

# Birds

By Dennis Skadsen

A total of 303 species of birds have been observed in the four-county area covered by this publication. This list includes one species now extinct, the Passenger pigeon; six species listed as state or federally threatened or endangered; and 155 species observed breeding in the area.

The following list is compiled from several sources including bird checklists from the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge, Hartford Beach State Park, Sica Hollow State Park, Roy Lake State Park, and Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area; observations published in South Dakota Bird Notes, Birds of South Dakota (Tallman et al. 2002), South Dakota Breeding Bird Atlas (Peterson 1995), SDOU Online Seasonal Bird Report System; and the author's personal observations.

Annotation is provided for some groups and individual species that are unique to northeast South Dakota or merit special attention due to location or interest by birdwatchers.

Taxonomic order and common names follow Tallman et al. (2002)

## ❖ Seasonal Status and Abundance

The seasonal status and abundance of each species follows the common name. The category given for each bird best describes the species seasonal status and abundance specifically for northeast South Dakota based on the authors experience and published records. To save space, only the

season that the bird is most likely to be encountered is given. Even though a bird is listed for only one season in this publication, it may also be present during another season. For instance, the Lesser scaup listed here as a common migrant has been observed nesting in northeast South Dakota and could be listed as an uncommon summer resident. Serious birders will want to consult a resource like Birds of South Dakota (Tallman et al. 2002) for more specific seasons and dates.

Descriptions for each category are given below.

### Seasonal Status:

***Permanent Resident*** – A bird that breeds and winters in the same area (year-round). In northeast South Dakota examples of permanent residents include; Downy woodpecker, Black-capped chickadee, White-breasted nuthatch.

***Summer Resident*** – A bird that breeds in a given area but spends the winter elsewhere. The summer season is the months of June and July. In northeast South Dakota examples of summer residents include; Great blue heron, Black tern, Red-eyed vireo, Tree swallow.

***Winter Resident*** – A bird that regularly spends the winter in northeast South Dakota but breeds elsewhere. The winter season is the months of December through February. In northeast South Dakota examples of winter residents include; Dark-eyed junco, Lapland longspur, Common redpoll.

***Winter Visitor*** – A bird that is present on an irregular basis during the winter season as described above. In northeast South Dakota

examples include; Northern goshawk, Snowy owl, Evening grosbeak.

**Migrant** – A bird moving to or from its summer breeding range to its wintering grounds. Spring migration is the months of March through May; fall migration is the months of August through November. In northeast South Dakota examples include; Snow goose, Gray-cheeked thrush, and Yellow-rumped warbler.

**Asterisk \*** - Denotes a species that has been observed nesting or behavior confirming breeding (carrying food, distraction displays etc.) has been observed in Day, Grant, Marshall and/or Roberts Counties. Some species are localized breeders like the Veery and Scarlet tanager which have been found nesting only in heavily forested coulees like Sica Hollow State Park.

### Abundance:

**Common** – Easily found in suitable habitat and appropriate season. In northeast South Dakota examples include; Canada goose, American crow, American robin.

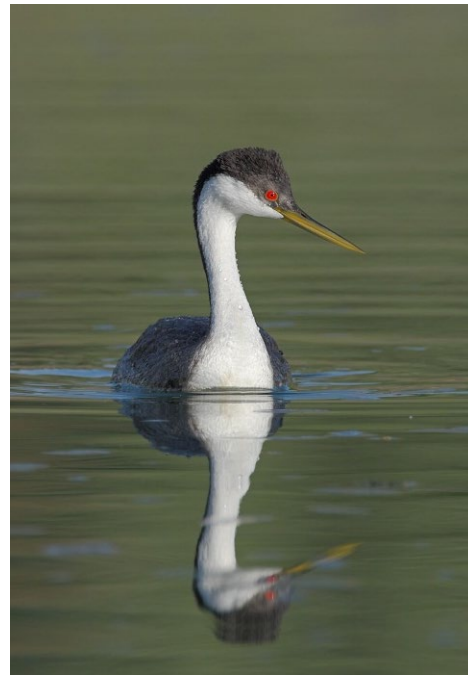
**Uncommon** – May be found in suitable habitat or locale with some effort and patience. In northeast South Dakota examples are; Red-bellied sapsucker, Red-breasted nuthatch, and Chestnut-collared longspur.

**Rare** – Only a few individual birds are observed during a particular season or the species has very restricted habitat requirements. In northeast South Dakota examples are; Broad-winged Hawk, Pileated woodpecker, and Veery (restricted habitats).

## Birds Observed in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties, South Dakota.

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### Loons and Grebes



Western Grebe (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Common Loon\*** (*Uncommon Migrant*)  
Most often observed during spring and fall migration on larger area lakes that include Big Stone, Enemy Swim, Pickerel, Roy, and Rush Lakes. May also be a rare summer resident occasionally breeding in NESD. Dave German and the author observed adult loons with flightless young on Enemy Swim Lake during the months of June and July in 2005 and 2006. No nest has been observed, but it is speculated the birds are building their nests on Campbell Slough where there is little shoreline development and little disturbance from recreational boating. An adult with two young was observed on Mud Lake July 15, 2011 (SDOU) in Marshall County, and a pair reportedly nested on the

Minnesota side of Big Stone Lake summer 2012.

