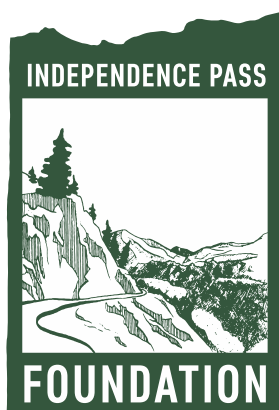
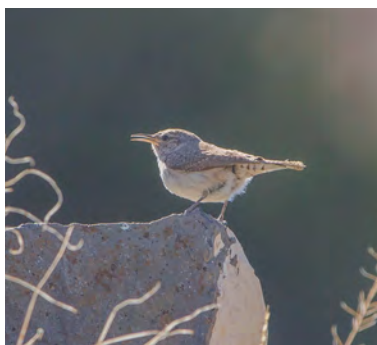
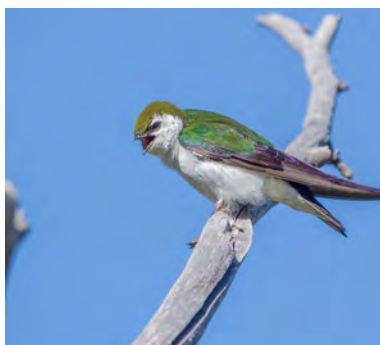
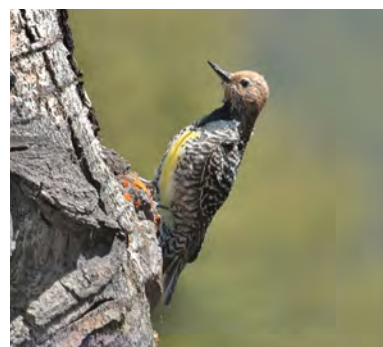
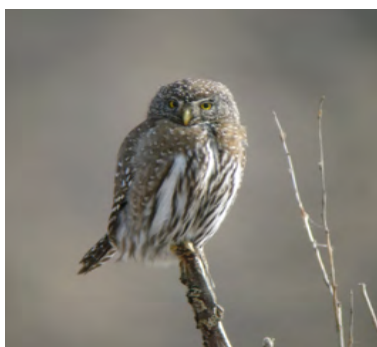
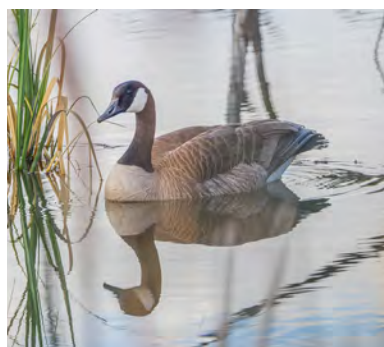


INDEPENDENCE PASS FOUNDATION

ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST



The Birds of Independence Pass

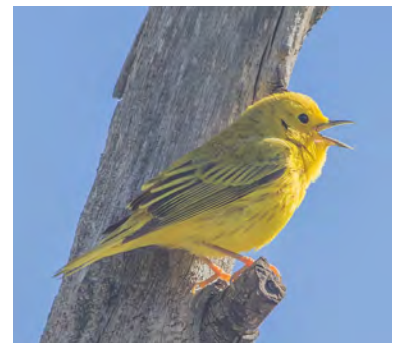
Introduction

This selection of birds pertains to the portion of Independence Pass between Difficult Campground and the summit of the Pass. The area's rugged terrain spans several mountain life zones on the western slope of the continental divide, offering richly diverse habitats for a wide variety of birds, some of which are specialized western and/or high altitude species. In this illustrated list, colorful photographs, identification tips, seasonality and life history information acquaint you with the birds of Independence Pass.

