**Shortgrass Prairie Region**

The shortgrass prairie region includes the southwestern corner and Panhandle of Nebraska. This area is made up of short to mixed grass prairie and the Pine Ridge. The shortgrass prairie is the driest and warmest of the Great Plains grasslands.

This region receives an average of 12 - 17 inches of rainfall annually and consists of buffalo grass and blue grama. The Pine Ridge is found in northwestern Nebraska and is dominated by ponderosa pine. More than 300 species of migratory and resident birds can be found in the shortgrass prairie region, as well as a variety of mammals, plants, reptiles, insects and other species.

**Bird Viewing Tips**

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.

**Red Crossbill**  
*Loxia curvirostra*  
*Size*: L: 5.5 - 7.9 in., WS: 11 in.  
*Description*: Stocky finch with distinct crossed bill, darker wings and males red, females yellow-green.  
*Diets*: Seeds, mainly conifer  
*Habitat*: Coniferous forest  
*Viewing*: Year-round, sporadic

**House Finch**  
*Haemorhous mexicanus*  
*Size*: L: 5.0 - 5.5 in., WS: 8.0 - 9.8 in.  
*Description*: Strong cone beak, buffy brown with darker streaks, males have red through head and chest.  
*Diets*: Seeds  
*Habitat*: Rural to urban  
*Viewing*: Year-round, statewide

**Pygmy Nuthatch**  
*Sitta pygmaea*  
*Size*: L: 3.5 - 4.3 in., WS: 7.75 in.  
*Description*: Small body with larger thin bill, light under, slate above with brown cap.  
*Diets*: Insects, some seeds  
*Habitat*: Ponderosa pine forest  
*Viewing*: Year-round, Panhandle

**American Goldfinch**  
*Spinus tristis*  
*Size*: L: 4.3 - 5.0 in., WS: 7.5 - 8.7 in.  
*Description*: Small finch with gray to orange beak and white wing bars. Males yellow and black, females tan.  
*Diets*: Seeds  
*Habitat*: Rural to urban  
*Viewing*: Year-round, statewide

**Beaks as Tools**

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

**Identification Guide**

OutdoorNebraska.org

**Birds of the Nebraska Shortgrass Prairie**
Burrowing Owl
*Athene cunicularia*
Description: Brown back with white spots, lighter chest with brown spots, white throat and eyebrows, yellow eyes and bill.
Diet: Small animals
Habitat: Grasslands, associated with prairie dog towns
Viewing: Year-round, statewide except SW corner

Turkey Vulture
*Cathartes aura*
Description: Bare red head, dark feathers, under-wings are two-toned with “fingered” tips.
Diet: Carrion
Habitat: Open areas, rural to urban
Viewing: Summer, statewide

American Kestrel
*Falco sparverius*
Size: L: 8.7 - 12.2 in., WS: 20 - 24 in.
Description: Pale spotted front, rusty spotted back, black band above tail, and black mustache. Males have slate blue wings.
Diet: Carnivore, mostly insects
Habitat: Open areas
Viewing: Year-round, Panhandle

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

Red-tailed Hawk
*Buteo jamaicensis*
Size: L: 18 - 32 in., WS: 45 - 52.4 in.
Description: Large raptor known for rusty red tail. Plumage can vary widely, but generally dark brown above and light below.
Diet: Carnivore, mainly small mammals
Habitat: Fields to woodlands
Viewing: Year-round, statewide

Gadwall
*Mareca strepera*
Description: Breeding males have rusty head/neck, pale gray/white through body, black on wings and tail. Females have white crescent behind bill.
Diet: Aquatic plants and insects
Habitat: Wetlands, plains
Viewing: Summer in SW Panhandle, spring/fall statewide

Ferruginous Hawk
*Buteo regalis*
Size: L: 22 - 27 in., WS: 52.4 - 66 in.
Description: Large raptor, broad wings with pointed tips, light to dark morphs, rusty legs.
Diet: Carnivore, small animals
Habitat: Grass to shrubland
Viewing: Spring-summer, Panhandle; winter southeast

Blue-winged Teal
*Spatula discors*
Description: Small, mottled-brown duck with wing-patch of powder blue, white, and green. Males have white crescent behind bill.
Diet: Aquatic plants and insects
Habitat: Vegetated wetlands
Viewing: Summer, statewide

Mountain Bluebird
*Sialia currucoides*
Size: L: 3.0 - 3.9 in., WS: 6.3 - 7.9 in.
Description: Large raptor with black head, back and tail. White spots on wings and tail tips. Rusty sides and white belly.
Diet: Insects, grain, and berries
Habitat: Brush, rural to urban
Viewing: Summer, Panhandle; winter, southeast

Western Meadowlark
*Sturnella neglecta*
Size: L: 6.3 - 10.2 in., WS: 22 - 24 in.
Description: Robin sized with short tail, flat head, long bill, brown back, yellow front, and black V on chest.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Grasslands
Viewing: Year-round, statewide

Western Kingbird
* Tyrannus verticalis*
Description: Small animals
Habitat: Various, rural to urban
Viewing: Year-round, western two-thirds

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
*Polioptila caerulea*
Size: L: 3.0 - 7.9 in., WS: 11 - 14.2 in.
Description: Males are bright sky blue, lighter below. Females are gray/brown with some blue on wings. Both have round bellies and thin beaks.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Open woodland
Viewing: Spring-fall, Panhandle

Black-billed Magpie
*Pica hudsonia*
Description: Black with iridescent on wings and tail. White on wing tips, back, and belly. Long tail.
Diet: Carrion, berries, insects, and grains
Habitat: Various, rural to urban
Viewing: Year-round, western two-thirds

Yellow Warbler
*Setophaga petechia*
Size: L: 4.7 - 5.0 in., WS: 6.3 - 7.9 in.
Description: Small bright yellow bird with a large black eye. Males have red streaking on chest.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Open woodland
Viewing: Spring-fall, statewide

Northern Flicker
*Colaptes auratus*
Size: L: 11 - 12 in., WS: 16.5 - 20 in.
Description: Gray/brown all over, black stripes on back, black spots and bib on front, long strong bill.
Diet: Insects
Habitat: Rural to urban, open woodland, parks, field edges
Viewing: Year-round, statewide