



Crystal Bridges
Museum of American Art

Birds

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American Goldfinch

The Colors and Calls of the Goldfinch

NARRATOR: Naturalist Rick Jones explains how to identify the colors and call of the American Goldfinch, a songbird common to Crystal Bridges.

RICK JONES: Goldfinches are birds of open areas, and they often flock together. So, except during the breeding season, you'll see flocks of goldfinches descend upon your feeding station together. During the winter, they have sort of a dull molt. They look like very small, undescrpt little gray jobs to most people.

RICK CONTINUES: But in the summer, the males develop their bright yellow plumage with black caps, a very striking looking bird. And they have the habit of flying in sort of undulating patterns, often saying, "Chip, chip, chip," at the bottom of each undulation.

[End of Stop]

Barred Owl

About the Barred Owl

NARRATOR: Lynn Sciumbato introduces the barred owl, a common inhabitant of wooded areas and one whose call is frequently heard here at Crystal Bridges.

LYNN SCIUMBATO: In any wooded area in Arkansas, but especially in a wooded ravine such as this, barred owls may be found. They are our common forest owl and the owl many refer to as the hoot owl. As befits their size, their prey selection consists of chipmunks, lizards, small squirrels, voles, and their favorite, frogs. Hence, they are often found near water.

LYNN CONTINUES: They tend to be fairly vocal since they are a forest species, and it's easier to hear each other than it is to see through the trees. Their most common and well-known call is their territory call, which sounds like "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all," [Bird call sounds] but they have a host of other vocalizations that most people would not associate with an owl conversation. Although they are nocturnal, barred owls will often be seen hunting before dusk and sometimes after dawn.

[End of Stop]

Carolina Chickadee

About the Carolina Chickadee

NARRATOR: Naturalist, Rick Jones describes the appearance and habits of the intelligent and acrobatic Carolina chickadee.

RICK JONES: The Carolina chickadee is an approachable bird that has a short neck and a large head, giving it a distinctive spherical body shape. Its tail is fairly long and narrow. Carolina chickadees have a black cap and bib separated by stark white cheeks. The back, the wings and tail are soft gray. They are intelligent, inquisitive, and amazingly acrobatic birds.

RICK CONTINUES: Except during the breeding season, they gather in feeding flocks with other chickadees and a variety of other small species roaming within a fairly large area. Despite being a flocking species, they normally space themselves fairly widely while eating. Chickadees are cavity nesters who readily accept bird boxes mounted in suitable habitats by humans. The female builds the nest base with moss and sometimes with a strip or two of bark, then she adds a thick lining of hair and/or plant fibers. Finally, she lays six to eight brown speckled white eggs in the cup of the nest.

[End of Stop]

Carolina Wren

Carolina Wrens

NARRATOR: Carolina wrens are tiny birds with big voices. Naturalist Rick Jones explains the reasons for the Carolina wren's call and discusses the benefits and drawbacks of this little bird to ability to nest near human habitations.

RICK JONES: Carolina wrens are our woodland birds. They're more comfortable in the woods, although they have adapted quite well to the fragmentation of the forest that has occurred throughout this country.

RICK CONTINUES: Some birds do better than others after humans have altered the ecosystem in which they live, and the wrens generally are among those that have adapted well.

They like to nest very close to humans. Oftentimes you'll find a Carolina wren nest in a bucket that you hang outside your garage or something. They are cavity nesters, so they do look for a shelter in which to place their nest. It's a tiny little bird, you know, about five inches from the tip of its beak to the end of its tail. Very small little brown bird with a very prominent white eye stripe that runs above the eye, but you'll hear it singing,

RICK CONTINUES: "Teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher," a very loud, clear voice singing in the woods, and I just want to make the point that birds have developed their songs over the eons for a reason.

This little, tiny little bird with the big voice has really lived most of its time on this earth in deep Woodlands. And so it has developed a very loud voice in order to penetrate the depths of the forest, the bio mass that's there in the forest. It carries very well.

[End of Stop]

Carolina Wren

Mobbing

NARRATOR: Even small birds can defend themselves effectively from predators.

Naturalist Rick Jones reveals the way that individual birds protect their territory and even mob together to defend their nests.

RICK JONES: Very few birds can cuss as well as a Carolina Wren or a titmouse. They are both very alert, inquisitive birds, and are often the first on the scene of a catastrophe of some kind.

