

# Intro to Birding



OUTDOOR ED TO GO

# WELCOME TO BIRDING

What is birding? It is actively watching, observing, or counting birds of any species in any place. Look up! Look to the right! To the left! Birds are all around you, whether perched on the branch of a Douglas Fir tree or soaring high above in the clouds. There are nearly 18,000 species of birds worldwide, and each one is unique in its own special way - and fun to watch!

## WHAT'S IN THIS PACKET?

This booklet is jam-packed with info on how to get started with birding. Birding can be as simple as looking out a window and watching a robin collect nest materials, or as complex as seeking out particular habitats, species, or behaviors and using fancy tools. In the following pages you will find:

- Basic terminology
- Birding etiquette
- What to bring with you
- Helpful phone apps for bird identification
- Basics of bird behavior
- Common bird species of the Front Range
- Places to go birding: on campus, Sondermann Park, & Fountain Creek Nature Center
- Intro to field journaling and drawing
- How to take action for birds
- Resources for learning more



# BASIC BIRDING TERMS

## **SONGBIRDS**

A family of perching birds that makes up more than half of all bird species. They have a special toe arrangement where three toes point forward and one points backward.

## **RAPTORS**

Birds of prey that primarily hunt and feed on vertebrates that are large relative to the bird. They have keen eyesight for detecting food at a distance or during flight, strong feet equipped with talons for grasping or killing prey, and powerful, curved beaks for tearing flesh.

## **WATERFOWL**

Ducks, geese, or other large aquatic birds.

## **BINOCS**

Short for binoculars, an optical instrument with a lens for each eye, used for viewing distant objects (like birds!)

## **SCOPE**

A telescope-like optical instrument on a tripod for stationary birding with a greater zoom range.

## **VOCALIZATIONS - SONGS**

Birds use different types of vocalizations with different meanings. Bird songs are sounds that are melodious to the human ear, these are relatively complex vocalizations that carry a clear pattern. Songs are used to defend territory and attract mates, are only made by male birds, and mostly occur during breeding season.

## **VOCALIZATIONS - CALLS**

Bird calls are shorter than songs and are relatively simple, often just one syllable long - think a duck "quack" or crow "caw." Both sexes vocalize with calls and they can be heard in all seasons.

## **LIFER**

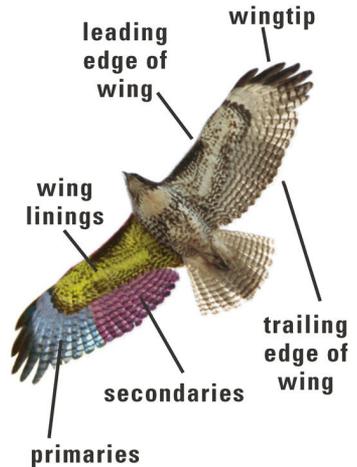
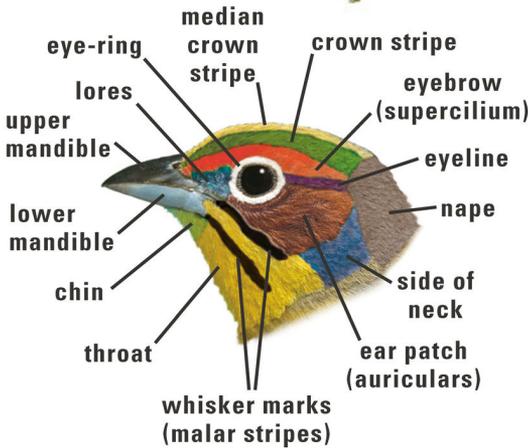
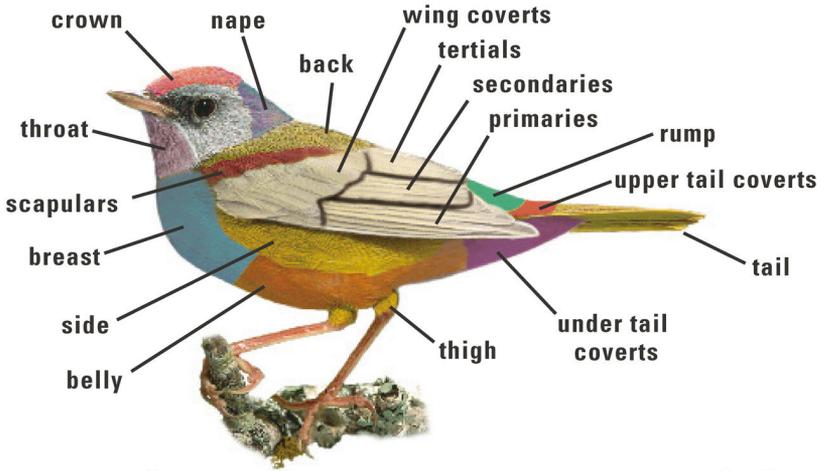
Any bird species that you see for the first time in your life.