**Pied-billed Grebe\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Horned Grebe\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Red-necked Grebe\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Eared Grebe\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Western Grebe\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Clark's Grebe\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

Look for grebes on area wetlands and lakes with emergent vegetation. Good areas to observe the Red-necked grebe include Enemy Swim Lake and several small lakes north and east of Lake City in Marshall County, including Greys and Turtlefoot Lakes near Sica Hollow. For Western and Eared Grebes, the northwest corner of Bitter Lake near Waubay, SD is a good site. Other grebe hotspots include Bullhead Lake located east of Wilmot, SD, and Cottonwood Lake and Slough in northern Roberts County. All six species have been observed nesting in northeast South Dakota

### Pelicans and Cormorants



Nesting American White Pelicans (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**American White Pelican\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Double-crested Cormorant\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

Both birds can be found nesting in large colonies in northeast South Dakota. Currently, the largest colony is situated on several small islands located in the southwest corner of Bitter Lake in Day County. In 2007, 14,713 American white pelican nests were counted at this location making it one of the largest breeding populations currently extant in the continental United States. Prior to 1998, colonies were established on islands located at North and South Waubay Lake, Piyas Lake, North Drywood Lake, and Bitter Lake. However, due to extremely wet conditions all these locations were inundated in the late 1990s by rising lake levels. These displaced breeding populations no doubt consolidated on new islands created by the rising water of Bitter Lake.

### Bitterns, Herons, and Ibis



Least Bittern (photo by Doug Backlund)

**American Bittern\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Least Bittern\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Great Blue Heron\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Great Egret\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Snowy Egret\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Little Blue Heron** (*Rare Migrant*)  
**Cattle Egret\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Green Heron\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Black-crowned Night-Heron\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**White-faced Ibis\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

All the species listed above are associated with aquatic habitats, and seven are colonial nesting species. One of the largest heron rookeries in northeast South Dakota is located on Bitter Lake. Species nesting at this rookery include Great blue heron, Great egret, Snowy egret, Cattle egret, and Black-crowned night-heron. The rookery is situated in a grove of trees located on an island in the lakes southwest corner. A nesting colony of White-faced ibis is located in a marshy area along Bitter Lake's northwest shore near the city of Waubay.

The American bittern, Least bittern, and Green heron are more solitary nesting species. The American and Least bitterns prefer wetlands with dense emergent vegetation and are more often heard than seen. These two species were heard at two dozen locations during a recent survey in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties. The Green heron seems to prefer riparian areas along the larger lakes, look for this bird along the outlet creek located in the West Unit of Pickerel Lake State Recreation

Area, and at Hartford Beach State Park along Big Stone Lake's shoreline.



Great Blue Heron (photo by Doug Backlund)



White-faced Ibis (photo by Doug Backlund)

## Vultures

**Turkey Vulture** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

Historically nested near Fort Sisseton (McChesney 1879), however no recent nest records exist. Frequency of summer observations in Marshall and Roberts Counties has increased during recent years



and this species may be nesting in the forested coulees of these two counties.

### Swans, Geese, and Ducks

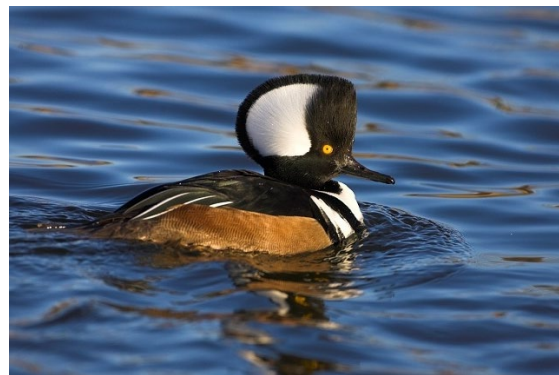


Mallard hen (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

- Greater White-fronted Goose** (*Common Migrant*)
- Snow Goose** (*Common Migrant*)
- Ross's Goose** (*Uncommon Migrant*)
- Cackling Goose** (*Common Migrant*)
- Canada Goose\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Tundra Swan** (*Common Migrant*)
- Wood Duck\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Gadwall\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- American Wigeon\*** (*Common Migrant*)
- American Black Duck\*** (*Rare Migrant*)
- Mallard\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Blue-winged Teal\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Cinnamon Teal** (*Rare Migrant*)
- Northern Shoveler\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Northern Pintail\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)
- Green-winged Teal\*** (*Common Migrant*)

- Canvasback\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Redhead\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)
- Ring-necked Duck\*** (*Common Migrant*)
- Greater Scaup** (*Uncommon Migrant*)
- Lesser Scaup\*** (*Common Migrant*)
- Surf Scoter** (*Rare Migrant*)
- White-winged Scoter** (*Rare Fall Migrant*)
- Long-tailed Duck** (*Rare Migrant*)
- Bufflehead\*** (*Common Migrant*)
- Common Goldeneye\*** (*Common Migrant*)
- Hooded Merganser\*** (*Uncommon Migrant*)
- Common Merganser** (*Common Migrant*)
- Red-breasted Merganser** (*Uncommon Migrant*)
- Ruddy Duck\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

The best season to observe waterfowl in northeast South Dakota is during spring migration. Migrating waterfowl arrive as soon as open water appears, occasionally as early as late February. Spring migration peaks by late April. Some of the earliest migrants can be seen along the west shore of Blue Dog Lake where discharge from the State Fish Hatchery flows into Blue Dog Lake providing some of the earliest open water for ducks and geese. During the winter months, check the cooling ponds located at the Big Stone Power Plant just east of Big Stone City, SD for over-wintering waterfowl. With the number of wetlands and lakes found in this area, waterfowl are one of the most abundant and easiest groups of birds to find and study.



