



FEMALE

MALE

NORTHERN CARDINAL



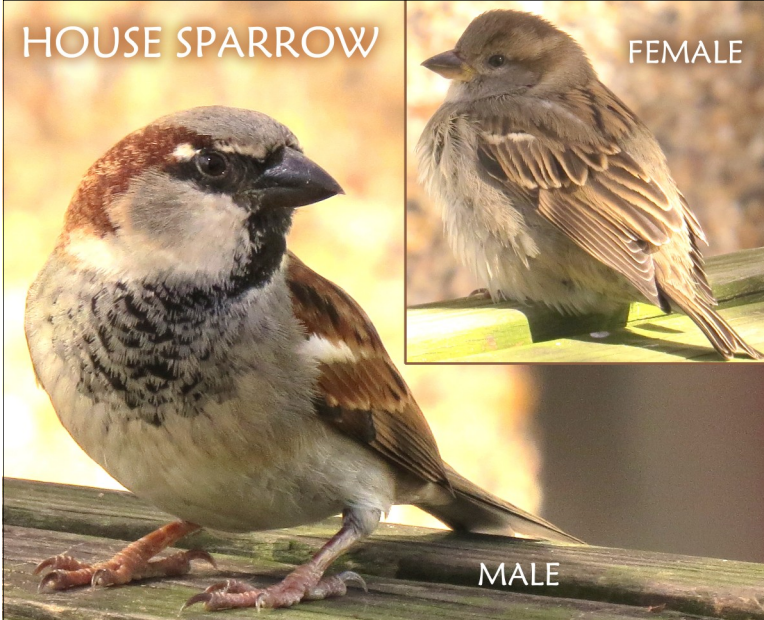
AMERICAN ROBIN



EUROPEAN STARLING



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD



HOUSE SPARROW

FEMALE

MALE



BLUE JAY

BAYOU CITY BIRDING
ZINE #4
NEIGHBORHOOD BIRDS

This zine features seven very common birds that can be seen year-round on walks through the neighborhood. Watch and see how the shape of their beaks relates to what they eat, and how they move and interact with each other. Birds are shown in order of size, with the largest ones first.

 A Blue Jay is perched on a wooden log, facing left.


MALE

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

FEMALE

AMERICAN ROBIN

LOOK FOR: A perky bird with an orange or brick-red breast/belly, gray head/back/wings/tail, and a broken white “eye ring.” Females are paler. Usually runs (but will also hop) from spot to spot, cocking its head as if to listen for worms before they can get away.

FIELD NOTES: Found in small to medium-size groups that grow larger in winter as other robins migrate from the north. Uses its slightly curved beak to pull worms from the ground and also eats insects, fruit, and berries. Whistles several happy songs, with a favorite sounding like “cheerily, cheerily, cheer up, cheerily, cheer up!”

1st SEEN ON AT

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

LOOK FOR: A bold, two-tone gray bird with an off-white breast/belly. Perches in full view on branches, fences, street signs, etc. and walks, runs, or hops while feeding. When in flight, the white feathers underneath the long, mostly gray tail show on the outside edges, and large white patches appear on the wings.

FIELD NOTES: Usually found alone or with a few other “mockers.” Uses its slightly curved beak to eat insects, fruit, and various small critters like beetles and wasps. Loudly sings the songs of other birds, repeating a tune three or four times before switching to the next.

1st SEEN ON AT

BLUE JAY

LOOK FOR: A feisty blue, gray, white and black bird whose tail and wings shine as if they are jeweled. Jays often push other birds away from feeders, but make up for it in part by chasing away hawks and cats.

FIELD NOTES: Usually found with a few other jays. Uses its short, blunt beak to hammer open nuts and also eats seeds, insects, fruit, berries, mice, and frogs. Makes a sharp call that sounds like the word “jay” pulled into two syllables, and a softer call that sounds like “quee-deedle.” Jays also imitate the calls of hawks, perhaps trying to warn (or just fake out?) other birds.

1st SEEN ON AT

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE

LOOK FOR: A sort of mean-looking, shiny bluish-purple-black bird with a low forehead, yellow eyes, long/heavy/curved bill, and an extra-long tail that is creased down the center. The female is smaller, colored two-tone brown with a lighter stripe above her eyes. Struts around and can run quickly despite the big feet.

FIELD NOTES: Found in medium-sized groups. Eats insects, plants, and various little critters, often pecking its beak into the ground. Grackles can usually be seen in grocery store parking lots, eating discarded food. Makes a variety of low-pitched whistles and rattles.

1st SEEN ON AT

NORTHERN CARDINAL

LOOK FOR: A timid red bird with a black mask around his beak. The female is more gray-brown than red, with both males and females having crested heads. Birds reveal themselves with their singing, especially in spring when pairs join in duets. Hops while feeding, always staying close to cover around bushes and trees.

FIELD NOTES: Usually found as pairs (or in winter, as small family groups). Uses its cone-shaped beak to eat seeds, insects, fruit, and berries. Whistles many tunes, with favorites sounding like “hey you hey you!” “chew chew chew” “wheat wheat” and “peabody peabody.”

1st SEEN ON AT

EUROPEAN STARLING

LOOK FOR: A pushy bird with a stubby tail and pointy wings, who looks all black at a distance. In the fall, feathers have pretty white tips and cinnamon edges, which gradually wear off to reveal shiny purple/green highlights. Walks and runs clumsily while feeding.

FIELD NOTES: Found in medium to very large groups. Uses its long, sharp beak to eat almost anything, often pecking into the soil. Beak is black in winter, yellow in summer. Makes loud squeaks and squeals, raising a racket in the evenings. Starlings will try to steal the nest holes drilled into trees by birds like woodpeckers.

1st SEEN ON AT

HOUSE SPARROW

LOOK FOR: A bouncy little guy with broad rust-brown stripes across the sides of a gray head, black goatee, black bib (which darkens in winter), wings streaked in rust and brown, and a gray breast/belly/rump. The female is paler, lacks the goatee and bib, and has a light stripe above her eyes. Sparrows hop.

FIELD NOTES: Usually found in small groups around houses (where they often nest in attic vents), buildings, and restaurant patios. Uses its cone-shaped beak to eat seeds, insects, fruit, and bits of food people have left behind. Makes a “chirp” and a two-syllable “che-eep.”

1st SEEN ON AT

LEARN MORE...

Look closely at birds’ beaks and at the patterns on their faces, and then practice describing what you see. Learn more by sketching birds using methods illustrated at JohnMuirLaws.com/drawing-birds. You can also learn to recognize birds’ songs and calls at AllAboutBirds.org and/or by downloading the free Merlin Bird ID app.

You can support birds by adding bird feeders and bird baths to your yard, which should be refilled daily and cleaned every two or three days. Search the web for “DIY bird feeders” (or baths) and you’ll find plans for making feeders/baths that birds will be grateful to use!

Download more of the Bayou City Birding Zines at WhiteOakBayou.org