

Wilson's Warbler

Wilsonia pusilla
Length: 4½-5 inches

This dazzling, yellow warbler can be easy to spot, but difficult to positively identify because it almost never stops moving. A tireless insectivore, the Wilson's warbler seems to chase bugs constantly by gleaning, probing, and suddenly flitting upward to snatch airborne prey. While the yellow and olive-green female Wilson's might be confused with another warbler species, the silky black cap of the male is distinctive. They are fond of water; you may get a good look at this bird by pausing quietly near the shallow edge of a stream or pond.

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Dendroica coronata
Length: 5-6 inches

One of the most abundant warbler species, this dazzling bird is identified by its bright yellow rump patch. The male "butter butt" in breeding plumage also has bright yellow on the sides, throat, and crown as well as black (sometimes dark blue-gray) on the breast and cheeks. His song is a sweet warble. Look for yellow-rumps foraging for insects in trees and tall shrubs, sometimes flying up to catch them in the air.

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On the cover: Song sparrow.
Photos courtesy Jerry Ting

Common Songbirds in the East Bay Regional Park District





Songbirds are often beautiful, and their songs are familiar, pleasing sounds to many people. Making up almost half of all bird species in the world, songbirds are also known as “**perching birds.**” Their feet have three toes facing forward and one facing back, allowing them to easily grasp their perch, even while sleeping.

Male songbirds pour forth their melodies on spring mornings, and many sing from mid-winter through mid-summer. They use songs to announce their claim to nesting territories and to warn other birds of the same species to stay away. If all goes well, the irresistible combination of colorful plumage and vibrant song will attract a mate, and a nest full of young birds will be the result. Males tend to stop singing when close to the nest to avoid attracting predators. Songbirds also produce other shorter and simpler sounds known as calls, used to communicate during all seasons.

Both the male and female adults of some species take care of their nestlings. In others, only the female incubates the eggs and feeds the young. During the spring, listen for baby birds in the nest chirping aggressively when their parents are close, begging for food. Once the young birds fledge (leave the nest and start flying), they often continue to beg the adults for food through late spring and sometimes even summer.

When exploring your East Bay Regional Parks, your neighborhood, or even your backyard, it may be possible to see and hear many of the birds listed in this brochure. In whatever way you choose to study songbirds, the experience is sure to be rewarding!

The following are just a few favorites among the many songbird species commonly seen and heard in the East Bay Regional Parks.



American Robin

Turdus migratorius

Length: 8½-10 inches

An all-time backyard favorite in much of North America, the robin is also widespread in undeveloped areas of California. Look for this bird in grassy patches as it hunts worms by watching and listening for them as they squirm near the top of the soil. The handsome rust-colored breast of this thrush, combined with its elegantly cheerful song (cheerily-cheeri-up-cheerio), make the robin easily identifiable.

Hear the Songbirds

An Internet search will show many birdwatching apps for smartphones and computers. Most include songs! Comparing recordings with live songs is an excellent way to identify birds. However, please **DO NOT play recordings outside**; the sudden appearance of a competing “bird” (the sound coming from your phone) will be very stressful to the birds you are observing.



Songbird audio recordings

To hear songbird audio clips of the birds in this brochure, scan this QR code with a smart phone camera, its QR code reader, or go to www.ebparks.org/songbirds. *Songs sometimes vary by region and even by the individual bird, so what you hear in the wild may sound differently than the recording.*

Songbird Resources

Field Guides

- The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America, David Allen Sibley
- Western Birds, Roger Tory Peterson
- Field Guide to the Birds of North America, National Geographic
- Field Guide to the Birds of North America, National Wildlife Federation
- Field Guide to the Birds, Western Region, Donald and Lillian Stokes

Birder Resources

- www.goldengateaudubon.org

Bewick's Wren

Thryomanes bewickii

Length: 4½-5¼ inches

Flitting through parkland open forest and scrubby chaparral, or probing around your house, the always-curious Bewick's wren inspects cracks and crevices for a possible insect meal or future nest site. The striking white eyebrow stripe distinguishes this year-round resident from other wrens. The Bewick's long tail is usually held in a stiff, vertical tilt and waved about threateningly as the wren scolds territorial intruders. As a loud singer, this wren produces a complex and variable collection of burr-like buzzing, ending in a long, sweet trill.



Common Songbirds in the East Bay Regional Park District

Black-Headed Grosbeak

Pheucticus melanocephalus
Length: 7-8 inches

A major celebrity of the songbird world, the black-headed grosbeak's spectacular color and robust size add to the joy of hearing its rich, warbling song (similar, but more complex than the American robin's song). Black-headed grosbeaks are most common in oak woodlands, streamside habitats, and among groves of conifers. Consuming both insects and seeds, grosbeaks sometimes appear at backyard feeding stations, where they dash in to snatch a seed before shyly disappearing into nearby vegetation.

