

Forest Park is home to many birds. Many more use the park as a stopover on their annual migration. More than 200 species of birds have been seen in the park, but some are far more common than others.

Visitors to Forest Park can see most of the birds described here without much effort. Some occur only in the summer, like Common Nighthawk, Eastern Kingbird, Barn Swallow, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Red-winged Blackbird. Although all the birds included here are "land birds," which don't require open water like ducks and herons, several of them are easiest to find around the lakes and lagoons. Woodpeckers and owls occur throughout the park but are most often seen in the Kennedy Forest.

PROTECTING THE FRAGILE BALANCE

- The park, founded in 1876, shelters an incredible diversity of wildlife and habitats. Forested areas, lakes and ponds, open spaces and fields, are among the various habitat types.
- Because some mammals are so visible and so fascinating, park visitors may want to feed or interact with them. For your safety, be aware these "cute" animals can bite! For the mammal's well-being, we encourage you NOT to feed these park residents. Just observe and enjoy the wildlife!
- You can also help preserve the fragile balance of park habitats. Remember to recycle or discard all waste. Don't destroy park wildlife by pulling down live branches or damaging plantings. Drive slowly through the park, lessening noise pollution. Better still, walk or bicycle through the park and enjoy the variety of mammals.
- All wildlife should be appreciated and preserved.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Field Guide to the Birds of North America
Second Edition,
Published by National Geographic Society, 1987

A Field Guide to the Birds (Eastern)
Published by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980
Author: Roger Tory Peterson,

Stokes Field Guide to Birds - Eastern Region
Published by Little, Brown and Company, 1996
Authors: Donald and Lillian Stokes

Birds of the St. Louis Area - Where and When to Find Them
By Webster Groves Nature Study Society, 1998
Authors: C. Alwood, P. Bauer, D. Anderson, R. Korotev,
and J. Van Benthuyzen

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LAND BIRDS

FOREST PARK



1. AMERICAN CROW

Length: 18"

Crows are one of the most conspicuous birds of Forest Park and their "caws" are heard year round. These large black birds eat insects, frogs, nuts, seeds, bird eggs and nestlings,

roadkills, and discarded human food. Crow nests, which are about the size of basketballs, are made of sticks and placed high in large trees. Crows typically lay 4-5 eggs.

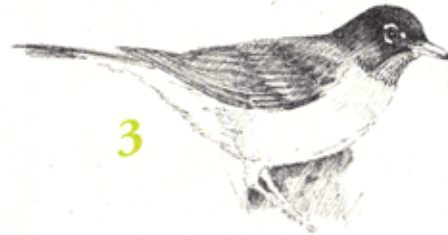


2. BLUE JAY

Length: 11"

Ten species of jays occur in the U.S., but only the Blue Jay is found in the St. Louis area. Blue Jays are closely related to crows and eat many of the same things, but more of their diet is plant material like acorns and other nuts.

In Forest Park, Blue Jays often build their nests with the plastic holders that bind together a six-pack of soda. In Kennedy Forest it is not uncommon to see several such holders wedged 20-feet high in the "Y" of a tree.



3. AMERICAN ROBIN

Length: 10"

With gray backs and brick-red breasts, robins are unmistakable. They are easy to see and study because they are one of the tamest of our common birds. Notice the small white areas at the corners of their tails when they fly. Officially, our robin is called American Robin. The name helps distinguish this bird from some related robins (one of

which is all black) from Central America, and from the unrelated, red-breasted bird of Europe after which our robin was named. Although people regard robins as harbingers of spring because they return to grassy areas of St. Louis in February and March, many spend the winter in rural wooded areas, sometimes in large flocks.



4. RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER AND 5. RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

Length: (Red-bellied): 9.5"; (Red-headed): 9"

Five species of woodpecker occur year round and regularly nest in Forest Park. The Red-bellied is one of the most common. This species seems misnamed because the small reddish patch on the gray belly is hard to see. Instead, its most conspicuous feature is its red nape. The male also has a red crown. Red-headed

Woodpeckers, which are less common in the park, are striking black and white birds with totally red heads. Both woodpeckers nest in holes in trees and often are seen feeding on insects and seeds in the trees around picnic areas.



