

## Birds You Might Not Expect in Winter

By Art Arenholz

In winter, we expect to see birds like ducks, geese and cranes. We don't expect to see colorful songbirds, sprightly flycatchers or the other birds of summer. So let's look briefly at some winter surprise birds that are here most winters.

Most insect-eating birds, like Kingbirds and Warblers, go south during fall. But, each winter, you can find several Say's Phoebes perched on a low post or twig, happily flying out to snap a flying insect and returning to a nearby perch. Say's is easy to identify with its dark head, dark and twitchy tail, and a faintly peach-colored belly, and the "fly-catching" behavior.



Another Phoebe we see most winters is the Black Phoebe. Its behavior is much like Say's, but this bird is solid black except for the contrasting white belly.



During summer, we can find two different cormorants perched on a watery log in several places on the Refuge. A recent favorite location is the log complex near the new boardwalk, on the Marsh Loop road. But in winter, it is hard to find a Double-Crested Cormorant, while it is easy to find the Neotropic Cormorant; whose name suggests it should be on a warm, tropical island. To identify the Neotropic, look at the yelloworange throat-patch. Neotropic's throatpatch points in a "V" toward the back of the head. (Double-crested throat-patch is larger and squarish, and does not have the "V" shape.

After almost all of the colorful songbirds have flown to a warmer place, we can still find a few birds that did not read the bird books.

Perhaps the most surprising is the Yellow-rumped Warbler. Just about the only warbler to stay through the winter, Yellow rump has adapted his diet to include berries during the cold weather. Found as far north as Albuquerque, this bird has yellow on the crown, throat, sides, and of course the rump. Add patches of white in the wings and tail, and you can identify this bird all year long.

Another small bird that can be mistaken for a warbler in winter is the tiny and very active Rubycrowned Kinglet. The olive body reminds you of a dull colored warbler, and a kinglet is certainly nervous enough to resemble a warbler. To confirm the I.D. of the kinglet, look for the dark wing-bar behind the two white wing-bars. Usually, the ruby crown is hard to see.



During summer, we see the Lesser Goldfinch a lot, and the American Goldfinch not very often. But, in winter, both goldfinches are here, but their colors are quite subdued. During winter, American Goldfinch can be identified by stubby bill, brown tones on the body, white wing-bars and a white undertail. The Lesser Goldfinch also has the stubby bill and white wing-bars, but body tones are greenish or dark, not brown and the under-tail is yellow. Even if you list them as goldfinch species, you will enjoy watching the small flocks move about actively.

Often mixed in with a flock of other finches is the Pine Siskin. About the same size as the goldfinch, this bird has two aids to identification. First, a heavily streaked body (like a female House Finch), and second, a thin, sharply pointed bill (very unlike, a female House Finch). The touch of yellow in the wings and base of the tail is easily seen in a few siskins in winter, but hard to see in many others.

Another bird with a yellow head is sometimes reported to the Visitor Center staff as a winter warbler. This is the Verdin, a year round resident that is about the size of the tiny kinglet. To identify the Verdin, look for the yellow head, gray body and some chestnut color in the bend of the wing.



Perhaps everyone's favorite blue bird is the beautiful turquoise-blue male Mountain Bluebird. We see this bird in winter more than the Western Bluebird, but we can separate them fairly easily. Unlike the Western Bluebird, the Mountain Bluebird has no rusty color on the chest or back, his blue is lighter in color, and he often hovers when hunting insects in a field.



So enjoy the waterfowl, sparrows and raptors, but look carefully for a splash of color, too. You might be rewarded by a colorful, hardy winter visitor that doesn't know about [TRAVELOCITY.COM](http://TRAVELOCITY.COM)!