

# Birds of the French Basin Marsh



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

- Mallards are large ducks with hefty bodies, rounded heads, and wide, flat bills
- Mallards can live in almost any wetland habitat, natural or artificial
- Mallards are “dabbling ducks”—they feed in the water by tipping forward and grazing on underwater plants



Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

- Wood Ducks have a unique shape among ducks—a boxy, crested head, a thin neck, and a long, broad tail. In flight, they hold their head up high, sometimes bobbing it
- Unlike most waterfowl, Wood Ducks perch and nest in trees and are comfortable flying through woods
- Look for Wood Ducks in wooded swamps, marshes, streams, beaver ponds, and small lakes. They stick to wet areas with trees or extensive cattails. As a cavity nester, Wood Ducks take readily to nest boxes

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American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*)

- Hides in plain sight in shallow wetlands of eastern North America
- They often flock with the ubiquitous Mallard, where they look quite similar to female Mallards
- These are dabbling ducks that tip up instead of dive when they forage. They eat aquatic plants, invertebrates, and occasionally small fish in shallow water. They also fly into agricultural fields to feed on waste corn and grain



Blue winged teal (*Anas discors*)

- Pairs and small groups of this tiny dabbling duck inhabit shallow ponds and wetlands across much of North America
- Blue-winged Teal are long distance migrants, with some birds heading all the way to South America for the winter
- Look for Blue-winged Teal on calm bodies of water from marshes to small lakes



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Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*)

- A buoyant, large-headed duck that abruptly vanishes and resurfaces as it feeds
- Bufflehead nest in old woodpecker holes, particularly those made by Northern Flickers, in the forests of northern North America
- Bufflehead are very small, compact ducks with large, rounded heads and short, wide bills
- Bufflehead dive underwater to catch aquatic invertebrates. When courting females, male Buffleheads swim in front of them, rapidly bobbing their heads up and down



Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)

- Gadwall feed with other dabbling ducks, tipping forward to feed on submerged vegetation without diving. They sometimes steal food from flocks of diving ducks or coots
- Gadwall breed mainly in the Great Plains and prairies. On migration and in winter, look for Gadwall in reservoirs, ponds, fresh and salt water marshes, city parks, sewage ponds, or muddy edges of estuaries

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## Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*)

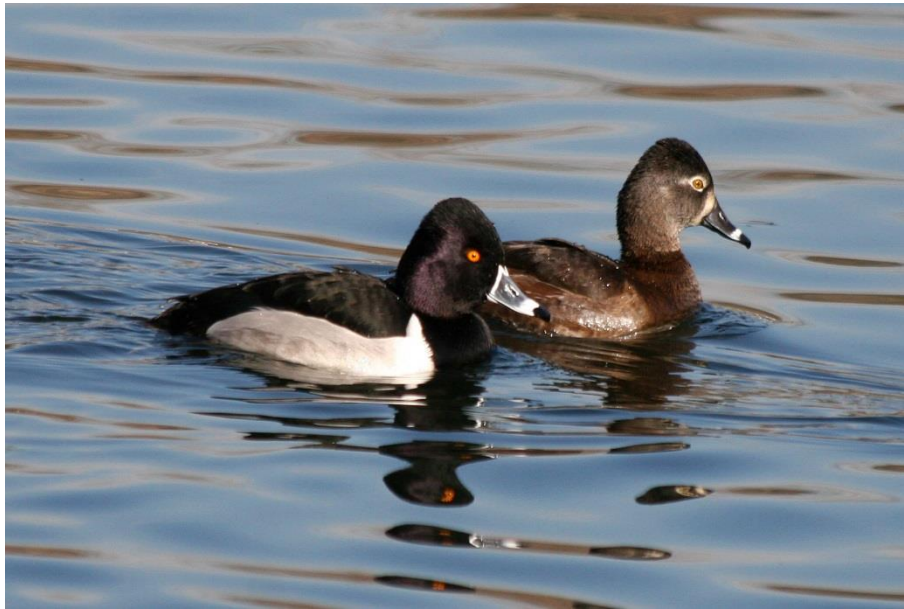
- Its elongated, spoon-shaped bill has comblike projections along its edges, which filter out food from the water
- When flushed off the nest, a female Northern Shoveler often defecates on its eggs, apparently to deter predators
- Northern Shoveler pairs are monogamous, and remain together longer than pairs of other dabbling duck species
- Breeds in open, shallow wetlands. In winter, inhabits both freshwater and saline marshes



## Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

- The Northern Pintail is among the earliest nesting ducks in North America, beginning shortly after ice-out in many northern areas
- The northern pintail is a medium-sized dabbling duck with a slim profile, long narrow neck and pointed tail
- Females nest in open areas typically on the ground in low or sparse vegetation and cropland stubble. Pintails tend to locate their nests farther from water than other ducks

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Ring Neck Duck (*Aythya collaris*)

- At distance, look for this species' distinctive, peaked head to help you identify it
- Even though this species dives for its food, you can find it in shallow wetlands such as beaver swamps, ponds, and bays
- Of all the diving duck species, the Ring-necked Duck is most likely to drop into small ponds during migration
- Ring-necked Ducks are often in small flocks and pairs, diving to feed on mollusks, invertebrates, and submerged aquatic vegetation. Sometimes they flock with scaup; other times you may see them with dabbling ducks



Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

- Ruddy Ducks are compact, thick-necked waterfowl with seemingly oversized tails that they habitually hold upright
- Males court females by beating their bill against their neck hard enough to create a swirl of bubbles in the water
- They nest in marshes adjacent to lakes and ponds, primarily in the Prairie Potholes region. In migration, they flock to large rivers, ponds, and lakes, and also gather in coastal estuaries, frequently mixing with other diving ducks such as Bufflehead and goldeneyes

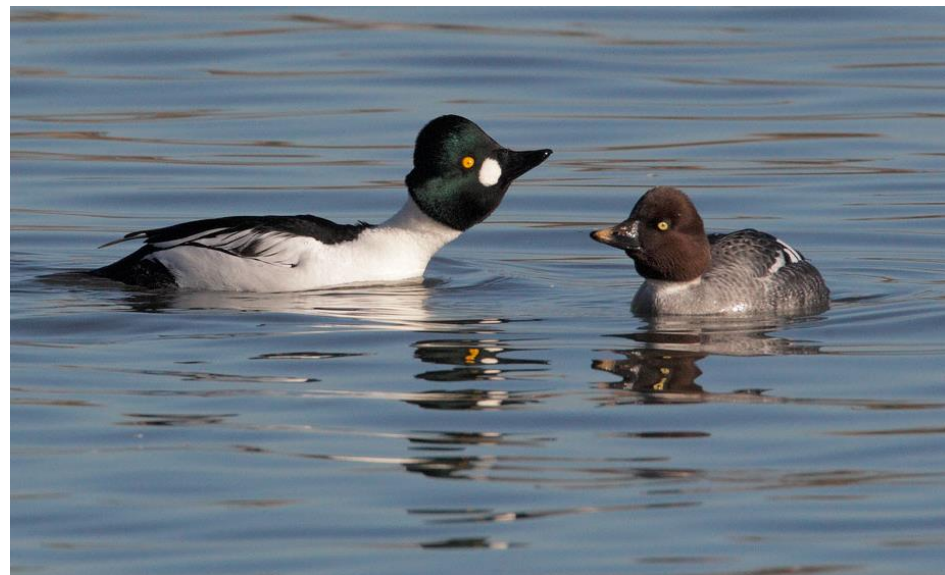


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American Wigeon (*Anas americana*)

- A common and increasingly abundant duck, the American Wigeon breeds in northwestern North America and is found throughout the rest of the continent in migration and in winter
- The American Wigeon's short bill enables it to exert more force at the bill tip than other dabbling ducks, thus permitting efficient dislodging and plucking of vegetation
- The American Wigeon is the dabbling duck most likely to leave water and graze on vegetation in fields. However, feeding in fields on grain, such as corn, is rather rare
- American Wigeon courtship displays include tail-wagging, head-turning, wing-flapping, and sudden jumps out of the water



Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

- The black-and-white Common Goldeneye is one of the last ducks to migrate south in fall. It often will winter as far north as open water permits
- A female Common Goldeneye often lays eggs in the nest of another female, especially in nest boxes. She may lay in the nests of other species of ducks as well. Common and Barrow's goldeneyes lay in each other's nests, and Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers often lay in the goldeneye's nest too
- The eyes of a Common Goldeneye are gray-brown at hatching. They turn purple-blue, then blue, then green-blue as they age. By five months of age they have become clear pale green-yellow. The eyes will be bright yellow in adult males and pale yellow to white in females

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Double Crested Cormorant  
(*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

- Stand on docks, rocky islands, and channel markers, their wings spread out to dry
- These solid, heavy-boned birds are experts at diving to catch small fish
- Double-crested Cormorants are large waterbirds with small heads on long, kinked necks. They have thin, strongly hooked bills, roughly the length of the head. Their heavy bodies sit low in the water
- Double-crested Cormorants are the most widespread cormorant in North America, and the one most frequently seen in freshwater. They breed on the coast as well as on large inland lakes. They form colonies of stick nests built high in trees on islands or in patches of flooded timber



Pied-Billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

- A small diving bird with a chicken-like bill, the Pied-billed Grebe is common on lakes and ponds across North America. It is rarely seen flying and prefers to sink out of sight when danger threatens
- Although it swims like a duck, the Pied-billed Grebe does not have webbed feet. Instead of having a webbing connecting all the toes, each toe has lobes extending out on the sides that provide extra surface area for paddling
- The downy chicks can leave the nest soon after hatching, but they do not swim well at first and do not spend much time in the water in the first week. They sleep on the back of a parent, held close beneath its wings. By the age of four weeks, the young grebes are spending day and night on the water. For the first ten days their response to danger is to climb onto a parent's back. After that, when danger threatens, they dive under water



# Birds of the French Basin Marsh



## Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

- Northern Cardinals tend to sit low in shrubs and trees or forage on or near the ground, often in pairs. They are common at bird feeders but may be inconspicuous away from them, at least until you learn their loud, metallic chip note
- Look for Northern Cardinals in inhabited areas such as backyards, parks, woodlots, and shrubby forest edges. Northern Cardinals nest in dense tangles of shrubs and vines
- Only a few female North American songbirds sing, but the female Northern Cardinal does, and often while sitting on the nest. This may give the male information about when to bring food to the nest. A mated pair shares song phrases, but the female may sing a longer and slightly more complex song than the male



## Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

- Cedar Waxwings are social birds that you're likely to see in flocks year-round. They sit in fruiting trees swallowing berries whole, or pluck them in mid-air with a brief fluttering hover. They also course over water for insects, flying like tubby, slightly clumsy swallows
- Look for Cedar Waxwings in woodlands of all kinds, and at farms, orchards, and suburban gardens where there are fruiting trees or shrubs
- The Cedar Waxwing is one of the few North American birds that specializes in eating fruit. It can survive on fruit alone for several months. Brown-headed Cowbirds that are raised in Cedar Waxwing nests typically don't survive, in part because the cowbird chicks can't develop on such a high-fruit diet



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American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

- Inquisitive and sometimes mischievous, crows are good learners and problem-solvers, often raiding garbage cans and picking over discarded food containers
- American Crows are common birds of fields, open woodlands, and forests. They thrive around people, and you'll often find them in agricultural fields, lawns, parking lots, athletic fields, roadsides, towns, and city garbage dumps
- Young American Crows do not breed until they are at least two years old, and most do not breed until they are four or more. In most populations the young help their parents raise young for a few years. Families may include up to 15 individuals and contain young from five different years



Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

- Male Red-winged Blackbirds do everything they can to get noticed, sitting on high perches and belting out their *conk-la-ree!* song all day long. Females stay lower, skulking through vegetation for food and quietly weaving together their remarkable nests. In winter Red-winged Blackbirds gather in huge flocks to eat grains with other blackbird species and starlings
- Look for Red-winged Blackbirds in fresh and saltwater marshes, along watercourses, water hazards on golf courses, and wet roadsides, as well as drier meadows and old fields. In winter, you can find them at crop fields, feedlots, and pastures
- Male Red-winged Blackbirds fiercely defend their territories during the breeding season, spending more than a quarter of daylight hours in territory defense. He chases other males out of the territory and attacks nest predators, sometimes going after much larger animals, including horses and people

# Birds of the French Basin Marsh



American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*)

