Bird Guide to the TTF Watershed

Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership, Inc.
Bring this guide along whenever you go out for a walk in the watershed... from Tacony Creek Park to High School Park... to your own backyard. Explore the creek, discover new places and see more birds! It also helps to bring along a good bird identification guide and binoculars.

This checklist has been compiled from the Birds of Fairmount Park Urban Greenways IBA, prepared by Keith Russell of the National Audubon Society.
What is the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Creek (TTF) Watershed?

A watershed is all the land that drains into a body of water. For us, that’s the 30 square miles surrounding the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford (TTF) Creek. All of the rain falling in our watershed eventually makes its way to the Delaware River. Tookany Creek begins in Montgomery County and flows into Philadelphia at Cheltenham Avenue, where it’s known as Tacony Creek. In Juniata Park, the name changes again to the Frankford Creek, which continues to the Delaware below the Betsy Ross Bridge.

What is the TTF Watershed Partnership?

The Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to improving the health and vitality of our watershed. We do this by engaging our communities in education, stewardship, restoration, and advocacy.

What is the #1 Source of Water Pollution?

Chemicals, trash and other harmful materials on the ground wash into storm drains when it rains, dumping them directly into our creeks, streams and rivers. Fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides used on lawns wash into nearby creeks, poisoning creeklife and robbing the water of essential oxygen. This runoff harms everything from plants and wildlife to our sources of drinking water.

What does bird watching have to do with our creek?

Birds rely on healthy habitat - like forests, meadows and streams - as a source of food, water, shelter and a place to start a family. If the creek isn’t healthy, the many birds that live here or pass through during migration are unable to find the resources they need to survive.

Bird watching, or birding, is a great way to get out and explore nature! We want you to enjoy and appreciate nature in your own neighborhood, and to help us care for the creek that these birds depend on.

We can help birds and protect our creek by removing trash, replacing invasive plants with natives, and marking storm drains in our neighborhoods. Make a difference by working with us to improve the health of the creek in your backyard and community!

Get involved at www.ttfwatershed.org
Finding birds in the TTF

There are many great places to go for a bird walk in the TTF watershed, from parks and wildlife sanctuaries to your own back yard. Different birds prefer different types of habitat. Find the right habitat and you’re more likely to find the birds you’re looking for. How many birds can you find in the habitats below?

Habitat types

A) Woodland - A forest of mature trees and understory shrubs provides homes and food for many species. Woodpeckers make holes in trees that many animals nest in. Dead leaves on the forest floor hide insects and worms, which birds like towhees and white-throated sparrows love to search for. In the spring, warblers actively search oaks and other leafy trees for caterpillars and worms.

B) Streams and wetlands - Wetlands soak up water after rain storms. Many birds like the great blue heron and belted kingfisher rely on streams like the TTF for finding fish, frogs and other critters.

C) Meadow - Grassy meadows full of wildflowers provide lots of food for insects and the birds that eat them. Hawks and falcons will often perch above a meadow, waiting for a meal to pass by.

Urban wildlife - Many birds have learned to live alongside humans in cities and suburbs. Pigeons, house sparrows and starlings are an everyday sight, but keep an eye out for chimney swifts and nighthawks flying overhead and the occasional urban owl or falcon.
Birding tips for beginners

From our friends at the Wyncote Audubon Society

1. Get to know your common birds first - perched, in flight and by silhouette. Learn their songs and calls. You’ll soon be able to recognize them at a glance (or by ear). When something less common comes along, you’ll know to pay close attention!

2. Don’t get overwhelmed! Learn a few birds at a time. Good beginner birds are northern cardinal, american robin, blue jay, european starling, house sparrow, house finch, carolina chickadee, and downy woodpecker.

3. Find some birding mentors! Groups like TTF, Wyncote Audubon and BirdPhilly host expert led bird walks throughout the year. These are great opportunities to learn in a welcoming group setting. Find links to their websites on our Resources page at the back of this book.

Some things to look for when identifying birds

Size and body shape - Is the bird smaller than a sparrow? Larger than a crow?

Beak shape - Many birds’ beaks are specialized - short & stout for seed eaters; thin, slender beaks for finding bugs in tree bark; sharp, hooked bills for birds of prey.