## **LIFE LIST**

A compilation of all the bird species you have seen over your lifetime. It can be general or for specific locations.

# BIRD MORPHOLOGY

Understanding basic bird morphology will give you the language needed to identify birds based on their body shape and coloring.



# BIRDING ETIQUETTE

When you head out to do some birding, make sure you stay on trails, do not disturb nests, be mindful when using recordings of bird songs and calls (don't use them during breeding season), minimize flash photography, wear neutral colored clothing, do not attempt to hold or capture birds, and do take photos of rare birds!

## WHAT TO BRING BIRDING

- **Binoculars:** If you only bring one thing when you go birding, it should be a pair of binocs! While you can often see common species up close in the vegetation near you or waterfowl on a lake, most species will be deep in the trees, soaring in the sky, perched high up, or far away. And many species will fly away if you get too close. Check out the back cover of this booklet for info on how to rent binocs!
- **Field Guide:** Either a physical book or a phone app (discussed in the following pages) will be good to have on hand when you see a species you aren't familiar with or need assistance with identification.
- **Camera:** If you like to take photos, bring your camera! A good zoom is helpful, but you can always take a photo through binocs!
- **Hat:** Particularly on sunny days, glare on binocs can make them hard to use, a hat will reduce the glare.
- **Basic walking/hiking equipment:** Bring the essentials like water, snacks, sunscreen, appropriate clothing for the weather, and a good pair of shoes for walking or hiking.



## BIRDING PHONE APPS

Some people love carrying around a paper field guide and journal while birding, but there are many apps out there to lighten your load and contain more information than a book could. The following apps are all free and can be downloaded on most smartphones.



### **EBIRD**

This is a great app for keeping track of the species you see while you are birding. At the beginning of an outing you start a list on the app, then add in species as you see them. If you do this every time you bird, the app will keep a running list of all the species you've ever seen!



### **MERLIN ID**

Merlin is your bird ID guide on the go! Many birders find it easier to use this app than to carry around a book field guide. This is a great app for identifying birds that are new to you with their ID feature, as well as learn more about species with images, range maps, habitat descriptions, calls and songs.



### **AUDUBON**

This is an all-in-one birding resource. There is a birding guide where you can check your ID and learn about different species, you can enter info to help with bird ID, keep track of sightings, keep a life list, get rare bird alerts, and find good trails to go on.



### **ALLTRAILS**

This is a trail/hike finding app. You can search for a specific park or trail to get maps, a description, length, elevation, and other information. Good birding trails are usually tagged with "wildlife" or "birdwatching" or both.

# BIRD BEHAVIOR



In animals, behaviors can be instinctive, learned, or a combination of both. Whatever their source, behaviors are important adaptations for survival of the individual and the species. It is often easy and informative to observe and record bird behaviors. Noting the behavior of a bird – along with its appearance, sound, and location – is often key to identifying the species!

You may observe some of the following common bird behaviors:

**Feeding:** Each bird species' feeding behaviors will differ from others. For example, some birds feed on the ground, others feed in tree canopies or in tree bark. Some waterfowl will skim the surface and some will dive underwater.

**Territorial behavior:** Easier to see in the spring when birds are getting ready to mate. If you hear a male bird singing, it's usually a sign of territorial behavior. Sometimes you will even see songbirds yell, scream, chase, and on rare occasions physically fight with each other to defend their territory.