written by
Rebecca Weiss

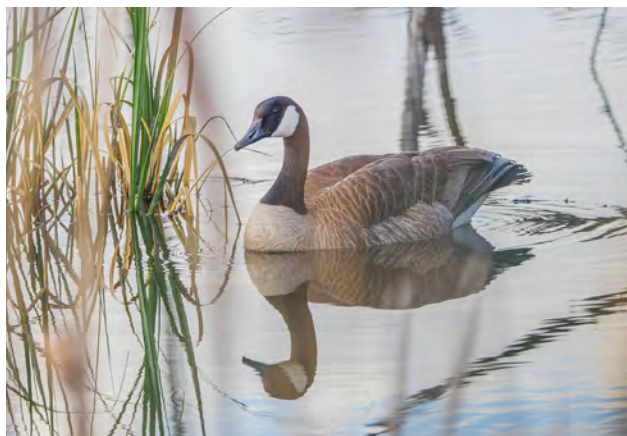
*photography by **
Mark Fuller

- 3** Waterfowl
- 3** Shorebirds and Wading Birds
- 4** Game Birds
- 5** Hummingbirds
- 5** Birds of Prey
- 8** Kingfishers and Dippers
- 9** Woodpeckers
- 11** Flycatchers
- 12** Swallows
- 13** Vireos, Larks and Wrens
- 14** Jays and other Corvids
- 16** Chickadees, Nuthatches and Similar Birds
- 18** Kinglets and Thrushes
- 20** Waxwings, Pipits and Tanagers
- 21** Finches
- 23** Warblers
- 25** Sparrows



* except the Northern Pygmy Owl and the American Crow (perched) by Bill Schmoker, and the Boreal Owl from the Open Source internet.

WATERFOWL



Canada Goose

Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

HABITAT }

lakes, beaver ponds, quiet reaches of the river

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek wetlands, Lost Man Reservoir

STATUS }

migratory, resident, breeding

Canada geese are partial migrants; some members of the population migrate while others do not. Locally, Canada geese nest in early summer below 9,500'. During spring and fall, migrating or dispersing geese occasionally feed along slow-moving reaches of the river and in streams, reservoirs and beaver ponds.



Mallards, female (left), male (right)

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

HABITAT }

lakes, beaver ponds, wetlands, slow-moving reaches of the river

LOCATIONS }

Roaring Fork River, Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Lost Man Reservoir

STATUS }

resident, breeding

This dabbling duck tips tail-end up as it feeds on submerged aquatic vegetation. Especially hardy and adaptable, the mallard is the most common and widely distributed duck in North America.

SHOREBIRDS AND WADING BIRDS



Spotted Sandpiper

Spotted Sandpiper

Actitis macularius

HABITAT }

shorelines of lakes and ponds up to 11,000'

LOCATIONS }

wetlands at Difficult Creek area, Grizzly Reservoir, Lost Man Reservoir

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This sandpiper bobs its tail up and down as it walks along shallow shorelines in search of insects, worms, small fish and crustaceans. Spotted Sandpipers have reversed roles in which females compete for territories and males raise the young.



Great Blue Heron

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

HABITAT }

shallow wetlands, ponds, and slow-moving reaches of the river

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake trailhead, Grottos

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Great blue herons nest in treetop colonies along rivers below 9,000' in the Roaring Fork Valley. These large wading birds occasionally visit higher elevations to feed in wetlands and quiet parts of the river.

GAME BIRDS



Dusky Grouse (female)



Dusky Grouse (male)

Dusky Grouse

Dendragapus obscurus

HABITAT }

aspen and conifer forests, mountain shrublands, meadows

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek Trail, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Relying on its cryptically colored plumage, the dusky grouse may flush in a flurry of loud wingbeats when a potential threat, such as a coyote or a hiker, comes close. Watch for male dusky grouse displaying in spring and early summer, when they strut with tail fanned and orange eyebrows and purplish neck patches exposed.



White-tailed Ptarmigan

White-tailed Ptarmigan

Lagopus leucura

HABITAT }

alpine tundra

LOCATIONS }

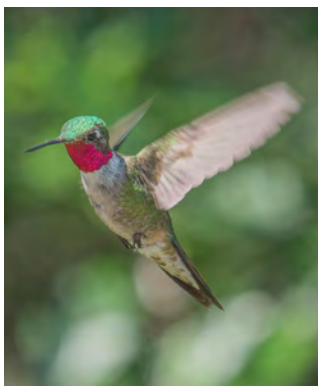
Upper Lost Man Trail, summit of the Pass

STATUS }

resident

This highly camouflaged, ground-dwelling bird matches its surroundings perfectly by way of a prolonged molt that gradually changes its plumage from mottled brown in summer to pure white in winter. White-tailed ptarmigan chicks are ready to leave the nest only 12 hours after hatching; watch for hens foraging with their broods in late July.

