Irvine Prairie Ornithology Guide

Killdeer

Bald eagle

Upland Sandpiper

Grasshopper Sparrow

Eastern Meadowlark

Dickcissel

Northern Harrier

Horned lark

American Robin

Sedge Wren

Bobolink

Common Yellowthroat
**Killdeer**

**Scientific Name:** Charadrius vociferus  
**Habitat:** Grasslands  
**Food:** Insects  
**Nesting:** Ground  
**Behavior:** Ground forager  
**Conservation Status:** Low concern  

**Fun Fact:** Named after their shrill wailing call that sounds like “kill-deer”.

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**Dickcissel**

**Scientific Name:** Spiza americana  
**Habitat:** Grasslands  
**Food:** Seeds  
**Nesting:** Shrub  
**Behavior:** Ground forager  
**Conservation Status:** Low concern  

**Fun Fact:** This chunky bunting migrates in flocks during the spring and summer. Flock size grows the further they fly.

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**Common Yellowthroat**

**Scientific Name:** Geothlypis trichas  
**Habitat:** Scrub  
**Food:** Insects  
**Nesting:** Shrub  
**Behavior:** Foliage gleaner  
**Conservation Status:** Low concern  

**Fun Fact:** This warbler was one of the first birds to be catalogued by Linnaeus in the New World (1766).

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**Bald Eagle**

**Scientific Name:** Haliaeetus leucocephalus  
**Habitat:** Forests  
**Food:** Fish  
**Nesting:** Trees  
**Behavior:** Soaring  
**Conservation Status:** Low concern  

**Fun Fact:** A spiritual symbol for indigenous peoples long before it was deemed an American national symbol in 1872.

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**Upland Sandpiper**

**Scientific Name:** Bartramia longicauda  
**Habitat:** Grasslands  
**Food:** Insects  
**Nesting:** Ground  
**Behavior:** Ground forager  
**Conservation Status:** Low concern  

**Fun Fact:** A shorebird that avoids water and ground forages with family members.

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**Meadowlark**

**Scientific Name:** Sturnella magna  
**Habitat:** Grasslands  
**Food:** Insects  
**Nesting:** Ground  
**Behavior:** Ground forager  
**Conservation Status:** Common bird in steep decline  

**Fun Fact:** The only way to tell the Eastern and Western Meadowlarks apart are their songs - even then it is difficult to differentiate!
**American Robin**

- **Scientific Name:** Turdus migratorius
- **Habitat:** Open woodlands
- **Food:** Insects
- **Nesting:** Tree
- **Behavior:** Ground forager
- **Conservation Status:** Low concern

**Fun Fact:** One of the first birds to return after winter. Also loves worms. The early bird really does get the worm!

**Horned Lark**

- **Scientific Name:** Eremophila alpestris
- **Habitat:** Grasslands
- **Food:** Seeds
- **Nesting:** Ground
- **Behavior:** Ground forager
- **Conservation Status:** Common bird in steep decline

**Fun Fact:** Inhabits one of the most extensive elevation ranges for birds, from sea level to 13,000 feet.

**Red-tailed Hawk**

- **Scientific Name:** Buteo jamaicensis
- **Habitat:** Open woodlands
- **Food:** Small animals
- **Nesting:** Tree
- **Behavior:** Soaring
- **Conservation Status:** Low concern

**Fun Fact:** Its thrilling scream is often dubbed over bald eagles in movies.

**Northern Harrier**

- **Scientific Name:** Circus hudsonius
- **Habitat:** Grasslands
- **Food:** Mammals
- **Nesting:** Ground
- **Behavior:** Aerial diver
- **Conservation Status:** Low concern

**Fun Fact:** Its owl-ish face helps it hear ground prey under thick grass.

**Grasshopper Sparrow**

- **Scientific Name:** Ammodramus savannarum
- **Habitat:** Grasslands
- **Food:** Insects
- **Nesting:** Ground
- **Behavior:** Ground forager
- **Conservation Status:** Common bird in steep decline

**Fun Fact:** Unusual for birds, the males can sing two different songs.

**Sedge Wren**

- **Scientific Name:** Cistothorus platensis
- **Habitat:** Grasslands
- **Food:** Insects
- **Nesting:** Shrubs
- **Behavior:** Ground forager
- **Conservation Status:** Low concern

**Fun Fact:** One of the most nomadic territorial birds in North America.
About Irvine Prairie

Irvine Prairie is a 292 acre prairie-in-progress on the farm of Cathy Irvine in memory of her husband David. In partnership with Cathy and the farm operator, we are restoring an ecologically diverse tallgrass prairie that engages current and future generations of students and community members in learning about Iowa's prairie heritage and appreciating the benefits provided by prairie.

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation holds the conservation easement on the property, and the University of Northern Iowa Foundation Properties Corporation is the owner. The original 77 acres was dedicated on May 18, 2018. In January 2023, Cathy Irvine donated an additional 215 acres to complete the gift.

Since 2018, we have introduced over 100 species of native prairie plants, using the most genetically diverse and regionally appropriate seed sources available, and closely matching species with soil moisture conditions. Some hard-to-establish species are started in our greenhouse and introduced as plugs. The Tallgrass Prairie Center uses the best known approaches to controlling weeds and encouraging diverse, native wildlife. We are committed to documenting the work, and carefully monitoring the results, to guide future management decisions.

Find more information about Irvine Prairie at www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org/irvine-prairie/

Additional Resources

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology: https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/
National Audubon Society: https://www.audubon.org/birds
The Nature Conservancy: https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/

Bird Friendly Iowa: https://birdfriendlyiowa.org/
S.O.A.R.: https://soarraptors.org/
Iowa Young Birders: https://iowayoungbirders.wildapricot.org/
Iowa Ornithologists’ Union: https://iowabirds.org/
Iowa Department of Natural Resources: https://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/Iowas-Wildlife

Bobolink

Scientific Name: Dolichonyx oryzivorus

Habitat: Grasslands
Food: Seeds
Nesting: Ground
Behavior: Ground forager
Conservation Status: Declining

Fun Fact:
No other North American bird is black and white, like wearing a tuxedo backwards. Both males and females navigate using the Earth’s magnetic field.