

Beginning Bird ID - "Habitat"

or

Don't go looking for Seagulls in the Forest!



We've reviewed 3 of the 4 ways suggested by Cornell Lab of Ornithology to help us identify birds: **Size & Shape, Color Pattern, and Behavior.** The last topic introduces us to an important word:

habitat

noun

hab-i-tat | \ 'ha-bə-,tat \

the place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows.*

A bird's Habitat is where it finds the necessities for survival:

Food, Water, Shelter, and Nesting.



*Merriam-Webster



Our Seagull isn't likely to find a great expanse of water, wide open spaces, or a rocky ledge overlooking the ocean (or large lake) where it can make a nest and raise its young, in a forest where there are so many trees growing close so together.

There are generally **four types of habitat** that birds like to call their home:

- **Woodland habitats**—coniferous or deciduous trees;
- **Aquatic (watery) habitats**—lakes, ponds, swamps, marshes, oceans, and shorelines;
- **Scrub-shrub habitats**—short woody plants and bushes; and
- **Open habitats**—grasslands, agricultural fields, and tundra.

Once you learn what kinds of birds depend on each habitat you have a quick tool to help you identify birds in the field.



Which habitat would our Seagull prefer to live in?



Which habitat do you prefer to live in?



This beautiful bird lives right here in the

Woodlands of

Maine. It's called an **Ovenbird** because of the shape of its nest, usually found right on the ground. Look at the photo. **What kind of habitat from the list above do you think the Ovenbird needs in order to build its nest and raise its young?**



<https://macphailwoods.org/nature-guides/birds/ovenbird/>



Woodland habitats

coniferous or deciduous trees



“**Conifers**” are trees that produce cones - like Pine cones. Sometimes coniferous trees are called “**evergreens**”, which helps us remember that they keep their “leaves” all year long. Evergreen plants can be trees or shrubs and provide food and shelter to birds. They eat the seeds and berries and the hardy needle branches offer protection against the weather (especially in winter) and predators (which makes evergreens an excellent place for nesting).



“**Deciduous**” trees and shrubs lose their leaves usually in the fall. They do this to better survive the winter, but don't give a lot of



shelter for birds. But they're a huge benefit to birds once the leaves return. When birds return to their northern breeding grounds, it is not a coincidence that the deciduous plants are just beginning to bloom. The number one source of food for birds is insects and deciduous trees and shrubs are home to thousands. Plus, they provide other bird foods like seeds, nuts, berries, sap, and nectar.



ROBIN: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/98675522@N06/32856178861/>

CHICKADEE by Doug Tallamy - <https://blog.nwf.org/2015/04/chickadees-show-why-birds-need-native-trees/>

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER: <https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/60010281>



Aquatic Habitat

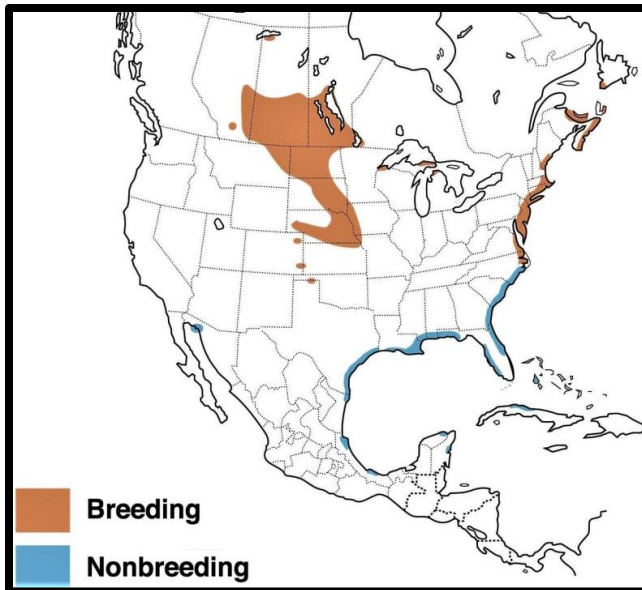
ocean shores, lakeshores,
rivers, and wetlands



Piping Plover & Nest Photo by Phil Stone, Wells, ME <https://www.philstonephotography.com/>

Seagulls like to nest in the rocky cliffs, but the **Piping Plover**, a rare shorebird, likes to nest right on the beach! This Plover has a worldwide breeding population of only 8,400 birds. Notice how the eggs are *camouflaged* by the beach sand. Still, the Piping plover's numbers are declining due to unintentional interference by humans, trampling, dogs, vehicles,

predation by cats, rats, crows, seagulls and more, changes in water levels, and destruction of habitat. On some of our beaches, their nesting areas are fenced off to help protect them.



Notice on the map how the habitat of the Piping plover is along the **ocean shores** in the Northeast and along **lakeshores, rivers, and wetlands** in the northern Great Plains and Great Lakes - **Aquatic Habitat**.

Chicks snuggle right under the parent's belly making it look like Mom or Dad has many pairs of legs!



Piping Plover w Babies Photo by Baerbel Bönisch LoSacco

Scrub-shrub Habitats short woody plants and bushes

Mount Agamenticus summit area is a well-managed **Scrub-shrub habitat** which is critical for birds. The flowering plants provide nectar, seeds, and insects so necessary to breeding birds. Tall herbs, grasses and woody vegetation offer shelter and nest sites, as well as hunting areas for predatory birds such as owls, hawks and kestrels. Individual species of scrub-shrub birds have unique habitat requirements for nesting and feeding.

Here are a couple of songbirds found in the Mount A summit scrublands.



