

Notes:

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site

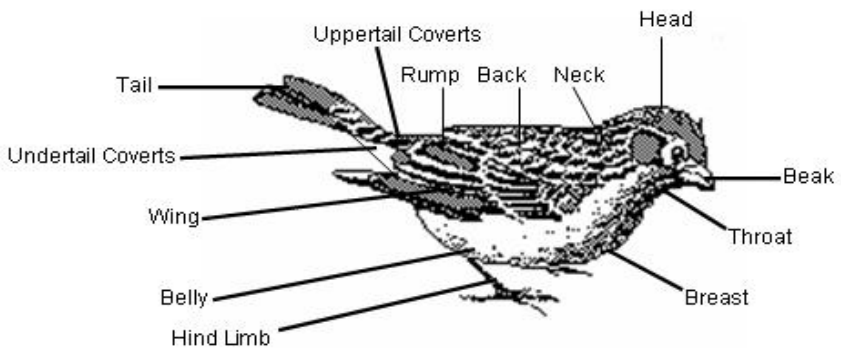


A Field Guide to the
Common Birds by
Habitat Type and Basic Color.



Western Meadowlark
Montana's State Bird

Topography of a typical bird



If you learn the general anatomy of a bird, it is much easier to find a bird in a field guide. A general rule when observing a bird is to continue to look at the bird for as long as you can. Never look the bird up until after it has disappeared. First look at the head. What is the shape of the beak, the color of the beak, does it have an eye ring, are there any distinguishing colors on the head? What is the color of the breast? Is it streaked, clear or have a central dot? What is the overall color of the bird, are the wings a different color than the body? Are there wing bars? Is the tail blunt, forked, or notched? Does it have a band across the end or several bands on the tail? Are there white outer tail feathers? Do the wings extend beyond the tail, the same length as the tail or shorter than the tail. What color are the legs and feet? Finally, does the bird show any behavioral traits? Does it hop, flick its tail, scratch, hang upside down? Is it on the ground, in a bush or high in the tree?

Once you have noted all of these traits, the bird will probably be gone and then you can then look in the field guide. With practice you can answer all of these questions in just a few seconds of observation. Some birders find it helpful to take notes or make a sketch.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Ben Bobowski of the Grant-Kohrs Ranach Site for encouraging me to develop this guide, and providing funds to make it possible. I also want to thank my wife, Laura Lee, for her editing and suggestions.

Gary Swant - Deer Lodge

Several area birders provided photographs for this project. Thank You!

Pete Arnold - Cheyenne, WY - Common Grackle, Spotted Sandpiper, Mourning Dove, and Wood Duck.

Nate Kohler - Deer Lodge, MT - Tree Swallow, Marsh Wren, and Cedar Waxwing.

Jeannie Marcure - Kalispell, MT - American Kestrel.

Bob Martinka - Helena, MT - Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Rough Wing Swallow, Willow Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Western Wood-pewee, Song Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Brewer's Blackbird, and Horned Lark.

Richard Mousel - Great Falls, MT - Black-billed Magpie.

Gary Swant - Deer Lodge, MT - Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, European Starling, Eastern Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, American Goldfinch, Black-headed Grosbeak, American Robin, Red-naped Sapsucker, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Killdeer, Bank Swallow, House Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Osprey, Canada Goose, Mallard, Gadwall, Ruddy Duck, Sora, Common Snipe, Long-billed Curlew, and Vesper Sparrow.

Jan Wassink - Kalispell, MT - American Crow, Common Raven, Bobolink, and Black-capped Chickadee

Dave Williams - Great Falls, Mt - Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, and Bullock's Oriole.

Identification of the Short Grass Prairie Birds of the Grant-Kohrs Historic Site

Common Raven, Western Meadow Lark, Eastern Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, American Crow, Mourning Dove, Savannah Sparrow, and Cliff Swallow are described in the *Riparian, Marsh Pond, and Wet Meadow ID Section*.

Shortgrass Prairie - Birds that are predominantly black

Brewer's Blackbird - Male is black year around, with purplish gloss on head and neck, and greenish gloss on body. Eyes are yellow. Female is gray-brown



Shortgrass Prairie - Birds that are predominantly red/rust



American Kestrel - Our smallest and most common falcon. Back and tail russet with wings blue-gray. Double black stripe on face is unique among falcons.