**Courtship behavior:** Often subtle and hard to distinguish, sometimes seeing pairs of birds spending all their time together is the most obvious sign. You may even see the male bird feeding the female as their bond solidifies. Once paired up they will begin to build their nest.

**Mating behavior:** Occurs as pairs build their nest. Although usually brief, if you are in the right place at the right time you may see a brief flurry of wing flapping that lets you know love is in the air!

**Mobbing and predator evasion:** More prevalent in the spring during nesting season. Parent birds will intensely chase, scream, and mob predators of all kinds in efforts to protect their eggs.

# COMMON BIRDS OF THE SPRINGS

These are some birds that are commonly seen around Colorado Springs throughout the winter and early springtime! Species composition will change throughout the year, so pay attention to the birds you see during spring and fall migration time as well as through the summer!

## SMALLER SONGBIRDS



### BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

One of the most common songbird species in this area. Tiny birds with black caps (tops of their heads), white cheeks, and black throats. They are gray above with light gray to buff sides and underparts. Listen for their distinctive “chick-a-dee-dee-dee” calls.



### MOUNTAIN CHICKADEE

Very similar looking to Black-capped Chickadees, but note their distinctive black eyeline. They also have slightly longer bills and are grayer underneath. Calls are similar to Black-capped Chickadees but sound slightly angrier or harsher.



### DARK-EYED JUNCO

The species is divided into several subspecies with some geographical and color variations; however, all have solid dark gray or brown heads and upper backs, white bellies, and pinkish beaks. Juncos are commonly seen together in groups across the forest floors and are easy to recognize by their crisp markings and their bright white tail feathers they flash in flight.

## SMALLER SONGBIRDS



### BUSHTIT

Sprightly, social songbirds that twitter as they fly weakly between shrubs and thickets in western North America. Almost always found in lively flocks, they move constantly, often hanging upside down to pick at insects or spiders on the undersides of leaves.



### HOUSE FINCH

Small-bodied with fairly large beaks and somewhat long, flat heads. The wings are short, making the tail seem long by comparison.

Adult males are rosy red around the face and upper breast, with streaky brown back, belly and tail. Adult females are grayish-brown with

hick, blurry streaks and an indistinctly marked face.



### AMERICAN ROBIN

Fairly large songbirds with a large, round body, long legs, and fairly long tail. American Robins are gray-brown birds with warm orange underparts and dark heads. In flight, a white patch on the lower belly and under the tail can be conspicuous. Compared with males,

females have paler heads that contrast less with the gray back.



### WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

The largest nuthatch, this is still a small bird with a large head and almost no neck. The tail is very short, and the long, narrow bill is straight or slightly upturned. They are gray-blue on the back, with a frosty white face and underparts.

The black or gray cap and neck frame the face and make it look like this bird is wearing a hood.

## SMALLER SONGBIRDS



### RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

A small, compact bird with a sharp expression accentuated by its long, pointed bill. Red-breasted Nuthatches have very short tails and almost no neck; the body is plump or barrel-chested, and the short wings are very broad.

They are blue-gray birds with strongly patterned heads: a black cap and stripe through the eye broken up by a white stripe over the eye. The underparts are rich rusty-cinnamon, paler in females.



### ROCK PIGEON

Tubby birds with small heads and short legs. Their wings are broad but pointed wings and the tail is wide and rounded. Variable in color, but most birds are bluish gray with two black bands on the wing and a black tip to the tail. Most birds have iridescent throat feathers.

Wing patterns may include two bars, dark spots, or can be plain. The tail is usually dark tipped. Commonly seen around campus and in urban areas.

## CORVIDS



### AMERICAN CROW

A large, long-legged, thick-necked bird with a heavy, straight bill. In flight, the wings are fairly broad and rounded with the wingtip feathers spread like fingers. The short tail is rounded or squared off at the end. American Crows are common birds of fields, open woodlands, and

forests. They thrive around people, and you'll often find them in agricultural fields, lawns, parking lots, athletic fields, roadsides, towns, and city garbage dumps.