Hooded Merganser – male (photo by Doug Backlund)

## Kites, Hawks, Eagles, and Falcons



Osprey (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Osprey\*** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Bald Eagle\*** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

Two of our largest raptors have apparently never been common in this area. The Bald eagle was reported as only a casual visitor during the mid to late 1800s by McChesney (1879) who made no mention of this species ever nesting in the region. Populations of both these birds were threatened with extinction due to pesticide use, but in the last few decades, after the use of DDTs and other chemicals were banned, populations have rebounded especially in South Dakota. As of the winter of 2017 there were twenty-eight active Bald eagle nests in the four counties covered by this publication; five nests in Day County, five nests in Grant County, three nests in Marshall County, and fifteen nest sites located in Roberts County. In 2007, Osprey were reported to have successfully nested on an artificial platform in Grant County, and in 2017 an adult with 2 young were observed on a nest constructed on a cell phone tower in Roberts Co. near Big Stone Lake.

**Northern Harrier\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Sharp-shinned Hawk** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Cooper's Hawk\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Northern Goshawk** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Broad-winged Hawk\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Swainson's Hawk\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Red-tailed Hawk\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Ferruginous Hawk\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

A pair successfully nested along SD Highway 12 just east of Ortley, SD for five years from 1988 to 1992 until one of the pair was killed by a vehicle along the highway. May be nesting in the Crandall-Crocker Hills of western Day County.

**Rough-legged Hawk** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

**Golden Eagle** (*Rare Migrant*)

**American Kestrel\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Merlin** (*Uncommon Winter Visitor*)

**Gyr Falcon** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Peregrine Falcon** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Prairie Falcon** (*Rare Migrant*)

Because of their size and propensity for soaring over open country, most of the raptors occurring in this area are easy to find and identify. Look for Ospreys during spring migration, especially along the wooded shorelines of large lakes like Big Stone, Waubay, and Enemy Swim. The Northern harrier can be seen near prairie wetlands at sites like Jensen Waterfowl Production Area during summer months. During late fall and winter, the Sharp-

shinned hawk, Northern goshawk, and Merlin can be found in wooded habitats like the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge, and especially at sites with conifer plantings like Hartford Beach State Park and Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area. The Cooper's hawk and Broad-winged hawk have been observed nesting along the wooded shorelines of Big Stone Lake and Sica Hollow State Park. The Swainson's and Red-tailed hawks also nest along the shores of area lakes, and will also occupy shelterbelts, especially those situated away from human habitation. Prairie falcons have been observed often during the Waubay Christmas Bird Count on prairies north of Enemy Swim Lake.

### Partridge, Grouse, Turkey, and Quail



Sharp-tailed Grouse on lek (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Gray Partridge\*** (*Rare Permanent Resident*)

**Ring-necked Pheasant\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Sharp-tailed Grouse\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Greater Prairie-Chicken\*** (*Rare Permanent Resident*)

The Sharp-tailed grouse has made a dramatic comeback in the last decade, thanks in part to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that planted several hundred thousand acres of cropland back to grass in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties. Leks can be found near Enemy Swim Lake,

One Road Lake, and in the Crandall-Crocker Hills of western Day County. As CRP acres retire and are returned to cropland, populations of Sharp-tailed grouse may decline in northeast South Dakota.

The Greater Prairie-Chicken has not fared as well. During the 1930s hundreds of prairie chickens would winter at the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge. Today small numbers still occur in Marshall County at Jensen WPA, in western Grant County, and in southwest Day County.

**Wild Turkey\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

### Rails, Gallinules, and Coots



Virginia Rail (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Virginia Rail\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

The Virginia rail was found at 23 locations during a recent survey of Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties between 2005 and 2007 (Drilling 2007). Surveys indicated the best areas to find this bird are wetlands dominated by cattails and cordgrass located in northern Roberts County between Claire City and Cottonwood Slough.

**Sora\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)



**American Coot\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

## Cranes

**Sandhill Crane\*** (*Uncommon Migrant*)  
McChesney (1879) reported that a few Sandhill cranes remained and bred on the Prairie Coteau near Fort Sisseton. Recent observations suggest the species is once again breeding in northeast South Dakota. In 2019 adults with young were observed in Grant County.

**Whooping Crane** (*Rare Migrant*)

## Plovers

**Black-bellied Plover** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**American Golden-Plover** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Semipalmated Plover** (*Uncommon Migrant*)



Piping Plover (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Piping Plover\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)  
Formerly nested along Bitter and Waubay Lakes in Day County. Last reported Bitter Lake observation was a pair seen by the author on 12 June 1988. Flooding in the 1990s altered these two-lake's shoreline, possibly making shoreline habitat unfavorable for Piping plovers.