Chestnut-backed Chickadee

Poecile rufescens
Length: 4-4½ inches

Naturalist Aldo Leopold once called the chickadee a "small bundle of large enthusiasms." Partial to treetops, these lively birds dangle fearlessly like tiny acrobats as they work to extract insects. Look for a tiny bird with a black cap and bib, and rust-colored back and sides. Chickadees are quite vocal birds, calling to one another often as they forage with a cheerful raspy chickadee-dee. Both male and female care for the young. Sunflower seeds and suet attract them to backyard feeders.



Goldfinch

Carduelis tristis
Length: 4½-5 inches

Once referred to as wild canaries, goldfinches are social songsters, often traveling in flocks. The male American goldfinch is the most vivid yellow of our three local species, while the lesser goldfinch (pictured above) is the most common in the East Bay. Finches feed on weed seeds, flower buds, and occasionally insects. Their undulating, "roller coaster" flight pattern and tendency to sing jubilantly while aloft make them easier to identify. Often goldfinches can be attracted to residential feeding stations stocked with thistle seed.

Hermit Thrush

Catharus guttatus
Length: 6-7 inches

The song of this small, spotted brown thrush is usually heard in forests and is considered by many to be among the most beautiful of any songbird. Described as "flute-like" and liquid in nature, the hermit's exquisite song must be heard to be believed. A sharply pointed bill, distinct dark spots on the creamy breast, rust-red rump and tail, and nervous wing-flicking behavior help identify this inconspicuous bird that will thrill you with its voice.



Northern Mockingbird

Mimus polyglottos
Length: 8-10 inches

A neighborhood and parkland favorite, the mockingbird has literally hundreds of songs in its repertoire. Its scientific name means "many-tongued mimic." In addition to composing his own brilliant vocal productions, the male mockingbird imitates other birds and animals, car alarms, and a host of other inanimate noise makers. Expressing his mid-winter through summer-time passion with wild abandon, the male often sings loudly at night. Sleekly elegant in gray plumage with white wing patches, mockingbirds eat insects and berries and can be easily attracted to backyard feeders.

Oak Titmouse

Baeolophus inornatus
Length: 5-5½ inches

The head-feathers that point up into a crest make this otherwise plain and grayish bird easy to recognize. Its unique, loud, and jubilant teedle-ee teedle-ee song has been called "the heart and soul of the oak forest." Its frequent call, however, sounds a lot like a chickadee. Just as fun to watch as to listen to, the oak titmouse is energetic in its quest for insects and seeds as it hops around branches of trees, especially oaks. Sometimes it uses its beak to loudly crack open seeds and acorns.

Song Sparrow

Melospiza melodia
Length: 5-7 inches

At first glance the song sparrow seems a rather unassuming "little brown bird." Its most distinctive field mark is the dark spot centered on the streaked brown breast. However, when the male of this species belts out his sweet and highly complex springtime song, he lays legitimate claim to the title "songbird." When flushed from its streamside habitat, this sparrow pumps its tail vigorously as it flies low and zips back into hiding. Coyote Hills Regional Park and other shoreline parks along San Francisco Bay provide critical habitat for a special race of this species, the Alameda salt marsh song sparrow. This bird is listed by the state as a "species of special concern."

White-Crowned Sparrow

Zonotrichia leucophrys
Length: 6-7 inches

Plump and striking in its appearance, the white-crowned sparrow is a common visitor to residential seed feeders, and a year-round resident in the Bay Area. The bold black and white crown stripes are key diagnostic markings for this species, which often feed on the ground. Look for white-crowns energetically scratch-kicking through leaf-litter for seeds as you hike parkland trails. In the winter white-crowns often mix with golden-crowned sparrows, whose descending "oh dear me" whistling song is a familiar wintry sound.



Spotted Towhee

Pipilo maculatus
Length: 7-8½ inches

This large, colorful sparrow has a call like a door-bell buzzer, and a song

that is a simple, light-hearted trill. Spending much of its time feeding on the ground underneath dense bushes, the towhee noisily scratch-kicks dry leaf litter to uncover hidden seeds. You will usually hear it long before it appears in the open, but seeing its black, rust-red, and crisp white coloring is worth the wait.



Purple Finch and House Finch

Haemorhous purpureus and Thyomanes bewickii
Length: 5-6½ inches

Two different species that are sometimes hard to tell apart, the males of both purple and house finches belt out a long and cheerful song. Purple finches are misnamed since the male's bright red has only a subtle rosy tint, which extends further down on its body compared with the house finch. House finch males have a truer red color and dark streaking on their breast. Contrary to their name, they live in a wide variety of habitats as well as around houses, and they are generally more common than the forest-dwelling purple finches. Both eat lots of seeds, berries and flower buds, while the purple finch eats more insects, especially in summer.