Shortgrass Prairie - Birds that are predominantly brown

Horned Lark - Brown back and light underparts. Head pattern is distinctive with black feather "horns" with white to yellow face and throat. Black bib and eye strip. In flight, tail is dark showing white outer feathers.



Long-billed Curlew - This shorebird is often found in the grasslands. Cinnamon brown above, buffy below, with a long down curved bill. Lacks head stripes of other curlews.

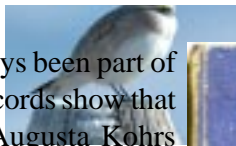
Vesper Sparrow - Dark ear patch bordered in white along lower and rear edges and white eye ring. In flight, obvious white outer tail feathers.



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Introduction:

Birds, and identifying birds have always been part of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch. Historical Records show that birds were admired by the Kohrs. Augusta Kohrs was said to have been able to whistle the birds out of the trees. Con Warren's personal bird book is pictured to the right.



Today, nearly all birds are protected, and we value them as watchable wildlife, and indicators of a healthy ecosystem. We hope this guide to the common birds of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch will enrich your experience as you visit the history of early ranch life in the Deer Lodge valley.

Organization of the guide:

For the experienced birder with a lot of time to spend, there are excellent field guides which list more than 1000 species of North American birds. For someone new to the area or to birding, even the more than 280-species identified in the Deer Lodge Valley can be daunting.

The best way to learn birds is to go out with others who know then and spend time studying a field guide. Since time is limited for many ranch visitors, we have reduced the number of species in this guide to the sixty-three most common birds seen at the ranch in the spring and summer.

This field guide (*starting on page 8*) is organized to make identification as easy as possible for the novice by listing the birds by:

- ◆ Most common habitat at the ranch
- ◆ Predominant color

Bird Groups and Families

When one starts to study birds, how do you make sense out of 1,015 species that have been recorded in North America? You do so by recognizing that these birds can be put into groups or families that have similar characteristics that are passed from generation to generation. Knowing these family characteristics can help you to sort out birds into meaningful groups. Remember this guide is sorting birds, not by genetic characteristics, but by two observable field characteristics, **habitat** and **primary color**. However, it is essential to understand the families or general groups of birds if you are going to be successful using a field guide to North American birds. Listed here are the families or groups of birds, by common name when available, that you would expect to see in Montana and general traits about each.

Birds groups associated with water, riparian zones and wetlands habitats

Loons - Fish eating birds with long bodies and legs set far back

Grebes - Similar to loons only smaller, lobbed toes and long necks

Pelecaniformes (six families) - fish-eating water birds, 2 species in Montana, American White pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants

Wading Birds - (six families) All are long legged waders, most have long necks, long pointed or curved bills to probe mud or spear prey.

Swans and Geese - Larger than ducks, long necked and tip up when feeding

Dabbling Ducks - These ducks feed by dabbling their bills in water or tipping up. When they fly, they don't run on the water, they take off directly.

Diving ducks - These ducks live in deep water and dive for their food. They usually run along the water to become air borne

Cranes and Rails - All are found in marshy wetlands and vary greatly.

Cranes are conspicuous and large, rails are small and often secretive.

Shorebirds - A large group of small to medium birds, with thin bills and long legs. They feed by probing in the mud for insects.

Gulls, and Terns - Gulls are familiar highly visible species which like open areas such as beaches, whereas terns are smaller with slender pointed beaks.

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Identification of the Marsh/Pond Birds of Grant-Kohrs Historic Site

Canada Goose, Mallard, Marsh Wren, Wood Duck, Ruddy Duck, Gadwall, Killdeer, Redtail Hawk, Marsh Wren, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, Common Yellowthroat, and Osprey are birds of this habitat and described in the Riparian ID Section.

Marsh/Pond - Birds that are predominately brown



Sora - A brownish shy rail with short thick yellow bill. The front of the face is black with a grey neck and breast. Long greenish legs. This bird is seldom seen but often heard. The call is a descending whinny.

Common Snipe - A mottled brown, stocky, bird with heavily striped head and back. The belly is white and the breast is streaked. There is a dark eye stripe and short yellow legs. The bill is very long and grayish.