**Killdeer\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

## Stilts and Avocets



American Avocet (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Black-necked Stilt** (*Rare Migrant*)

**American Avocet\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

## Sandpipers and Phalaropes

**Greater Yellowlegs** (*Common Migrant*)

**Lesser Yellowlegs** (*Common Migrant*)

**Solitary Sandpiper** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Willet\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Spotted Sandpiper\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Upland Sandpiper\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Hudsonian Godwit** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Marbled Godwit\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Ruddy Turnstone** (*Uncommon Spring Migrant*)

**Sanderling** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** (*Common Migrant*)

**Least Sandpiper** (*Common Migrant*)

**White-rumped Sandpiper** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Baird's Sandpiper** (*Common Migrant*)

**Pectoral Sandpiper** (*Common Migrant*)

**Dunlin** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Stilt Sandpiper** (*Common Migrant*)

**Buff-breasted Sandpiper** (*Rare Migrant*)



**Short-billed Dowitcher** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Long-billed Dowitcher** (*Common Migrant*)

**Common Snipe\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**American Woodcock\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

The males of these two species perform spectacular courtship flights during April and early May. Look for Common snipe in wet meadows adjacent to wetlands. The American woodcock prefers meadows located in wooded areas like Hartford Beach State Park, Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area, Sica Hollow, and the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge. Courtship flights of male woodcocks can be observed during early evening hours. Listen for the male's distinctive "peent" call.



Wilson's Phalarope (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Wilson's Phalarope\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Red-necked Phalarope** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

Plovers, stilts, avocets, sandpipers, and phalaropes are collectively known as shorebirds. In the spring, shorebirds arrive

in late March or early April dependant on weather and snowmelt. During spring, concentrations of these birds can be found almost anywhere in northeast South Dakota on mudflats and shorelines, flooded fields, and shallow wetlands. Shorelines and shallow bays along Bitter and Waubay Lakes are good shorebird areas in the spring, but also are excellent areas to find those species that breed in northeast South Dakota including the American avocet, Willet, Marbled godwit, and Wilson's phalarope. Fall migration begins as early as mid-July and continues through early November. Due to drier conditions, mudflats along the shores of larger permanent wetlands become the predominant shorebird habitat during fall migration.

### Gulls and Terns



California Gull nestlings (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Franklin's Gull\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Bonaparte's Gull** (*Common Migrant*)

**Ring-billed Gull\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**California Gull\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Herring Gull** (*Uncommon Spring Migrant*)

**Caspian Tern\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Common Tern\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Forster's Tern\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Black Tern\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

Seven species of gulls and terns regularly nest in northeast South Dakota and two species are migratory. The Franklin's gull, Ring-billed gull, California gull, Caspian tern, Common tern, Forster's tern, and Black tern are all colonial nesting species. One of the largest nesting colonies in northeast South Dakota is located on Bitter Lake. Franklin's gulls and Black terns are found nesting in the marshy area along the northwest corner of the lake near Waubay. The other four species are found nesting on islands located in the southwest corner of the lake. Bitter Lake is one of two known breeding locations for the Caspian tern and California gull in South Dakota. Adult Caspian terns are often observed during the summer months hunting over Church Bay on Enemy Swim Lake.

Both Bonaparte's gull and the Herring gull are migrant species. The Herring gull is observed most often during spring migration in northeast South Dakota.

### Pigeons and Doves



Eurasian Collared-Dove (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Rock Pigeon\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Eurasian Collared-Dove\*** (*Permanent Resident*)

This large dove, native to southern Asia, escaped captivity in the Bahamas and rapidly spread across North America from Florida in the 1980s. The first South Dakota record was of a bird observed in Edmunds County in 1996. The species is now a common resident in towns and cities. During the 2017 Waubay Christmas Bird Count, 111 Eurasian Collared-Doves were observed in the town of Waubay, SD.

**Mourning Dove\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

### Cuckoos



Black-billed Cuckoo (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Black-billed Cuckoo\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

These two birds are most often found in heavily wooded areas like Sica Hollow and Hartford Beach State Parks. Knowing the songs of male cuckoos is useful since these two species are more often heard than seen.

## Owls



Immature Great Horned Owl (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Eastern Screech-Owl\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Great Horned Owl\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Snowy Owl** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Burrowing Owl\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Barred Owl** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Long-eared Owl\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Short-eared Owl** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

**Northern Saw-whet Owl\*** (*Rare Migrant*)

Breeding records exist for five of the seven species of owls observed in northeast South Dakota. The Great horned owl is the most frequently reported breeding species in this area, partially due to the fact it nests early in the season well before trees have begun to leaf and hide nest sites. The Eastern screech-owl nests in tree cavities, and occasionally nest boxes. The Long-eared owl has been observed nesting along the

wooded shores of Big Stone Lake and in Sica Hollow State Park.



Burrowing owls (photo by Doug Backlund)

The Burrowing owl was last reported nesting in this area in 1985. This species nests in underground burrows in pastures and native prairies near colonies of ground squirrels. There have been unconfirmed reports of Burrowing owls nesting in the southwest corner of Grant County between Strandburg and Troy. Loss of native prairie and control of ground squirrels has negatively affected populations of this owl which are declining in eastern South Dakota and elsewhere. The only east river breeding record for the Northern saw-whet owl is from Roberts County for an adult observed with two immature young in 1978.



Eastern Screech-Owl (photo by Doug Backlund)

Due to the secretive nature of owls and the fact few birders are active during the



evening hours when owls are most active, several of the species listed above may be nesting more frequently than reported in northeast South Dakota.

### Goatsuckers



Common Nighthawk nestling (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Common Nighthawk\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Whip-poor-will** (*Rare Migrant*)  
Male Whip-poor-wills have been heard calling during early evenings in late May and early June at Hartford Beach State Park and Munson Gulch. Possibly nests along Big Stone Lake and in large forested coulees like Sica Hollow State Park.