## CORVIDS



### COMMON RAVEN

Not just large but massive, with a thick neck, shaggy throat feathers, and a Bowie knife of a beak. In flight, ravens have long, wedge-shaped tails. They're more slender than crows, with longer, narrower wings, and longer, thinner "fingers" at the wingtips. They are found in open and forest habitats



### BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE

Look for a black head, chest, back, and tail and a white belly and shoulder patches. It has an extremely long, iridescent green tail and a thick, slightly curved black bill. It has white patches on its wings that can be seen when it is in flight.



### BLUE JAY

Bright blue on top and white to gray on its throat, chest and belly. It has a gray-blue crest on its head and black and white bars on its wings and tail. Its bill, legs and feet are black. Common in urban environments.



### STELLER'S JAY

A large, dark jay of evergreen forests in the mountainous West with a black head and upper body. When patrolling the woods, Steller's Jays stick to the high canopy, but you'll hear their harsh, scolding calls if they're nearby. Graceful and almost lazy in flight, they fly with long swoops on their broad, rounded wings.

## CORVIDS



### WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB JAY

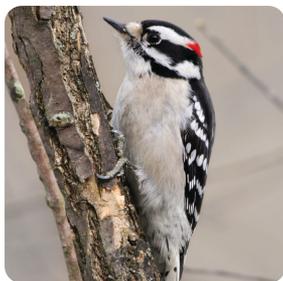
A fairly large, lanky songbird with long, floppy tail and an often hunched-over posture. The bill is fairly long and straight, with a pointed tip. Light blue and gray above, with a whitish throat and grayish belly separated by an indistinct, partial breast band of blue. In birds, the color blue depends on lighting, so Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays can look simply dark. Commonly seen in foothills ecosystems (such as Sondermann Park or Stratton Open Space).

## WOODPECKERS



### NORTHERN FLICKER

Adults are large and brown with black bars on the back and wings. Don't be surprised if you scare one up from the ground. It's not where you'd expect to find a woodpecker, but flickers eat mainly ants and beetles, digging for them with their unusual, slightly curved bill.



### DOWNY WOODPECKER

The black upperparts are checked with white on the wings, the head is boldly striped, and the back has a broad white stripe down the center. Males have a small red patch on the back of the head. The outer tail feathers are typically white with a few black spots. Note its small size; while the markings are nearly identical to those of the Hairy Woodpecker, the Downy Woodpecker is only two-thirds its size. Downy Woodpeckers hitch around tree limbs and trunks or drop into tall weeds to feed on galls, moving more acrobatically than larger woodpeckers.

## WOODPECKERS



### HAIRY WOODPECKER

A medium-sized woodpecker with a fairly square head, a long, straight, chisel-like bill, and stiff, long tail feathers to lean against on tree trunks. Its bill is nearly the same length as the head. Hairy Woodpeckers hitch up tree trunks and along main branches. They sometimes feed at the bases of trees, along fallen logs, and even on the ground at times.

## RAPTORS



### RED-TAILED HAWK

Large hawks with very broad, rounded wings and a short, wide tail. Most Red-tailed Hawks are rich brown above and pale below, with a streaked belly and, on the wing underside, a dark bar between shoulder and wrist. The tail is usually pale below and cinnamon-red above, though in young birds it's brown and banded. "Dark-morph" birds are all chocolate-brown with a warm red tail. "Rufous-morph" birds are reddish-brown on the chest with a dark belly. You'll most likely see Red-tailed Hawks soaring in wide circles high over a field. When flapping, their wingbeats are heavy. In high winds they may face into the wind and hover without flapping, eyes fixed on the ground.



### TURKEY VULTURE

Large dark birds with long, broad wings. Bigger than other raptors except eagles and condors, they have long "fingers" at their wingtips and long tails that extend past their toe tips in flight. When soaring, Turkey Vultures hold their wings slightly raised, making a 'V' when seen head-on.

## RAPTORS



### **GREAT-HORNED OWL**

Large, thick-bodied owls with two prominent feathered tufts on the head. The wings are broad and rounded. In flight, the rounded head and short bill combine to create a blunt-headed silhouette. Great Horned Owls are mottled gray-brown, with reddish brown faces and a neat white patch on the throat. Their overall color tone varies regionally from sooty to pale.



