



# Bird Walk

## Newsletter

8.6.2017

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**Cover Photo by  
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Male Yellowthroat**

Birds are basically divided into Passerines and Non-passerines. The passerine varieties of birds are many people's favorites. As a group, they are the most colorful, entertain us in our own backyards, and sing delightful tunes. When we think of the passerines, it is safe to think of them as the "perching" birds. It is less accurate to call them the song birds, because not all of them have songs. However, those possessing this ability can have very elaborate songs. They have tiny little non-webbed feet with long toes which are constructed for grasping branches. The arrangement of these toes is important. They have three toes forward and one toe backward which allows for grasping. Not only that, but the way the bird's foot anatomy is done, the "relaxed position" is actually in the clenched position. This enables the birds to relax while sleeping on a branch!

Passerines are known to use their feet for many things, not just gripping branches. Preening, holding seeds and nuts for easy eating, pulling away shells from nuts and seeds, and gripping and arranging nesting material are among those duties. A group of passerines, the corvids such as crows, are exceptionally smart problem solvers and will use their feet to handle self-made tools such as twigs and rocks to achieve a task.



Northern Cardinal

Photo by Paula Collins

Passerines, pronounced “pass-err-eyen” or “pass-err-een (either way), comprise more than half of the bird species-over 5000 types. The classification order is Order *Passeriformes*. Passerines are then divided up into 3 groups: Passeri or oscines (those that have passerine feet and highly developed voice boxes called *syrinxes*), Tyranni or suboscines (those which have passerine feet and primitive voice

boxes therefore smaller range of song notes), and the basal Acanthisitti group of birds that are only found in New Zealand and are ancient passerines considered distinct and may be different in origin.



**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**

**Photo by Guenter Weber**

Generally, the passerine birds are colorful or with distinct markings, small to medium in size, stand upright when on a branch, and most active in the mornings and daytime. In addition, most are omnivores, and hatch defenseless, dependent young. The eggs are usually more colorful than the non-passerine eggs. Clutch sizes range according to size of bird. So, the larger passerines may only have one egg, while the smaller passerines may lay 2-6. A few, usually the cavity nesters, can lay up to 12 eggs. After hatching, the young are blind, featherless, and are in need of tremendous amounts of parental care.



Carolina Wren

Photo by Guenter Weber

In order for beginners to narrow down the field of birds and decide if you are observing a passerine or non-passerine bird, it may help to know which types of birds simply are not passerines. According to Melissa Mayntz of “The Spruce”, the non-passerines include the following: Ducks and other waterfowl, woodpeckers, birds of prey, hummingbirds, kingfishers, nighthawks, turkeys and those in pheasant family, gulls and terns, penguins and puffins, shorebirds, wading birds, rails and moorhen/coots, swifts, swallows and martins, parrots, parakeets and macaw types, seabirds such as albatrosses and petrels, and ostriches, emus, and the like.

References for this article: Dahlem, Michael, “Passerines vs Non-Passerines”, mdahlem.net; Mayntz, Melissa, “Passerine”, The Spruce, 2017, [www.thespruce.com](http://www.thespruce.com); “Passerine” [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)





Black-crowned Night Heron

Photo by Guenter Weber



Barred Owl

Photo by Marina Coppedge

On August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017- a mild day for August- 42 species were recorded on the property. There were some surprises for the *unseen species* such as Blue Jay, Pileated Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler, and Boat-tailed Grackle. However, a 42 species tally was still a good count for this time of year. After a thorough investigation around Ravenswood Pond, Wood Duck, Anhinga, Little Blue Heron, and Great Egret were in attendance in good numbers. A juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron was also found at Ravenswood. In the cabin and Audubon Swamp areas, Little Blue Heron were discovered, as well as the Green Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Tufted Titmouse, and Common Yellowthroat. In the cemetery of the Audubon Swamp, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo and a Summer Tanager were pleasant sightings. A Mississippi Kite was seen there overhead. Two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were seen near the cabins and another was seen later at the cross dike of the large impoundment. Also seen at the large impoundment were the Great Blue

Heron, Tri-colored Heron, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Anhinga, Belted Kingfisher, Tree Swallow, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Coot, Common Moorhen, Clapper Rail, Osprey, and Northern Mockingbird. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were seen at the cross dike as well as at Ravenswood. Eastern Bluebirds were seen on the perimeter of the pavilion field and also at the Audubon Swamp. Red-bellied Woodpecker and Downy Woodpecker were seen and heard in the forested areas. Our birdwatcher had a good look at a Great Crested Flycatcher in the gardens, while White-eyed Vireo and Northern Cardinal were scattered about the property. Also making the list this week were: Mourning Dove, American Crow, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture and Laughing Gull. A lone Blue-winged Teal is also in the count which is an unusual sighting for this time of year.



A different sort of winged creature- the dragon fly

Photo by Paula Collins