Identification of the Wet Meadow Birds of Grant-Kohrs Historic Site

Sora, American Robin, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Killdeer, Common Snipe, and Red-winged Blackbird, have been described in the Riparian and Marsh Pond sections of the guide.

Wet Meadow - Birds that are predominately black



Bobolink - The breeding male is overall black with a black bill, head, wings, tail and underparts. The nape is buff to yellow, with white wing patch and tail. The female is mottled brown overall with a streak back, and pale eyebrow.

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Wrens - Generally small, brown, secretive, and active birds. They often have barred raised tails. Most sing continuously.

Dippers - Stocky, short tailed birds that feed underwater in streams.

Kinglets - Tiny weak flight birds found high in coniferous trees.

Solitaires and Bluebirds - Solitaires are long tailed short billed, small headed birds of the coniferous forest, while bluebirds are in open areas with scattered trees

Thrushes- Flute like singers associated with damp shaded coniferous forest, often in flocks, especially in winter.

Mimidaes - These are medium sized, long-tailed solitary songbirds who feed by raking leaf litter. They often run rather than fly to escape danger.

Waxwings - Crested headed birds with a facial mask often seen eating berries from trees.

Wood Warblers - A large family of small birds with short pointed bills. Many are yellow overall, especially those that feed high in trees.

Tanagers - Brightly colored, medium sized birds with large showing red and yellow colors.

Birds associated with Grasslands, bushy areas, and grassy stream edges habitats

Pipets - Solitaire and secretive birds found in grasses and open patches.

Sparrows - A large group of birds which are most often ground dwellers, and secretive. Many are drab brown and streaked, with short conical beaks for gathering seeds.

Icterids - A varied family of birds with slender, pointed beaks. Most found in grassy area and build their nest on or near the ground. Includes the blackbirds and the colorful orioles.

Once you learn the characteristics of these 34 family groups, you are well on your way to be able to identify all the birds that you see, especially if you learned the habitats they prefer. Be aware that some birds can be in several habitats, but most birds have preferred habitats.

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Song Sparrow - Mottled brown back, red-brown crown which is often erect, with a gray stripe. White throat and heavy streaking on sides and breast converging in a central spot. Legs and feet are pinkish. Often sings from a high perch.



Northern Waterthrush - Olive-brown upperparts and pale yellow eyebrow. Streaked white breast and spotted throat. Pinkish legs, often teeters or bobs its tail continuously. A ground dweller that walks rather than hops. Secretive and is heard more often than seen.

Cedar Waxwing - Brown upperparts with cinnamon head crest. Black mask on face, yellow wash on the belly. Gray rump and terminal yellow band on tail. Red spots on wings, but lacks the white and yellow of the winter counterpart - Bohemian Waxwing.



Mourning Dove - Olive-brown in color, with small head. Tail is long and tapering with outer white feathers which are seen in flight. Wings show black spots and underparts paler with dull red legs and black bill. Overall look is sleek. Their song is often mistaken for that of an owl.

Osprey - A large raptor with dark brown upperparts, and white underparts. White face shows distinct dark eye stripe. In flight long wings show dark wrist patches and tail is banded with black and white.





Canada Goose - This is our most common and familiar goose. It has a long black neck, white cheek and black head. It has dark brown upperparts, light brown underparts and a black tail.

Mallard - Our most familiar of all ducks. The male has a glossy green head, yellow bill, chestnut breast, orange feet and a white necklace ring. The body is gray with black tail feathers that curve upward. The female is mottled brown overall with an orange beak splattered with black.



Gadwall - The male is a mostly gray bird with black hind-quarters, dark bill and a black and white wing patch. Females are mottled brown with a brown bill showing orange sides.

Ruddy Duck - This small duck has a large head and bill with long stiff upright tail feathers. The breeding male shows white cheeks, blue bill, and a chestnut red body. The female is brown overall with the back and head crown darker. A dark cheek stripe is prominent.



Wood Duck - The male has a glossy green head with a crest that is slicked back from the crown. White chin, throat, shoulder slash are distinctive. The breast is chestnut spotted with white, golden sides, and dark back and hindquarters. The female has brown-gray upperparts, brown breast streaked with white and a white tear drop eye patch.

Birds groups associated with trees, forest and forest edge habitats

Raptors - These hawks, eagles, vultures and falcons hunt for prey, and soar for long distances looking for food.