### **COOPER'S HAWK**

Medium-sized hawks with broad, rounded wings and a very long tail. Adults are steely blue-gray above with warm reddish bars on the underparts and thick dark bands on the tail. Even when crossing large open areas they rarely flap continuously. Often found in wooded habitats.

## WATERFOWL



### **AMERICAN WIGEON**

American Wigeons are medium-sized, rather compact ducks with a short bill and a round head. They tend to sit on the water with their heads pulled down, giving them a no-necked look. Breeding males have a brownish gray head with a wide green stripe behind the eye and a gleaming white cap. The body is pale cinnamon with white patches on the sides of the rump that contrast with the black undertail feathers. In flight, note the white patch on the upperwing and a green patch on the secondaries. Females and nonbreeding males are warm brown with a brownish gray head and a dark smudge around the eye. Both sexes have a pale gray bill with a black tip.

# WATERFOWL



## MALLARD

Mallards are large ducks with hefty bodies, rounded heads, and wide, flat bills. Like many “dabbling ducks” (which feed mainly at the surface in contrast to the “diving ducks” which dive for their food) the body is long and the tail rides high out of the water, giving a blunt shape. Male Mallards have a dark, iridescent-green head and bright yellow bill. The gray body is sandwiched between a brown breast and black rear. Females and juveniles are mottled brown with orange- and-brown bills. Both sexes have a white-bordered, blue “speculum” patch in the wing.

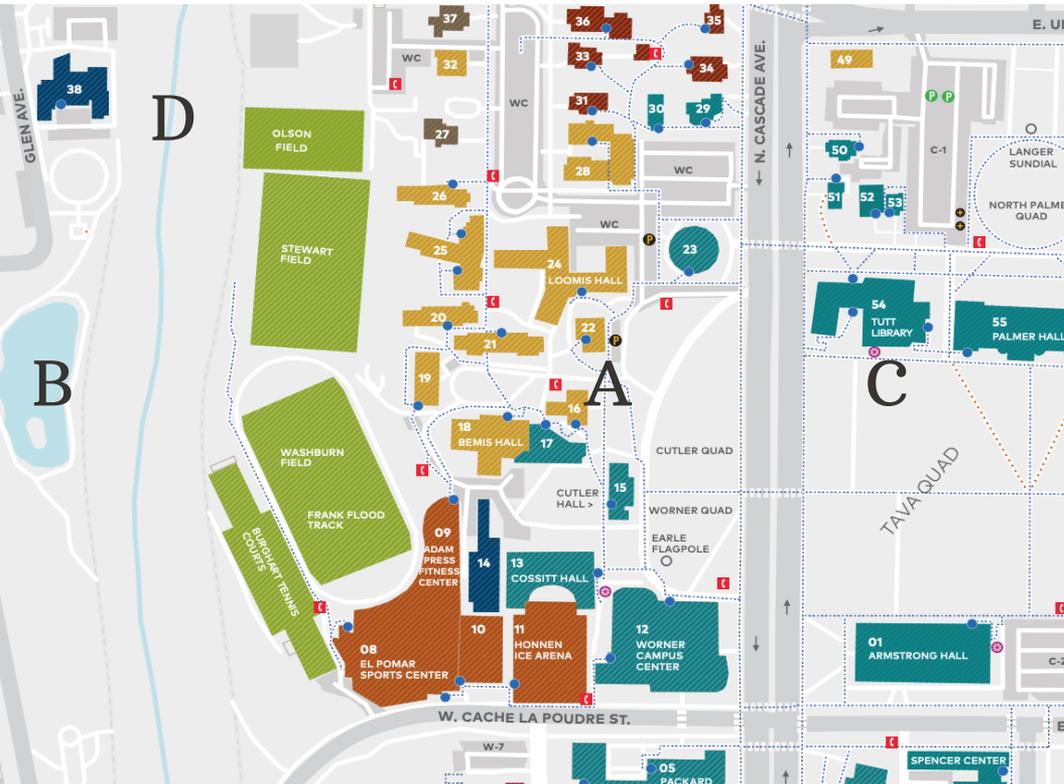


## CANADA GOOSE

Big waterbirds with a long neck, large body, large webbed feet, and wide, flat bill. Canada Geese have a black head with white cheeks and chinstrap, black neck, tan breast, and brown back. They feed by dabbling in the water or grazing in fields and large lawns. They are often seen in flight moving in pairs or flocks; flocks often assume a V formation.