HUMMINGBIRDS



Broad-tailed Hummingbird (female) Broad-tailed Hummingbird (male)

Broad-tailed Hummingbird *Selasphorus platycercus*

HABITAT }

wildflower meadows, avalanche paths

LOCATIONS }

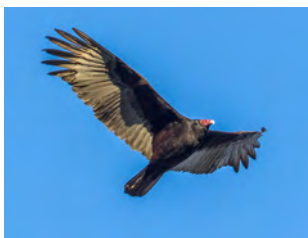
all areas, primarily below treeline

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Look and listen for broad-tailed hummingbirds in open areas where they feed on flower nectar and tiny insects. Only males' wings produce a high-pitched trilling sound; females' wings are silent.

BIRDS OF PREY



Turkey Vulture

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

HABITAT }

open shrublands, woods and meadows up to 9,500'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Distinguish the turkey vulture from other raptors by its featherless head and its wings that are held in a shallow "V" while soaring. What may appear to be unsteady teetering in flight is actually a sign of this bird's supreme ability to take advantage of subtle air currents for maximum efficiency.



Golden Eagle

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

HABITAT }

open landscapes up to treeline

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Lower and Upper Lost Man Trails

STATUS }

resident

Soaring flight along with very long, plank-like wings, huge size and dark brown plumage are key field marks for the golden eagle. This strong, keen-sighted hunter is capable of taking large prey such as an elk calf, but it feeds primarily on ground squirrels, hares, and other small animals.



Sharp-shinned Hawk

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus

HABITAT }

montane and subalpine forests

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Distinguish sharp-shinned hawks from similar Cooper's hawks by the sharp-shinned's darker nape, compact body, and squared-off tail. This small forest hawk preys primarily on small birds and times its breeding season to coincide with peak abundance of fledgling songbirds with which to feed its brood.



Cooper's Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Accipiter cooperii

HABITAT }

open woodlands and forests up to 10,000'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

resident

This forest hawk ranges below 10,000', while the similar sharp-shinned hawk occupies a higher elevational belt between about 9,000' and treeline. Female Cooper's hawks outsize males by about 30 percent, giving mated pairs the ability to hunt prey across a greater spectrum in order to feed their nestlings.



Northern Goshawk

Northern Goshawk

Accipiter gentilis

HABITAT }

extensive subalpine forests

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake Trail, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Secretive and uncommon, northern goshawks inhabit vast, unbroken forests where their primary prey is Steller's jays. This bird is the largest of three forest hawks that inhabit Independence Pass, including sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks.



Red-tailed Hawk



Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

HABITAT }

open landscapes up to treeline

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail, Independence Ghost Town

STATUS }

resident

The widely ranging red-tailed hawk is the most commonly seen hawk of Independence Pass. This hawk's plumage is extremely variable, including light and dark morphs as well as brown-streaked juveniles whose tails are buffy with brown bands instead of the namesake brick-red.



Great Horned Owl

Great Horned Owl

Bubo virginianus

HABITAT }

montane and subalpine forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail

STATUS }

resident

Silent flight, off-set ears and acute night vision help great horned owls hunt mammals such as voles and snowshoe hares. Nesting begins in early spring and owlets fledge in summer so they can learn to hunt while prey is most abundant.



Northern Pygmy Owl

Northern Pygmy Owl

Glaucidium gnoma

HABITAT }

montane woodlands and forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

resident

This aggressive hunter preys on songbirds and small rodents. Northern pygmy owls are often active during the day, relying more on vision than on auditory cues for locating prey.



Boreal Owl

Boreal Owl

Aegolius funereus

HABITAT }

subalpine forests

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail, Lost Man Campground

STATUS }

resident

Uncommon and nocturnal, the boreal owl is a key predator of small rodents such as voles and mice in mountain forests. Boreal owls rely on their sensitive hearing to locate prey in the dark.



Peregrine Falcon

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

HABITAT }

all habitat types with cliffs and open gulfs of air

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Upper Lost Man Trail, summit of the Pass

STATUS }

resident

Naturally rare in the Southern Rockies, peregrine falcons nest on cliff ledges and cover vast areas as they hunt birds such as rosy-finches and swifts in mid-air. Peregrines are found on all continents except Antarctica.

