

Windows to *Wildlife*



Eyes to the Sky

A new wildlife viewing guide
celebrating Idaho's raptors

On the Birding Trail

Wildlife viewing at Cartier Slough
Wildlife Management Area

Western Warriors

Soaring with Idaho's Golden Eagles

Blue Collar Corvids

Meet the hardworking
Pinyon Jay



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Species of
Greatest
Conservation
Need

Blue Collar Corvids

Meet the hardworking Pinyon Jay

Pinyon Jays/Mike Lewinski on Flickr CC

Nature's Tree Planters

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Imagine a bird that can stuff 54 pine seeds into a pouch in its neck, then fly miles to bury them like little time capsules. That's the Pinyon Jay, a bright blue member of the crow family with an important role in western North American forests.

These unique, crestless, mostly blue birds are nature's original tree planters. They are experts at harvesting seeds from pinyon pines, thanks to special featherless nostrils that let them dig deep into pine cones without ruffling any feathers. They are also efficient harvester and transporter of pinyon pine seeds, playing a crucial role in seed dispersal. But they aren't just collectors; they are community-minded birds that travel, breed, and forage together in large flocks. In fact, they are the earliest nesting corvids around, nesting as early as February.

In Idaho, you'll find these birds primarily in the south-central and southeastern portions of the state. Within 15 miles of the Utah border in the Albion, Jim Sage, and Black Pine mountains, they inhabit areas dominated by pinyon pine and juniper. This is the only location in Idaho where pinyon pine is found. Elsewhere, they make their homes in juniper woodlands south of the Snake River, with one adventurous flock living north of the river near Howe.

Unlike most jays, Pinyon Jays live in large flocks year-round, working together to find food and watch for predators. Each fall, they collect and hide thousands of pinyon pine seeds to eat later. Many of these hidden seeds sprout into new trees, helping to grow and renew the very forests the birds rely on.

PHOTO: Public Domain

So, what's on the menu when pinyon pines aren't around? These resourceful birds don't appear to be too picky. A study in southeastern Idaho in the early 1990s noted Pinyon Jays foraged on commercial sunflower seeds from backyard bird feeders, juniper berries, and insects. They have also been observed feeding on lizards, snakes, nestling birds, and small mammals.

Unfortunately, Pinyon Jay populations have dropped by 80% over the past 50 years. Direct loss of habitat and prolonged heat and drought events that limit pine nut production have taken their toll. They were petitioned to be protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2022. In 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated a 12-month review to determine if the species should be listed.

The good news? Researchers from the Intermountain Bird Observatory, in collaboration with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and other state and federal partners, have been surveying modeled Pinyon Jay habitats in Idaho to document and verify breeding status, abundance, and distribution in Idaho. Fortunately, the distribution of Pinyon Jays in Idaho has not changed much in the past 30 years. However, prior to 2021, there were only sporadic observations of Pinyon Jays north of the Snake River at Craters of the Moon National Monument. Since then, a colony has been verified near this area, likely breeding on lands within the Idaho National Laboratory.

Here's something surprising: all the breeding colonies found since 2023 are in pure juniper woodlands, even though pinyon pines grow in southern Cassia County. They have also been observed in limber pine and ornamental ponderosa pine, and spruce trees in residential areas.

In the future, we hope to improve our understanding of food selection, dispersal among and between flocks, and general movement patterns. Pinyon Jays were thought to be nonmigratory, but recent information from radio-marked birds in Utah has documented long-distance seasonal movements, indicating migratory behavior.

Want to spot one yourself? Head to the juniper-dominated foothills on the east edge of Pocatello, Craters of the Moon National Monument, or the City of Rocks National Reserve in southern Cassia County. Listen for their unique "rack" and "krawk" calls or observe a flock flying in search of their next meal.