Colors & patterns - Pay attention to color, but especially where the color is on the bird. Does the bird have a white eyebrow? Are there parallel stripes on the wings (wingbars)?

Wing & tail shape - Long, broad wings are great for soaring and gliding; shorter wings for speed and agility.

Behavior - What is the bird doing? Is it singing from the top of a tree? Picking through fallen leaves on the ground? Chasing off a larger bird? Some birds are shy and hard to see, some are bold and energetic!

Location and habitat - What type of habitat is the bird using? Is it perched over a meadow, high up in a pine tree, building a nest on your front porch?

Raptors in flight

With a little practice you can learn to identify most flying raptors (birds of prey) by their shape and behavior as they fly overhead.

1. cooper’s hawk  2. sharp-shinned hawk  3. bald eagle  4. peregrine falcon  5. red-tailed hawk  6. turkey vulture  7. black vulture
Featured Birding Hotspots

Tacony Creek Park

Philadelphia’s watershed park along the Tacony Creek features 300 acres of stream-side and woodland habitat amidst the urban landscape of lower Northeast Philadelphia. The park provides habitat for birds in a variety of landscapes, from hardwood forest, to upland meadows, wetlands and the creek itself.

The park is accessible from 10 gateways, connecting the 3.2 mile paved walking and biking trail to the Philadelphia neighborhoods of Olney, Lawncrest, Feltonville, Northwood, Juniata and Frankford.

Along with the Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and Water departments, we invite you to join us in the ongoing restoration of this historic park and creek. TTF offers a full calendar of fun, educational park activities, from planting and cleanup days to guided nature and bird walks, plus our annual summer block parties at Tacony Creek Park Gateways! Check out the park map on page 8.
High School Park
This 11 acre park in Cheltenham Township is managed by the Friends of High School Park to preserve native habitat along Tookany Creek. The park includes a large meadow with a recently constructed boardwalk for bird watching.

Fisher Park
For a 25 acre urban park in Olney, Fisher Park features an impressive woodland of native trees and understory plants. In the spring, it is a terrific spot for finding many species of warblers and other migrating birds.

Awbury Arboretum
The historic home of the Cope family in Germantown, Awbury was designated as an arboretum and bird refuge in 1916. The wooded arboretum is home to the last daylit stretch of the Wingohocking Creek and features a small headwaters stream and pond, as well as a native plant meadow.

Frankford Creek at the Delaware River
The mouth of Frankford Creek is the place to find many species that are not typically seen upstream in the TTF. In the winter, many ducks gather here along the Delaware River. Ponds at the nearby Northeast Water Treatment plant stay warm year round, attracting insects and providing food for birds who might otherwise fly south for the winter, like northern rough-winged swallows.

George Perley Bird Sanctuary
The George Perley Bird Sanctuary is an 8 acre wildlife preserve in Glenside named after the first President of the Wyncote Bird Club (now Wyncote Audubon). Native trees and shrubs planted by volunteers have helped enhance this habitat for birds and other wildlife.

For more great spots to look for birds, check out our Birding Hotspot Map on the next page.
Tacony Creek Park

New!
Trail connection under Roosevelt Blvd.

Fishers Lane Bridge

Juniata Golf Course

Police Officer Lauretha Vaired Boys & Girls Club

Ferko

Juniata Boys & Girls Club

Housedman

Simpson

Overtoning

Frankford Creek

Cancer Treatment Center of America

Gateway

Playground

Tacony Creek Trail

1,500

750

0

Feet
Birds of the TTF Watershed

**Geese**
- canada goose *

**Ducks**
- wood duck
- mallard *
- american black duck
- ring-necked duck
- greater scaup
- lesser scaup
- bufflehead
- hooded merganser
- common merganser
- ruddy duck

**Grebes**
- pied-billed grebe

**Cormorants**
- double-crested cormorant

**Herons**
- great blue heron
- black-crowned night-heron
- great egret
- green heron

**Vultures**
- turkey vulture
- black vulture

**Raptors**
- osprey
- northern harrier
- sharp-shinned hawk
- cooper’s hawk *
- northern goshawk
- bald eagle
- red-shouldered hawk
- broad-winged hawk
- red-tailed hawk *