Photo posted with permission of Phil Stone, Wells, ME. <https://www.philstonephotography.com/>
PRAIRIE WARBLER at Mount A



Photo posted with permission of Phil Stone, Wells, ME. <https://www.philstonephotography.com/>
EASTERN TOWHEE at Mount A

If you consult www.AllAboutBirds.Org and search for your bird, Cornell will give you the keys to your bird's Habitat right on the first *Overview* page. (See below)



In this chart you can see the Prairie Warbler's Habitat is "Scrub", and it usually nests in a "Shrub". The chart tells us that it eats all kind of insects by picking them off leaves/foilage and that its numbers are declining, mostly due to loss of - you guessed it, "Habitat".

Prairie Warbler
Setophaga discolor
ORDER: Passeriformes
FAMILY: Parulidae

Warblers

Habitat Scrub
Food Insects
Nesting Shrub
Behavior Foliage Gleaner
Conservation Declining

Watch

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Prairie_Warbler/lifehistory

Eastern Towhee
Pipilo erythrophthalmus
ORDER: Passeriformes
FAMILY: Passerellidae

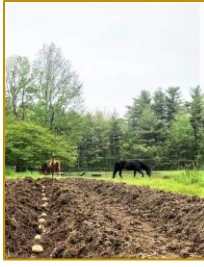
Towhees

Habitat Scrub
Food Omnivore
Nesting Ground
Behavior Ground Forager
Conservation Low Concern

Low

Here you can see that the Eastern Towhee shares the same Habitat as the Prairie Warbler, has a different kind of diet, and makes its nest on the ground.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Towhee/lifehistory



Open Habitats
grasslands, agricultural fields, and tundra



Both of these species of birds like to hang out in **Open Habitats** - the Savannah sparrow and the Snowy owl.



<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/55502961?>

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/37851091>

Snowy owls breed and nest way up in the Arctic Tundra where there are few trees. In years when lemmings (small mammals) are plentiful, these owls can raise up to ten or more chicks. When they come south for the winter, especially in years when lemmings are not plentiful, we see them here in Maine in habitats that are open and look somewhat similar to their Arctic habitat. Often that means they hang out near the ocean and around marshes and fields - even out at Nubble Lighthouse and the summit of Mount Agamenticus!



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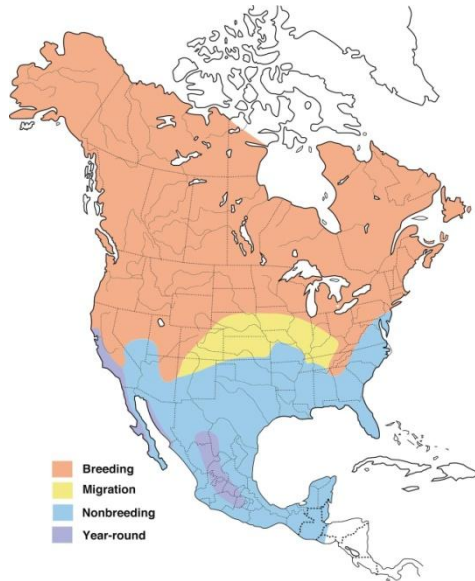


Photos Mt A & Nubble Lighthouse- Denise Johnson

The **Savannah sparrow** loves OPEN fields, meadows, salt marshes, prairies, grassy dunes, shores, pastures, edges of marshes, alfalfa fields; also tundra in summer, shores and weedy vacant lots in winter! Males can often be easily seen perched atop plants. As you can see on the map below, it has quite a large range all over the U.S.



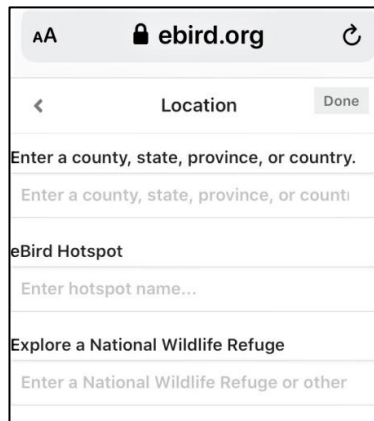
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/56075201>



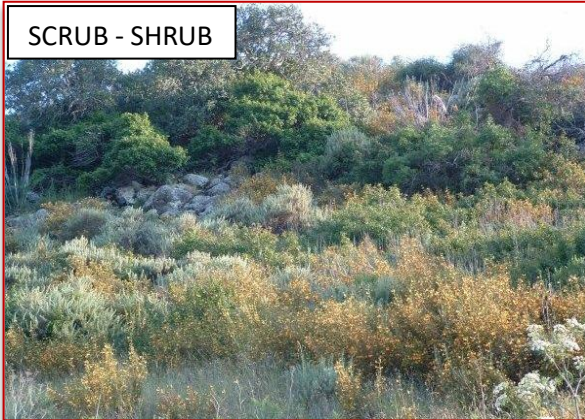
Savannah Sparrows eat insects and spiders, including beetles, grasshoppers, and millipedes - swallowing them whole. They'll even eat spittlebug nymphs inside the foamy froth that appears on goldenrod plants. In winter, they'll eat mostly small seeds from grasses and near the coast they may even eat tiny crustaceans.

It's quite fascinating to see the photos taken by people who report their sightings of Savannah sparrows to Cornell's eBird Website. Click through the sightings that have photos and read who took the photo, when, and especially WHERE they saw them. You can use the LOCATION Drop-down to add your town and state to find out WHERE near you that you might go to find a Savannah sparrow:

<https://ebird.org/media/catalog?taxonCode=savspa®ionCode=&mediaType=p>



Help these birds find their way back "Home" – back to their Habitat
Can you match the Seagull, Prairie Warbler, Ovenbird, and Snowy Owl to
Shrubland, Woodland, Open tundra, or Aquatic/Ocean Habitats?



Seagull



Prairie warbler



Hermit thrush



Snowy owl