

Out and About

BY STEPH WEIZENBACH,
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Migratory Bird Bingo

In autumn, we see ducks and geese gathering in flocks and flying south for the long, cold winter. It's pretty hard not to notice large flocks of honking geese! But have you noticed tiny songbirds or menacing raptors migrating too? Go birding and mark off all the birds you find on this Migratory Bird Bingo sheet. See how many you can spot before winter, and watch for more to return in the spring!

All bingo card photos: GERALD ROMANCHUK



Ask Stuart



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Q Stuart! Where can I find all the birds on the Migratory Bird Bingo sheet?

Each and every one of these birds can be found all across Alberta. Below are some helpful hints to assist you in your search! For more details to help you identify each of these unique migratory birds, visit allaboutbirds.org and search the birds' names. You can listen to their sounds, and make sure you read over the "Cool Facts" in the "Overview" tab of your favourite birds. There are some nifty facts in there you won't want to miss out on!

1 Common loons are an iconic Canadian symbol found on large open bodies of water — and on our Loonie dollar coins! Their eerie call, resembling a wolf howl, echoes across the lake.



2 Red-necked grebes are duck-sized water birds with long necks and a sharp, pointed beak. Catch a glimpse of them — before they dive under again! — on open bodies of water, including stormwater ponds in cities.



3 Tundra swans are really, really big white waterfowl, often found intermingled with flocks of snow geese or their even larger cousin, the trumpeter swan. Keep an eye out for this big bird with a long, straight neck on big lakes, farmers' fields, or flying overhead.



4 Snow geese are just like Canada geese, except their feathers are all white with black wingtips. And their honking sounds even noisier! Snow geese migrate in flocks of hundreds of thousands and spend down time in ponds, lakes, and farmers' fields.



5 Northern shovelers are the ducks with a shovel on the end of their bill. They spend their time in shallow ponds, shoveling water from side to side, filtering out delicious aquatic invertebrates to eat.



6 Red-tailed hawks are large hawks with, you guessed it, a red tail! Watch for this aptly named hawk circling high in the sky over a farmer's field or find them perched on a fencepost along the roadside.



7 American kestrels are our smallest falcon and can be found perching on telephone poles, rooftops, or fence posts. Its shrill "killy killy killy" cry will alert you to its presence.



8 Sandhill cranes' rattling bugle calls from a flock of tens of thousands of individuals can be heard 4 km away! Faint and distant at first, listen as they get closer and you will be sure to see the flock for yourself. If you're lucky, you can observe sandhill cranes riding the thermals, flying in circles, climbing higher and higher into the sky. What an amazing sight!



9 Killdeer are shorebirds who announce their own name everywhere they go. Listen for the telltale "kill deer kill deer kill deer" call as you walk along any shoreline.



10 Wilson's snipe is the monkey of the wetlands. Sit at a wetland in the evening to listen for the monkey-like winnowing sound made by air rushing over its outspread tail feathers. Or look on top of bales or fenceposts in the nearby farmer's field for a pudgy brown bird with a skewer for a beak.



11 Belted kingfishers are stocky, large-headed birds with a thick pointed beak. They can be found along stream edges where cliffs are present. Sit and watch for a while. They hunt by plunging directly from their overwater perch — *plunk!* — right into the water to catch a fish! Also, listen for their mechanical rattle while exploring near a stream and you will spot this unique bird right away!





12 Northern flickers are Alberta's very own anteaters! Watch for a bird that flies up from the ground while you are out on your next walk. This woodpecker spends a lot of time on the ground lapping up ants with its long, barbed tongue. Watch for a flash of colour from its wings and a white patch on the rump to help identify it as it flies away.



13 Least flycatchers are teeny-weensy, grayish-green, bug-eating songbirds. You will hear them singing "CHEbek CHEbek CHEbek" over and over again as you walk through the woods. If you have binoculars, see if you can spot the tiny, chanting bird. You can check it off your Migratory Bird Bingo whether you spotted it or if you identified its song!



14 Red-eyed vireos are found by listening to what the bird's song is telling you. Listen for yourself: "Here I am, in the tree, look-up, at the top..." Do you think one might be at the top of that tree? I bet you can guess what colour this sleek little olive-green bird's eyes are!



15 American crows can be found just about anywhere. Look for them beside the street, on top of your trash can, in the sky, or at the park behind your home. A crow's tail is short and rounded or squared at the end, unlike ravens, who have a wedge-shaped tail. Also listen for their iconic "caw caw caw!"



16 Barn swallows are cone-shaped birds with no neck. Their blue-orange bodies zip by you as they snag flying insects out of the air in open areas or near ponds. Look for them while out on a country walk, especially near, you guessed it, barns!

And also near other structures like sheds and bridges.



17 Ruby-crowned kinglets are adorably frantic songbirds that are even smaller than a chickadee! Watch for their telltale and constant wing flicking as they feed on insects in the branches of shrubs and trees. Their distinctive, jumbled twittering is hard to describe; give it a listen on allaboutbirds.org to help you identify them in the foliage.



18 American robins are one of our first, hopeful signs of spring when they return from the south. Robins have a dark brown back and an orange chest. Watch them hop along your lawn after it rains, constantly turning their heads to the side as they look down for worms and bugs in your lawn.



19 Yellow-rumped warblers are, like the name says, warblers with a yellow bum! These little black, white, and gray birds have small yellow flanks on either side and a big yellow rump patch. Watch for small flocks moving through your area in wooded parks.



20 Western tanagers are flame-coloured songbirds that can be found foraging on the tops of spruce or pine trees. Try putting out a feeder with freshly cut oranges to entice them to your backyard during migration — but watch out for other creatures who like citrus, including wasps!



21 Chipping sparrows can be found on the ground or in low shrubs. You can locate these little sparrows by following the sound of their mechanical chipping.



22 Savannah sparrows invite you to tea with their song. "Let's have tea in the savannah!" You'll find them eating seeds on the ground in open grasslands.



23 White-throated sparrows are patriotic birds with a white throat that sing, "Oh sweet Canada Canada Canada." When you hear that song, search for them in the trees at the forest's edge, in low shrubs, or foraging on the ground.



24 Red-winged blackbirds are medium-sized black birds with red wing patches. They're very protective of their territory, and can be found ferociously chasing away bigger birds, anything from geese to bald eagles, in the vicinity of wetlands with cattails or reeds.