**Falcons**
- american kestrel
- merlin
- peregrine falcon

**Plovers**
- killdeer

**Sandpipers**
- american woodcock
- solitary sandpiper
- spotted sandpiper

**Gulls**
- ring-billed gull
- great black-backed gull
- herring gull
- laughing gull

**Pigeons and Doves**
- rock pigeon (feral pigeon) *
- mourning dove *

**Cuckoos**
- yellow-billed cuckoo
- black-billed cuckoo

**Owls**
- eastern screech-owl *
- great horned owl *
- northern saw-whet owl
- long-eared owl

**Nightjars**
- common nighthawk
- whip-poor-will

**Swifts**
- chimney swift *

**Hummingbirds**
- ruby-throated hummingbird *

**Kingfishers**
- belted kingfisher

**Woodpeckers**
- red-headed woodpecker
- red-bellied woodpecker *
- yellow-bellied sapsucker
- downy woodpecker *

**Flycatchers**
- olive-sided flycatcher
- eastern wood-pewee *
- yellow-bellied pewee
- acadian flycatcher
- alder flycatcher
- willow flycatcher
- least flycatcher
- eastern phoebe *
- great crested flycatcher *
- eastern kingbird *

**Vireos**
- white-eyed vireo
- yellow-throated vireo
- blue-headed vireo
- warbling vireo *
- philadelphia vireo
- red-eyed vireo *

**Crows and Jays**
- blue jay *
- american crow *
- fish crow *
- common raven

**Chickadees and Tits**
- carolina chickadee *
- black-capped chickadee
- tufted titmouse *

**Swallows**
- purple martin
- tree swallow
- northern rough-winged swallow*
- bank swallow
- cliff swallow
- barn swallow *

**Nuthatches**
- red-breasted nuthatch
- white-breasted nuthatch *
* species known to breed in the TTF watershed

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Seen something in the TTF that hasn't made it into the list? Add it here:

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________
Beyond birds, our watershed is home to lots of amazing wildlife. Upload your plant and animal photos to iNaturalist.org - a worldwide community science database. Not sure what you’ve found? iNaturalist will help you identify it. Use the website or free mobile app. Other community members will help guide you towards an ID. Join our TTF project page to see what we’re finding in our watershed: www.ttfwatershed.org/iNaturalist

Create an eBird.org account to enter your bird walk sightings online. It’s a great way to keep track of your personal ‘life list’ of species you’ve seen. Hoping to see a specific bird? Explore maps on eBird of where and when it’s most likely to be found. Most importantly, your list becomes valuable data for scientists.

Your nature observations can help scientists learn more about our watershed wildlife, their habitats and ways we can protect them. Use these fun free programs to keep track of your wildlife sightings, and help us learn about who lives in our watershed.

“For well nigh fifty years I have lived on the edge of the valley through which winds the Tacony Creek, a stream flowing into the Delaware in the northern section of the county of Philadelphia. Each year the city creeps closer to us. That red-brick wave has almost reached to the opposite edge of our valley, yet still the quiet stream comes down as of old between its wooded hillsides, its marshy meadows, its overhanging willows and its alder thickets. For the study of bird-life this valley is almost ideal.”

- George Spencer Morris, 1915
Co-Founder, Delaware Valley Ornithological Club
RESOURCES

AUDUBON PENNSYLVANIA  
pa.audubon.org

AWBURY ARBORETUM  
www.awbury.org

BIRD PHILLY  
www.birdphilly.org

CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY  
www.birds.cornell.edu

DELAWARE VALLEY ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB  
www.dvoc.org

EBIRD  
www.ebird.org

FAIRMOUNT PARK CONSERVANCY  
www.myphillyphpark.org

FRIENDS OF HIGH SCHOOL PARK  
www.highschoolpark.org

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY  
www.audubon.org

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION  
www.nwf.org

PHILADELPHIA PARKS & RECREATION  
www.phila.gov/parksandrecreation

PHILADELPHIA WATER  
www.phillywatersheds.org

WYNCOTE AUDUBON SOCIETY  
www.wyncoteaudubon.org

TOOKANY/TACONY-FRANKFORD WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP  
www.ttfwatershed.org

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