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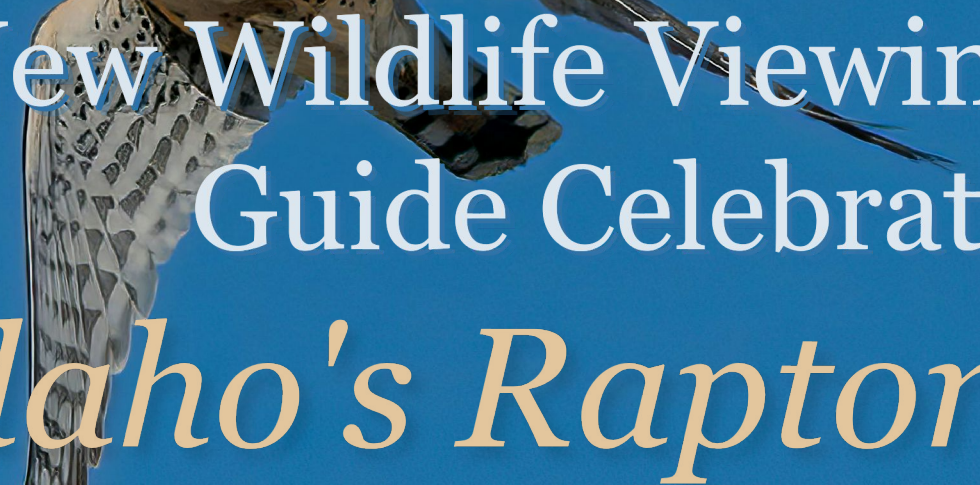
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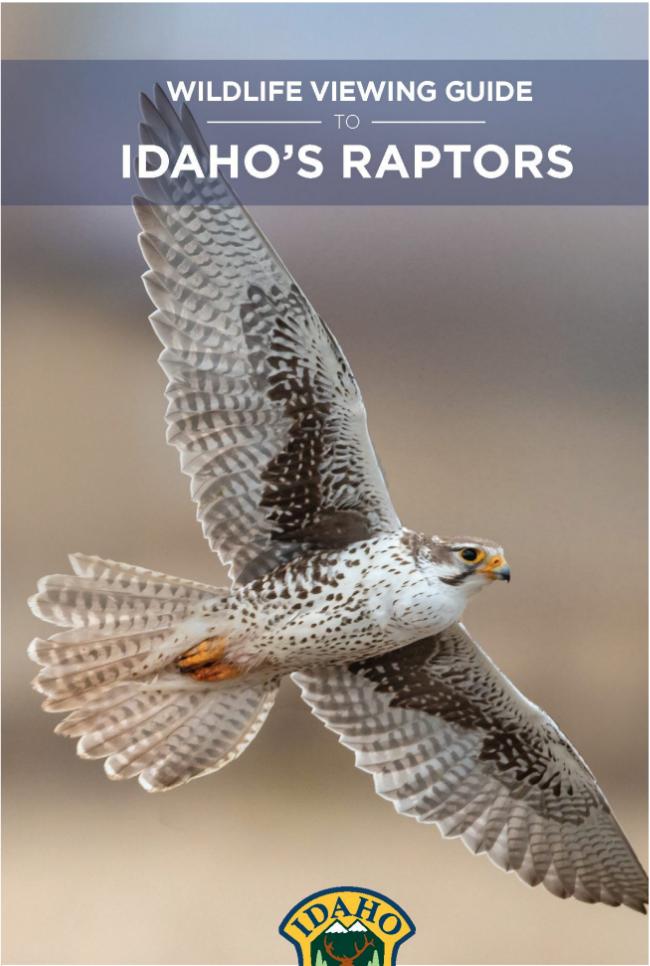




New Wildlife Viewing Guide Celebrates *Idaho's Raptors*

A male American Kestrel in flight. PHOTO: Richard Seeley/Shutterstock.com

Exploring Idaho's Raptors



WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE
TO
IDAHO'S RAPTORS

Idaho's wildlife viewing series just got more exciting: a brand-new guide to the state's 31 raptor species. Building on the success of earlier guides on ungulates, owls, and bats, this pocket-sized resource explores the hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures that shape Idaho's skies and landscapes.

