

NY Breeding Bird Atlas III  
[ebird.org/atlasny](http://ebird.org/atlasny)

# Guide to Fledglings

for the top 20 species reported  
during the 2<sup>nd</sup> NY BBA



Black-capped Chickadee  
Réjean Deschênes/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/66587571>





## What to look at on a fledgling

1. Plumage coloration and pattern
2. Downy feathers
3. Feathers in sheaths
4. Buffy tips or edging
5. Color of the iris (eye)
6. Bill color and shape
7. Mouth color (inside)
8. Color of the gape (edge of bill in corner of mouth) – often pink or yellow
9. Short tail (shorter than the wings)
10. Leg and feet color



## Mourning Dove

- Coloration similar to adult
- Pale edging on wing and back feathers gives scalloped look
- Tail and wings not fully grown
- A few downy feathers on the breast and undersides
- Legs and feet olive or pale pink
- Bare skin around eyes gray (not turquoise)
- Bill gape gray or slightly reddish (not red)





Fledgling

Adult male

## Downy Woodpecker

- Coloration similar to adult
- Red on forehead (forehead also red on Hairy, yellow on Black-backed)
- Black feathers on back have a grayish tinge
- Belly feathers are fluffier, less sleek
- Top of bill slightly curved (adults straight)
- Gape is cream-colored when very young





## Northern Flicker

- Coloration similar to adult, but duller
- Red patch on back of head broader
- Bands of tan and black on upper back are less distinct
- Moustachial stripe not as dark
- Black necklace is smaller
- Head and neck more gray than tan
- Bill pink when very young becoming gray by the time they fledge





## Eastern Phoebe

- Coloration similar to adult
- Yellow gape
- Buffy wing bars
- Feathers may show buffy edging on low back
- Yellowish wash to breast

## Red-eyed Vireo

- Coloration similar to adult, but duller
- Gray on upperparts and white below
- Eye stripe evident
- Eye brown (not red)
- Yellow gape
- Legs pinkish (not gray)
- Juveniles are light yellow on flanks, sides, and under tail



Juvenile

Main photo by Logan Korte/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/107999251>  
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## Blue Jay

- Plumage pattern recognizable
- Blue not as bright and black is duller than on adults
- Crest not well defined
- Pink bill (not black) with pink gape
- Upper back is gray with no barring
- Legs and feet pale gray (not black)





Red mouths



94%

## American Crow

- Coloration similar to adult
- Feathers dull dark gray (not glossy black)
- Pink gape
- Bright pink or red inside mouth
- Blue-gray eyes (not brown)
- Looser, fluffier feathers

Main photo by Linda LeRoy/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/45029711>  
Inset by Larry Joseph/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/166452801>



98%

## Black-capped Chickadee

- Coloration very similar to adult
- Feathers look fluffier
- Yellow gape







## Tree Swallow

- Plumage unlike adults
- Upperparts slaty-brown
- Lack iridescent blue of adults
- Duller white breast than adult
- Yellow gape
- Pinkish legs and feet (not brown)
- Easily confused with Rough-winged and Bank Swallows

Photo by Maryse Lessard/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/62829321>



## Barn Swallow

- Coloration similar to adult
- Duller overall and forehead and throat not as deep rusty
- Largely lacks metallic sheen
- Yellow gape
- Bill pinkish-brown (not black)
- Short streamers (outer tail feathers)







## Gray Catbird

- Coloration similar to adult
- All gray with a brown wash
- Lacks distinctive black cap of adult
- Rust under the tail not as rich
- Feathers fluffier (more filamentous)
- Yellow gape
- Legs and feet pinkish (not black)

Photo by Jeremy Collison/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/45029711>





## American Robin

- Black head and red belly just like adults
- Usually show white supercilium
- Spotted belly (all members of the thrush family)
- Pale buffy spots on upper back
- White throat
- Yellow gape

Photo by Alex Lamoureaux/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/29362281>





## Cedar Waxwing

- Coloration unlike adult
- Overall grayer
- Little to no crest
- Black patch around eye duller
- Smaller yellow tips on tail feathers
- Fewer waxy tips
- Belly pale with brown streaks
- Brown bill (not black) with pale yellow gape
- Brown legs and feet (not black)

Photo by Drew Weber/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/108791161>



94%

## American Goldfinch

- Color pattern reminiscent of adult
- Buffy brown above and pale buffy yellow below
- Black wings with buffy barring (not white)
- Yellow gape (looks pink in older fledglings because mouth is pink)
- Gray-brown bill (not yellow-orange)







## Chipping Sparrow

- Coloration unlike adult
- Light gray belly with thin dark streaks (all young sparrows have a streaked belly)
- Crown streaked dark brown and buff (no red cap)
- Upperparts dark brown with buffy edging
- May show faint buffy supercilium
- Pale, warm brown bill
- Yellow gape
- Pinkish legs and feet

Photos by Fyn Kynd/Macaulay Library

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/113181211>

<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/113181181>



## Song Sparrow

- Coloration reminiscent of adult
- More streaking on belly
- Facial markings less distinct
- Narrowly striped cap without reddish tint seen on adults
- Upper back feathers and wing coverts have buffy tips
- Yellow gape
- Legs and feet pinkish to light brown (not medium-dark brown)

Photo by Amanda Guercio/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/59533861>



## Red-winged Blackbird

- Coloration similar to adult female, but duller and pale parts yellower
- Yellow around eye, on cheek, and the throat (not gray)
- Yellow or buffy underparts with narrower streaks
- No epaulet (shoulder patch)
- Buffy edging on back and wings
- Pink gape
- Light-dark brown bill (not black as in adult males)





## Common Grackle

- Coloration unlike adults
- Dull gray-brown plumage lacks iridescence of adults
- Faint streaking on breast
- Body feathers show slightly lighter brown edging
- Eyes brown (not yellow)
- Brown bill (not black)
- Pink gape
- Brown legs and feet (not black)

Photo by Heather Wolf/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/162886231>





## Common Yellowthroat

- Coloration somewhat like adult female
- Olive brown upperparts, wing feathers edged with olive green
- Throat and upper breast tawny and lack yellow, yellow wash on lower belly and under tail
- Pale buffy eye ring
- Bill pinkish to light brown (not brown or black)
- Yellow gape
- Legs and feet pale pink (not dark pink or brown)

Photo by Bridget Spencer/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/164878321>



## Yellow Warbler

- Coloration unlike adults
- Olive gray upperparts with bright lemon yellow edging on wings
- Pale gray underparts with yellow wash, lacks any streaking
- Black eye stands out (like adults)
- Pinkish bill (not black)
- Yellow gape
- Light pink legs and feet (not tawny yellow)

Photo by Brian Tinker/Macaulay Library  
<https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/166378271>





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Compiled for NY BBA III



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Primary references: Birds of the World & Macaulay Library