

City Hall Park Bird Banners



Gail Karlsson

A NYC Parks #ArtintheParks Project
Sponsored by Friends of City Hall Park
and the City Hall Park Conservancy

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Also by Gail Karlsson:

Meeting Trees in City Hall Park (2025)

A Birds' Guide to the Battery and NY Harbor (2022)

City Hall Park Bird Banners
A New York City Parks public art project
#ArtintheParks

Gail Karlsson is a nature writer and photographer who lives near City Hall Park and often watches the birds there. These banners are designed to call attention to the many types of wild birds using the wooded areas in this very small, urban space, where most people notice only the pigeons.

Some of the wild birds are year-round city residents that have adapted to living in a human-dominated environment. Others come to the park only during the summer or winter, or just stop by briefly on their spring or fall migrations.

The banners show some of the more commonly seen birds, but there are many others you might find if you look closely. The wild birds remind us of the natural world that was here long before any human settlement, connecting us with our own history and evolution, and the greater mysteries of life on earth.

Many of the birds are becoming endangered as they lose foraging and nesting spots due to human activities. Planting bird-friendly trees in city parks is one way to help support a more diverse community of wildlife in our neighborhoods.

Sponsors:

Friends of City Hall, cityhallparknyc.org

City Hall Park Conservancy, chpc-nyc.org



Hermit Thrush

Binoculars focused on a patch
near a park fence
at Broadway, City Hall Park
holding my breath
watching, listening.
Dry leaves ruffle slightly in the breeze.
Is this the sound I hear
or something else?
I detect a quit quit weeyoo weeyoo
soft melodious song amidst traffic hum
declaring his presence, my presence.
Undaunted he searches for food
buff colored disguise amidst leaves
brown against tan,
his chest an array of small dots
mirroring the leaves' freckled remnants
as Spring approaches.
Then he stops, turns to look at me
his shining eyes focused
on my binoculars watching him
near a park fence
at Broadway, City Hall Park.

Rella Stuart-Hunt March 25th, 2026

City Hall Park Banner Birds

American Crow
American Kestrel
American Robin
Black-and-White Warbler
Blue Jay
Common Grackle
Eastern Towhee
European Starling
Gray Catbird
Hermit Thrush
House Sparrow
Mourning Dove
Northern Cardinal
Northern Flicker
Northern Mockingbird
Northern Parula
Ovenbird
Red-tailed Hawk
White-throated Sparrow
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker



Red-tailed Hawk

These are the largest birds that come to City Hall Park, and they are pretty wild. They soar over the city, and nest on the high buildings and bridges. Sometimes you can see one perched on top of City Hall, scanning for prey. They usually hunt during the day for the rats and squirrels and other birds, like pigeons, that can be found easily in city parks.



Mourning Dove

These doves, with their sad-sounding cooing calls, are native to North America, unlike the pigeons, (also called Rock Doves), that came to New York from Europe as domesticated birds brought over by people settling here. Over time, the pigeons were able to get loose and multiplied, thriving on human food scraps. Mourning Doves eat seeds and grains.



American Crow

You can often see a group of three or four crows going around together as they forage in the trees for bugs, seeds and fruits. These birds are probably family members. Once there was a very large nest made of sticks that dropped down onto the ground in City Hall Park. It looked like it was probably a crow's nest that had fallen from high up in a tree.



Common Grackle

Grackles look a bit like small crows, and they have similar foraging and eating habits. They have longer tails, though, and beady yellow eyes. In the shade, they seem to be dark-colored, but then in the bright sunlight their feathers will look purple, green and blue. There are special structures in the feathers to scatter the light, which makes them iridescent.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

What a silly-sounding name for a very elegant bird. This is a type of woodpecker that comes south to spend the winter in the city. The name refers to its habit of using its sharp, chisel-like bill to make long rows of holes, or wells, in the bark of trees and then lapping up the sap that oozes out, along with any insects that are also drawn to the sweet liquid.



Northern Flicker

Some of these flashy woodpeckers are permanent residents in New York City, but the ones in City Hall Park are mostly migratory. They might come by in large groups in the fall and check out the lines of tree holes made by the sapsuckers. Their favorite food is ants, though, so they will also spend a lot of time digging around down on the ground.



European Starling

Starlings were brought into New York City in the 1890s and then spread out across much of the country, thriving on insects and berries. They are generally considered to be invasive because they are aggressive about taking over tree cavities for their nesting sites, displacing native birds. They are quite attractive, though, and good singers.



American Kestrel

These small falcons will sometimes perch on top of City Hall or other nearby buildings, watching for movement down in the park. In the summer they mostly eat large insects, but in the winter there are more mice available. During migration seasons in the fall and spring they will sometimes grab one of the colorful warblers or other little birds passing by.



Northern Cardinal

What a delight to see a bright red male cardinal among the tree leaves, or brightening up the park when it is mostly gray, or snowy. They might be looking for seeds, or the fruit on the holly trees or winterberry bushes. The female cardinals are paler but also lovely. The couples are often together and you might hear them calling back and forth.