Inside, you'll find everything you need to spot raptors in the wild, whether you're driving past farm fields, hiking near canyon rims, or simply looking up in your own neighborhood. With straightforward tips on identification, behavior, and where to look, you'll gain the confidence to recognize these incredible hunters.

Raptors are impressive to watch and they play important roles in our ecosystems. They help control rodent populations and serve as valuable indicators of environmental health. This guide highlights what makes each species distinctive, from the American Kestrel's characteristic hovering behavior to the Golden Eagle's soaring flight. It will also help you distinguish between species that are easily confused, like Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks, so you can confidently identify what you're observing.

Whether you're new to birding or have years of experience, this guide will help you explore Idaho's birds of prey.



Pick up your **FREE** copy at any Idaho Department of Fish and Game office! **6**



Idaho Birding Trail

Cartier Slough

Wildlife Management Area

Just west of Rexburg, Cartier Slough Wildlife Management Area is one of the best spots for fall birding in eastern Idaho. Tucked along the Henrys Fork, this 1,000-acre area mixes wetlands, riverside habitat, and sagebrush, attracting thousands of migrating birds every October and November. You'll see waterfowl like Canada Geese, Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, and plenty of ducks hanging out on the sloughs, while Bald Eagles and Northern Harriers soar overhead. In early fall, songbirds like White-crowned Sparrows and Hermit Thrushes come through before the wintering birds arrive. The trails at Beaver Dick Park make it easy to explore, though watch out for occasional flooding and seasonal hunting closures. Whether you're hoping to see huge flocks of waterfowl or catch a late-season migrant, Cartier Slough is worth the trip.

To Get There: Cartier Slough is five miles west of Rexburg on Highway 33, right next to Beaver Dick Park. You can park at a few pullouts along the road or walk in from the park's trail.

American Tree Sparrow



PHOTO: Gerald A. DeBoer/Shutterstock.com

Golden Eagle

Western Warriors

Species of
Greatest
Conservation
Need



Golden Eagles are iconic raptors of western North America, inhabiting grasslands, sagebrush, and semi-open mountainous habitats. They breed from Alaska through the western US and live year-round in Idaho, though they are less common in the eastern states.

These powerful hunters feed primarily on small to medium-sized mammals, especially jackrabbits, but they also take birds, reptiles, and occasionally scavenge carrion. Golden Eagles build large nests, up to eight feet wide, on high cliffs or in tall trees, lining them with grasses. After courtship in late February, they lay one to three eggs in March, and the young fledge about ten weeks later.

Often seen alone or in pairs, they soar with wings held in a slight "V" shape, wingtips spread like fingers, and hunt by soaring high, flying low over the ground, or perching before striking prey. Most are year-round residents, though some may move short distances in response to food availability.

While populations in the West remain stable, habitat loss from development, lead poisoning, and poaching are ongoing concerns. Birdwatchers can spot these raptors at locations like the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, Hells Canyon, and Owyhee Canyonlands.

Call of the Sky
Scan to listen



Talon Tidbit: A Golden Eagle can carry prey up to 8 pounds and its feet exert 500 psi. That's enough to crush a car tire!

Thank You

Thank you to those who made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or contributed to the Idaho Nongame Wildlife Fund when completing their taxes.

Your contribution provides important funding for wildlife and habitat conservation, research, and outreach in Idaho.



Windows to Wildlife

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM

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*The contents of the articles in this publication are the views and opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect the policies or opinions of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game or the State of Idaho.

Great Horned Owls are powerful nocturnal hunters, feeding on a variety of prey from rodents to birds. As fall arrives, listen for their distinctive deep hoots echoing through the lengthening nights. Their ear-like tufts make them one of North America's most recognizable owls. PHOTO: Patrick Myers/NPS