# BIRDING ON CAMPUS

If you don't feel like going far, or don't have access to a bike or car, you are in luck! There are many places to see birds on and around campus. Below is a map with some hot spots labeled. Descriptions for each follow the map.



## **A** OLD TOWN - LOOK FOR GREAT HORNED OWLS

Most years, a pair of Great-horned owls can be spotted around campus. They are often seen near Loomis, down by the fitness center and next to the soccer fields. At night, their deep, 3-note call can be heard, and during the day, they can be spotted roosting in trees with large branches and trunks. They will often perch very close to the trunk and blend in extremely well, so a good method for spotting one is to scan with binoculars up and down the trunks of ponderosa pines.

## BIRDING ON CAMPUS

### **B** POND BY FACILITIES - LOOK FOR WATERFOWL

Past the athletic facilities on the west side of Monument Creek is a small pond near the facilities building along Glen Avenue. Here you can almost always see Canada Geese and other waterfowl, such as Mallards. You can also listen and scan the tree branches for small songbirds such as finches, chickadees, and bushtits.

### **C** LIBRARY - LOOK FOR TOWNSEND SOLITAIRE

On the south side of Tutt library facing the quad, small Finches, House Sparrows, Rock Pigeons, and occasionally a Townsend Solitaire can be seen flitting between the trees lining the path and the rafters of the library (hint for the Solitaire: listen for its signature high pitched, repeated one note call and scan the very tops of the trees from which it usually sings). On the north side, behind the library and Palmer, Chickadees, Nuthatches, and other small songbirds can be seen in the branches of the pine trees.

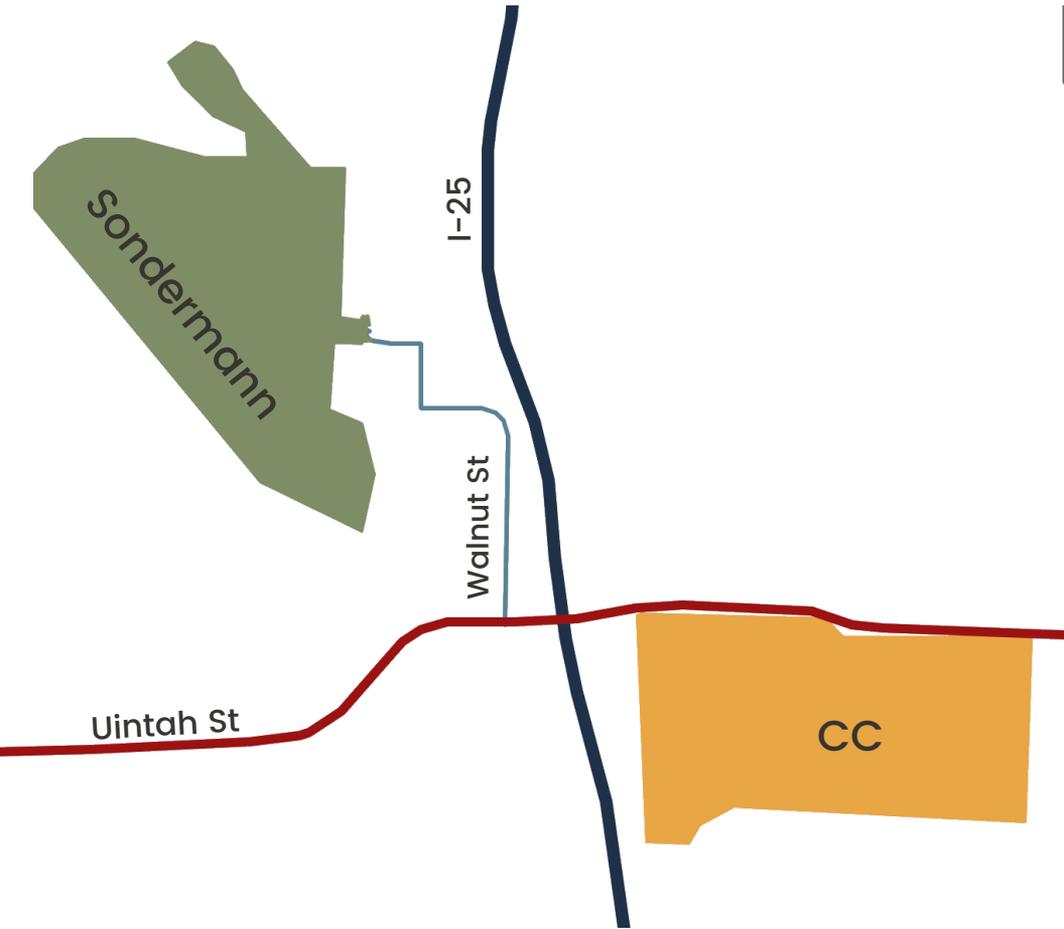
### **D** MONUMENT VALLEY PARK - GREAT VARIETY