KINGFISHERS AND DIPPERS



Belted Kingfisher (female)



Belted Kingfisher (male)

Belted Kingfisher

Megaceryle alcyon

HABITAT }

clear, calm rivers, streams and lakes

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Reservoir

STATUS }

resident

The belted kingfisher dives like a dart to catch small fish within the top two feet of clear bodies of water. Fish are adeptly turned in the bill to be swallowed head-first and indigestible parts are later coughed up in the form of a small pellet.



American Dipper

American Dipper

Cinclus mexicanus

HABITAT }

clear, cold mountain streams and rivers

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek Trail, Weller Trail, Grottos, Braille Trail

STATUS }

resident

Look for American dippers along rushing rivers where they perch on rocks and dive to feed on aquatic insect larvae. Dippers construct their round, moss nests on streamside rocks, fallen logs, or bridge abutments, often within the spray zone.

WOODPECKERS



Williamson's Sapsucker, female Williamson's Sapsucker, male

Williamson's Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus thyroideus

HABITAT }

mixed pine and aspen forests

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake Trail, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This uncommon sapsucker nests in cavities that it excavates in the soft wood of aspen trees and it feeds on insects and pine sap. Males and females have very different color patterns, which led early naturalists to describe the Williamson's sapsucker initially as two separate species.



Red-naped Sapsucker

Red-naped Sapsucker

Sphyrapicus nuchalis

HABITAT }

deciduous forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Weller Campground, Grottos

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Red-naped sapsuckers drill shallow wells in the bark of aspens, willows and alders in order to feed on carbohydrate-rich sap. Their old nesting cavities are prized by secondary cavity nesters such as mountain bluebirds, chickadees, wrens, and swallows.



Hairy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Dryobates villosus

HABITAT }

pine and aspen forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Watch for this large woodpecker in forests and open woodlands where it feeds on bark beetles, caterpillars, berries, seeds, and nuts. When comparing to the similar downy woodpecker, note that the hairy's head is about the same length front-to-back as its bill.



Downy Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Dryobates pubescens

HABITAT }

pine and aspen forests, especially near riparian areas

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

resident

Their small size allows downy woodpeckers to exploit foods that larger woodpeckers cannot access, such as aphids and ants on plant stalks, as well as insects found in wood. Distinguish the downy from the similar hairy woodpecker by its relatively short bill which is shorter than the length of its head front-to-back.



American Three-toed Woodpecker

American Three-toed Woodpecker

Picoides dorsalis

HABITAT }

conifer forests

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Burned and beetle-killed conifer forests with abundant insects are prime habitat for American three-toed woodpeckers. These birds deliver sideways blows to chip off flakes of bark on tree trunks and branches, revealing the insect larvae that they eat.



Northern Flicker

Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus

HABITAT }

open coniferous and deciduous forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident, breeding

While capable of excavating in wood to find food, flickers spend much of their time foraging on bare ground where they probe in the soil for ants and beetle larvae. Notice this woodpecker's slightly decurved bill.

FLYCATCHERS



Olive-sided Flycatcher

Olive-sided Flycatcher

Contopus cooperi

HABITAT }

open, ragged subalpine conifer forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This large flycatcher feeds on airborne insects in mountain forests with plenty of open airspace and snags for perching. Key field marks include the dark patches on either side of its creamy, white breast, that make this bird appear as if wearing a vest over a white shirt.



Western Wood-Pewee

Western Wood-Pewee

Contopus sordidulus

HABITAT }

open, mixed forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Western wood-pewees forage around edges of woodlands and forests where trees provide open perches from which these flycatchers sally out to grab flying insects. This foraging behavior is known as hawking.



Hammond's Flycatcher

Hammond's Flycatcher

Empidonax hammondii

HABITAT }

coniferous and mixed forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Grottos, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

The Hammond's flycatcher is an important migratory insectivore, feeding primarily on flying insects in the forests it inhabits. Distinguish this species from the very similar cordilleran flycatcher by voice (three-part song versus two-part song, respectively) and habitat.



Cordilleran Flycatcher

Cordilleran Flycatcher

Empidonax occidentalis

HABITAT }

deciduous and coniferous riparian forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Weller Lake Trailhead, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Listen for this bird's two-part song, tee-seet, in forests near streams and lakes. Cordilleran flycatchers' large nests are loose masses of plant fibers, moss, and spiderweb silk.

