

Columbia County Expected Bird Species

Below is a list of birds considered common and to be expected in Columbia County. The list notes will also apply to surrounding counties (Baker and Suwannee). The taxonomic order followed is somewhat arbitrarily for convenience and the species list is not comprehensive. One should appreciate that strays and less common birds can be seen many times. One should become familiar with similar species in same bird families by referring to a good bird field identification guide showing color and physical comparative features of each species as well as range maps to indicate typical summer and winter occurrence. This list does not provide bird identification information but does include some habitat and behavior notes.

Birds do have preferred habitats where they are typically observed. The presence of many bird species does change with regularity along with seasons. Some species are with us only during the summer or the winter for example.

Ducks and Geese- Feral [Canada geese](#) can be seen occasionally in the county. [Snow geese](#) do occur some winters. Feral [Mallard](#) ducks and domesticated [Muscovy Ducks](#) are common on local lakes. [Wood Ducks](#), the recently range expanded [Black-bellied Whistling Duck](#) and less commonly, [Mottled Ducks](#), breed here but all other species occur only in winter. [Blue-winged Teal](#) are early migrants (September) followed by other “puddle” or dabbling duck species (which prefer shallow weedy areas) such as [Northern Shoveler](#), [Green-winged Teal](#) and [Gadwall](#). Typical “diving” ducks (which typically are seen in more open water areas than puddle ducks) are [Ring-necked Duck](#), [Ruddy Duck](#), [Bufflehead](#), and [Hooded Merganser](#). Less common is [Lesser Scaup](#).

Duck-like Marsh Birds- Brownish [Pied-billed Grebes](#) swim and dive singularly in vegetated lakes and marshes along with flocks of the ever cackling, clucking and dipping dark grey/blackish [American Coots](#) and [Common Moorhens](#).

Water Turkeys- Both the long-necked, long-tailed [Anhinga](#) and the stubbier necked/billed/tailed [Double-crested Cormorant](#) are routinely seen diving and catching fish as well as sunning with outstretched wings.

Pelicans- in winter, [white pelican](#) can be a common sight on large lakes of north Florida. The [Brown Pelican](#) of the Gulf and Atlantic would be rare here.

Hérons Egrets Ibis's and Wood Storks- Most of eastern North America's long-legged waders can be found in Florida and do occur in Columbia Co. The large [Great Blue Heron](#) and [Great Egrets](#) are conspicuous along most lake and marsh edges. [Snowy Egrets](#), [Little Blue Herons](#), [Tricolored Herons](#), short-legged [Green Herons](#) and [Black-crowned Night Herons](#) are less common but present year round in local waters. [Cattle Egrets](#) are common in pastures in spring and summer and roost in willow trees over water at night. [White Ibis](#) and [Glossy Ibis](#) sometimes are seen in large flocks. [Wood Storks](#) feed on dry ponds and marshes and sometimes soar overhead amongst the vultures. [Least Bitterns](#) are occasionally seen flying over cattail areas in summer months.

Limpkin- [Limpkin](#) nest here and remain in winter; can be seen along lake shores in downtown areas and secluded waters, often feeding on large apple snails or mussels.

Cranes- The [sandhill crane](#) migrates to central Florida each winter and is commonly seen and heard over our county from November till spring.

Game birds- [Wild Turkey](#) and [Northern Bobwhite](#) are both found throughout the year in woods and fields.

Hawks Eagles and Vultures- Most of eastern N. A. raptors can be seen in Columbia Co. Two common soaring hawks, or buteos, are [Red-shouldered Hawk](#), often seen flying along edges of cypress swamps or woods clearings and the larger, more often soaring higher [Red-tailed Hawk](#). Both are year around residents. Our smallest pointy-winged falcon, the [American Kestrel](#) can be seen hovering or perched year around. We have 2 accipiters, or bird hawks- the [Cooper's Hawk](#) which nests here and the [Sharp-shinned Hawk](#), which is a winter visitor. Both are skulkers and dash along tree lines and chase birds at feeders. The [Bald Eagle](#), [Osprey](#) and both [Turkey](#) and [Black Vultures](#) are permanent residents. Often seen soaring overhead, [Swallow-tailed](#) and [Mississippi Kites](#) are summer residents only. The [Northern Harrier](#) can be seen flying slow and low over marshes and agricultural fields in winter.

Shorebirds Plovers and Sandpipers- about 42 species of shorebirds or short-legged waders are seen annually in Fl. 24 species have been seen in Columbia Co., many of them on mud flats when Alligator Lake goes dry. The [Killdeer](#) is a common plover seen nesting on roofs and in fields and feeding in wet areas as well. [Black-necked Stilts](#) nest in the local marshes. All other shorebirds are migrants or winter visitors. Common migrants include [Spotted](#), [Least](#) and [Pectoral Sandpiper](#) and [Long-billed Dowitcher](#). Winter visitors considered common include [Lesser](#) and [Greater Yellowlegs](#) and [Wilson's Snipe](#). Occasionally, the beautiful [American Avocet](#) is observed in shallow muddy water.

