Spring Birds
in McHenry County

Mid-Spring Arrivals
Mid-April to Early May
Welcome to Springtime Birding in McHenry County!

Wild places in McHenry County nurture many year-round resident bird species that become more active as the weather warms. The prairies, oak savannas, wetlands, and woodlands of this area also provide important nesting and feeding habitat for all kinds of migratory birds who arrive or pass through each spring and fall. Our spring migration season, from March to May, is one of the best times to learn about northern Illinois birds.

Birding, also known as birdwatching, is the process of observing and identifying bird species. This guide will help novice birders get started with spotting common mid-spring bird arrivals in McHenry County. Many of these birds flock to neighborhoods as well as protected natural areas, so you may see them on a walk in the woods or during a stroll down your street. Experienced birders may also find this guide useful as a refresher or quick-start list. Happy birding!

If you want to see birds even closer to home, look for the species in this guide that are marked with a bird house. These species are attracted to backyard feeders and habitat, making birding at your own window simple and fun for the whole family! Check the Resources at the end of this guide to learn more about bird-friendly backyards.

Tips for Beginner Birders

What do I need to start birding? All you really need is a place to observe birds and your own eyes. However, most birders find that binoculars and a good bird identification guide make it easier and more enjoyable to spot and identify birds. Check the Resources page at the end of this guide for more information about binoculars and guides.

Where should I go to see birds? Public parks, trails, and conservation areas are great places for a birding adventure. And don’t forget to look in your own backyard and around your neighborhood! Many species can be spotted around the edges of shopping centers, subdivisions, and apartment complexes. The more you observe your surroundings, the more birds you will start to see everywhere.

What if I need to stay home or can’t take a walk? That’s the perfect opportunity to bring birds to your yard, balcony, patio, or porch! Bird feeders and food are sold online and at hardware, grocery, and big box stores. But feeding birds doesn’t have to be complicated or expensive. You can even make bird feeders out of items around the house or in your recycling bin. Check the Resources page of this guide for more information about attracting birds to your backyard.

How do I develop my birding skills? It’s pretty simple! Just listen and watch the world around you. Move slowly and quietly and observe your surroundings in detail. As you become familiar with common local bird species, you’ll be able to quickly and easily tell what kind of birds you see and hear. And of course, it’s fun to share your birding adventure with friends or family!

Another way to challenge yourself as a birder is by creating a “life list” of bird species to spot and check off as your skills grow. A good introduction to “life lists” can be found at www.backyardnature.net/birdlist.htm.
**Species Information**

**Brown Creeper**  
This tiny bird sports camouflage that helps it hide as it zigzags up and down tree trunks, using its long, probing bill to find insects, and larvae in bark crevices. They seek mature trees in forests, woodlands, parks, and yards.

**Did You Know?**  
You can attract Brown creepers to your yard with peanuts, suet, and sunflower seeds.

**Scientific Name:** Certhia americana

**Chipping Sparrow**  
This pretty sparrow with a bright, reddish cap can be identified by its loud, trilling song. Look for them in areas where trees grow near grassy openings, such as savannas, parks, and yards. They eat seeds and insects along with the occasional berry.

**Did You Know?**  
You can attract Chipping Sparrows to your yard with sunflower and nyjer seeds, cracked corn, and millet.

**Scientific Name:** Spizella passerina

**Eastern Meadowlark**  
Eastern Meadowlarks are a species of conservation concern due to habitat loss, and McHenry County’s prairies and grassy fields are attractive to this bird. You may see them perched on fences or stalking the ground, digging among prairie plants for tasty insects, seeds, and fruits.

**Did You Know?**  
You can attract Eastern Meadowlarks to your yard with sunflower seeds and cracked corn.

**Scientific Name:** Sturnella magna

---

**ID Tips**

**Brown Creeper**  
ID Tips: Males and females have a mottled brown and buff back, wings, and tail, a white belly, breast, and throat, and a broad buff-colored stripe over the eye. Up to 5.5" long.

Listen to Calls:  

**Chipping Sparrow**  
ID Tips: Males and females are streaky, crisply-patterned brown with a pale breast, throat, belly, and face. Look for a black line through the eye and a rusty reddish crown. Up to 5.9" long.

Listen to Calls:  
[www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chipping_Sparrow/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chipping_Sparrow/sounds)

**Eastern Meadowlark**  
ID Tips: Males have a bright yellow chest and throat and the back, head, wings, and tail are pale brown mottled with black. A bold black V marks the chest and flashes of white are seen when the bird takes flight. Females have subdued tones. Up to 10.2" long.

Listen to Calls:  
[www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Meadowlark/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Meadowlark/sounds)
Grasshopper Sparrow
This small bird is sometimes hard to spot in fields and prairies. Listen for a thin, buzzing song and look for a little round sparrow clinging to grass stalks or perched on a fence, often fluttering its wings. It eats insects and seeds.