6. DOWNY WOODPECKER AND 7. HAIRY WOODPECKER

Length: (Downy): 7"; (Hairy): 9"

These two woodpeckers look alike. The Hairy is bigger (9" long) than the Downy (7" long), and has a proportionately larger bill. Both have white bellies and backs, and black wings with white spots. Males have small red patches

at the back of their heads. Downys outnumber Hairys about 15 to 1 in Forest Park. Downys are our smallest woodpecker and sometimes feed on shrubs, corn stalks, and small vines that are too small for their larger relatives.

8. NORTHERN FLICKER

Length: 13"

Unlike other woodpeckers, Flickers often feed on the ground. They make a loud, repetitive call, "wik-wik-wik-wik-wik." During the spring mating season, they sometimes hammer on the metal parts of park lamp posts to make noise. Flickers have spotted

breasts and are the only woodpecker in the area with a brown back. When they fly, their white rumps are conspicuous. Flickers occur year round throughout wooded sections of the park, but are easiest to find in April when migrant birds pass through.

9. GREAT HORNED OWL

Length: 22"

There is probably at least one pair of Great Horned Owls in the park right now. For big birds (almost 2 feet tall), they hide well during the day, in pine trees, thick vines, or perched against the trunk of a large tree. Finding one is easier than you may think, however, particularly in Kennedy Forest when there are no leaves on the trees. Listen for the crows. When a crow finds a roosting owl or hawk, it "caws" loudly, which attracts other birds. Soon a dozen squawking crows are perched

around or swooping at the owl, trying to drive it away. The big owls are accustomed to this and usually stay put, trying to ignore their tormentors. The owls eat rabbits, squirrels, skunks, cats, ducks, and (yes) crows.

Great Horned Owls begin nesting earlier than any other bird species in the St. Louis area. By February they are usually sitting on eggs, in stick nests high in trees. One year, a pair nested in a tree behind the Art Museum, raising two young. Dozens of people jogged and walked by the tree every day without knowing the owls were there.



10. EASTERN SCREECH-OWL

Length: 9"

Screech Owls look like miniature Great Horned Owls because both have "ear" tufts (which are completely unrelated to their actual ears). The little owls are about 9" tall and appear in two colors: red and gray. Perhaps our most nocturnal owls, Screech Owls are seldom seen during the day, but sometimes can be found roosting on a branch,

hidden in a vine, or looking out from a hole in a tree, where they nest. They eat mice, frogs, small birds, and insects. As with Great Horned Owls, their presence is often indicated by other birds. Blue Jays, Cardinals, and even Chickadees habitually scold Screech Owls exposed during the day.



11. NORTHERN CARDINAL

Length: 8.5"

Almost everyone knows the bright red Cardinal, the St. Louis baseball mascot. Visitors see and hear Cardinals year-round almost everywhere in the park. Once you learn their characteristic whistle call, they

are easy to find. Females are browner than males so they are inconspicuous while sitting on their nests, which they usually build in low shrubs. Cardinals eat seeds and insects.



12. BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD

Length: 7.5"

The nests of Cardinals and many other birds are often parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird. Cowbirds don't build their own nests, but lay their eggs in other birds' nests. Sometimes they remove eggs of the host bird to make room for their own. Cardinals and other host species feed and raise the cowbird chicks as their own, and because cowbird eggs

usually hatch sooner and grow faster, the host bird's young may fail to survive. Cowbirds have seriously reduced the numbers of some bird species. In Forest Park they sometimes are seen feeding in the grass around picnic areas. The male Cowbird is a black with a brown head. The female is gray.



13. RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

Length: 8.5"

Male Red-wings are easy to

near water since they nest in



16. BARN SWALLOW

Length: 7"

Barn Swallows deftly catch flying insects. They seem to appear from nowhere to follow the mowing machines that cut grass in Forest Park. They nest in and around the Mounted

Police stables in nests they build mainly from mud. Their deeply forked tails distinguish them from most other bird species.

17. COMMON GRACKLE

Length: 12"

Grackles are black birds with very long, wedge-shaped tails and yellow eyes. In bright sunlight, they appear iridescent purple and green. They often

occur in small flocks and are most common around the edge of the lakes. They eat a variety of items and are fond of live bait discarded by fisherman.

18. MOURNING DOVE

Length: 12"

Mourning Doves are one of the most widespread birds in the U.S. and thrive in a variety of habitats. They are smaller and slimmer than their relative, the Rock Dove. The Mourning Dove's tail is

pointed while the Rock Dove's is fan-shaped. They build a loose platform of sticks in trees for nesting. Their name derives from the mournful "coo, coo, coo" call.

