Spring Birding in McHenry County

Late Spring Arrivals
Mid-May to Late 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 late 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.

Online resources to discover nature, MCCD.me/e-learning
Species Information

Baltimore Oriole
This lovely orange and black bird has a rich, flutelike song that is a sweet herald of spring in eastern North America. Orioles prefer to perch and nest in high tree branches, so if you hear one singing, look up! They are found in open woodlands, parks, orchards, and yards. They eat nectar, fruit, and insects.

Did You Know? To attract Baltimore Orioles to your yard, try putting out halved oranges, a shallow dish filled with a small amount of sweet fruit jelly, or a store-bought oriole feeder with a commercial nectar product.

ID Tips: Males are black with a brilliant orange breast and belly and a white wing bar. Females and immature males have subdued gray and orange tones, with two white wing bars and an orange head. Up to 7.5” long.

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

Scientific Name: *Icterus galbula*

Black-Throated Green Warbler
This bright little warbler is a constant singer. Listen for a buzzy, ringing call that sounds like “trees trees I love trees.” Keep an eye on the upper branches of trees in forests and woodlands to spot this cherished spring arrival. Warblers eat insects, fruit, and buds.

Did You Know? One male Black-Throated Green Warbler was observed singing 466 songs in a single hour.

ID Tips: Males have a bright yellow face, dusky ear patch, black throat, streaked black sides, and green back. Females are similar with a white throat. Up to 4.7” long.

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

Scientific Name: *Setophaga virens*

Photos
**Bobolink**
This grassland bird species is in decline due to habitat loss. It arrives in McHenry County’s prairies and fields during breeding season. Look for this little bird perched on grasses or fluttering about as it searches for a mate. Bobolinks have short necks, flat heads, and distinctive coloring in the breeding season. They enjoy seeds, insects, spiders, and invertebrates.

**Did You Know?** Breeding males do fascinating display flights during spring and early summer. Look for them singing while flying “helicopter style,” appearing to hang in mid-air as they rapidly flutter their wings.

**ID Tips:** Breeding males are black with a yellow cap on the back of the head, black bill, and white markings on the wings and back. Females and non-breeding males are warm brown with streaking on the flanks and a pink-toned bill. Up to 8.3” long.

**Scientific Name:** *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

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

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**Magnolia Warbler**
This portly little warbler winters in southern Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Watch for their bright flashes of yellow as they hunt for insects on the outer branches of trees. They can be found among dense wooded edges in forests, parks, yards, and woodlands. Caterpillars are a favorite treat.

**Did You Know?** The oldest recorded Magnolia Warbler was nearly 9 years old when he was caught and released.

**ID Tips:** Males have black wings with a white bar and a yellow belly. Look for a black neck ring with black streaks down the breast. Females have a gray head, a faint gray neck ring, and narrow white wing bars. Up to 5.1” long.

**Scientific Name:** *Setophaga magnolia*

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

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**Online resources to discover nature, MCCD.me/e-learning**
### Red-Eyed Vireo

**Look to the treetops to catch a glimpse of this tiny, but loud, bird.** Red-Eyed Vireos are prolific singers and prefer habitat in mature forests and woodlands with a shrubby understory. They can also be found hanging out in wooded edges, parks, and yards. These birds forage for invertebrates, insects, spiders, seeds, and fruit, and love eating caterpillars.

**Did You Know?** A single male may produce 20,000 songs per day!

**ID Tips:** Males and females are olive-green with a white breast and belly and a green-yellow wash on flanks and under tail. Look for a distinct patterned head with a gray crown and a white eyebrow strip bordered by black lines. Adults have red eyes that appear dark from a distance. Up to 5.1” long.

**Listen to Calls:** [www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-eyed_Vireo/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-eyed_Vireo/sounds)

**Scientific Name:** Vireo *olivaceus*

### Rose-Breasted Grosbeak

This cheery bird has bold coloring and a triangular finch beak. Its distinctive, sweet-toned voice sounds a bit like an American Robin singing opera! Look in woodlands, yards, parks, gardens, orchards, and shrubby edges. They eat insects, seeds, fruit, and invertebrates.

**Did You Know?** To attract Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks to your yard, put out sunflower seeds, peanuts, and safflower seeds.

**ID Tips:** Males are black with a scarlet and white breast and white wing and tail patches. Females and immature males are streaky brown and white. Up to 7.5” long.

**Listen to Calls:** [www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rose-breasted_Grosbeak/sounds](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rose-breasted_Grosbeak/sounds)

**Scientific Name:** Pheucticus *ludovicianus*
Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
This is the only species of hummingbird that migrates to eastern North America for breeding. Watch for them in woodlands, prairies, fields, orchards, stream borders, and yards. Hummingbirds feed on the nectar of bright tubular flowers such as cardinal flower, jewelweed, and bee balm - as well as small insects.

**ID Tips:** Males are shimmery emerald green with a dappled green and white breast and belly, a black mask, and a brilliant red collar. Females are green with a white belly, breast, and throat, and buff markings on the flanks and face. Up to 3.5” long.

**Listen to Calls:**

**Scientific Name:** *Archilochus colubris*

**Photos:**
- Adult male
- Adult female
- Adult breeding male
- Adult female or immature male

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Scarlet Tanager
These scarlet and black males and yellow and gray females prefer to stay hidden high up in the trees. Listen for their energetic “chick-burr” song in forests, woodlands, parks, and gardens. They enjoy berries, insects, spiders, buds, and larvae.

**ID Tips:** In spring, males are brilliant scarlet red with black wings. Females are pale yellow-green with gray wings. In fall before migrating south, males molt their breeding feathers and become yellow and gray like the females. Up to 6.7” long.

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

**Scientific Name:** *Piranga olivacea*

**Photos:**
- Adult male
- Adult female
- Adult breeding male
- Adult female or immature male
Resources

Choose Your Birding Tools:


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](http://www.allaboutbirds.org).


Become a Citizen Scientist:

Become a **volunteer scientist** with eBird, a free worldwide citizen science project, at [www.ebird.org](http://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](http://www.savingcranes.org).

Join a Birding Group:

Meet other birders through **birding events and outings** hosted by the McHenry County Audubon Society and the Illinois Audubon Society. Visit [www.mchenryaudubon.org](http://www.mchenryaudubon.org) and [www.illinoisaudubon.org](http://www.illinoisaudubon.org).

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](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](https://gbbc.birdcount.org/pledge-to-fledge/?lang=fr)

Learn About Backyard Bird Feeding:

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