

Appendix B: Birds of the Marsh Creek Watershed

Great Blue Heron – Ardea herodias

The largest heron in North America, the Great Blue Heron can be found looking for fish around shallow waters in ponds, lakes and creeks.

Description

- Large, gray bird.
- Long legs, "S"-shaped neck, and long, thick bill.
- White crown stripe.
- Black plume extending from behind eye to off the back of the neck.
- Bluish gray back, wings, and belly.
- Sexes appear alike.

Commonly Spotted:

- Mainstem of Marsh Creek.

Sound

- Call a deep, hoarse croak.

Cool Facts

- Occasionally a heron will try to eat a fish that is too large to swallow.



Great Blue Heron photographed by Giuliano Gerra and Silvio

Great Egret – Ardea alba

The Great Egret was once the largest egret in the Old World, however The Great Blue Heron has taken over that role. The Great Egret can be found in all the same areas as the Great Blue Heron.

Description

- Large, all white heron.
- Long, black legs and feet.
- Yellow bill is long, stout, and straight.
- Flies with neck pulled back in S-curve.
- Sexes appear alike

Commonly Spotted:

- See Great Blue Heron.

Sound

- A deep croak when disturbed. Other low calls around nest.

Cool Facts

- Nestlings commonly are aggressive and large chicks frequently kill their smaller siblings.
- The longevity record for a wild Great Egret is nearly 23 years.



Great Egret photographed by James Dixon.

Snowy Egret – Egretta thula

A small, active white heron, the Snowy Egret is found near creek banks.

Description

- Medium-sized, slender all-white heron.
- Back legs and yellow feet.
- Long thin neck, bill, and legs.
- Bill dark.
- Sexes appear alike

Commonly Spotted:

- On the banks of the mainstem of Marsh Creek.

Sound

- A loud, nasal squawk in aggression or territorial defense.

Cool Facts

- While feeding in shallow pools, snowy egrets flush out their prey.



Snowy Egret photographed by James Dixon.

Green Heron – Butorides virens

A small, stocky wading bird, the Green Heron stands motionless when it waits for small fish to approach within striking range and can be difficult to see, but it frequently announces its presence by its loud squawking.

Description

- Small, dark heron.
- Long yellowish legs.
- Long, dark, pointed bill.
- Long neck, but shorter than most herons, often kept pulled in tight to body.
- Sexes similar, but female slightly smaller, duller, and lighter.

Commonly Spotted:

- Usually is first heard then seen roosting in trees along creek banks or flitting ahead.

Sound

- Flight or alarm call an explosive "skeow." Also make series of "kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk" notes.



Green Heron courtesy of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Cool facts

- The Green Heron is one of the few tool-using birds. It commonly drops bait onto the surface of the water and grabs the small fish that are attracted.

Red-tailed Hawk – Buteo jamaicensis

The Red-tailed Hawk is a bird of open country. It is frequently seen sitting on utility poles where it watches for rodents in the grass along the roadside.

Description

- Large hawk.
- Wings long and broad.
- Tail broad and red.
- Most commonly with pale chest and dark band across belly.
- Sexes look alike; female larger.

Commonly Spotted:

- On fence posts and utility poles.
- Flying in open sky.

Sound

- Call a raspy, scraping, screamed "kree-eee-ar."

Cool Facts

- In the courtship display a pair of Red-tailed Hawks soars in wide circles. The pair may grab onto one other and may interlock their talons and spiral toward the ground.



Red-tailed Hawk photographed by John Carmichael.

Red-shouldered Hawk – Buteo lineatus

The Red-shouldered Hawk favors woodlands near water and is perhaps the most vocal American hawk.

Description

- Medium-sized to large hawk.
- Wings and tail striped black and white.
- Underparts barred reddish.
- Pale crescent near wingtips in flight.
- Sexes look alike; female larger

Commonly Spotted:

- Flying in the open sky. Listen for distinctive cry.

Sound

- Call a loud "kee-aah," with second note descending in pitch. Often given repeatedly.