Game Birds - These are chicken like birds with heavy bodies that spend much of their lives on the ground searching for food. Some are found exclusively in grassland habitats.

Pigeons & Doves - These birds pick food from the ground while walking with tiny steps. They often coo as they walk.

Owls - These night time predators, have hooked peaks, and sharp talons. They have large eyes, and their calls are hoots or screeches.

Goatsuckers and Swifts - Most have large heads and mouths, perch on the ground or low shrubs and are active insect feeders at dusk or at night.

Hummingbirds - Tiny to small birds with long bills and feed on flowering plants

Woodpeckers - Stiff tails and stout bills which enable them to feed on insects under the bark of trees.

Passerines - (Order for all the land birds that perch and the rest of the bird groups listed.)

Flycatchers - A family of many species which are often drab in color, hard to identify, and capture insects in flight.

Shrikes - Hooked billed song birds that prey on song birds

Vireos - Small drab song birds with large hooked bills that feed on insects in leafy trees

Jays, and Crows - These noisy and aggressive species are conspicuously bright colored or black. Often found in groups.

Swallows - Pointed wings and forked tailed aerial flyers which feed on insects in flight.

Chickadees - Small inquisitive birds, with strong legs and short stout beaks.

Nuthatches - Small, short-tailed, proportional long-billed birds that often feed head down.

Marsh/Pond: This habitat is an extension of the riparian/stream habitat and is made up of standing open water in ponds that drain into the Clark Fork River. Other areas are backwater marshes, or depressions filled with water from railroad construction and dredging operations, that took part on the ranch in the past.

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|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Canada Goose | Osprey | Wilson's Snipe |
| Wood Duck | Redtail Hawk | Marsh Wren |
| Gadwall | Killdeer | Common Yellowthroat |
| Mallard | Sora | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Ruddy Duck | Spotted Sandpiper | |

Wet Meadows: This unique habitat is created by man's agricultural activities and is made up of areas that are flooded or sprinkler irrigated for production of hay. Many of the wet meadows are seasonally wet in the spring and dry out in late summer and fall. These lands have few native species, and have been planted to high production grass species.

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|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Sora | American Robin | Yellow-headed Blackbird |
| Killdeer | Red-winged Blackbird | |
| Wilson's Snipe | Bobolink | |

Short Grass Prairies: These lands are native grasslands that survive in a semiarid condition without irrigation. Annual rainfall is 11.5 inches per year, but 70% of the moisture falls in the growing season, so grass production is surprisingly good for the amount of moisture. This habitat contains the most native plant species, as it has had the least impact by man.

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|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| American Kestrel | American Crow | Brewer's Blackbird |
| Long-billed Curlew | Common Raven | Common Grackle |
| Mourning Dove | Homed Lark | Vesper Sparrow |
| Eastern Kingbird | Cliff Swallow | Savannah Sparrow |
| Western Kingbird | Northern Rough Wing Swallow | Western Meadowlark |



Spotted Sandpiper - Brown barred upperparts, and white spotted underparts. Spots lacking in winter. White eye brow, yellow-orange legs and yellow-orange bill with black tip. Teeters or bobs continuously.

Bank Swallow - Our smallest swallow, with distinct brownish-gray breast band on white underparts. Throat is white and extends around back of neck. Back and wings are brown. Shallow forked tail.



Northern Rough Wing Swallow - Brown above and whitish below, with gray-brown wash on upper breast, throat and chin. Easily distinguished from Bank swallow by lack of breast band.

Tree Swallow - Our most common swallow. Dark upper parts and light underparts. Upper parts iridescent blue-green rather than brown. Dark color extends below the eye.



Willow Flycatcher - Olive-brown upperparts, white throat, pale-olive breast and yellowish belly. Two white wing bars on brown wings and lacks an eye ring.



Least Flycatcher - Brownish back, breast washed with gray-brown, belly and undertail pale yellow. Large head for the size of the body with bold white eye ring and light throat. Two white wing bars, and long narrow dark tail and bill.

Western Wood-pewee - Dark olive-brown upperparts, light underparts. Two faint wing bars and no eye ring. Lower mandible shows some yellow-orange color. Throat lighter than breast.



House Wren - Unstreaked brown above with very faint eyebrow. Short tailed is finely barred with black and is usually cocked up. Throat is slightly lighter than underparts. Typically a loud bubbly song.

