

COMMON BOISE RIVER BIRDS



The Treasure Valley and its natural hallmark, the Boise River, are home to more than 150 bird species and many other kinds of wildlife. The river is accessible to the public in many places in Ada and Canyon counties.

Golden Eagle Audubon Society works to improve bird and wildlife habitat along the Boise River in southwest Idaho through ecological restoration.

You can get involved and learn more by visiting our website.

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www.GoldenEagleAudubon.org

< CANADA GOOSE
(*Branta canadensis*)



One of the more common birds encountered on the Boise River, the Canada Goose can be identified by its long, straight black neck and large white cheek patches. Look for them swimming nearly anywhere in the river, and foraging for succulent young grass shoots in adjacent parks and fields. Canada Geese may exhibit defensive behaviors when cornered or when young are present. Their erect posture and hissing vocalization can be imposing.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) >

This familiar duck can be found on the Boise River just about any day of the year. The male's green head and white neck ring are distinctive. The female Mallard, like most female ducks, is drab brown. This is an adaptation to camouflage her when she's sitting on the nest. Mallards are called "puddle ducks" or "dabbling ducks" because when they forage in water they generally don't dive completely under the water.



< WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*)

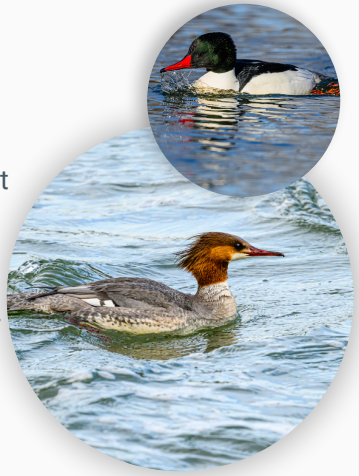
This somewhat secretive duck can be found where still or slow-moving water is in close proximity to large trees, like the area around Barber Pool. Males can be identified by their distinctive tuxedo markings; the browner females have a diagnostic white teardrop mark around the eye. Wood Ducks nest in tree cavities or nest boxes and typically lay large clutches of eggs.



COMMON MERGANSER >

(Mergus merganser)

Pronounced "mer-GAN-zer," this duck belongs to a group called "diving ducks." Common Mergansers eat fish nearly exclusively, catching them by pursuit during prolonged, sometimes deep, underwater dives. For that reason, you have to watch carefully. Mergansers may dive under and pop up in a different spot. Female mergansers, as in the larger photo, are generally less drab than most female duck species. Their reddish crested head is easily identifiable. Male Common Mergansers (small inset photo) have an orange bill, black head, and white breast and sides. Mergansers sit low in the water and sometimes stick their heads underwater to scout for fish.



< RING-BILLED GULL

(Larus delawarensis)

Along with the California Gull, Ring-billed Gulls are the most common gull seen on the Boise River. Ring-billed Gulls can be seen coursing over the river, gathering on rocky bars, or loitering in parking lots looking to scavenge just about anything edible and even inedibles! Like other gulls, the Ring-billed Gull takes 2+ years to achieve mature plumage. In their early years, they are brown and blotchy. By their third year, they acquire the familiar white front and gray back plumage. Adult Ring-billed Gulls can be distinguished from the similar California Gulls by the distinctive dark ring near the tip of the bill, brighter yellow legs, and a lighter gray back.

GREAT BLUE HERON >

(*Ardea herodias*)

The only long-legged wading bird you are likely to see along the Boise River, Great Blue Herons eat fish, frogs, snails, crayfish, and just about any other juicy morsel they can spear with their long bill. Male and female herons look alike, stand almost 4' tall, and are largely blue-gray all over. Herons nest and roost in large trees in loose colonies, called rookeries. Look for them standing motionless in the water or perched on a tree branch overlooking the water.



< BELTED KINGFISHER (*Ceryle alcyon*)

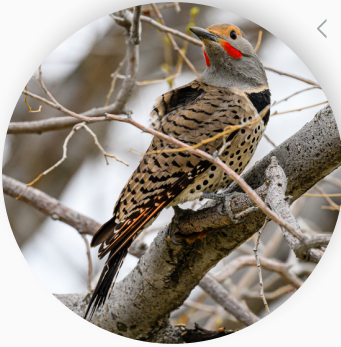
This fish-eating bird is most easily identified by listening for its long, clattering rattle call usually heard in flight. The kingfisher may be seen perching on a prominent branch, coursing over the river with its unique rowing wingbeat, or hovering over the water looking for prey. The hover is often followed by a headlong dive into the water where the bird uses its stout beak to catch fish. The kingfisher's large blue head and mostly white belly make it one of the more distinctive birds on the river.



OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) >

This large raptor, with dark brown upperparts and contrasting white underparts, can be seen spring through fall flying over the Boise River and local ponds and lakes hunting for fish. The sexes are similar and adults have yellow eyes. Osprey's wings are held at a distinct angle in flight making a characteristic shallow v-shape. They are unusual among hawks in possessing a reversible outer toe that allows them to grasp slippery fish with two toes in front and two behind. They build a bulky nest of sticks, often on top of platforms provided by utility companies to keep them off cell towers and power poles.





