

LEVEL 1 - BACKYARD SAFARI

Learn to recognize your feathered neighbors!

Prepared by Dr. Kieran Lindsey and [Next-Door Nature](#)

GET READY...

We'll begin with an introduction to some of the most plentiful and easy-to-identify birds, then move into other nearby landscapes, less common species, and trickier IDs over time. You'll find links to blog posts with fun facts about each species and more pictures in their field notes below.

GET SET...

1. Download the pdf checklist then look out your windows or sit quietly outside and watch for birds.
2. Check what you see against the photo and descriptions below.
3. Sure you've got the right bird? Check the box next to its name.
4. When you've seen and recorded at least 5 of the 7 birds listed (you're on your honor here) come back to this page (you may want to bookmark it) and then report by adding a comment on this page:

<https://nextdoornature.org/urban-safari-series/>

5. Once 15 people have commented I'll post Level 2!

[continued on the next page]

GO!!

1. American Robin



It doesn't get more iconic than the charcoal jacket and garnet waistcoat worn by both male and female American Robins. The largest North American thrush (7-3/4 to 11 in or 20-28 cm from beak to tail-tip) has a yellow-gold bill, long legs, long tail, a prosperous chest and belly, with accents of white beneath the tail and around the eyes. Male Robins have a somewhat darker head, particularly in breeding season.

lafayettepark.org/barefoot-in-the-park/

2. Blue Jay



The Blue Jay is a familiar, gregarious, and vocal relative of crows and ravens. Azure above with a pert crest, ivory below, accessorized with a brief ebony mask, necklace, and barring on the tail and wings, both males and females are definitely fashion-forward. While smaller than its cousins, the Blue Jay still qualifies as one of the larger backyard bird species (9-1/2 to 12 in or 25-30 cm, beak to tail-tip).

<http://lafayettepark.org/blue-jay/>

3. European Starling



These chunky, robin-sized birds are an easy species to ID, with their short tails and wings, slender yellow beaks, and black plumage that shimmers purple and green in sunlight. Following winter molt, their rainbow feathers are strewn with bright white spots. In flight, their pointed wings, tail, and long beaks give the appearance of a small, four-pronged star... and that's how they came to have the name star-ling

<http://lafayettepark.org/grassroots/>

4. Mourning Dove



Mourning Doves are a parfait of muted tones, with raspberry-tinged legs, pale peach breast feathers, apricot head, pale blueberry eyelids, along with pecan-colored back, primary feathers, and long fan-shaped tail. Raisin-dark spots garnish the wing coverts of this slim, average-sized (9 to 13-1/3 in or 23-34 cm from beak to tail-tip) ground-feeder.

<http://lafayettepark.org/lonesome-doves/>

5. Northern Cardinal



Probably the most widely recognized wild bird species in my hometown of Saint Louis, MO, thanks to a certain MLB team that calls the area home. The Northern Cardinal is a relatively large songbird (8-1/2 to 9 in or 21-23 cm from bill to tail-tip) with a brightly-colored vice-like beak and a jaunty crest. Males are brilliant red with a contrasting black mask and throat; females are tawny-olive with red-tinged wings and a smaller black mask.

<http://lafayettepark.org/vice-squad/>

6. Northern Mockingbird



As a vocal impersonator extraordinaire, the Northern Mockingbird doesn't need to be a sartorial showoff. This slender, medium-sized (8-1/4 – 10-1/4 in or 21-26 cm, beak to tail-tip) is stone gray above, platinum on the belly and throat, with darker taupe wings and tail. Two bright white wing bars and outer tail feathers help observers to determine the Mockingbird's true identity.

<http://lafayettepark.org/nocturne/>

7. White-Breasted Nuthatch



White-Breasted Nuthatch (WBN) — the white color referenced in the name is more like the faint gray of second-day snow than milky-white, and spans the entire belly, including the underside of the tail, not just the chest (technically, birds do not have breasts), as well as shoulders, throat, neck, and face. The beak is a terse iron chisel, the head cap a similar tone. Not much neck to speak of but there's a cool slate cape flung across the back and wings. A dusting of henna along the sides provides a spot of color to this wintry scene.

<http://lafayettepark.org/headfirst/>