- Goldfinches often flock with Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls. Spring males are brilliant yellow and shiny black with a bit of white. Females and all winter birds are more dull but identifiable by their conical bill; pointed, notched tail; wingbars; and lack of streaking. During molts they look bizarrely patchy
- These are active and acrobatic little finches that cling to weeds and seed socks, and sometimes mill about in large numbers at feeders or on the ground beneath them. Goldfinches fly with a bouncy, undulating pattern and often call in flight, drawing attention to themselves



Purple Finch (*Haemorhous purpureus*)

- Male Purple Finches are delicate pink-red on the head and breast, mixing with brown on the back and cloudy white on the belly. Female Purple Finches have no red. They are coarsely streaked below, with strong facial markings including a whitish eyestripe and a dark line down the side of the throat
- Purple Finches breed mainly in coniferous forests or mixed deciduous and coniferous woods. During winter you can find them in a wider variety of habitats, including shrublands, old fields, forest edges, and backyards
- Purple Finches readily come to feeders for black oil sunflower seeds. You'll also see them in forests, where they can be noisy but hard to see as they forage high in trees. In winter they may descend to eat seeds from plants and stalks in weedy fields. Their flight is undulating

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Black Capped Chickadee  
(*Poecile atricapillus*)

- Black-capped Chickadees seldom remain at feeders except to grab a seed to eat elsewhere. They are acrobatic and associate in flocks—the sudden activity when a flock arrives is distinctive. They often fly across roads and open areas one at a time with a bouncy flight
- Chickadees may be found in any habitat that has trees or woody shrubs, from forests and woodlots to residential neighborhoods and parks, and sometimes weedy fields and cattail marshes. They frequently nest in birch or alder trees



Yellow-Rumped Warbler  
(*Setophaga coronata*)

- Yellow-rumped Warblers are fairly large, full-bodied warblers with a large head, sturdy bill, and long, narrow tail
- Yellow-rumped Warblers typically forage in the outer tree canopies at middle heights. They're active, and you'll often see them sally out to catch insects in midair, sometimes on long flights. In winter they spend lots of time eating berries from shrubs, and they often travel in large flocks
- In summer, Yellow-rumped Warblers are birds of open coniferous forests and edges, and to a lesser extent deciduous forests. In fall and winter they move to open woods and shrubby habitats, including coastal vegetation, parks, and residential areas



# Birds of the French Basin Marsh



Common Yellowthroat  
(*Geothlypis trichas*)

- Look for these furtive, yellow-and-olive warblers skulking through tangled vegetation, often at the edges of marshes and wetlands
- Common Yellowthroats spend much of their time skulking low to the ground in dense thickets and fields, searching for small insects and spiders. Males sing a very distinctive, rolling *wichety-wichety-wichety* song, and both sexes give a full-sounding *chuck* note that is easy to learn. During migration, this is often the most common warbler found in fields and edges. It sometimes joins other warbler species in mixed foraging flocks



Nelson Sharptail Sparrow  
(*Ammodramus nelsoni*)

- A secretive sparrow with a brightly-colored face, the Nelson's Sparrow breeds along the edges of freshwater marshes and in wet meadows of interior North America, and in salt marshes along the northern Atlantic Coast
- Nesting: Open cup of grass stems and blades, lined with finer grass blades and sometimes built up on sides to form partial covering
- Forages on ground in dense grass or edges of shallow pools

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Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*)

- Redpolls travel in flocks of up to several hundred individuals. They move frenetically, foraging on seeds in weedy fields or small trees one minute and swirling away in a mass of chattering birds the next. Their buzzy zap and risingdreeee calls are distinctive
- Look for Common Redpolls in northern habitats ranging from willow flats to open conifer forest to open, weedy fields. They visit backyard bird feeders as well, especially during the winter
- Common Redpolls can survive temperatures of -65 degrees Fahrenheit. A study in Alaska found Redpolls put on about 31 percent more plumage by weight in November than they did in July



Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*)