Marsh Wren - Light brown upperparts with black triangle on upper back streaked with white. Prominent white eyebrow. Brown crown and long thin curved beak.



Savannah Sparrow - Mottled brown upperparts, finely streaked breast, light streaked underparts, Yellow eyebrow, and pale median crown stripe. Light colored legs and bill.

The map found on pages ten and eleven is a habitat map of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch. Four habitats have been identified; short grass prairie, wet meadow, riparian/stream and marsh/pond.

Based on observations over many years, it is probable that there are more than 150 species of birds found on the Grant-Kohrs Ranch. Field observations have recorded 104 species. Listed below, by habitat type, are the sixty three most common birds. Be aware that any bird could be flying over any of these habitats, and you could observe them. However, they are placed in their preferred habitat for feeding, breeding, and nesting.

Riparian/Stream: This habitat is characterized by flowing water and the associated shrubs, and grasses along the banks. Many of the shrubs are species of willow mixed with larger cottonwood trees. This habitat includes Cottonwood and Fred Burr Creek, which flow east to west and are tributaries of the Clark Fork River. The Clark Fork River flows south to north through the ranch and is the headwaters of the Columbia River Basin. These lands have had decades of heavy metal contamination, but no new contamination in recent history.

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|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Canada Goose | Willow Flycatcher | Gray Catbird |
| Wood Duck | Least Flycatcher | European Starling |
| Gadwall | Western Kingbird | Cedar Waxwing |
| Mallard | Eastern Kingbird | Yellow Warbler |
| Ruddy Duck | Black-billed Magpie | Northern Waterthrush |
| Osprey | American Crow | Common Yellowthroat |
| Redtail Hawk | Common Raven | Savannah Sparrow |
| American Kestrel | Tree Swallow | Song Sparrow |
| Killdeer | Northern Rough Wing S. | Black-headed Grosbeak |
| Spotted Sandpiper | Bank Swallow | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Mourning Dove | Cliff Swallow | Western Meadowlark |
| Red-naped Sapsucker | Black-capped Chickadee | Common Grackle |
| Downy Woodpecker | House Wren | Northern Flicker |
| Marsh Wren | Bullocks Oriole | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| Hairy Woodpecker | American Robin | Bullock's Oriole |
| Western Wood-Pewee | | American Goldfinch |



Bullock's Oriole - Bright orange breast, belly, and outer tail feathers. Black back, crown, eye line, and throat patch. Bold white wing patch. Females have yellow throat and breast, back and crown drab rather than bold black.

Red-tailed Hawk - This our most common hawk is stocky, with broad, rounded wings. Most show a belly band of dark streaks on underparts. Adults have distinctive red tail. In flight tail fans and has dark marks on leading edge of wings. Sexes similar with female slightly larger.



Barn Swallow - Only swallow that has a long deeply forked tail. In flight the underparts appear buffy-red to cinnamon. Throat is reddish-brown, back and cap are blue-black.

Cliff Swallow - The squarish tail and buffy rump are the obvious field marks. The crown and wings are blue-gray. Buffy breast, cream-colored forehead and white belly contrasts with the rusty-red cheek, nape and throat.



Riparian Habitat - Birds which are predominately brown, drab-brown, or brown and white



Killdeer - This shorebird typically darts across the ground, stops, then runs again. Brown back and white underparts. Distinctive double bands, upper band encircles the neck. White eyebrow and white face patch above the bill.

Habitat Niche Diversity

Niches can be defined as small areas within a habitat that are different from the larger habitat. The more niches within a habitat the greater the diversity of bird species. This is especially true if the niches are vertically stratified. For instance, if a habitat contains grasses, shrubs, low and tall trees, there are many niches for the birds to live. Birds often compete for food, shelter, and nest sites. This competition can be within a species and between species. The more niches, the more birds can coexist in the same habitat. If a habitat is rich in niche diversity, you can expect to it to be rich in bird densities and species.

If you look at the bird lists for our four habitat types on the Grant-Kohrs Ranch, you will see that the Riparian Zone has the greatest diversity of species. It also has the greatest diversity of niches for birds to live in. Likewise, the wet meadow is a monoculture of a few plants created by agricultural activities, for the production of hay. It contains few niches, and has a low number of bird species.