Gulls and Terns- Most gulls and terns are "beach birds" in Florida. Adult and immature [Ring-billed Gulls](#) concentrate at local landfill and fly over downtown lakes during winter. They are sometimes joined by a few petite and quicker-winged [Bonaparte's Gulls](#). Both species sit and rest or pick food from water surface. The [Forster's Tern](#) is seen in winter plumage and the [Black Tern](#) forages over marshes during migration. Terns dive into water but do not sit and feed.

Pigeons and Doves- [Rock Pigeon](#), [Mourning Dove](#), and [Common Ground Dove](#) can be seen year around. The introduced [Eurasian Collared-Dove](#) and expanding [White-winged Dove](#) are locally common.

Cuckoos- The [Yellow-billed Cuckoo](#) nests here but is not always seen clearly as it forges high in dense foliage, especially seeking hairy caterpillars. It is often spotted flying from one tree to the next. Its "rain crow" call is often heard.

Owls- The [Barred Owl](#) is our commonest owl. It is seen often; its classic “Who cooks for you- who coos for yooouuuah?” call and raucous owl laughter are legendary. [Great Horned Owl](#), [Screech Owl](#) and [Barn Owl](#) are more often heard than seen.

Nightjars- this group includes 2 species present during summer; the often heard (after dark) [Chuck-wills-widow](#) and the graceful flying (dawn and dusk, primarily) [Common Nighthawk](#).

Hummingbirds- During summer, the [Ruby-throated Hummingbird](#) is a familiar sight in gardens and yards. It is the only normally seen hummingbird in all of eastern N.A.; however one should look for [Rufous Hummingbird](#) during the winter.

Kingfishers- The distinctive machine-gull rattle call and silhouette of [Belted Kingfisher](#) can be seen hovering over lakes and perched on wires overlooking ponds all winter. The species breeds rarely in N. Fl.

Woodpeckers- All the woodpeckers of eastern N.A. can be seen in our county. The most common are [Red-bellied Woodpecker](#), often giving its harsh “quirr” calls or drumming steadily, and our smallest species, [Downy woodpecker](#). The largest, [Pileated Woodpecker](#) is also very vocal and seen often. The [Red-headed woodpecker](#) prefers large dead trees on open woods; listen for its “queerp” calls. [Northern Flicker](#) is seen flying or feeding on the ground or tree stumps. Both these species are less common. The endangered [Red-cockaded Woodpecker](#) is locally common in open old-growth pine woods in Osceola NF. Our only migratory species, the [Yellow-bellied Sapsucker](#) is common in woods during winter months; giving its nasal cat-like mew call notes.

Flycatchers- The distinctive [Eastern Kingbird](#) seen on fences and wires and the vocal [Great-crested Flycatcher](#) of open woods are common sights in summer. During winter, the smaller [Eastern Phoebe](#) is often seen on low fences, perches in open woods and around the edges of urban gardens. Its tail wagging and constant “Phoeb” notes attract attention. All flycatchers are aerial attack specialists.

Shrikes- The distinctive perched silhouette and black facial mask of [Loggerhead Shrike](#) is seen on wires and fences in agricultural areas.

Crows and Jays- Both [Fish Crow](#) and [American Crow](#) are resident in Columbia Co. The “carr caaw” call of the former is well-known. The nasal “cah or cah-ah” of fish crow is less familiar. The species cannot be reliably separated by field marks. The [Blue Jay](#) is normally seen and heard in woods or residential areas.

Swifts and Swallows- Six swallow species migrate through our county. The [Purple Martin](#) and [Barn Swallow](#) nest here. The latter nests under bridges and is often seen flying near Interstate overpasses and river crossings. In winter, the [Tree Swallow](#) is commonly seen flying over local lakes.

Chickadees and Titmice- [Carolina Chickadee](#) and [Tufted Titmouse](#) hang out together in the woods and at bird feeders.

Nuthatches- The very small [Brown-headed Nuthatch](#) gives forth its squeaky toy doll call notes from outer limbs in open pine woods

Wrens- The familiar [Carolina Wren](#) is a permanent resident; well known to nest in flower pots or somewhere in an open shed. In winter, the [House Wren](#) often lets out its agitated hissing/scolding call notes from fence rows, brush piles and downed tree tops.

Kinglets and Gnatcatchers- The [Blue-gray Gnatcatcher](#) is a year around actively feeding attraction in open brushy areas and woody undergrowth. In winter, [Ruby Crowned Kinglets](#) happily feed in most all habitats along with titmice and winter warblers

Thrushes- The [American Robin](#) is seen on lawns and mowed roadsides all winter as well as feeding on holly trees in particular, sometimes in large flocks. The [Eastern Bluebird](#) is a permanent resident preferring open fields and open woods borders. Five species of “spotted” thrushes migrate through the county, all mostly seen in wooded areas. [Hermit Thrushes](#) are sometimes seen or heard giving repeated soft “chup” calls in winter in brushy woods. The most expected migratory species are [Swainson’s Thrush](#) and [Veery](#). The boldly spotted [Wood Thrush](#) is most striking and rarely can be found singing its flutelike song and nesting in dense woods such as Oleno SP.