Blue Jay

Although Blue Jays are quite easy to spot, you will often hear them giving a sharp warning before you see them, especially if there is a hawk or another danger nearby. Some stay here for the winter, and others move further south if they can't find enough insects or acorns. Their color is not from pigment but from blue light reflected off their feathers.



Northern Mockingbird

Mockingbirds get their name because they are able to mimic all sorts of sounds, including other birds, but also police sirens, car alarms, and even passing trucks. It may be a way to show prospective mates how talented they are. They have gray wings with large white stripes and long tails that stick up. They like to eat insects in summer, then berries in winter.



American Robin

Some robins will stay in this area for the winter if there is enough food. If not, they will move a short distance away, then return in the spring to nest in trees in wooded areas. You might see them pulling up worms, especially when they need protein-rich food for their babies. Later in the year, they enjoy the crabapples and dogwood fruits in City Hall Park.



Gray Catbird

Like mockingbirds, catbirds are also clever mimics. They get that name because they will make mewing sounds like cats hiding in the bushes, but can sound like other birds and animals as well. Although they are mostly gray, except for a black cap, there are surprising orange-red patches under their tails. They are close in size to robins and have a similar diet.



Eastern Towhee

These large, long-tailed sparrows are mostly seen hopping around looking for seeds and small insects. They nest on the ground under bushes in secluded areas. Their black backs and reddish-orange sides can make them seem similar to robins, but they are smaller. Their name refers to their repetitive song, which supposedly sounds like “drink your tea”.



House Sparrow

Introduced from England in the mid-1800s, house sparrows adapted to city life and then spread out across the country. One of the reasons they were brought here was to help control swarming insects after many bug-eating native birds were displaced due to land clearing and construction in the growing city. Now you often see them eating street food.



White-throated Sparrow

Many of these native North American birds come to the city in the fall and spend the winter here. You will mostly see them scratching on the ground for seeds. Then, in the spring, they head back up north to nest. As they get ready to leave, you might hear them singing a piping song that supposedly sounds like “Oh Sweet Canada, Canada, Canada”.



Hermit Thrush

These charming little birds have a mournful, flute-like song, which they mostly perform in northern forests where they go to nest. They pass through the park and stay for a month or so on their way up in the spring, and then again going back in the fall. They are among the last of the migrants to leave, after filling up on insects and berries to fuel their travels.



Ovenbird

This name refers to the dome-shaped nests they build on the ground in forested areas that don't have much underbrush, including in some of the larger city parks. You might see them passing through this park in spring and fall, generally foraging on the ground for insects in the leaf litter. They have a loud repetitive call that sounds like “teacher, teacher”.



Northern Parula

So many bright colors in one little warbler. Parulas start showing up in April on their way north, after spending the winter in the Caribbean and Central America. They can be hard to spot as they search in the trees for caterpillars, spiders and other insects, though they also will come down lower to also look in bushes. Their song is described as a 'buzzy trill'.



Black-and-White Warbler

These warblers are also early spring migrants, and they are quite easy to see. Instead of flitting around up in the leaves, they are usually spotted walking up and down the trunks and branches of trees looking for insects. Their simple black and white coloring is distinctive, while other small warblers often have confusingly similar feather colors and patterns.

More Information

Organizations:

NYC Bird Alliance - nycbirdalliance.org

Local Nature Lab - localnaturelab.org

Linnean Society of New York - linnaeannewyork.org

Cornell Lab of Ornithology - birds.cornell.edu

Apps:

Merlin (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Sibley Birds

Articles on bird-watching:

National Geographic October 3, 2022 - *Can bird-watching improve your child's memory?*

Huff Post March 4, 2026 - *Study Suggests Becoming An Expert In This Beloved Hobby May Actually Protect Your Brain Health*

Psychology Today, December 25, 2024 - *Birding Your Way to Well-Being*

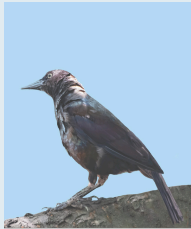
Plants for Birds in NYC:

nycbirdalliance.org/our-work/conservation/habitat-protection/plants-for-birds

positive bloom.com.these-native-shrubs-will-feed-birds-through-winter-in-new-york/



American Crow



Common Grackle



Red-tailed Hawk



Mourning Dove



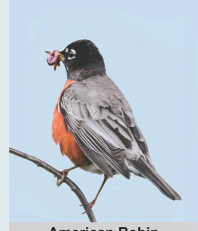
European Starling



American Kestrel



Northern Cardinal



American Robin



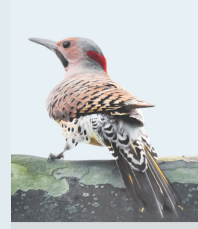
Northern Mockingbird



Blue Jay



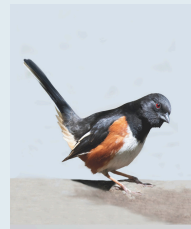
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