**Did You Know?** True to their name, Grasshopper Sparrows love to munch on grasshoppers.

**Scientific Name:** *Ammodramus savannarum*

---

Hermit Thrush
You may hear the Hermit Thrush sing its melancholy, lilting call before you see it. Watch the understory and ground in open areas of forests and woodlands. Hermit Thrushes often rummage through leaves on the ground for insects and small animals.

**Did You Know?** You can attract Hermit Thrushes to your yard with peanuts, fruit, and mealworms.

**Scientific Name:** *Catharus guttatus*

---

Ruby-Crowned Kinglet
This tiny bird forages quickly among the lower branches of trees and shrubs. One clue to look for is a constant flicking of the wings. Ruby-Crowned Kinglets are found in woodlands and thickets and enjoy insects, spiders, seeds, and fruit.

**Did You Know?** You can attract Ruby-Crowned Kinglets to your yard with sunflower seeds, suet, peanuts, and mealworms.

**Scientific Name:** *Regulus calendula*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species Information</th>
<th>ID Tips</th>
<th>Photos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Savannah Sparrow</strong>&lt;br&gt;One of the most common grassland sparrows in North America, this bird’s subdued, streaky brown coloring helps it hide in prairies, fields, and sedge wetlands. Savannah Sparrows prefer insects but also eat seeds.</td>
<td><strong>ID Tips:</strong> Males and females look the same, with crisp brown streaking on a paler belly and breast. Look for a yellow stripe over the eye and brown striped cheeks. Up to 5.9” long.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Listen to Calls:</strong> <a href="http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Savannah_Sparrow/sounds">www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Savannah_Sparrow/sounds</a>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Scientific Name:</strong> <em>Passerculus sandwichensis</em></td>
<td>![Adult male or female](Adult male or female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Song Sparrow</strong>&lt;br&gt;Song sparrows are one of the most familiar and common North American sparrows. They prefer open areas like wetland and lake edges, prairies, fields, open woodlands, and wooded edges in parks and yards. Song Sparrows eat insects, seeds, fruit, and suet.</td>
<td><strong>ID Tips:</strong> Males and females look the same with a rich, russet-red and gray coloring and bold streaks down a white chest. Up to 6.7” long.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Listen to Calls:</strong> <a href="http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Song_Sparrow/sounds">www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Song_Sparrow/sounds</a>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Scientific Name:</strong> <em>Melospiza melodia</em></td>
<td>![Adult male or female](Adult male or female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wood Thrush</strong>&lt;br&gt;You will most likely hear a Wood Thrush before you see it. Listen for males singing their haunting, flute-like “ee-oh-lay” song from the trees in forested areas. Then look towards the ground to see this bird digging through leaf litter for invertebrates and fruits.</td>
<td><strong>ID Tips:</strong> Males and females have warm brown backs, wings and heads with a speckled brown and white belly, breast, and throat. Up to 8.3” long.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Listen to Calls:</strong> <a href="http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Wood_Thrush/sounds">www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Wood_Thrush/sounds</a>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Scientific Name:</strong> <em>Hylocichla mustelina</em></td>
<td>![Adult male or female](Adult male or female)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Did You Know?** This bird’s name actually has nothing to do with grassland habitat. It was named after a specimen collected from Savannah, Georgia in the 1800’s.

**Did You Know?** You can attract Song Sparrows to your yard with peanuts, corn, millet, nyjer thistle seeds, sunflower seeds, and safflower seeds.

**Did You Know?** The male sings pairs of notes simultaneously due to its Y-shaped voicebox, creating a duet-like sound.
Resources

Choose Your Birding Tools:

Check out binoculars for different budgets at www.birdfeederhub.com/best-budget-binoculars-for-backyard-bird-watching/.

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology’s All About Birds website offers extensive free bird identification information, from photos to recordings of bird songs, at www.allaboutbirds.org.


Become a Citizen Scientist:

Become a volunteer scientist with eBird, a free worldwide citizen science project, at www.ebird.org. Birders can develop their skills with online learning tools and submit their own birding data to support global bird research.

Volunteer to look for local crane species during the annual Midwest Crane Count project, a multi-state effort organized by the International Crane Foundation. This non-profit conservation organization also operates a learning center in Baraboo, Wisconsin, where you can see 15 species of cranes up close! Visit www.savingcranes.org.

Join a Birding Group:


Find Birding Activities for the Whole Family:

Find resources and activities for young birders through the eBird’s Young Birders Network at https://ebird.org/about/resources/for-young-birders

Sign the “Pledge to Fledge” and help spread the word about birding to your family and friends! https://gbbc.birdcount.org/pledge-to-fledge/?lang=fr

Learn About Backyard Bird Feeding:

Visit www.feederwatch.org/learn/feeding-birds/ for lots of information about attracting birds to your backyard, porch, balcony, or neighborhood.