RICK CONTINUES: If there's a snake closing in on a nest and a wren or a titmouse sees that, they will take it upon themselves to warn the whole county with a very ruckus scolding, cussing sound. They're really a delight and oftentimes other titmice and chickadees and other small songbirds will be drawn in and you'll just see a whole canopy of bird scolding and screaming at the predator. It's really, it's called mobbing. Sometimes other birds will mob a hawk or an owl sitting in a tree just minding its own business and they just come around and raise all kinds of a ruckus because they want other birds to be aware of the danger that's in the area.

[End of Stop]

Northern Cardinal

The Northern Cardinal

NARRATOR: With the male's year-round bright red plumage, the northern cardinal is one of the most recognizable birds in the region. Naturalist Rick Jones discusses the habits of these colorful birds and how to attract cardinals to your yard.

RICK JONES: The male northern cardinal is perhaps responsible for getting more people to open up a birding field guide than any other bird. Seven states have named it their state bird, and many sport teams have adopted it as their mascots.

RICK CONTINUES: Cardinals are a perfect combination of familiarity, conspicuousness, and style, a shade of red that commands your attention. Even the pastel-colored females sport a sharp crest and warm red accents. Cardinals don't migrate, and they don't molt into adult plumage, so they're still breathtakingly beautiful in winter's snowy backyards. In summer, their sweet whistles are one of the first sounds of the morning. Nearly any bird feeder you put out ought to attract northern cardinals, as long as you live within their range, but they particularly seem drawn to sunflower seeds.

RICK CONTINUES: Leave undergrowth in your backyard or around the edges, and you may have cardinals nesting on your property.

[End of Stop]

Northern Cardinal

How to Find Birds

NARRATOR: You may not always be able to see birds in the field right away, but you will almost certainly hear them. Naturalist Rick Jones explains how you can find and identify birds in the field, both native species and visitors.

RICK JONES: The best way to find birds is to listen. Is to go to a place where you can sit down and just listen to what's going around, because oftentimes you will hear more birds than you see. That's by design.

RICK CONTINUES: Some of them don't want to be seen, but they do want to announce their presence to rivals and to mates, so they will be singing and that will direct your eyes to the source of the song.

The best way to learn to identify a bird is to follow that sound until you find the bird and then note the field marks. How large is the bird? Does it have wing bars? What's the shape of its bill? Where did you see it? What kind of activity was it doing? These are the things that will aid you to identify the bird and most experienced birders don't carry a heavy and bulky field guide around with them.

RICK CONTINUES: They have a little notebook, and they write down what they see.

[End of Stop]

Northern Mockingbird

Mockingbird Habits

NARRATOR: Rick Jones, naturalist at Hobbs and Devil's Den State Parks, describes the habits of the vocal and multi-talented mockingbird and how to attract them to your yard.

RICK JONES: If you're hearing an endless string of a dozen or so different birds singing outside your house, you might have a northern mockingbird in your yard. These slender-bodied birds apparently pour all their color into their personalities. Mockers are truly birds with a lot to say about any subject.

RICK CONTINUES: They sing almost endlessly, sometimes annoyingly at night. [bird sound] They flagrantly harass birds and occasionally humans that intrude on their territories, diving from above or prancing towards them on the ground, legs extended flaunting their bright white wing patches.

Four southern states, including Arkansas, have designated the northern mockingbird as their state bird. Look for mockers and towns, suburbs, parks, forest edges, and open land at lower elevations. Northern mockingbirds are common in backyards, but they rarely visit feeders. It feeds mainly on the ground, running or hopping short distances and then lunging after prey items.

RICK CONTINUES: While on the ground, it raises and lowers its wing in a conspicuously jerky movement that exposes its white wing patches. This wing-flashing behavior is perhaps a means of startling insects into movement, the better to be seen and eaten. You can encourage mockingbirds to visit your yard by keeping an open lawn but providing fruiting trees or bushes, including mulberries, hawthorns, and blackberry brambles.

The mocker preys upon insects. It helps to keep the insect population in check. It also eats the fruits off of shrubs and other berry-producing flora.

RICK CONTINUES: Some of these seeds over the eons have adapted the means to pass all the way through a bird's digestive tract unchanged. And so, when the bird flies to another location and there are bird droppings as a result, then the seed is then propagated to another area.