SWALLOWS



Tree Swallow

Tree Swallow

Tachycineta bicolor

HABITAT }

open areas near forest edges

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

As its name suggests, the tree swallow commonly nests in old woodpecker cavities in trees. A family of tree swallows may consume as many as 300,000 insects while feeding its nestlings.



Violet-green Swallow

Violet-green Swallow

Tachycineta thalassina

HABITAT }

open areas near forest edges or rocky cliffs

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Violet-green swallows mix with tree swallows in habitats near water, but they also forage and nest in more arid habitats and are thus found more widely on Independence Pass. Key field marks include a prominent white rump patch and white extending above the eyes on the face.

VIREOS, LARKS AND WRENS



Warbling Vireo

Warbling Vireo

Vireo gilvus

HABITAT }

deciduous riparian forests and shrublands

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

The warbling vireo forages for insects and spiders among deciduous foliage, often high in the tree canopy. These birds are known for their persistent singing, even from the nest.



Horned Lark

Horned Lark

Eremophila alpestris

HABITAT }

barren or sparsely vegetated alpine tundra

LOCATIONS }

summit of the Pass

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

One of North America's most common and widespread birds, horned larks inhabit areas with plenty of dry, barren ground, including such settings in the high country. These birds are often seen in flocks as they feed on insects and seeds.



Rock Wren.

Rock Wren

Salpinctes obsoletus

HABITAT }

talus fields and other rocky areas

LOCATIONS }

talus fields above Weller Lake, Lincoln Creek area, and Upper Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Difficult to see because of its remote and inaccessible habitat, the rock wren inhabits open talus slopes where it forages for insects among the rocks. Throughout its western range, this bird ranges from hot deserts to high mountains where rocky, open areas exist.



House Wren

House Wren

Troglodytes aedon

HABITAT }

riparian woods

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

House wrens occupy dense tangles of understory brush near water, where they forage on insects and other arthropods. These birds can be detected easily by ear as they sing their rich, bubbly, warbling songs.

JAYS AND OTHER CORVIDS



Clark's Nutcracker

Clark's Nutcracker

Nucifraga columbiana

HABITAT }

conifer forests

LOCATIONS }

Independence Ghost Town area, Lower Lost Man

STATUS }

resident

Its dagger-like bill allows the Clark's nutcracker to open pinecones in order to eat the seeds or cache them in loose mineral soil for use in winter. Each individual creates thousands of caches and has the memory capacity to re-find most of them; those that are forgotten may germinate, reflecting the nutcracker's role in distributing and planting trees.



Canada Jay

Canada Jay

Perisoreus canadensis

HABITAT }

subalpine conifer forests

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Grottos, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail, Independence Ghost Town area

STATUS }

resident

Like a gray ghost, the Canada jay seems to appear out of thin air any time hikers bring out lunch, ready to feast on crumbs. This bird caches perishable food items such as insects, berries and bits of mushrooms, which are preserved by cold winter temperatures.



Steller's Jay

Steller's Jay

Cyanocitta stelleri

HABITAT }

conifer forests and adjacent habitats

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Steller's jays are omnivorous and forage in the forest canopy, understory, and on the ground where they flick aside leaf litter with their bills to uncover food items. These birds are quick to alert their forest community to potential predators or other hazards with their raucous alarm calls.



American Crow



fan-shaped tail

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

HABITAT }

open settings up to 10,000'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area

STATUS }

resident

American crows live in open settings, particularly human-altered areas, and are therefore seen mainly in the lower areas of the Pass. For comparison with common raven, note these field marks: crows are one-third smaller than ravens, have a fan-shaped tail, flap continuously in flight, and have a stout, evenly curved bill.



Common Raven



wedge-shaped tail

Common Raven

Corvus corax

HABITAT }

mountain forests and areas above treeline

LOCATIONS }

all

STATUS }

resident

This is the large, all-black bird that is commonly seen in the higher areas of Independence Pass. For comparison with American crow, note these field marks: a common raven is about the size of a red-tailed hawk, its tail is shaped like a wedge, it soars in flight, and the upper mandible of its heavy bill curves strongly downward.

CHICKADEES, NUTHATCHES AND SIMILAR BIRDS



Black-capped Chickadee

Black-capped Chickadee

Poecile atricapillus

HABITAT }

forests and shrublands up to 10,000'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos

STATUS }

resident

Black-capped chickadees nest in aspen and cottonwood forests, using existing cavities or excavating them in soft, rotting wood. These birds are able to lower their body temperatures on cold winter nights, a survival strategy that saves vital energy.



