



Birds are awesome!

Hi I'm Sarah. I study and protect Missouri's birds. And I love my job. Why? Because birds are awesome! They fly. They sing. They come in different colors, shapes, and sizes. So climb in for a fun flight. I'm going to show you why birds are the coolest creatures on the planet.

Sarah's Guide to BIRDS

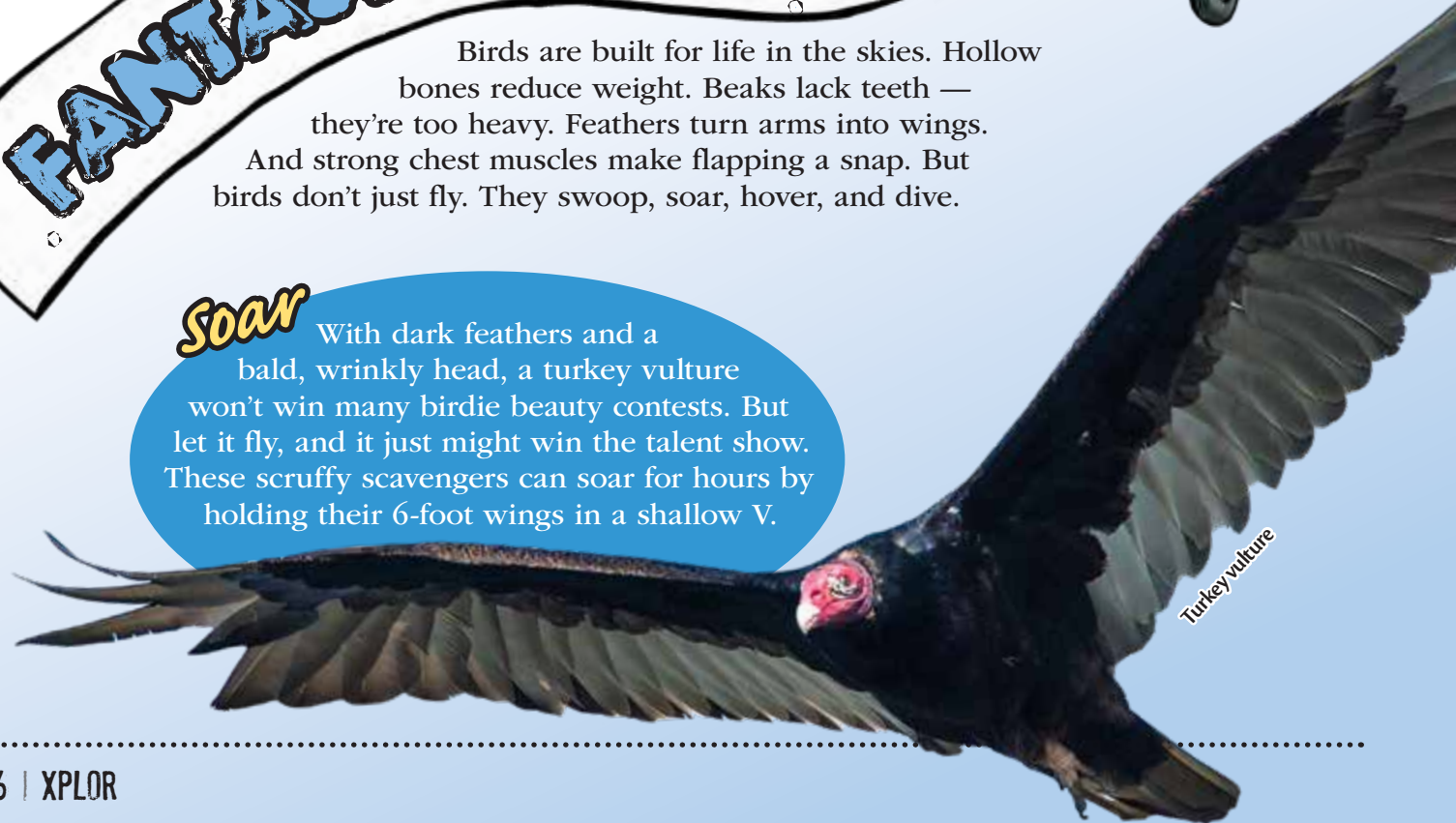
Buckle your seatbelt. We're about to go on a wild ride!



FANTASTIC FLYERS

Birds are built for life in the skies. Hollow bones reduce weight. Beaks lack teeth — they're too heavy. Feathers turn arms into wings. And strong chest muscles make flapping a snap. But birds don't just fly. They swoop, soar, hover, and dive.

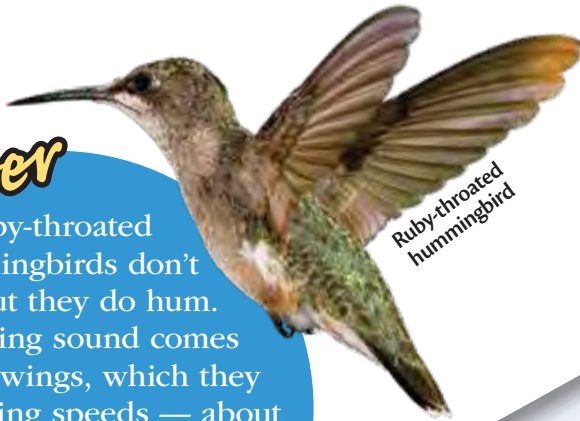
Soar With dark feathers and a bald, wrinkly head, a turkey vulture won't win many birdie beauty contests. But let it fly, and it just might win the talent show. These scruffy scavengers can soar for hours by holding their 6-foot wings in a shallow V.



