

BIRDING IN EVERY SEASON

With distinct color patterns and unique songs, this list of common songbirds of the St. Croix will be great to get you started on your birding adventure. Keep in mind that some of these birds migrate south for the winter and may only be seen from spring to fall. Nevertheless, the winter in Minnesota and Wisconsin is a great time to start birding because leafless trees and shrubs make birds much easier to see. If you are birding in the winter, keep your eyes open for the black-capped chickadee, American goldfinch, and the American robin.

Don't be dismayed if you have trouble finding an American goldfinch in the winter. Most people expect to see the same brightly-colored, yellow bird that they see in the summer. However, the American goldfinch molts in late fall, replacing its bright yellow feathers with duller ones as seen in this winter photo. Look online or in a field guide to see different color patterns for each of these birds.



• BACKYARD BIRD-WATCHING •



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

A small, distinctive finch common year-round in the St. Croix River Valley. Breeding males are bright yellow with a black cap and black wings with white wing bars. Found in open woodland areas and at most feeders. Call sounds like *pot-to-chip*.



SCARLET TANAGER

This vibrant songbird breeds in the St. Croix River Valley during spring and early summer. It can be spotted high in the forest canopy and is usually heard before being seen. Male is a vibrant red with black wings and tail. Call sounds like *chick-burr*.



RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

This blackbird is one of the most abundant birds across North America and can be seen anywhere from marshes, to roadsides, phone wires, or on cattails. Male is glossy black with red and yellow shoulder patches. Song sounds like *konk-la-lee* with a waver on the *lee*.



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

A tiny songbird common year-round in the St. Croix River Valley. Identified by black cap and bib with white cheeks. Found virtually anywhere with trees and around any feeder. It is usually heard before seen. Call sounds like a whistled *pee-ur* or *chika-dee-dee-dee*.

• BACKYARD BIRD-WATCHING •

A small woodpecker common across most of North America year-round. Commonly seen foraging in forests and visiting bird feeders. Males have a red patch on the back of the head. Call sounds like a short and soft *pik*. Drum is steady and lasts 2-3 seconds.

DOWNY WOODPECKER



This vibrant songbird is common during spring and summer breeding season. Seen perched high up in open woodland trees or at backyard feeders. Males have a bright orange belly and a black head and wings. Song is a series of flutelike pair notes repeated 2-7 times.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE





RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

This woodpecker is common year-round in hardwood forests foraging on bark. Male has a red cap and nape, pale belly, and black and white barred wings/back. Call is a shrill, rolling *kwirr* or *churr* and drum is a steady 19 beats per second and lasts about a second at a time.



BLUE JAY

This large songbird is common year-round to forests across eastern North America. It is often at backyard feeders and known for its intelligence. Adult is a striking blue with a prominent crest and black band around neck. Variety of calls, most common a loud jeer.

• BACKYARD BIRD-WATCHING •

This medium-sized songbird is common year-round across the United States in open woodlands and lawns. Adult has a rusty orange belly, black head and body, and yellow beak. Song is a string of varied whistles often sounding like *cheerily*, *cheer up*, *cheerily*, *cheer up*.

AMERICAN ROBIN



This medium-sized songbird is common across eastern North America in open woodlands during breeding season. Often seen in shrubs or foraging on the ground. Adults are grey with a black cap, red undertail coverts, and long tail feathers. Call sounds like the raspy mew of a cat.

GRAY CATBIRD



SEXUAL DIMORPHISM

Sexual dimorphism is the fancy term that is used when males and females of the same species look different from one another. This is especially noticeable in several species of birds. You may have noticed that many of the descriptions above included the color of the male bird's feathers but not the female's. This is because in many species of birds, the male is brightly colored while the female is a dull grey/brown.

Male birds have evolved to have brightly colored feathers because it helps attract female mates. The brighter the colors on the male bird, the more likely it will be to attract a female bird and have its own offspring. If a male bird has dull feathers, it will be less likely to attract a female to have offspring with.

Photo right: male and female cardinal.
Photo below: parent and child with curly hair.



Brightly colored feathers are a genetic trait, just like blond or curly hair. Much like humans, young birds will often look like their parents when they grow up. In many bird species, brightly-colored males have more offspring than dull-colored males. Over many years, this has resulted in male birds having the brightly colored patterns that we can easily identify.

On the next two pages, see if you can correctly match the male and female versions of each songbird species. Once you finish matching, notice how each species has a very different set of colors and color pattern. Beside attracting a mate, what other reasons do you think could explain the different colors, shapes, and sizes of the songbird species that live along the St. Croix River?



SPECIES MATCHING GAME

Can you correctly match the male and female birds from each species?



A



B



C



D



E



F

1



2



3



4



5



6



SPECIES MATCHING GAME

Can you correctly match the male and female birds from each species?



G

7



H

8



I

9



J

10



K

11



L

12



Answers on the next page.

MATCHING ANSWERS

A-4, American goldfinch

B-3, Scarlet tanager

C-5, Bluebird

D-6, Baltimore oriole

E-2, Northern cardinal

F-1, Indigo bunting

G-9, Red-bellied woodpecker

H-11, Red-winged blackbird

I-12, Downy woodpecker

J-8, White-breasted nuthatch

K-7, Red-breasted grosbeak

L-10, Blackburnian warbler