- Dark-eyed Juncos are birds of the ground. They hop around the bases of trees and shrubs in forests or venture out onto lawns looking for fallen seeds. You'll often hear their high chip notes, given almost absent-mindedly while foraging, or intensifying as they take short, low flights through cover
- Dark-eyed Juncos breed in coniferous or mixed-coniferous forests across Canada, the western U.S., and in the Appalachians. During winter you'll find them in open woodlands, fields, parks, roadsides, and backyards
- Dark-eyed Juncos are primarily seed-eaters, with seeds of chickweed, buckwheat, lamb's quarters, sorrel, and the like making up about 75% of their year-round diet. At feeders they seem to prefer millet over sunflower seeds. During the breeding season, Dark-eyed Juncos also eat insects including beetles, moths, butterflies, caterpillars, ants, wasps, and flies

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## House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

- The House Sparrow takes frequent dust baths. It throws soil and dust over its body feathers, just as if it were bathing with water. In doing so, a sparrow may make a small depression in the ground, and sometimes defends this spot against other sparrows
- House Sparrows eat mostly grains and seeds, as well as livestock feed and, in cities, discarded food. Among the crops they eat are corn, oats, wheat, and sorghum. Wild foods include ragweed, crabgrass and other grasses, and buckwheat. House Sparrows readily eat birdseed including millet, milo, and sunflower seeds. Urban birds readily eat commercial bird seed. In summer, House Sparrows eat insects and feed them to their young. They catch insects in the air, by pouncing on them, or by following lawnmowers or visiting lights at dusk



## Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)

- Brown Thrashers skulk in shrubby tangles or forage on the ground below dense cover. They're most obvious when they sing their loud songs from shrubs and treetops. The song is a complex string of many musical phrases (many copied from other birds' songs, with each phrase typically sung twice before moving on). They also make a distinctive, harsh *tsuck* note
- Scrubby fields, dense regenerating woods, and forest edges are the primary habitats of Brown Thrashers. They rarely venture far from thick undergrowth into which they can easily retreat
- Brown Thrashers are accomplished songsters that may sing more than 1,100 different song types and include imitations of other birds, including Chuck-will's-widows, Wood Thrushes, and Northern Flickers



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## Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

- Canada Geese feed by dabbling in the water or grazing in fields and large lawns. They are often seen in flight moving in pairs or flocks; flocks often assume a V formation
- Some migratory populations of the Canada Goose are not going as far south in the winter as they used to. This northward range shift has been attributed to changes in farm practices that makes waste grain more available in fall and winter, as well as changes in hunting pressure and changes in weather
- In a pattern biologists call “assortative mating,” birds of both sexes tend to choose mates of a similar size
- The oldest known wild Canada Goose was 30 years 4 months old



## Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)

- They forage on the ground in fields, where they eat waste grain, other seeds, and insects when available. Ring-necked Pheasants usually walk or run and only occasionally resort to flying, usually when disturbed at close range by humans or other predators. Males give a loud, cackling display that can be heard over long distances
- Pheasants, along with most members of the grouse family, have specialized, powerful breast muscles—the “white meat” that you find on a chicken. These muscles deliver bursts of power that allow the birds to escape trouble in a hurry, flushing nearly vertically into the air and reaching speeds of nearly 40 miles per hour

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## Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

- Common Grackles are resourceful foragers. They sometimes follow plows to catch invertebrates and mice, wade into water to catch small fish, pick leeches off the legs of turtles, steal worms from American Robins, raid nests, and kill and eat adult birds
- Common Grackles eat mostly seeds, particularly agricultural grains such as corn and rice. Other seeds include sunflower seeds, acorns, tree seeds such as sweetgum, wild and cultivated fruits, and garbage. In summer, one-quarter or more of a grackle's diet may be animals, including beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, spiders, crustaceans, mollusks, fish, frogs, salamanders, mice, and other birds



## European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

- All the European Starlings in North America descended from 100 birds set loose in New York's Central Park in the early 1890s. The birds were intentionally released by a group who wanted America to have all the birds that Shakespeare ever mentioned. It took several tries, but eventually the population took off. Today, more than 200 million European Starlings range from Alaska to Mexico, and many people consider them pests
- A female European Starling may try to lay an egg in the nest of another female. A female that tries this parasitic tactic often is one that could not get a mate early in the breeding season. The best females find mates and start laying early. The longer it takes to get started, the lower the probability of a nest's success. Those parasitic females may be trying to enhance their own breeding efforts during the time that they cannot breed on their own