Just a short walk past the soccer fields from campus is a great trail along Monument Creek. Here, waterbirds such as American Wigeons, Mallards, and Great-Blue Herons as well as songbirds like Cedar Waxwings, Lesser Goldfinches, and House Wrens can be spotted. A tip for spotting herons is to scan along the edges of the creek. They hunt by wading in shallow water and spearing fish with their bills, so they are often standing very still and can blend into the vegetation if you don't look closely.



# BIRDING NEAR CAMPUS - SONDERMANN

If you want to get off campus and check out a local park, we recommend heading over to Sondermann Park. It's just on the other side of the interstate, about a 1.5 mile walk or bike ride from campus.



## GETTING THERE

Head west on Uintah under the I-25 bridge. Take the first right onto N Walnut St. and follow it until it curves and becomes W Buena Ventura St. Turn right on N Chestnut St. and left onto W Caramillo St, which will lead into the parking lot.

## BIRDING NEAR CAMPUS - SONDERMANN



The park is tucked against the eastern edge of The Mesa – a high gravel escarpment above Monument Creek Valley, providing a quiet enclave for animals. The park is well known for its foothill bird species including juncos, magpies, ravens, grosbeaks, and hummingbirds. You can also commonly see mule deer, raccoons, coyotes, and red foxes here. The short trails near the main parking lot explore the shaded Mesa Creek corridor. Here you will be surrounded by large cottonwood trees and will see more forest bird species. The trails further out from the lot will take you through open habitat, providing opportunities to scout the sky for raptors, and see other scrubland birds like Woodhouse's Scrub Jays.

# BIRDING HOT SPOT - FOUNTAIN CREEK

Fountain Creek Regional Park and Nature Center is a great place to go see an array of waterbirds as well as smaller songbirds who prefer forest and riparian habitats. Getting here requires access to a car, so it's a great option for the weekend, or after class on a sunny week day!

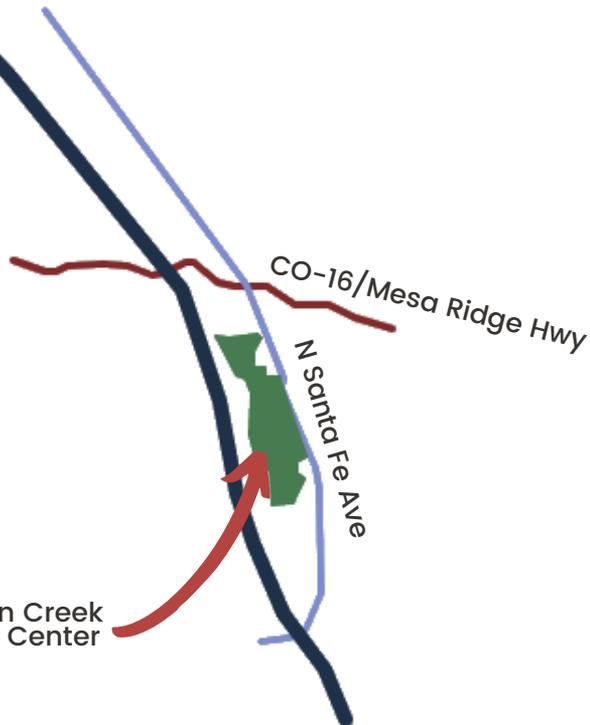
## GETTING THERE

It's a 20 minute drive from CC to the park. Head south on I-25 for about 10 miles. Take exit 132A and head east on CO-16/Mesa Ridge Highway. Take the first exit and merge onto N Santa Fe Ave. In a half mile, turn right onto Cattail Marsh Rd and follow the road to the Nature Center!