Turkey vulture

Hover

Ruby-throated hummingbirds don't sing, but they do hum. The buzzing sound comes from their wings, which they flap at blinding speeds — about 50 times each second! This helps a hummer hover like a helicopter so it can sip nectar from flowers and bird feeders.



Ruby-throated hummingbird

Dive

Hang on! We've got to gun it to catch this fast flyer. Peregrine falcons are the speediest birds in the world. When one spots a yummy pigeon, it folds its wings and ... WHOOSH! Like a missile, it plunges toward its prey at 200 mph.



Peregrine falcon

MIGRATION SENSATION

A tiny transmitter helps me track where this warbler wanders. It's so small you can't see it, and the bird doesn't feel a thing.



Protecting migratory birds is a tricky business. They don't stay in one place for long. Take this **cerulean** (*sub-rue-lee-un*) **warbler** for example. During summer, it raises its babies in Missouri. But during fall, it flies to South America for winter. To thrive, warblers need healthy habitats here, there, and everywhere in between.



BIRD BUFFET

More than 300 kinds of birds turn up in the Show-Me State. And each one is equipped with a variety of tools that help it survive. To see for yourself, sneak a peek at this lineup of beaks — and eyes, wings, tails, and feet.

Beaks



Red crossbills pry open pine cones with the crisscrossed tips of their freaky beaks.



A **shoveler's** snout is like a pasta strainer. Water drains out, but seeds and insects get trapped inside for the duck to munch.



When a **pelican** wishes for fishes, it scoops them from the water with its pouchlike beak.

Eyes



Thanks to eyes that stick out from the sides of its head, a **woodcock** can see up, down, and all around.



A see-through extra eyelid slides into place to protect a bird's peepers like a pair of goggles.



An **owl's** huge eyes gather lots of light and come in handy to snatch prey at night.

Ta-da! Have I mentioned that birds are awesome?



Wings



Long, wide wings help this **red-tailed hawk** soar long distances with little effort.



A **bobwhite's** stubby wings help it change direction quickly. But they aren't good for flying far.



A **canvasback's** narrow, pointy wings let it zip through the sky at more than 60 mph.

Tails



Male **wild turkeys** fan out their tails, then strut around to charm female turkeys.



Stiff tail feathers keep a **woodpecker** from tipping over backwards while it hammers out holes.



A **scissor-tailed flycatcher** uses its forked tail to swoop and swerve like a feathered fighter jet.

Feet



Mallards use their webbed feet to paddle swiftly through the water.



A **yellow-rumped warbler's** toes are tiny but tough. Could you hang on to a branch with your feet?



Ospreys can bend their outer toes forward or backward to get a better grip on slippery fish — pretty *talon*-ted, huh?



This painted bunting wears a rainbow on its back.

FLASHY FEATHERS

As you can see, birds wear a kaleidoscope of colors. Boy birds, believe it or not, are usually more colorful than girl birds. Why? A guy's flashy feathers help him catch the eye of a mate. And a gal's understated outfit helps her stay hidden when she's sitting on a nest.

TEENY-TINY TO BIG AND MIGHTY

Birds come in an astonishing array of sizes. Missouri's smallest bird is the ruby-throated hummingbird. It weighs less than a nickel and has a wingspan of about 4 inches. At the other end of the scale, American white pelicans win the prize for longest wingspan — up to 9½ feet. And trumpeter swans, the Show-Me State's heaviest bird, tip the scales at nearly 30 pounds.



HOME TWEET HOME

From city parks to the far-flung Ozarks, almost anywhere you go you'll find a few beaked buddies to hang out with. Some birds live nearly everywhere. Others seek specific habitats in which to find food, make homes, and raise babies.



Dickcissel

Grassland

With lots of seeds and bugs, grasslands offer a buffet for birds. An upland sandpiper weaves through the wildflowers, jabbing its beak at grasshoppers and other insects. Male greater prairie-chickens stamp their feet and shake their tail feathers to charm female chickens. A dickcissel sings his name to proclaim this patch of prairie belongs to him.



Wood duck



Red-winged blackbird



Greater prairie-chicken



Upland sandpiper

Wetland

Wetland birds prefer life on the soggy side. Black-necked stilts wade through oozy mud and mucky water, snapping up aquatic creepy-crawlies. Wood ducks nest high in trees along marshes and streams. Male red-winged blackbirds sing from the tops of cattails to attract mates and warn other birds to KEEP OUT!



Black-necked stilt



Eastern bluebird

When you're using binoculars, find the bird with your eyes first. Then — without taking your peepers off that bird — bring the binoculars to your eyes.



Northern cardinal

Forest

Deep in the shady forest, a barred owl uses its keen eyes and ears to detect rodents after dark. A pileated woodpecker bashes its beak into bark to nab tree-tunneling insects and hammer out homes. American redstarts flash their bright feathers to flush insects out of hiding. Scarlet tanagers creep through the canopy, bagging buzzy bees and wasps for breakfast. And a wood thrush's sweet, flutelike song rings through the trees.



Barred owl



American redstart



Pileated woodpecker



Scarlet tanager



Wood thrush

Now that you know why flocks rock, let's all say it together: Birds are awesome!

LET'S GO BIRDING!

Missouri's wavy western prairies, rolling northern farmlands, rugged Ozark forests, and soggy Bootheel swamps offer plenty of places to see birds. But if you need help narrowing down your options, fly over to greatmissouribirdingtrail.com. There you'll find a handy map of the best birding locations in the state.



Backyard

Backyard birds don't mind sharing space with people. Eastern bluebirds raise their babies in cavities, either in a tree or a birdhouse. Cardinals crack open seeds with their brawny beaks. A black-capped chickadee lets other birds know when danger lurks nearby by singing its name: *chicka-dee-dee-dee*.



Black-capped chickadee