Mountain Chickadee

Mountain Chickadee

Poecile gambeli

HABITAT }

conifer forests up to treeline

LOCATIONS }

most locations below Upper Lost Man

STATUS }

resident

A cool color palette and bold, white line through the black cap are key field marks for this bird. As conifer habitat specialists, mountain chickadees are much more common than black-capped chickadees in the extensive pine forests of the Pass.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta canadensis

HABITAT }

conifer forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek Trail, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Red-breasted nuthatches typically walk facing downward on tree trunks and branches as they search for insects among crevices in bark. Listen for their nasal *yank yank yank* calls, given regularly as they forage.



White-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta carolinensis

HABITAT }

deciduous forests up to 9,500'

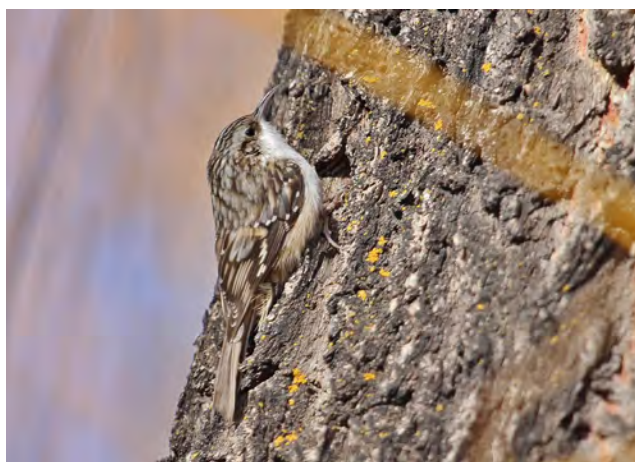
LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area

STATUS }

resident

Its short tail, slightly recurved bill and characteristic head-downward walking along trunks and branches of trees help identify this bird as a nuthatch. White-breasted nuthatches occupy lower elevation deciduous habitats, while red-breasted nuthatches inhabit pine forests and range as high as the subalpine life zone.



Brown Creeper

Brown Creeper

Certhia americana

HABITAT }

deciduous and coniferous forests

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Dense forests of large, mature trees are home to the brown creeper. Camouflaged to match the bark, this bird climbs upward on tree trunks and branches, using its long, slender, decurved bill to probe crevices in search of the insects and spiders it eats.

KINGLETS AND THRUSHES



Golden-crowned Kinglet

Golden-crowned Kinglet

Regulus satrapa

HABITAT }

mature forests of spruce and fir

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Listen for golden-crowned kinglets on any hike through subalpine conifer forests where their very high-pitched, thin song and calls are the best signs of their presence. These tiny birds are insectivores, foraging on aphids, caterpillars, spiders and other small invertebrates high in the forest canopy.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Regulus calendula

HABITAT }

conifer and deciduous forests near riparian areas

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This tiny bird weighs about as much as a nickel and weaves a globe-shaped nest suspended from horizontal tree branches. The ruby-crowned kinglet is one of the most widely distributed birds in the forests of Independence Pass.



Mountain Bluebird, female



Mountain Bluebird, male

Mountain Bluebird

Sialia currucoides

HABITAT }

grasslands and meadows near forest edges

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail, Independence Ghost Town

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Mountain bluebirds nest in old woodpecker cavities and feed in open meadows where they fly down from low perches to grab insects on the ground. Disturbances such as avalanches, forest fires, and wind events benefit bluebirds by creating the food-rich, open landscapes these birds need.



Townsend's Solitaire

Townsend's Solitaire

Myadestes townsendi

HABITAT }

coniferous forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Look for Townsend's solitaires on open perches such as treetop spires or upper branches of snags. White eye-rings and the buffy patches seen on their wings in flight are key identification traits.



Swainson's Thrush

Swainson's Thrush

Catharus ustulatus

HABITAT }

coniferous forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Known for their ethereal songs, Swainson's thrushes are more often detected by ear than by sight. These birds inhabit moist pockets within forests of pine, spruce and fir.



Hermit Thrush

Hermit Thrush

Catharus guttatus

HABITAT }

forests of spruce, fir and aspen

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

The flute-like song of the hermit thrush is a signature sound of mountain forests on the Pass. Note this bird's rufous tail, a useful field mark when comparing it to the similar Swainson's thrush whose tail is gray.



