1. Stay quiet and calm.
2. Be discreet — wear muted clothing and limit fragrances.
3. Use your ears! Listen for bird songs and calls.
4. Use binoculars to get a closer look, always keep a respectful distance from wildlife.
5. Be patient.
6. Go to where the habitat is — visit state parks and other public lands.
7. Do your homework — learn what species of birds live in the area.

The Sandhills region in Nebraska contains the largest area of stabilized grass covered dunes in the western hemisphere. Of the 13 million acres, over a million of these are wetlands. There are 1,600 Sandhill lakes, comprising around 80,000 surface acres of water. These wetland areas are important for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, providing much-needed habitat. This area also sits directly atop the Ogallala aquifer, for which the wetlands play an important role in retaining and filtering the water.

This area receives 17 - 23 inches of water annually. The sandy soil of the area makes farming difficult, so this area contains one of the largest tracts of unplowed prairie in North America. People primarily use the Sandhills region for cattle grazing. With few lights from buildings and infrastructure across the Sandhills, there is low light pollution, making the area ideal for stargazing.

**Birds of the Nebraska Sandhills**

**Identification Guide**

**Lark Sparrow**
*Candelostoma grammaticus*
Description: Chestnut and cream head, streaked brown above, pale below, black “mustache” and spot on chest, long tail with white corners.
Diet: Seeds
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Spring-fall, statewide

**Grasshopper Sparrow**
*Ammobius savannarum*
Size: L: 4.3 - 4.7 in., WS: 8.0 - 8.5 in.
Description: streaky sparrow with brown above, buff below, white eye ring, yellow lore, short tail.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Spring-fall, statewide

**Dark-eyed Junco**
*Junco hyemalis*
Size: L: 5.5 - 6.3 in., WS: 7 - 9.8 in.
Description: Variable, gray-brown back, head and chest, white belly, dark eyes, pink bill, and white outer tail feathers.
Diet: Seeds and insects
Habitat: Rural to urban
Viewing: Fall-spring, statewide

**Loggerhead Shrike**
*Lanius ludovicianus*
Size: L: 8 - 9 in., WS: 11 - 12.6 in.
Description: Songbird with a gray head/neck, hooked bill, white underside and wing-patch, black wing, tail and mask.
Diet: Insects and small animals
Habitat: Grasslands with scrub or hedgerows
Viewing: Spring-fall, statewide; winter, SE corner

---

**Beaks as Tools**

- Nectar Feeder
- Insectivore
- Granivore
- Specialist Seed Eater
- Fishing
- Fiber-Feeding
- Surface Probing
- Probing
- Chiseling
- Raptor

**NOT TO SCALE**

OutdoorNebraska.org
**Greater Prairie-chicken**
*Tympanuchus cupido*

Description: Large grouse with barred brown plumage; males have orange air sacs on their neck used in display.
Diet: Seeds and insects
Habitat: Open grasslands
Viewing: Year-round, Sandhills

**Great Blue Heron**
*Cyanocitta cristata*

Description: Tall with long legs and neck, dagger-like bill, gray body, lighter face with black stripe above eye.
Diet: Fish, frogs, small birds
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide; summer, northeast

**Trumpeter Swan**
*Cygnus buccinator*

Description: Large white bird with long neck, black on legs and bill, extending onto face.
Diet: Aquatic plants, some insects/fish
Habitat: Open areas near shallow water
Viewing: Summer, northern Sandhills

**Swainson’s Hawk**
*Buteo swainsoni*

Size: L: 19 - 22 in., WS: 46 - 54 in.
Description: Brown/gray above, white below, brown/red chest, dark back and yellow legs.
Diet: Mammals and insects
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide; summer, west

**Ringed Pheasant**
*Phasianus colchicus*

Description: Buffy cinnamon with orange air sacs on their neck used in display.
Diet: Plants and grains
Habitat: Open grasslands
Viewing: Year-round, Sandhills

**Green-winged Teal**
*Nasus americana*

Size: L: 12 - 15 in., WS: 20.5 - 23 in.
Description: Small mottled brown duck with green stripe on neck and back. Breeding males have cinnamon head with green streak on side.
Diet: Seeds, some small fish
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide; summer, northeast

**Red-tailed Hawk**
*Buteo jamaicensis*

Size: L: 18 - 22 in., WS: 45 - 52 in.
Description: Large raptor known for their rusty red tail. Plumage can vary widely, but generally dark brown above and light below.
Diet: Carnivores, mainly small mammals
Habitat: Fields to woodlands
Viewing: Year-round, statewide

**Ring-necked Pheasant**
*Phasianus colchicus*

Description: Brown shorebird with dark green wings, long legs, and long, downturned beak.
Diet: Worms, crabs, insects
Habitat: Wetlands and shortgrass prairie
Viewing: Summer, northwest

**Long-billed Curlew**
*Numenius americanus*

Description: Tall with long legs and neck, dagger-like bill, gray body, lighter face with black stripe above eye.
Diet: Fish, frogs, small birds
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide

**Eared Grebe**
*Podiceps nigricollis*

Size: L: 11.8 - 14 in., WS: 20.5 - 21.6 in.
Description: Large white bird with dark green wings, long legs, and black V on chest.
Diet: Aquatic insects, shrimp, fish
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Fall/spring, statewide; summer, western Sandhills

**Yellow-breasted Chat**
*Icteria virens*

Size: L: 7 in., WS: 8.6 in.
Description: Olive/gray above, bright yellow chest and white “spectacles”.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Shrubland
Viewing: Spring-fall, west

**Killdeer**
*Charadrius vociferus*

Description: Brown shorebird with white belly, chin, and face markings, two black chest bars and long legs.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Rural to urban
Viewing: Spring-fall, statewide

**American Avocet**
*Recurvirostra americana*

Description: Breeding males have rusty head/neck, pale gray/white through body, black on wings and back, long blue-gray legs, long black upturned bill.
Diet: Aquatic invertebrates
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide

**Western Meadowlark**
*Sturnella neglecta*

Size: L: 6.3 - 10.2 in., WS: 22 - 24 in.
Description: Short tail, flat head, long bill, brown back, yellow front, and black V on chest.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Year-round, statewide

**Western Grebe**
*Aechmophorus occidentalis*

Size: L: 21.8 - 29.5 in., WS: 31 - 34 in.
Description: Black back and face, white neck and underside, long neck and black bill.
Diet: Fish
Habitat: Wetlands
Viewing: Fall/spring, statewide; summer, western Sandhills

**Swainson’s Hawk**
*Buteo swainsoni*

Size: L: 19 - 22 in., WS: 46 - 54 in.
Description: Brown/gray above, white below, brown/red chest, dark back and yellow legs.
Diet: Mammals and insects
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Spring/fall, statewide; summer, west