Cool Facts

- At an early age nestling Red-shouldered Hawks shoot their feces over the edge of their nest. Bird poop on the ground is therefore a sign of an active nest.



Red-shouldered Hawk photographed by Peter S. Weber.

Turkey Vulture – Cathartes aura

Seldom does the Turkey Vulture flap its wings as it soars over large areas searching for carrion.



Turkey Vulture photographed by Peter S.

Description

- Large soaring bird.
- Long wings and tail.
- Body feathers entirely blackish-brown.
- Red head mostly unfeathered.
- Sexes appear similar, but female slightly larger.

Commonly Spotted:

- Soaring in the sky on warm updrafts.

Sound

- Usually silent. Makes hiss at carcasses, roosts, and nest.

Cool Facts

- The Turkey Vulture uses its sense of smell to locate carrion and can detect the odors of dead animals below a forest canopy.
- When threatened, the Turkey Vulture will regurgitate food at its attacker.

Common Merganser - Mergus merganser

A large diving duck with a long thin bill, the Common Merganser is found along large lakes and rivers. The long bill has toothy projections along its edges that help the duck hold onto its slippery fish prey.



Common Merganser courtesy of the United States Environmental Protection

Description

- Large, slender diving duck.
- Long, thin, orange bill.
- White patches in wing visible in flight.
- Male boldly patterned with white sides, black back, and green head. Female dull gray with reddish head and white chin.

Sound

- Silent except in courtship when male makes a hoarse croaking, a twanging sound, or a bell-like note. Female makes a harsh "gruk." Wings produce a rushing noise in flight.

Cool Facts

- The Common Merganser usually nests in tree cavities, either those made by large woodpeckers or from where a limb broke off.

Hooded Merganser - Lophodytes cucullatus

A small fish-eating duck of wooded ponds, the Hooded Merganser nests in holes in trees.



Hooded Merganser photographed by A.J. Hand.

Description

- Small to medium-sized duck.
- Long, narrow bill.
- Fluffy, fan-shaped crest.
- Male boldly patterned with black and white crest, female smaller and grayish brown with shorter crest.

Sound

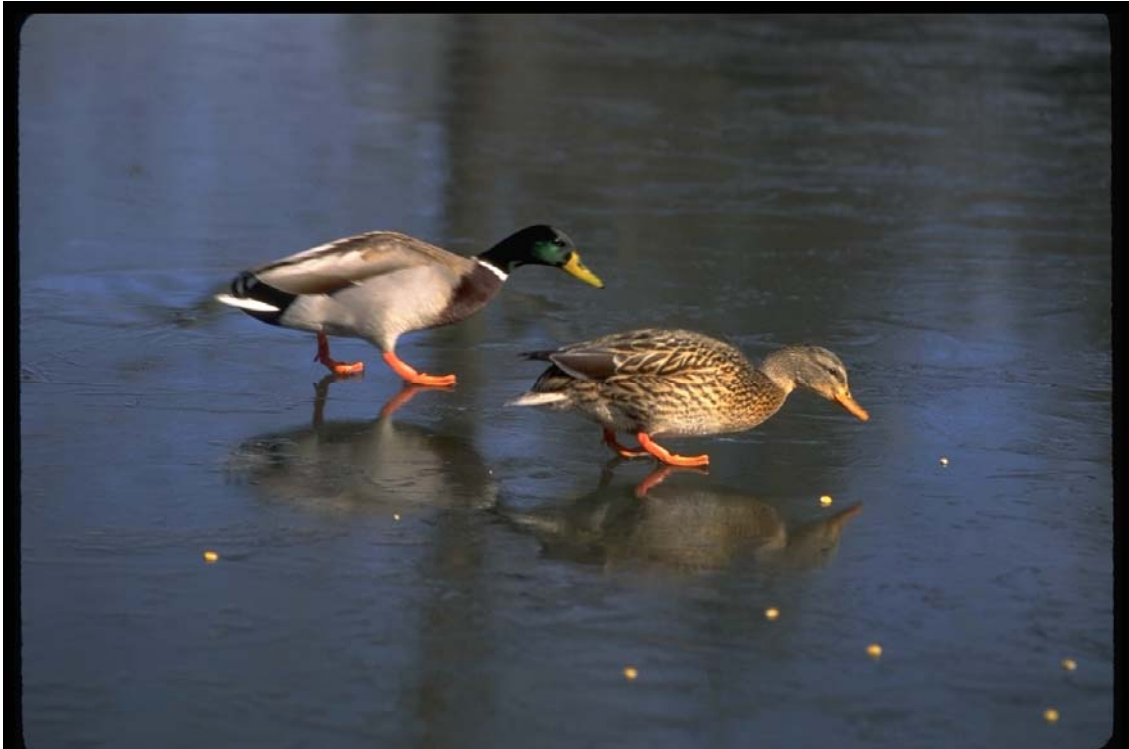
- Silent except in courtship when male gives a deep rolling frog-like sound. Wings produce a loud whistling in flight.