American Robin

American Robin

Turdus migratorius

HABITAT }

open forests

LOCATIONS }

all locations up to treeline

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

You may be surprised to see American robins foraging around stands of stunted conifers high in the mountains, but these adaptable thrushes are equipped to inhabit nearly any setting from residential back yards to the environs of Independence Pass. Robins leave the high country for the winter season and are early to return in spring, often arriving while the snowpack still blankets the land.

WAXWINGS, PIPITS AND TANAGERS



Cedar Waxwing

Cedar Waxwing

Bombycilla cedrorum

HABITAT }

various open and wooded habitats

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area

STATUS }

resident

This species is easily recognizable by its black mask and prominent crest. Cedar waxwings are late to nest, waiting to time the hatching of their broods with the ripening of local fruits and berries which form the basis of their diet.



American Pipit

American Pipit

Anthus rubescens

HABITAT }

alpine tundra

LOCATIONS }

Upper Lost Man Trail, summit of the Pass

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This bird is named for its quick, light *pipit* calls. Often one of the most common species on the tundra, American pipits can be distinguished from other birds by their upright posture and tail-bobbing behavior.



Western Tanager, female



Western Tanager, male

Western Tanager

Piranga ludoviciana

HABITAT }

mixed forests and shrublands up to 10,000'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Look for this colorful bird during summer in open, patchy forests, including areas where trees have been knocked down by avalanches. Western tanagers feed on insects in the forest canopy, adding fruits and berries to their menu in late summer.

FINCHES



Pine Grosbeak, female



Pine Grosbeak, male

Pine Grosbeak

Pinicola enucleator

HABITAT }

spruce and fir forests above 9,500'

LOCATIONS }

Weller Lake Trail, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail, Independence Ghost Town

STATUS }

resident

Pine grosbeaks nest in the protective cover of dense spruce and fir trees. Males are pink-red on the head, back and chest, and females are dusky yellow on the head. These birds consume grit for needed minerals and to help grind the seeds they eat. Look for them on the ground at roadsides and dirt pullouts, particularly at the Upper Lost Man trailhead.



Brown-capped Rosy-Finch, adult on the left, juvenile on the right

Brown-capped Rosy-Finch

Leucosticte australis

HABITAT }

high, alpine crags and tundra

LOCATIONS }

Upper Lost Man Trail, summit of the Pass

STATUS }

resident

These hardy finches inhabit the extreme environment of the high peaks year-round, where they nest in crevices in cliff faces, and forage on windblown insects on snowfields and seeds of tundra plants on windy ridges. Males defend floating territories around their mates rather than around their nest sites.



Cassin's Finch, female



Cassin's Finch, male

Cassin's Finch

Haemorhous cassinii

HABITAT }

pine forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Cassin's finches move about mountain forests to feed on seasonal foods ranging from pinecone seeds to insects to buds of aspens and willows. The male has a crimson crown and a clean breast, while the female is covered with fine, crisp streaks, and can easily be confused for a "mystery sparrow."



House Finch (female)



House Finch (male)

House Finch

Haemorhous mexicanus

HABITAT }

various open forest settings

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

resident

This adaptable finch inhabits many different landscapes across its North American range. House finches have curved bill profiles; coarse, blurry, brown streaks; and males have crimson plumage on their heads and upper parts.



Pine Siskin.

Pine Siskin

Spinus pinus

HABITAT }

pine forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Weller Lake Trail, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

These small finches give buzzy contact calls as flocks feed on pinecone seeds. Yellow highlights in their wings and tails are variable; some individuals may show very little yellow while others may show a lot.



Evening Grosbeak (male)



Evening Grosbeak (female)

Evening Grosbeak

Coccothraustes vespertinus

HABITAT }

open conifer and aspen forests

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos

STATUS }

resident

This bird's massive bill allows it to crush large, hard foods such as chokecherry pits and mountain ash seeds. During the nesting season, evening grosbeaks add spruce budworms and other insects to their diets.

WARBLERS



Orange-crowned Warbler

Orange-crowned Warbler

Leiothlypis celata

HABITAT }

oak mountain shrublands up to 9,500'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Keeping to the leafy cover of their shrubland habitats, orange-crowned warblers climb through all levels of the canopy to feed on caterpillars, ants, flies, and other insects. These warblers may be found together with MacGillivray's warblers.



