially in parks, wooded green spaces and gardens. Outside of cities, they tend to prefer shrubby areas, especially near weedy fields and meadows.

Common



WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

The song of the white-throated sparrow is the iconic music of the boreal forest. It's clear, whistled, 'Oh sweet Canada, Canada, Canada' is the one bird song that most people recognize, even if they don't know the bird that is making it. White-throated sparrows are chubby brown birds, with a bright, white throat (hence the name) and a white and black striped head with yellow eyebrows. There is a second, more drab, morph where the white parts are a little paler and the black stripes are more brown, but it's the same species.

Interesting Facts

The two colour morphs actually have different personalities. White-striped birds tend to be more brash and aggressive than the drab tan-striped birds. However, the tan-striped birds have been recorded to be better parents. Females of both colours prefer tan-striped males.

Habitat

While white-throated sparrows are boreal birds, they are generalists within their range and nest pretty much all over the boreal zone. They're especially abundant in Eastman and Parkland regions, as well as the northern Interlake. However, you can find them all the way up to Churchill.

Common



SONG SPARROW

Song sparrows are the quintessential 'little brown bird'. They're quite handsome with a streaky brown back that ranges in shade from chestnut to a little rusty, depending on the location. They have greyish-white eyebrows and a brown stripe that extends back from the eye. The belly is white and their breast is streaked with brown with a prominent dark spot right in the middle. While they're not overly flashy, they are excellent singers. It will settle itself on a branch, tilt its head back and let forth a musical rattle of high notes and buzzes.

Interesting Facts

While songbirds are born knowing how to sing, they still have to learn their song from the adult birds around them. Song sparrows are no different. Studies have found that female song sparrows are attracted to males who can learn songs with many different components.

Habitat

Song sparrows are widespread across Manitoba. While they can be found throughout the province, you'll have the best chance of seeing them in the Interlake and Parkland regions. They typically nest in bushy areas along waterways and wetlands. They also like forest edges, shrubby areas and overgrown fields.

Common



YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD

While they'll never win an award for the most beautiful sounding bird, yellow-headed blackbirds sing with flare. They throw their whole body into it, tipping their heads at a crazy angle and letting loose what can best be described as a sound similar to a warbly rusty gate. While not musical, they are pretty birds. The males are a deep black with striking yellow heads (for which they are named). The females show a similar pattern, but instead of black, their body feathers are brown and the yellow head is much more muted.

Interesting Facts

Yellow-headed blackbirds and red-winged blackbirds often compete for space in the same wetlands. Red-wingeds usually arrive first and stake out their territories, only to be displaced by the more aggressive yellow-headed blackbirds.

Habitat

Yellow-headed blackbirds build their nests among the dense thickets of cattails and reed grasses in marshes. They are most common in the Prairie Pothole region of Manitoba's southwest, but are also easy to find in marshes along Lake Manitoba and the southern tip of Lake Winnipeg. Oak Hammock Marsh is another great place to look for them.

Common



BALTIMORE ORIOLE

Male Baltimore orioles are showstoppers. Their bright orange and black plumage stands out like a blaze among the green summer leaves. The female is a little more subtle, with a mostly yellow body and grey wings. Oriole songs are a rather musical series of whistles, sometimes interspersed with buzzy chatter.

Interesting Facts

Baltimore orioles are fans of dark, ripe fruit. They will sometimes eat it using a technique called gaping. They'll stab their beak into the fruit, then open their mouth, cutting a gash into the flesh. They then use their bristled tongues to lap up the juice.

Habitat

Baltimore orioles build carefully woven nests that look like hanging balls of yarn, high up in deciduous trees. You can find them in Winnipeg parks, and they are especially common around the southern end of Lake Manitoba. However, they range throughout the southern third of the province in open deciduous woodland.

Uncommon



BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER

These little stripy birds behave more like a nuthatch than a warbler. They can usually be seen creeping up and down tree trunks and along branches. Their black and white striped plumage helps them blend into the bark. Both males and females have black stripes on their head and a mask around the eyes, but the male's mask is darker and bigger.

Interesting Facts

Black-and-white warblers have an extra-long claw on their back toe to help them hold onto the bark when they're hanging upside-down.

Habitat

These feisty little birds range over most of Manitoba, except the far north. While they live all over the boreal forest, they prefer mixed wood stands with deciduous trees. The best places to look for them include the eastern slope of the Manitoba Escarpment, around Lake Winnipeg and the southern portion of the Eastman region.

Uncommon



YELLOW WARBLER

These little rays of sunshine can be found flitting among leaves all over Manitoba, singing their 'sweet-sweet-sweet, I'm-so-sweet' song. The males are a striking canary yellow all over with black centred wing feathers and rusty stripes along the breast and belly. Females are a slightly more muted yellow with an olive-coloured back.

Interesting Facts

Yellow warbler nests are often parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds who leave their eggs to be raised by the warbler parent at a cost to their own young. However, the warblers have evolved the ability to recognize the odd egg and will often build a whole new nest on top of the parasitized clutch and start over.

Habitat

Yellow warblers are ubiquitous little birds, found all the way up to the coast of Hudson Bay. They prefer shrubby areas to build their nests, often near water. You can also find them in gardens and within urban areas.

Common



AMERICAN REDSTART

These flashy little birds can be found showing off their tails all over the province. The black and orange pattern of the males evokes thoughts of a mini-oriole, but they have white bellies. The females and immature males replace the black with grey and the orange with yellow. All of them can be easily identified by their habit of fanning their tail feathers to flash their markings.

Interesting Facts

Like many warbler species, male redstarts may mate with two females at the same time. Unlike other warbler species, they will also maintain two separate territories at the same time, each with its own female on a nest.

Habitat

While they do range over much of the province, your best places to look for redstarts is along the Manitoba Escarpment, the Lake Manitoba Narrows and around Lake Winnipeg. They like to nest in open forest, often along waters' edges.

Common



ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK

These striking robin-sized birds can often be heard singing their hearts out in the top of the forest canopy. Their sweet song is often referred to as a 'robin who took singing lessons'. Males and females both have large, heavy beaks. Females are brown on top with streaky tan undersides that help her blend into the forest. Males, on the other hand, are quite flashy. Their black head and back contrasts starkly with their white belly and a splash of crimson on their breast gives them a bleeding heart look.

Interesting Facts

While they are accomplished singers, they aren't great nest builders. Their nests are often so threadbare, that you can see the eggs through the bottom.

Habitat

Rose-breasted grosbeaks range over much of the province and are most common in the eastern Parkland and Eastman regions. They especially like dense willow stands and forest edges.

Uncommon



SCARLET TANAGER

Scarlet tanagers are one of those birds that stops even seasoned birders in their tracks. The males are a deep scarlet red, offset by black wings, and look like a species more suited for a tropical forest. The females — while less striking, are a beautiful olive yellow in the place of the red, with greenish backs.

Interesting Facts

Not only do scarlet tanager males sing like 'a robin with a sore throat', but the females sing as well. Her song is softer and shorter and sung as an answer to the male, usually while she's gathering nest material.

Habitat

Manitoba represents the northern extent of the scarlet tanager's range. They aren't especially plentiful anywhere, but can be found more readily in the southeastern portion of the province and on the eastern slope of Riding Mountain. They will nest in mostly mature mixed forests, but also like jack pine stands and woodlands along water bodies.

Uncommon