Mimic thrushes- [Northern Mockingbirds](#) are a common sight. With us also are [Brown Thrashers](#) but they hide more in bushes. [Grey Catbirds](#) are rare in summer but numerous individuals spend the winter in brush piles and thickets.

Starlings- [European Starling](#) is a common urban citizen.

Waxwings- The beautiful [Cedar Waxwing](#) is with us from late winter till late spring. Tight flocks of 10-20 birds can be seen wheeling around from tree to tree giving their high pitched “wheeezy” call notes. They often concentrate in berry producing trees and shrubs.

Vireos and Warblers- This group is actually two separate families but will be combined in this expected bird list. Vireos feed more methodically than warblers. [Red-eyed Vireo](#) is an abundant breeding species in tall trees and sings incessantly in summer months. [White-eyed Vireo](#) is commonly located scolding in brushy thickets. 33 species of wood warblers can be expected annually in FL. These are striking birds and worthy of field guide perusal to learn to appreciate. Six species nest in our county; the diminutive [Northern Parula](#) of wooded areas, [Common Yellowthroat](#) of both wet and dry thicket edges and the ever trilling [Pine Warbler](#) of pine and mixed woods all being common. One should seek out the stunning [Prothonotary Warbler](#) in cypress swamps and flooded river swamps. In winter, the ubiquitous [Yellow-rumped Warbler](#), open space [Palm Warbler](#) and [Pine Warblers](#) are most common. These winter

warblers will come to suet feeders. Numerous species visit during migration; Such interesting and beautiful birds do not warrant being called common, but those species most expected would be: [Yellow Warbler](#) of thickets bordering wet areas, [American Redstart](#) and fall plumage [Chestnut-sided Warbler](#) of deep and open woods, [Prairie Warbler](#) of wet and dry area fields and edges, [Ovenbird](#) of the forest floor and [Northern Waterthrush](#) of willow thickets and wooded creeks.

Tanagers- In summer we have (naturally) the pretty [Summer Tanager](#) visiting bird baths and singing from tree tops. During spring migration we can be blessed to see stunning [Scarlet Tanagers](#) but the duller olive/yellow version is even more common in fall migration.

Sparrows and Towhees- Several sparrow species are actually quite common and interesting to observe. The “little brown birds” get a bad rap mostly because they stick to cover so often. Our only breeding species is the [Bachman’s Sparrow](#) which lives in low growth of open pine woods following prescribed burns and other sparse brush habitats. This species may be the best songster in N.A. One should visit the Mt. Carrie wildlife viewing trail in Osceola NF or Ichetucknee SP trail system during April-June to appreciate this singing. The following species are all winter visitors. [Chipping Sparrows](#) are commonly seen around feeders and woods borders. Along lake edges, [Swamp Sparrows](#) are common. [Song Sparrows](#) live in this same habitat as well as brush piles in fields and woods borders. [White-throated Sparrows](#) prefer brush piles and weedy tangles in the woods. [Savannah Sparrows](#) prefer very open areas such as fence rows and field edges. Other species also occur. Look closely and enjoy. [Eastern Towhee](#) is a permanent resident in young pines, clearcuts and brushy woods. Their “che-wink calls are legendary.

Blackbirds Meadowlarks and Orioles- This diverse bird family is well represented in our county. [Red-winged Blackbirds](#) are common over woods and lakes. [Common Grackles](#) are less common and usually prefer more extensive forests. But both species do come to feeders. [Brown-headed Cowbirds](#) frequent woods edges, farming areas and feeders. [Eastern Meadowlarks](#) are seen on very short grass areas such as pastures. The [Bobolink](#) is in this family and regularly occurs in rather large flocks of meadow-like marshes such as Alligator Lake or in stubble or young wheat/rye fields during the spring migration. We have [Orchard Orioles](#) nesting in open, park-like woods and sometimes visiting hummingbird feeders. The [Baltimore Oriole](#) is a migrant but sometimes stays for the winter feeding on berries or coming to fruit or suet feeders.

Cardinals Grosbeaks and Finches- Male and female [Northern Cardinals](#) are known by all and cheer our home sites and feeding stations. During migration the remarkable [Rose-breasted Grosbeak](#) visits, often at feeders during October, looking for sunflower seeds, or feeding commonly on dogwood berries. The truly blue, (females are brownish) [Blue Grosbeak](#) nests here in old field and along agricultural area roadsides. The smaller, but equally true and bright blue [Indigo Bunting](#) nests here as well. It is often seen in trees bordering clearcuts and other fields, and on wires. During winter the [American Goldfinch](#) arrives. When not feeding on sunflowers or thistle at our feeders, they feed on sweet gum balls. The purplish male or brown-striped female [House Finch](#) is an import from western N.A. and mostly is common in urban areas, singing beautifully from tree tops.

House Sparrows- The common brownish [House Sparrow](#) of McDonalds parking lots, nesting in street signs and traffic lights and hanging out in residential bushes is not a true sparrow but is in an old world weaver finch family.

Compiled by Jerry Krummrich 01/2009