### Swifts

**Chimney Swift** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

Rarely seen in rural areas, this bird called the “flying cigar” can usually be found in larger cities like Britton, Milbank, Webster, and Sisseton where chimneys provide nesting and roosting sites. Has been observed at Hartford Beach State Park where it may nest in tree cavities.

### Hummingbirds



Ruby-throated Hummingbird at nectar feeder, Buffalo Lake (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

The ruby-throated hummingbird is found along the wooded shores of northeast South Dakota lakes and forested coulees with perennial streams like Sica Hollow. Nests have been found along the shores of Big Stone Lake and at Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area, located in tree branches overhanging water. The author has observed this bird regularly during the summer at nectar feeders along Buffalo, Enemy Swim, and Pickerel Lakes. The occurrence of jewelweed, an important source of nectar, along watercourses and lakeshores may attract hummingbirds in late summer. Nectar feeders placed in urban settings may attract hummingbirds during migration in northeast South Dakota.

## Kingfishers

**Belted Kingfisher\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

## Woodpeckers



Red-bellied Woodpecker (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Red-headed Woodpecker\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Red-bellied Woodpecker\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Downy Woodpecker\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Hairy Woodpecker\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Northern Flicker\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Pileated Woodpecker\*** (*Rare Permanent Resident*)

One of the best areas to observe this family of birds is Hartford Beach State Park. All

but the Red-headed woodpecker may be observed in this park during the summer months. The Pileated woodpecker is a recent newcomer to the area. The species was first observed in northeast South Dakota along the shores of Big Stone Lake near Hartford Beach State Park in the mid-1980s. The species was confirmed breeding in the state in 1994 when Bruce Harris found a nest with young near Hartford Beach State Park. Since the 1990s this woodpecker has expanded its range up along the Whetstone, Yellowbank, and Little Minnesota River drainages into the wooded coulees that form the headwaters of these rivers including Sica Hollow State Park. Maybe establishing populations on the coteau highlands, recently reported from Drywood Lake in west-central Roberts Co., Buffalo Lake in Marshall Co. and the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge in Day County.



Pileated Woodpecker (photo by Doug Backlund)

## Flycatchers



Great Crested Flycatcher (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Eastern Wood-Pewee\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)

**Alder Flycatcher** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)

**Willow Flycatcher\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Least Flycatcher\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Eastern Phoebe\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Say's Phoebe** (*Casual Summer Resident*)

**Great Crested Flycatcher\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Western Kingbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Eastern Kingbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

Most flycatchers listed above will be found in mature woodlands like Sica Hollow and shrubby riparian areas along lakes and streams. The Eastern and Western kingbirds prefer more open country, often seen around farmstead shelterbelts. The Eastern phoebe is one of our earliest spring migrants; pairs are often building nests by mid-April.

## Shrikes

**Loggerhead Shrike\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Northern Shrike** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

## Vireos



Red-eyed Vireo (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Yellow-throated Vireo\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Blue-headed Vireo** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Warbling Vireo\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Philadelphia Vireo** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)

**Red-eyed Vireo\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

All the vireos listed above may be found in mature woodlands. Male Yellow-throated and Red-eyed vireos are often heard singing during the summer months at Hartford Beach and Sica Hollow State Parks and may possibly occur in other forested coulees located along the eastern slope of the coteau in Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties.



## Jays, Magpies, and Crows

**Blue Jay\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Black-billed Magpie** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**American Crow\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow\***  
(*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Bank Swallow\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Cliff Swallow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Barn Swallow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

## Larks



Horned Lark (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Horned Lark\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

## Titmice, Chickadees, Nuthatches, and Creepers



Red-breasted Nuthatch (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Black-capped Chickadee\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

## Swallows



Barn Swallow (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Purple Martin\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Tree Swallow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Red-breasted Nuthatch** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

Although usually observed during the winter months, especially in areas with mature pines like Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area, there is some evidence a few Red-breasted nuthatches remain to breed in northeast South Dakota. The author, and Dan Tallman - formerly of Aberdeen, SD, have banded females with well developed brood patches in May and June, indicating these females maybe incubating eggs. No actual nests of this cavity nesting species have been found however.

**White-breasted Nuthatch\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Brown Creeper** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

## Wrens



Marsh Wren (photo by Doug Backlund)

**House Wren\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Winter Wren** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Sedge Wren\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Marsh Wren\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

Look and listen for these two species in area wetlands. The Marsh wren is found in the interior and along the edges of wetlands where cattails grow. Sedge wrens occupy the grassy margins of wetlands and wet meadows. Since both species tend to remain out-of-sight-in heavy wetland vegetation, their presence is often confirmed by singing males.

## Kinglets



Golden-crowned Kinglet (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Golden-crowned Kinglet** (*Common Migrant*)

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (*Common Migrant*)

Both species may overwinter, especially in areas with mature pine and cedar trees like Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area, Hartford Beach and Roy Lake State Parks.

## Gnatcatchers



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Blue-gray Gnatcatcher\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

This species may be establishing a small breeding population at Hartford Beach State

Park where Jeff Palmer found a nest with young in 2004. Adults were also observed at this location during the summer of 2006 and 2007.