When you bird an area with lots of niche diversity, such as the riparian, spend time looking and listening for birds. Birds will tend to space themselves within the habitat according to their niche specialties. Sparrows, towhees, and thrashers will scratch in leaf litter for food. Crossbills will be high in conifers in flocks, feeding on cones. Creepers and nuthatches will often feed low on the tree near the trunk. Warblers will be on the outer edge of leafy trees, feeding on insects. Other birds, are elusive and hard to find. At times, it will take a great deal of patience. Some birds will only be identified by their calls and songs. Others, like chickadees can be curious but flighty, some such as jays, crows and magpies will be noisy and obvious.

The more time you spend watching birds, the more you will learn, and the more you will realize how much there is to learn. Birds are **watchable wildlife**. Take time to watch them and learn the wonders of nature.

This guide is only a starting point for watching the birds at Grant-Kohrs Ranch. If you see a bird that is not in this guide, take careful note, make sketches and watch the bird for as long as possible. Decide what family the bird is a member of. When the bird is gone, refer to a field guide to North American birds and make an identification. Start a life list. Enjoy America's most popular hobby - Bird Watching.

Identification of the Riparian Birds of Grant-Kohrs Ranch

Riparian Birds - Birds that are predominately black.

These birds can contain secondary colors. All birds are in breeding plumage, females appear like males, unless noted.

American Crow- Smaller than similar Common Raven, with a smoother overall appearance. Bill smaller than Common Raven and longer legs



Common Raven - Less common than American Crow with a shaggy throat. Bill is longer and heavier than American Crow. Legs shorter than American Crow.

Common Grackle - Appears all black, but in good light males show a glossy blue head, neck and chest. Eyes are pale yellow, and the tail is long and keel shaped.



Red-winged Blackbird - Glossy black overall with red shoulder patch, fringed with yellow. Female brown and heavily streaked, often with a red tinge on wings.

Brown-headed Cowbird - Brown head of the male contrast with metallic black body. Female is brown above and pale below.



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American Goldfinch - Breeding male is bright yellow with a distinct black cap. Black wings show white bars. Tail is black and white with white outer tail feathers. Female is dull yellow with olive back. Female lacks the black cap. Male is duller yellow without black cap in non-breeding plumage.

Riparian Habitat - Birds that are predominately Red or Orange

Black-headed Grosbeak - The male has cinnamon orange underparts with an all black head. Wings are black with white wing bars. Females plumage is buff or paler with fine streaks in the breast. The bill is large and triangular with upper mandible darker than lower.



American Robin - Under parts of this familiar bird are brick-red. Extreme lower belly white. Back is gray-brown with dark head with white around eye, and yellow beak. Some individuals paler than others in appearance.

Northern Flicker - An obvious woodpecker with brown barred back. Underparts are spotted with a distinct black crescent bib. In flight shows a white rump and red wing linings, thus the name "*Red-shafted Flicker*." Males show red moustachial strip which the female lacks.