MacGillivray's Warbler

MacGillivray's Warbler

Geothlypis tolmiei

HABITAT }

shrub thickets adjacent to riparian ecosystems

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

MacGillivray's warblers inhabit tangles of shrubs such as chokecherry, serviceberry, and snowberry in clearings and beneath stands of aspen trees in proximity to water. Notoriously difficult to see, they are best observed in early morning when males sing in the shrub canopy.



Yellow Warbler, female



Yellow Warbler, male

Yellow Warbler

Setophaga petechia

HABITAT }

riparian willows and cottonwoods

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Yellow warblers forage in constant motion as they glean leafhoppers, aphids, beetles, and other insects from foliage. This bird is North America's most widespread warbler species.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Setophaga coronata

HABITAT }

mountain forests of spruce and fir

LOCATIONS }

Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, and Lower and Upper Lost Man Trails

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Because they hop among branches and flycatch as they forage in the outer limbs of conifer trees, yellow-rumped warblers can often be easier to spot than other warblers. The local breeding subspecies of this warbler is Audubon's, and the white-throated Myrtle subspecies is often seen in spring and fall migration.



Wilson's Warbler

Wilson's Warbler

Cardellina pusilla

HABITAT }

extensive, subalpine willow thickets

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Wilson's warblers forage on caterpillars and other slow-moving insects among willow foliage. A good place to see this warbler is in the willow thickets at the beginning of the Lower Lost Man Trail.

SPARROWS



Lincoln's Sparrow

Lincoln's Sparrow

Melospiza lincolnii

HABITAT }

riparian habitats between 9,000' and treeline

LOCATIONS }

Grottos, Lincoln Creek area, Braille Trail, and Lower and Upper Lost Man Trails

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

Lincoln's sparrows forage among riparian willows, alders and birches, eating primarily caterpillars and other insect larvae. The Lincoln's has finer markings than fox and song sparrows, all of which can occur together in mid-elevations.



Song Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Melospiza melodia

HABITAT }

riparian habitats with shrubby vegetation up to 9,500'

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Grottos, Lincoln Creek area

STATUS }

resident

Song sparrows flit and hop on mud banks, among grass and within shrubs near the water's edge as they feed on invertebrates, seeds and fruits. Distinguish this bird from other sparrows by its distinctive song, coarse streaking and long tail.



Fox Sparrow

Fox Sparrow

Passerella iliaca

HABITAT }

riparian thickets of willow, alder and birch

LOCATIONS }

Difficult Creek area, Lincoln Creek area, Lower Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

This uncommon sparrow scratches among dense undergrowth to uncover food items in the leaf litter. Notice the triangular spots that form vertical streaks on the fox sparrow's upper breast.



White-crowned Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Zonotrichia leucophrys

HABITAT }

krummholz spruce stands and alpine willow thickets

LOCATIONS }

Lincoln Creek area, Lower and Upper Lost Man Trails, summit of the Pass

STATUS }

migratory, breeding

White-crowned sparrows, with their unique black-and white crown stripes, are simple to identify, and are commonly seen in the parking area at the summit of the Pass. This bird's song, a few mournful, thin notes followed by a sweet, jumbled trill, is a signature sound of the high country in summer.



Dark-eyed Junco

Dark-eyed Junco

Junco hyemalis

HABITAT }

conifer and mixed forests up to treeline

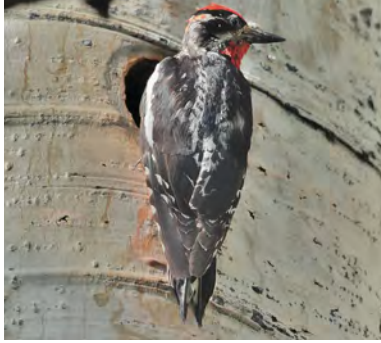
LOCATIONS }

most locations between Difficult Creek and Upper Lost Man Trail

STATUS }

resident

Unlike most other sparrows that inhabit open areas, dark-eyed juncos are forest birds, nesting beneath fallen logs or among gnarled tree roots. Listen for the junco's sweet, even-pitched trilling song in the shady forest.



INDEPENDENCE PASS FOUNDATION
ILLUSTRATED CHECKLIST
The Birds of Independence Pass