## Thrushes



Eastern Bluebird pair at nest box, Waubay National Wildlife Refuge (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Eastern Bluebird\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)

**Mountain Bluebird** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Townsend's Solitaire** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Veery\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

During the breeding season, the Veery may occur in all the heavily forested coulees located along the eastern slope of the Prairie Coteau. The only confirmed breeding record is from Sica Hollow State Park, however the species has been observed in Big Coulee and Munson's Gulch during June and July.

**Gray-cheeked Thrush** (*Uncommon Spring Migrant*)

**Swainson's Thrush** (*Common Migrant*)

**Hermit Thrush** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Wood Thrush\*** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)

A nest with young found by Bruce Harris in 1978 along Big Stone Lake in Roberts County is the only breeding record for this species in northeast South Dakota. The Wood thrush may be an accidental or occasional localized breeder in Sica Hollow State Park and other large forested coulees located in Marshall and Roberts Counties.

**American Robin\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Varied Thrush** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

## Mockingbirds and Thrashers



Gray Catbird (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Gray Catbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Northern Mockingbird** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Brown Thrasher\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)



## Starlings

**European Starling\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

## Pipits



American Pipit (photo by Doug Backlund)

**American Pipit** (*Common Fall Migrant*)

## Waxwings



Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Bohemian Waxwing** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)  
**Cedar Waxwing\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

The Cedar waxwing is most often observed late fall and winter when flocks move into residential areas and shelterbelts where fruit and cedar trees are available to provide food. The much larger Bohemian waxwing occasionally wanders south from northern Canada, where it is considered a permanent resident, possibly due to food shortages. In this area they often are observed with flocks of Cedar waxwings. Large conifer plantings at area State Parks are good areas to observe Cedar waxwings and the rarer Bohemian waxwing.

## Wood Warblers



Yellow-rumped Warbler - male (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Blue-winged Warbler** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)

**Golden-winged Warbler** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Tennessee Warbler** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Orange-crowned Warbler** (*Common Migrant*)

**Nashville Warbler** (*Common Fall Migrant*)

**Northern Parula** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Yellow Warbler\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Chestnut-sided Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Magnolia Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Cape May Warbler** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Black-throated Blue Warbler** (*Rare Fall Migrant*)

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** (*Common Migrant*)

**Black-throated Green Warbler** (*Rare Migrant*)

**Blackburnian Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Pine Warbler** (*Rare Fall Migrant*)

**Palm Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Bay-breasted Warbler** (*Uncommon Fall Migrant*)

**Blackpoll Warbler** (*Common Spring Migrant*)

**Cerulean Warbler** (*Rare Spring Migrant*)



American Redstart – male (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Black-and-white Warbler\*** (*Common Migrant*)

**American Redstart\*** (*Common Migrant*)

**Ovenbird\*** (*Common Migrant*)

For most areas in northeast South Dakota the three-species listed above are considered migrants; however, all have been confirmed as localized breeding species in Roberts and/or Marshall Counties. In a recent survey of Sica Hollow State Park, Draeger and Johnson (2003) observed behavior confirming the Black-and-white warbler and Ovenbird as breeding species, and the American redstart as a probable breeding species. Bruce Harris observed an American redstart nesting along Big Stone Lake in 1940, and the author has observed

both American redstart and Ovenbird males singing at Hartford Beach State Park during June and July. Birdwatchers should look for evidence of breeding by these three species in other woodlands located in Marshall and Roberts Counties.

**Northern Waterthrush** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Connecticut Warbler** (*Casual Fall Migrant*)

**Mourning Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Common Yellowthroat\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Wilson's Warbler** (*Common Fall Migrant*)

**Canada Warbler** (*Uncommon Migrant*)

**Yellow-breasted Chat** (*Rare Migrant*)

All but two of the twenty-nine species of wood warblers observed in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties are considered migrants. Both the Yellow warbler and Common yellowthroat are listed as common summer residents that breed in this area. As noted previously, three other species are considered localized breeders. The best season to observe most of the warblers listed above is during spring migration when males are showing their brilliant colors. Spring migration usually peaks around the first two weeks of May. Hartford Beach State Park is one of the states warbler hotspots, a total of twenty-two species have been observed in the park.



Black-throated Blue Warbler (photo by Doug Backlund)

## Tanagers

**Scarlet Tanager\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)  
The Scarlet tanager is observed during June and July at Sica Hollow State Park where Draeger and Johnson (2003) confirmed breeding in 2003. Occasionally observed at Hartford Beach State Park and a few of the larger woodlands located in Marshall and Roberts Counties namely, Munson's Gulch (Knights Canyon) and Big Springs Coulee.

## Towhees, Sparrows, Juncos, and Longspurs



LeConte's Sparrow (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Spotted Towhee** (*Rare Migrant*)  
**Eastern Towhee** (*Rare Migrant*)  
**American Tree Sparrow** (*Common Migrant*)  
**Chipping Sparrow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Clay-colored Sparrow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Field Sparrow\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Vesper Sparrow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Lark Sparrow\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)  
**Lark Bunting** (*Rare Summer Resident*)



