



Bird Identification Challenge

Learn to use your observation skills to spot and identify birds in the Illinois 4-H Bird Identification Challenge!

In this challenge, youth will:

1. Discover the skills needed for successful bird watching
2. Learn how to identify common local birds using color, pattern, size, shape, habitat & behavior
3. Use their senses to observe birds in their neighborhood

Challenge resources:

[4-H Bird Watching Bingo](#)

[Challenge Overview video](#) on YouTube

[Identifying Birds video](#) on YouTube

[Birding Tips video](#) on YouTube

[eBird Data Sheet](#) (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Challenge details:

Access the challenge resource materials above, which are hosted on the Illinois 4-H website at <https://4h.extension.illinois.edu/programs/home-activities>. For this challenge you'll need: your eyes and/or ears, as well as paper and a pencil to log your observations. We encourage you to use binoculars, if you have them, to help you observe birds in more detail. You'll also need access to a bird guide to help with identification. Some possible guide options include:

- [Common Summer Birds of Chicagoland Field Guide](#) (*pdf*) from the Field Museum (free)
- [Merlin BirdID App](#) from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology or the [Audubon Bird Guide: North America App](#) from the Audubon Society (both are free to install on your phone or tablet). If you have another "paid" birding app that you already own, you are welcome to use it.
- Any printed bird book for North America or Eastern North America such as those by Peterson, Kauffman, Sibley, Audubon, National Geographic, and Golden Guides (optional)

We highly recommend that you watch our challenge videos on YouTube to:

- Get an overview of the Bird Identification Challenge: <https://youtu.be/VmpxzOe8k4Q>
- Learn how to identify birds: <https://youtu.be/UDFDIM8gNyY>
- Get birdwatching tips: <https://youtu.be/VkcnhbKD0Cs>

Then download our [4-H Bird Watching Bingo sheet](#) and the optional [eBird Data Sheet](#).

Using these documents and tips from the videos as a reference, observe and identify birds from your balcony, yard or porch, or on a walk around your neighborhood. For your bird observation:

- Bring a piece of paper and pencil when you observe so you can take notes of which birds you saw or heard. If you have access to a printer, consider using the eBird Data Sheet to log your sightings. If you're techy, you can opt to take notes on a phone or tablet instead of paper.
- Use your eyes and ears to observe various birds, and then use color, shape, patterns, size, behavior and habitat to try to identify them. Learn more about these characteristics in our [Identifying Birds video](#).
- If you have binoculars, use them to help you get a better view of the birds to help with identification.

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- If you have a camera with good zoom, you may wish to bring it to help you document the birds you saw. Photos can be a great tool because they allow you to spend more time on identification later.
- If possible, bring one of the guides listed above along on your observation to help you with your identifications.

Once you've completed your observation, try to identify the birds you saw. Check off any birds you successfully identified on your 4-H Bird Watching Bingo Sheet. You can identify a bird by sight or sound (using bird calls). Continue to observe birds on different days, at different times, and in different locations, until you get a "bingo" on your card. A bingo is five birds in a row checked off: either horizontally, vertically or diagonally. The center box on the bingo sheet is meant to be checked if you identify a type of bird not listed elsewhere on the sheet, or if you spot a bird nest of any type.

If you want to learn more about any birds that are included on the Bird Watching Bingo Sheet, click on the (...) icons in the corner of each image to visit the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's "[All About Birds](#)" website. On each bird's page you can listen to bird calls, see additional images that can help with identification, and learn about the bird's range, habits and behaviors.

If you get a bingo, share your card and what you learned with your 4-H club or with your family or friends. You also can share your card or the complete list of birds you identified with us on social media by using the hashtag #thats4H by tagging "Illinois 4-H." Make sure you have parent/guardian permission before you share. Happy birding!

Questions?

Email amyh@illinois.edu or visit <https://4h.extension.illinois.edu/programs/home-activities>

Want to learn more about 4-H near you?

Find your local 4-H office at go.illinois.edu/FindYour4HOffice or learn more about Illinois 4-H at 4h.extension.illinois.edu

Did you have fun with this challenge?

Here are additional learning resources that may interest you:

- **Family Bird Watching Activities** (How Stuff Works): <https://lifestyle.howstuffworks.com/family/activities/bird-watching-activities-for-kids.htm>
- **Bird Song Hero Bird Song Matching Game** (Cornell Lab): <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/bird-song-hero/bird-song-hero-challenge>
- **Birds of Eastern North America Free Sound Library Download** (Cornell Lab): <https://dl.allaboutbirds.org/free-bird-song-download-from-the-cornell-lab>
- **Bird Cams** (Cornell Lab): <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/>
- **Illinois Common Birds Activity Book** (Illinois Department of Natural Resources): <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/publications/Documents/00000683.pdf> (English) or <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/publications/Documents/00000666.pdf> (Spanish)



Resource originally produced by Amy Henschen for DuPage, Kane & Kendall County 4-H.

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this program, please contact your local University of Illinois Extension office.

Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time for meeting your access needs.

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