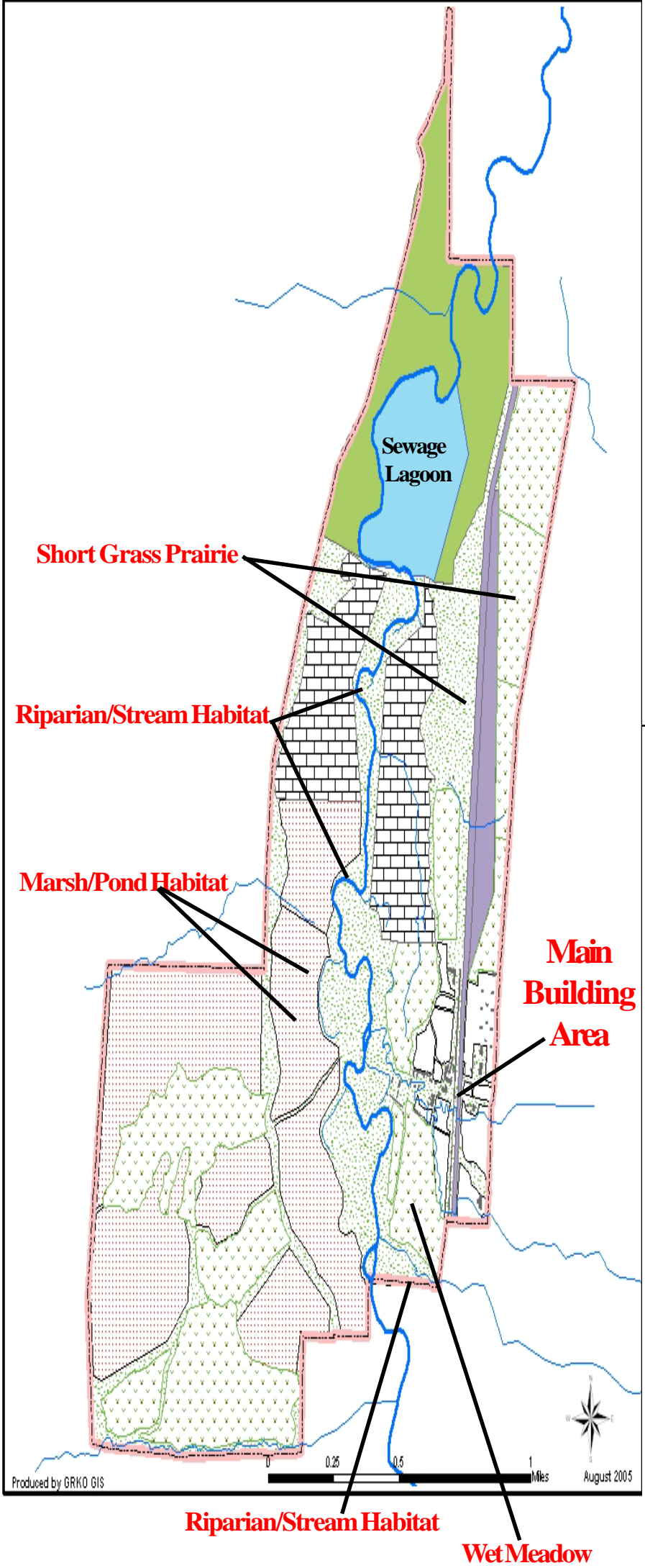
Red-naped Sapsucker - Another obvious woodpecker with red crown. Red is also on the nape of the head, chin and throat. White streaking on head as well. Back is blackish with white streaking. Wings black with large white wing patch. Females more whitish in appearance with white chin and red throat.

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Overview of the Grant-Kohrs Ranch and Habitat Types

Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site
Montana

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Yellow Warbler - Overall bright yellow, plumb, short tailed, with prominent dark eye. Males has distinct red streaks on breast, streaks faint or absent in females.

Common Yellowthroat - The male shows a bright yellow throat and breast. Under tail coverts yellow as well. The head has a broad black mask bordered by white. Legs are orange. The crown and back are greenish. Female lacks the mask band and has a white eye ring.



Western Kingbird - Belly is bright lemon yellow and obvious. Breast pale gray with ashy-gray head. Back darker than breast, with black wings and tail. Tail has white outer edges.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - Bright yellow head and breast. White wing patches contrast with black body. Female is dark brown, less contrasting with buffy-yellow head and breast. Female has no white wing patches.



Western Meadowlark - Yellow underparts are conspicuous, with a black V-shaped breast band. In flight has white outer tail feathers. Often seen on posts singing. Sexes are similar in appearance.



European Starling - Iridescent black with yellow beak. Base of bill blue in males, pink in females. Distinct white dots on non-breeding birds.

Eastern Kingbird - Black head, slate to black back, and upper tail. Broad white terminal band on upper side of tail. Underside white with gray wash across the breast.



Gray Catbird - Black cap, with charcoal gray body. Tail often cocked, showing chestnut to rufous undertail color.

Black-billed Magpie - Black-billed, long tailed, black and white marked bird. Often showing iridescence green highlights. White wing patches flash in flight.



Downy Woodpecker - Black woodpecker with white back. Similar to Hairy, smaller, with dark spots on the outer tail feathers. Beak shorter than depth of head.

Hairy Woodpecker - Similar to Downy, but overall much larger. Outer tail feathers are entirely white. Beak is as long as the depth of the head.



Black-capped Chickadee - Small, grayish overall, with black cap and chin. Gray back and wings with white underparts. Legs are dark.