19. ROCK DOVE

Length: 12.5"

Rock Dove is the official name for what most people call a pigeon. The Rock Dove was the first bird species domesticated and raised for meat. They originate from Europe and Asia and were brought to North America in the early 1600s. In their native habitat, they nest on

ledges of buildings, bridges, and freeway overpasses. Most are still blue-gray, but because humans bred them for racing and as "carrier pigeons," they now appear in a variety of colors. They are fast fliers and often are seen in small flocks flying over the park. Rock Doves are common in picnic areas where they feed



Male Red-wings are easy to recognize. They're black birds, a bit smaller than a Robin, with a red patch on the wing. If you look closely, you see the red patch is edged with yellow. Females appear totally different from males. They are dark brown and heavily streaked below. Red-wings are usually found

near water since they nest in marshy areas or along grassy edges of ponds and streams. During breeding season, males perch in conspicuous places, spread their wings to show their red wing patches, and give a distinctive "konk-a-reee" call.

14. EASTERN KINGBIRD

Length: 8.5"

Several species of flycatchers nest in the park during summer. The Eastern Kingbird is the most common of those. Kingbirds are handsome black and white birds, about 8.5" long, with a narrow white band on the end of their dark tail. Usually they are found in areas of tall but scattered trees,

and pairs often nest around the ball fields. They perch upright in the open, and dart out to catch flying insects, often returning to the same perch. They fearlessly pursue and attack larger birds, such as hawks and crows, that enter their territory.

15. COMMON NIGHTHAWK

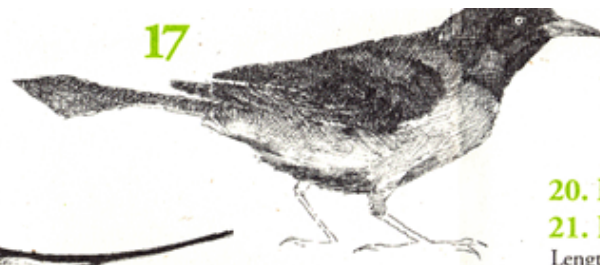
Length: 9.5"

A misnamed species, Nighthawks aren't hawks at all. They are members of a family of nocturnal birds called nightjars or goatsuckers, like the Whip-poor-wills and the Tawny Frogmouths found in the birdhouse at the Zoo. Many of the Nighthawks sighted in the park probably nest on the gravel rooftops of the hospital buildings to the east. Just after sunrise or at dusk, you can view nighthawks catching high-flying insects above the ball fields, and

hear their short "peent" call. The best time and place to see them, however, is just outside the park in late August and early September. At night during this period, dozens of southbound migrants catch insects in the lights of the large Amoco sign near the southwest corner of the park.



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habitat, they nest on rocky ledges or in caves, which is why they adapt well to

common in picnic areas where they feed on crumbs.

20. EUROPEAN STARLING AND 21. HOUSE SPARROW

Length: (Starling): 8"; (Sparrow): 6"

Like the Rock Dove, Starlings and House Sparrows are not native to this country. Both species were brought deliberately to the U.S. from Europe in the late 1800s. They were first released in the New York area. In areas of human habitation, the two are now among the most common bird species.

At a distance, Starlings look like short-tailed blackbirds. Adult Starlings are the only black birds with yellow bills. Seen closely, they are iridescent green and purple with spots. Starlings nest in holes and compete ferociously for nest sites with native species like

woodpeckers. Related to the Mynahs, Starlings make a variety of calls, often imitating other species. They forage on the ground for insects and seeds, sometimes in large groups.

House Sparrows, also known as English Sparrows, are little brown birds. They are often uninvited guests at picnics and outdoor lunch tables at the Zoo. They seldom live far from human habitation and seem to prefer human food when it is available. They nest in bird boxes, but also under eaves, on rafters, in light fixtures, and sometimes even in trees.

22. EURASIAN TREE SPARROW

Length: 6"

A close relative of the House Sparrow, the Eurasian Tree Sparrow was first released in this country in St. Louis in 1870. Unlike the House Sparrow, it did not spread across the country. Today, Eurasian Tree Sparrows remain largely confined to the St. Louis area. Although they are common in residential neighborhoods just south of the park, they are uncommon in Forest Park.