Cool Facts

- The Hooded Merganser finds its prey underwater by sight. The merganser can actually change the refractive properties of its eyes to enhance its underwater vision. In addition, the nictating membrane (third eyelid) is very transparent and probably acts to protect the eye during swimming, just like a pair of goggles.

Mallard – Ana platyrhynchos

One of the most familiar ducks, it is found in all kinds of wetlands and is a familiar inhabitant of urban park ponds.



Mallard courtesy of Purdue University and USDA Wildlife Service.

Description

- Large dabbling duck.
- Male with bright green head and pale body, female dull brown all over.

Sound

- Female gives loud series of quacks. Male makes softer, rasping "rab," also a grunt and whistle during display. Wings whistle in flight.

Cool Facts

- Mallard pairs form long before the spring breeding season. Pairing takes place in the fall, but courtship can be seen all winter. Only the female incubates the eggs and takes care of the ducklings.

American Dipper – Cinclus mexicanus

A chunky bird of streams, the American Dipper is North America's only truly aquatic songbird. It catches all of its food underwater in swiftly flowing streams by swimming and walking on the stream bottom.

Description

- Stocky, medium-sized bird.
- Gray all over.
- Large head; short neck.
- Long legs.
- Short tail.
- Thin, dark bill.
- White eyelids obvious when it blinks.
- Constantly bobs body up and down.
- Sexes look alike, but male is larger.



Sound

- Song clear and ringing, with repeated notes. Call a sharp "zeet."

Cool Facts

- To be able to survive in cold waters during the winter, the American Dipper has a low metabolic rate, extra oxygen-carrying capacity in its blood, and a thick coat of feathers.
- Unlike most other songbirds, but similarly to ducks, the American Dipper molts its wing and tail feathers all at once in the late summer. The bird is flightless during this time.

Belted Kingfisher - Ceryle alcyon

The Belted Kingfisher is often seen hovering before it plunges headfirst into water to catch a fish. It frequently announces its presence by its loud rattling cry.

Description

- Medium-sized bird.
- Large head and shaggy crest.
- Large, thick bill.
- Bluish head and back.
- White throat and collar.
- White underneath with blue breast band.
- Female with red chest band and flanks, male without.



Belted Kingfisher courtesy of Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory.

Commonly Spotted:

- Flying in a straight line above creek.
Listen for a loud scolding cry and look for a flash of blue.

Sound

- Call a loud, harsh rattle.

Cool Facts

- During breeding season the Belted Kingfisher pair are territorial against other kingfishers. A territory includes the streambed and the vegetation along it and averages 0.6 mi long. The nest burrow is usually in a dirt bank near water. The tunnel slopes upward from the entrance, probably to keep water from entering the nest. Tunnel length ranges from 1-8 ft.

*Ruby-crowned Kinglet - **Regulus calendula***

One of North America's smallest birds, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet can be recognized by its constant wing-flicking.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet by photographer Peter S. Weber.

