



WHERE THE BIRDS ARE

Jacelyn Downey

Time spent outside in the Wyoming winter tends to be frigid cold, bright white, and very quiet.

After months of seeing few critters besides cottontails, chickadees, and cows, forgetting what spring is like is easy.

The first sighting of bluebirds and green growth poking through the snow

can be very exciting. Some may even feel an unavoidable pull to get out and see what else is alive and kicking. For those folks, look no further than your own backyard, local park, or wild public land.

Here is a spring fever guide to birds and other wildlife.

OVERHEAD

American White Pelican – You might think these pelicans are strictly ocean dwellers, but in fact white pelicans spend the majority of the year inland. While flying overhead, look for black-edged wings contrasting with white.

Sand Hill crane – Most people hear these birds before they spot them overhead during their spring and fall migrations. Witnessing their courtship dance is a treat.

Common nighthawk – These birds can be spotted chasing flying insects over water, near bridges, and open land, especially at dawn and dusk.



American white pelican



Sand Hill crane



Common nighthawk



FENCE POSTS AND TELEPHONE WIRES

American kestrel – The kestrel is a type of falcon; they usually hunt prey from a perch such as a post or telephone wire.

Western meadowlark – Our state bird and a true signal that spring is here. Chances are, you've seen these birds singing atop a fencepost.

Loggerhead shrike – These birds are known for impaling insects and small rodents on barb wire and thorns as a means to save them for a later meal.

American kestrel



Western meadowlark



Loggerhead shrike



IN THE TREES

Yellow-breasted chat – Despite the bright yellow of this large warbler, they can be hard to find in the thick brushy areas they prefer. However, in the spring the males earn their name "chat" by their noisy singing.

Bullock's oriole – Males are brilliant orange and black, females are a dull yellow. Look for these birds along rivers and streams, often in cottonwood trees or in flowering shrubs in yards and gardens where they weave their hanging nests.

Cedar waxwing – These sleek birds are named for their bright red-orange waxy feather tips. You'll find them in trees and shrubs with fruit, their main food source.



NESTING NEAR YOUR HOME AND OUTBUILDINGS

Say's Phoebe – These sociable, peachy grey birds build cup-shaped nests on natural or human-made ledges that have shelter over them.

Say's Phoebe



Yellow-breasted chat



IN THE FIELD

Lark bunting – These striking black and white insect eaters are often found trailing a fence line or foraging in fields and pastures.

Upland sandpiper – You can hear the unmistakable wolf whistle of these birds in the springtime or see them atop fence posts in ranchland.

Burrowing owl – As their name suggests, you'll find these birds in abandoned burrows of prairie dogs and other ground dwellers.

Lark bunting



Burrowing owl



Bullock's oriole



Cedar waxwing



Upland sandpiper



American robin – The red-breasted robin is often called the harbinger of spring, but in Wyoming, they can be found year-round.



American robin

Barn swallow – One of several types of swallows found in Wyoming, barn swallows build their mud nests inside of sheds, barns, bridges, and other structures.



Barn swallow



IN YOUR GARDEN

American goldfinch –

Goldfinches love sunflower seeds. If you grow them in your garden, leave them standing through winter as a food source.

House wren – These small, brown, insect-eating birds will nest nearly anywhere. Attract them to your garden by planting shrubs.

Rufous hummingbird –

Planting red, tubular flowers such as penstemon, paintbrush, and gilia species are very attractive to these tiny pollinators.



American goldfinch



House wren



Rufous hummingbird

Looking to go further afield? Check out a few apps that make birding in Wyoming a bit easier and lighter.

The Wyoming Bird Trail App helps you find great birding sites in every part of the state.

The Audubon Guide to Birds helps with identification and even lets you know what birds have been seen recently at or near your current location.

For youth, I recommend the Merlin App. This is a great beginner guide.

Lastly, for those looking to make a contribution to science and the understanding of birds in Wyoming or wherever your travels take you, check out ebird. All of these apps are free and can be downloaded where you get your other smartphone apps.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

American avocet – Look for these slender, long-legged, and long-billed birds at the edges of alkaline waters.

American coot – Also called mud hens, you will often see big “rafts” of these birds in larger bodies of water.

While duck-like in appearance, these birds don’t have webbed feet.

Northern shoveler – These birds can resemble mallards, but on closer inspection, you’ll notice an enlarged bill. The bill is used to strain food from the water.



American avocet



American coot



Northern shoveler

Jacelyn Downey works for Audubon Rockies and looks for any excuse to be outside when things start moving in the spring. You can reach her at (307) 756-3941 or jdowney@audubon.org. You can also go to rockies.audubon.org to learn what’s going on in the bird world such as when a local Audubon Chapter is organizing a field trip, or how to participate in citizen science opportunities like bird banding, bird surveys, and classroom bird counts, and to attend family events like the Wyoming BioBlitz.