Grasshopper Sparrow (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Savannah Sparrow\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Grasshopper Sparrow** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Henslow's Sparrow** (*Rare Summer Resident*)  
**Le Conte's Sparrow\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)  
**Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** (*Rare Migrant*)  
**Fox Sparrow** (*Uncommon Migrant*)  
**Song Sparrow\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)  
**Lincoln's Sparrow** (*Common Migrant*)  
**Swamp Sparrow\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**White-throated Sparrow** (*Common Migrant*)  
**Harris's Sparrow** (*Common Migrant*)  
**White-crowned Sparrow** (*Uncommon Migrant*)  
**Dark-eyed Junco** (*Common Migrant*)  
**Lapland Longspur** (*Common Winter Visitor*)  
**Smith's Longspur** (*Rare Fall Migrant*)  
**Chestnut-collared Longspur\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)  
**Snow Bunting** (*Common Winter Visitor*)

Knowing the songs of male sparrows, and the types of plant communities each species inhabits are useful tools in finding and identifying this diverse group of birds. The aptly named Swamp sparrow is found, along



with the Marsh wren, in permanent wetlands with cattails and phragmites. The rarer LeConte's sparrow may be found along the grassy edges of prairie wetlands. On larger prairie sites like those found in the Crandall-Crocker Hills look, and especially listen for Savannah and Grasshopper sparrows. The songs of these two sparrows resemble insects more than birds. The Field sparrow has a seemingly restricted range in northeast South Dakota, most often seen and heard along Big Stone Lake at Hartford Beach State Park.

### Cardinal, Grosbeaks, Buntings, and Dickcissel



Northern Cardinal (photo by Doug Backlund)

#### **Northern Cardinal\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

The Northern cardinal has expanded its range since the 1800s. The cardinal has populated a small area in northeast South Dakota along the shores of Big Stone Lake in Grant and Roberts Counties. Commonly heard and observed at Hartford Beach State Park and in Big Stone City.

#### **Rose-breasted Grosbeak\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

#### **Blue Grosbeak\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

#### **Indigo Bunting\*** (*Uncommon Summer Resident*)



Dickcissel – male (photo by Doug Backlund)

#### **Dickcissel\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

Due to the loss of grassland habitat, populations of Dickcissels were declining throughout North America. However, with the onset of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that planted several hundred thousand acres of cropland back to grass, populations increased. Unfortunately, many CRP contracts are expiring and due to the push to plant corn for ethanol, many of these grasslands will be converted back to crops, causing a decline in populations once again.

### Meadowlarks, Blackbirds, and Orioles

#### **Bobolink\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

#### **Red-winged Blackbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

#### **Western Meadowlark\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

#### **Yellow-headed Blackbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

#### **Rusty Blackbird** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

**Brewer's Blackbird\*** (*Rare Summer Resident*)

**Common Grackle\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Brown-headed Cowbird\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Orchard Oriole\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

**Baltimore Oriole\*** (*Common Summer Resident*)

## Finches



Red Crossbill – male (photo by Doug Backlund)

**Pine Grosbeak** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Purple Finch** (*Common Winter Visitor*)

**House Finch\*** (*Uncommon Permanent Resident*)

**Red Crossbill\*** (*Uncommon Winter Visitor*)

Occasionally nests at Pickerel Lake State Recreation Area, where the author observed a nest with young in 1987, and females with recently fledged young in 1993 and 1997. The crossbill has a unique bill adapted for removing the seeds from pine cones. In this area the bird is always associated with plantings of ponderosa pine like those found at the west unit of Pickerel Lake State

Recreation Area, Hartford Beach and Roy Lake State Parks.

**White-winged Crossbill** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Common Redpoll** (*Uncommon Winter Visitor*)

**Hoary Redpoll** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)

**Pine Siskin\*** (*Uncommon Winter Resident*)

**American Goldfinch\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

**Evening Grosbeak** (*Rare Winter Visitor*)



Pine Siskins feeding on niger seed (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

This group of birds are often called “winter finches” due to the fact they appear during late fall into the winter season. The Purple finch, House finch, Common redpoll, Pine siskin, and American goldfinch are frequent guests at winter bird feeding stations throughout northeast South Dakota.

## Old World Sparrows

**House Sparrow\*** (*Common Permanent Resident*)

## ❖ Accidental Species



Swallow-tailed Kite (photo by Doug Backlund)

Accidental species are birds observed well outside their normal or expected range. The number in parenthesis is the number of observations reported for each species in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties.

**Tricolored Heron (3)**  
**Brant (1)**  
**Trumpeter Swan (1)**  
**Mississippi Kite (1)**  
**Swallow-tailed Kite (Ft. Sisseton 1800s)**  
**Red-shouldered Hawk (3)**  
**Yellow Rail (1)**  
**Common Moorhen (2)**  
**Whimbrel (1)**  
**Long-billed Curlew (2)**  
**Least Tern (1)**  
**Boreal Owl (2)**  
**Lewis's Woodpecker (2)**  
**Vermilion Flycatcher (1)**  
**Gray Jay (1)**  
**Clark's Nutcracker (1)**  
**Common Raven (1)**  
**Tufted Titmouse (1)**  
**Prairie Warbler (1)**  
**Prothonotary Warbler (1)**  
**Worm-eating Warbler (1)**  
**Summer Tanager (1)**  
**Western Tanager (1)**  
**Lazuli Bunting (1)**

## ❖ Extinct Species

### **Passenger Pigeon**

McChesney (1879) reported taking (shooting) several Passenger pigeons the fall of 1877 and observing additional birds in July 1878. Krosch (1987) provided a reprint of an article first published in 1880 that denotes a Passenger pigeon seen by Thomas S. Roberts and Franklin Benner between Lake Traverse and Big Stone Lakes in 1879.