Description

- Tiny bird.
- Dull, olive-green.
- Wingbars.
- White eye ring.
- Short tail.
- In constant motion, continually flicking its wings.
- Sexes similar, male with red crown (usually hidden), female without red crown.

Commonly Spotted:

- In mixed flocks in trees along creek. Look for flicking tail and “twitchy” movement.

Sound

- Song a jumble of notes, starting with two or three high "tsees," followed by five or six lower "tur" notes, and ending with repeated "tee-da-lett" phrases. Call a quick "di-dit."

Cool Facts

- The Ruby-crowned Kinglet is a tiny bird that lays a very large clutch of eggs. Although the eggs themselves weigh only 0.65 g (0.02 oz), an entire clutch can weigh as much as the female herself.

Hermit Thrush - Catharus guttatus

The Hermit Thrush does not migrate in the winter. Its diet changes from insects in summer to insects and fruit in winter.

Description

- Medium-sized thrush.
- Brown back, reddish tail.
- Black spots on chest.
- Thin white eye ring.
- Sexes look alike.

Commonly Spotted:

- Flute-like song more often heard in the woods.
- Solitary.

Sound

- Song a melodious, fluty warble, mostly on one pitch, starting with a clear whistled note.



Hermit Thrush photographed by Steve Nanz.

Cool Facts

- East of the Rocky Mountains the Hermit Thrush usually nests on the ground. In the West, it is more likely to nest in trees.

Varied Thrush - Ixoreus naevius

The Varied Thrush is a large, robin-like thrush that is a characteristic bird of the mature, dark coniferous forests.

Description

- Large thrush.
- Burnt orange throat, chest.
- Dark face mask and back.
- Dark V-shaped breast band.
- Buffy orange wingbars and stripe above eye.
- Female duller and slightly smaller than male.

Commonly Spotted:

- Look for bright flashes of orange among trees.

Sound

- Strong whistled tone on a single pitch, usually buzzy in quality. Call note a dry "chup."

Cool Facts

- Males defend and maintain small feeding territories around bird feeders. They are aggressive and dominate many other feeder bird species.



Varied Thrush photographed by Peter LaTourrette.

Sources:

Information: Courtesy of the *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*, www.birds.cornell.edu, the *Connecticut Dept. of Environmental Protection*, <http://dep.state.ct.us>, *Megan Isadora* and *Paola Bouley*.

Pictures:

- Great Blue Heron: Courtesy of www.justbirds.org by naturalist photographers *Giuliano Gerra* and *Silvio Sommazzi*.
- Great Egret: Courtesy of <http://home.cfl.rr.com/jamesanddiane/index.html> by photographer *James Dixon*.
- Snowy Egret: Courtesy of <http://home.cfl.rr.com/jamesanddiane/index.html> by photographer *James Dixon*.
- Green Heron: Courtesy of *Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory*, www.fnal.gov.
- Red-tailed Hawk: Courtesy of www.newgrangefarm.com by photographer *John Carmichael* of The Northern Ireland School of Falconry.
- Red-shouldered Hawk: Courtesy www.wildbirdphotos.com by photographer *Peter S. Weber*.
- Turkey Vulture: Courtesy www.wildbirdphotos.com by photographer *Peter S. Weber*.
- Common Merganser: Courtesy of the *United States Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes National Program*, www.epa.gov/glnpo.
- Hooded Merganser: Courtesy <http://friendsofsherwoodisland.org> by photographer *A.J. Hand*.
- Mallard: Courtesy of *Purdue University*, www.entm.purdue.edu and *USDA Wildlife Service*.
- American Dipper: Courtesy of www.utahbirds.org by photographer *Nicky Davis*.
- Belted Kingfisher: Courtesy of *Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory*, www.fnal.gov.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Courtesy www.wildbirdphotos.com by photographer *Peter S. Weber*.

Hermit Thrush: Courtesy <http://www.camacdonald.com> by photographer *Steve Nanz*.

Varied Thrush: Courtesy <http://www.camacdonald.com> by photographer *Peter LaTourrette*.