As of printing this packet, Fountain Creek Nature Center is open Tuesday through Saturday, 9 AM - 4 PM. Scan the code below to check the website for updates before you go!



Fountain Creek Nature Center



# BIRDING HOT SPOT - FOUNTAIN CREEK

There are a series of short loops around the Nature Center entrance, and going north, after a stroll through some forested sections along the creek, there are a few lakes that the trail runs along, perfect for spotting herons, kingfishers, and many different species of waterfowl. Some common species spotted here include:

Cackling Geese, Red-Winged Black-Birds, Bushtits,  
Green-winged Teals, American Goldfinches,  
Yellow-rumped Warblers, American  
Wigeons, Tree Swallows, and  
many more! Beavers  
can also be  
spotted at times!



Scan this code for a more detailed map of the park!



# LOOKING TO LEARN MORE?

## LOCAL BIRDING CLUBS

- Aiken Audubon - Pike's Peak Region Birding Club - [www.aikenaudubon.com](http://www.aikenaudubon.com)
- Audubon Rockies - CO/WY/UT Audubon Society [rockies.audubon.com](http://rockies.audubon.com)
- Tiger Audubon Club - CC's Birding Club - @tigerauduboncc on instagram and [tigerauduboncc@gmail.com](mailto:tigerauduboncc@gmail.com)

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

- CC Library Birding Guides - a resource full of info and images [bit.ly/30SPfFH](http://bit.ly/30SPfFH)
- Colorado Birding Trail - the best trails for birding in the state [coloradobirdingtrail.com](http://coloradobirdingtrail.com)

# TAKING ACTION FOR BIRDS

- Window collisions: due to their reflective nature, birds have a tendency to fly into big windows, mistaking them for the natural world. While birding in urban areas, take note of smudges, feathers, or carcasses by windows. Tiger Audubon monitors window collisions to identify problem areas. Email them at the address above if you want to become a window monitor!
- Citizen science: using the Ebird app while birding and submitting lists allows researchers to compile migration pattern maps and study the impacts of climate change on avian populations.
- Audubon: the National Audubon Society's mission is to protect birds and their habitats by fighting for environmental policy and educating about the wonders of birds. Email Tiger Audubon or check out the Aiken Audubon club (info above) to get involved!



# FIELD JOURNALING

## WHAT IS A FIELD JOURNAL?

A notebook or collection of sketches and notes taken from observations while in the field. They can be about anything you see in the natural world: clouds, plants, bugs, weather, birds, etc.



## WHY SHOULD YOU KEEP ONE?

What we know about birds, and the natural world in general, changes daily. Any random note or observation is important to scientific discovery, and your personal record is helpful for your experience.

## HOW DO YOU KEEP ONE?

The process of keeping a field journal is unique to each person. Some emphasize drawings and art, while others prefer to write more. The journal can be a physical journal or a digital record. You can document whatever is of interest to you in whatever way you'd like: behaviors, species, habitats, whatever! Get used to sketching quickly and jotting down notes - nature doesn't hold still for long!

## NEED SOME BINOCS?

Binoculars makes birding easier and more enjoyable - you get to see more birds! Most people, however, don't have a pair just lying around. The folks over at the Organismal Biology and Ecology department have offered to let you check a pair out for free when you want to go birging this spring!

**EMAIL OLIVIA NOONAN, ORGANISMAL BIOLOGY  
& ECOLOGY PARAPROFESSIONAL, AT  
ONOOAN@COLORADOCOLLEGE.EDU  
TO RESERVE A PAIR OF BINOCULARS!**