[End of Stop]

Pileated Woodpecker

About the Pileated Woodpecker

NARRATOR: Lynn Sciumbato explains the important role of woodpeckers in the forest environment and discusses the pileated woodpecker, the largest of the woodpecker species found at Crystal Bridges.

LYNN SCIUMBATO: Woodpeckers are an important part of a healthy forest because they eat the tree boring bugs found under the bark, so they protect the trees from detrimental insects.

LYNN CONTINUES: Few people realize, however, that woodpeckers will only excavate a nesting cavity in dead wood, either a dead tree or a dead branch on a live tree. The pileated woodpecker is the largest woodpecker found in this area and is the size of a crow. It's call sounds a lot like other woodpeckers, but the exceptional sound that befits their size is the drumming that they do in the spring to attract a mate. [bird sound] The hole they make also matches their size. Whereas most woodpeckers make a perfectly round hole, pileated woodpeckers make an oval or rectangular hole in a large dead tree.

LYNN CONTINUES: The presence of pileated woodpeckers is an indicator of a healthy, mature forest.

[End of Stop]

Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks

About Hawks

NARRATOR: Lynn Sciumbato describes the differences in hunting styles of two types of hawks that may be seen at Crystal Bridges, the red-tailed hawk and the red-shouldered hawk.

LYNN SCIUMBATO: On a ridge top, two types of hawks may be seen. The red-tailed hawk, the largest and most common hawk in the state, can sometimes be seen soaring overhead.

LYNN CONTINUES: These birds hunt open area habitats, and so while they may not hunt in timbered areas such as this, they can often be seen overhead moving from one hunting area to the next. The call of the red-tailed hawk is the quintessential hawk call heard in every Western film. [bird sound] But in reality, you very seldom hear them except during breeding season.

The red-shouldered hawk, on the other hand, is our common forest hawk. Slightly smaller than the red-tailed hawk, they are found in relatively mature forests and because of their tolerance to humans in parts of town with mature trees.

LYNN CONTINUES: In forests as well as in town, they are voracious rodent predators. They are very vocal and can be heard often and any time of year. [bird sound] But be warned, blue jays can mimic red-shouldered hawks perfectly.

[End of Stop]

Tufted Titmouse

Tufted Titmouse

NARRATOR: Naturalist Rick Jones discusses the highly vocal tufted titmouse, a regular visitor to the area's bird feeders.

RICK JONES: The tufted titmouse is a little gray bird with an echoing voice. It's common in Eastern deciduous forests and a frequent visitor to feeders. The large black eyes, small round bill and brushy crest give these birds a quiet but eager expression that matches the way they flip through the canopies, hanging from twig ends and dropping into bird feeders.

RICK CONTINUES: When a titmouse finds a large seed, you'll see it carry the prize to a perch and crack it with its sharp wax of a stout bill.

Tufted titmice are acrobatic foragers, if a little slower and more methodical than the chickadees. They often flock with chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers and are regular visitors to feeders, where they are assertive over smaller birds.

Nothing can cuss like a titmouse. They are the first to respond to a bird's distress alarm and will bob and scold the source of danger with enthusiasm. Their flight tends to be fluttery but rather level than undulating.

RICK CONTINUES: You'll find tufted titmouse in most Eastern woodlands below 2000 feet elevation, including deciduous and evergreen forests.

[End of Stop]

White-breasted Nuthatch

About the White-breasted Nuthatch

NARRATOR: Naturalist Rick Jones describes the white-breasted nuthatch, explains how it got its name, and how it shares its preferred hunting area with another bird, the brown creeper.

RICK JONES: The white-breasted nuthatch is a common feeder bird with clean, black, gray, and white markings. They are active, agile, little birds.

RICK CONTINUES: Like other nuthatches, they often fly to the top of a tree trunk, turn upside down and spiral methodically downward to the base of the tree, probing into bark furrows with their straight pointed bills, looking for insects. Nuthatches get their common name from their habit of jamming large nuts and acorns into tree bark, then whacking them with their sharp bills to hatch the seed from the inside. white-breasted nuthatches may be small, but their voices are loud, and often they're insistent, nasal yammering will lead you right to them. These are birds of mature woods and wooded edges.

RICK CONTINUES: They're particularly associated with deciduous stands, including maple, hickory, basswood, and oak.

[End of Stop]