< **NORTHERN FLICKER**
(*Colaptes auratus*)

This large, distinctive woodpecker is a common sight along the Boise River year-round. Flickers are often seen on the ground, revealing their specialization as ant-eaters. In flight, the flicker shows a white rump patch and reddish-orange underwings. Flickers also have unusual vocalizations. One call is a high-piercing *keew* usually repeated every 15-20 seconds. Another call is a long, strong series *kwikwikwi*. Someone once thought this sounded like *flik-a-flik-a-flik-a*, giving the bird its common name.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE >
(*Pica hudsonia*)

This relative of jays, crows, and ravens does well in the city or the country. It is an easy bird to identify due to its bold black-and-white plumage and conspicuous behaviors. The Black-billed Magpie prefers a few scattered trees interspersed with open parks, prairies, or farm fields. Magpies build a unique nest with a twig roof that looks like a football made of sticks and shoved into a tree. Magpies can be seen foraging on the ground in open areas. Their variable calls include a rising, nasal *jeeek*.



< **RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD**
(*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

A conspicuous bird on the Boise River is the Red-winged Blackbird. Significantly dimorphic (genders look different), males have bright, bi-colored shoulder patches with the red patch giving the bird its name. Females are streaky brown to match the color of the reeds in which they build nests. Semi-colonial by nature, Red-winged Blackbirds can be found at just about any wetland having emergent, reedy vegetation. Red-wings forage in upland areas including shrublands, grasslands and farm fields, sometimes in large flocks.

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE > (*Poecile atricapillus*)

The Black-capped Chickadee is one of our year-round residents found in trees and shrubs. It is a common backyard bird and often seen along the river. Look for a small, active bird with a black cap and bib poking around leaf buds, bark crevices, and flowers for small insects. Males and females look alike. You may hear their distinctive *chick-a-dee, chick-a-dee-dee-dee* call before you see them. Their song is a 2- or 3-part whistle often rendered as *hey swee-tee*. They readily come to feeders for sunflower seeds, chips and suet.



< SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)



A larger streaky sparrow, the Song Sparrow sings a conspicuous lilting song from a prominent perch. Like the Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrows are abundant near water but are also comfortable in most suburban settings. Note its streaky sides converging into a darker central breast spot. Song Sparrows sing loudly and often but can remain hidden in the understory, leaving you to simply enjoy the cheery song.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Dendronica petechia*) >

Common in brushy habitat near any kind of water, the Yellow Warbler can be identified by its bright colors and clear, melodious vocalizations. Their secretive behavior makes them hard to see, so it may be better to learn this species' distinctive song as well as its field marks. Both genders are bright yellow overall, and the male has reddish streaks on the breast. The mnemonic for the Yellow Warbler's song is "sweet, sweet, sweet, you're-so-sweet". It is high and clear with some variation. Yellow Warblers prefer denser vegetation so look and listen for them in willow thickets and other stream-side shrubbery.





< **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER**
(*Setophaga coronata*)

This bird can be seen all year along the river, often in small flocks with other birds. It is smaller than a robin and larger than a chickadee. The male has a bright yellow throat, yellow patch on the side, and a yellow crown. The yellow rump (area above the tail) is easily seen in flight. The black chest and sides in summer turn streaky tan in winter. Females and young have the same basic pattern but duller. It often flies out from a branch to snatch an insect out of the air.

HOUSE FINCH >
(*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

The House Finch's reddish hue and bubbly song make it easy to identify. Because House Finches visit bird feeders and often nest on buildings, they are one of the birds you're likely to see out your window but you can find them along the river too. Male finches (pictured) sport a reddish forehead, throat, and upper breast with streaked sides. They tend to sing their songs from the highest perch available. Females, who have blurry streaks from their throat all the way down to their legs, are otherwise drab like most cup-nesting female songbirds. Both genders have stubby, thick bills indicating their preference for eating seeds.



Notes

SEASONAL ABUNDANCE

	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter
Waterfowl:				
Canada Goose	C	C	A	A
Mallard	A	A	A	A
Common Merganser	C	O	C	C
Wood Duck	C	O	O	C
Water Birds:				
Belted Kingfisher	O	O	O	O
Great Blue Heron	C	C	C	C
Ring-billed Gull	A	C	A	A
Raptors				
Osprey	C	C	C	R
Perching Birds				
Black-billed Magpie	C	C	C	C
Black-capped Chickadee	C	C	C	C
House Finch	C	C	C	C
Northern Flicker	O	C	O	C
Red-winged Blackbird	C	C	C	R
Song Sparrow	C	C	C	C
Yellow-rumped Warbler	C	O	A	A
Yellow Warbler	O	C	O	R

KEY: A = Abundant C = Common U = Uncommon O = Occasionally Seen R = Rare



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