## ❖ Endangered and Threatened Species

### Federal and State Endangered

**Whooping Crane**

**Eskimo Curlew**

**Interior Least Tern**

**Piping Plover**

### State Threatened

**Osprey**

### State Endangered

**Peregrine Falcon**

The South Dakota Natural Heritage Program managed by the SD Dept. of Game, Fish, tracks forty-seven species of birds found in this area and Parks including eight State listed endangered or threatened species. For a full list of species tracked by the Natural Heritage Program go to:

<https://gfp.sd.gov/rare-animals/>



## ❖ Birding Activities and Organizations



Waubay Christmas Count Participants (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

### **South Dakota Ornithologists Union**

The organization's primary mission is to promote the study of South Dakota's birds. It accomplishes this goal by publishing a state bird book and breeding bird atlas (see references), checklists, quarterly journal (South Dakota Bird Notes), conducting field trips and meetings, sponsoring an on-line data entry and retrieval system for bird observations across the state, and issuing grants and scholarships to students and researchers to further ornithological study in the state. The organization's members range from amateur birdwatchers to professional ornithologists.

More information on SDOU can be found on the following website;

<http://sdou.org/>

### **Christmas Bird Count**

The Christmas Bird Count is an annual survey of birds usually conducted during the last two weeks of December through the first week of January. Participants drive and walk specific routes in count circle 15 miles in diameter, tallying the species and number

of birds observed within the count circle during a 24-hour period or count day. In this area, one count is still active. The Waubay National Wildlife CBC has been ongoing since 1954. Other counts have been conducted in the past for Webster and Wilmot. Unfortunately, these count circles are no longer active. The CBC is sponsored by the National Audubon Society.

For more information contact the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge at (605) 947-4521 or the WNWR website listed below in early December for count date and information.

<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/waubay/>

### **Great Backyard Bird Count**

The Great Backyard Bird Count takes place mid-February. Participants count the highest number of individuals for each species observed in one location for a period of fifteen minutes over a period of four days. The count is co-sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. For more information visit the GBBC website at:

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

### **Project FeederWatch**

Participants count birds visiting their feeding stations from November through April to help ornithologists track winter bird distribution and abundance. Participants count the highest number of individuals for each species visiting their site, usually during a set period once a week. Project FeederWatch is sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

For more information visit the Project FeederWatch website at:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

## ❖ Suggested References

There is an overwhelming amount of bird books to choose from dealing with identification, life histories, bird feeding and attracting birds, regional and state bird books, breeding bird atlases, bird songs etc. In addition to books there are several electronic guides available on DVD, computer programs and web-sites devoted to bird identification, smart phone apps, compact discs and other electronic formats used to learn and identify bird songs and calls.

The most popular bird books are field guides used to aid in identifying species. The classic “Peterson” field guide format presents paintings of birds with arrows pointing out important field marks to aid in identification. These books are usually published as eastern or western field guides using the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian as a dividing line between the eastern and western United States. More recently, authors have begun using actual photographs (some digitally enhanced) of birds in their guides and have combined eastern and western species into one book. There are many specialty guides available that concentrate solely on identification of groups like hawks, shorebirds, gulls, warblers or sparrows.

Listed below are some useful guides and references for this area.

## Field Guides:

A Field Guide to Birds of Eastern and Central North America, Sixth Edition  
By Roger Tory Peterson  
2010. Houghton Mifflin Publishing

*In my opinion still one the best for the beginning or advanced birdwatcher. Easily carried in pocket or pack. The eastern guide will suffice for northeast South Dakota.*

See also: Sibley Bird Guides, Kaufman Bird Guides, Stokes Bird Guides, Audubon, National Geographic, Crossley, National Wildlife Federation guides to name a few.

## State and Regional Guides:

Birds of South Dakota  
By Dan Tallman, D.L. Swanson, and J.S. Palmer  
2002. South Dakota Ornithologists Union

*A must have for anyone interested in South Dakota birds. Accounts list the species current known status in the state, distribution map, information on habitat, and migration, nesting, and winter observation dates.*

South Dakota Breeding Bird Survey II  
@ <https://gfp.sd.gov/breeding-bird-atlas/>

## Bird Songs:

Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs, Eastern Region  
1997. Time Warner AudioBooks  
(3 cd set with booklet)

## Specialty Guides:

There are currently several specialty guides in print including; advanced birding, bird nests and nestlings, feeder birds, hummingbirds, molt, raptors, shorebirds and gulls, warblers etc. Most can be found on the internet carried by most of the larger vendors like Amazon.com.

Tallman, Dan A., David L. Swanson, and Jeffrey S. Palmer. 2002. Birds of South Dakota. South Dakota Ornithologists Union, Aberdeen. xxvi+ 441 pp.

## Websites:

South Dakota Birds and Birding  
<http://sdakotabirds.com/>

## ❖ Literature Cited

Draeger, Rosemary and Linda Johnson. 2003. Breeding Bird Survey of Sica Hollow State Park, Marshall and Roberts Counties, South Dakota Summer 2003. Unpublished report, South Dakota Dept. of Game, Fish, and Parks, Pierre. +20 pp.

Krosch, Penelope. 1987. A Contribution to the Ornithology of Minnesota. Reprint. Loon 59:66-71

McChesney, Charles E. 1879. Notes on the Birds of Fort Sisseton, Dakota Territories. Bull. U.S. Geol. and Geog. Surv. of the Territories 5:71-103.

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