

Birds in the Village, Today and 1865

Appomattox Court House National Historic Park covers 1,743 acres and provides a habitat for at least 99 bird species. As you enjoy your visit, keep an eye out for the bird species that are commonly found in the historic village:



Eastern Meadowlark

- Mourning dove**
10.5" bird with long tail
brown w/ black spots; buff belly
purple-green sheen on neck
- Eastern meadowlark**
8.5" bird
brown and white w/ black stripes
yellow belly, black V on chest
- Cedar waxwing**
6" bird
dark brown w/ yellowish belly
black eye patch/chin; red wing bar
- Chipping sparrow**
5" bird with slim, forked tail
rusty brown w/gray face & belly
black line passes through eye
- Carolina wren**
5" bird with long tail held upright
rusty brown w/ buff belly
white throat and bars
- House finch**
5" bird with long tail
red forehead, breast, rump
brown wings, tail
- Grasshopper sparrow**
4.5" bird with short tail
brown; white stripe on head
poor flier, flits close to ground
- Northern cardinal**
8" bird with long tail
red plumage; black face mask
crested head
- American crow**
17" bird with squared tail
completely black plumage
- Common grackle**
11" bird, forms large flocks
black; purple to green sheen
long beak, very long tail
- European starling**
6" bird, forms large flocks
black with white flecks
yellow bill
- Orchard oriole**
6"bird with sharply pointed beak
male: black with brown/red belly
female: gray with yellow belly
- Downy woodpecker**
6" bird with red pom-pom on head
Black w/ white spots; white belly
white stripes on face
- Northern mockingbird**
9" bird with long black tail
yellow eye; gray plumage
white belly, wing bar, wing patch
- American robin**
8.5" bird with yellow bill
gray w/ dull red belly
black head
- Tufted titmouse**
5" bird with crested head
gray w/ white belly
found in small flocks
- Carolina chickadee**
4" bird
gray w/ gray-white belly
white face; black crown, throat
- Blue grosbeak**
6" bird
blue plumage with brown belly
black face mask; brown wing bar
- Eastern bluebird**
5.5" bird
blue w/ white belly
orange-red throat, breast, sides
- Indigo bunting**
4.5" bird, likes shrubby areas
dark blue plumage
wings, tail almost black
- Red-eyed vireo**
5" bird with red eye
olive-green w/ white belly
gray crown
- Common yellowthroat**
4" bird
olive w/yellow throat and breast
black face mask; belly faded white

Birds of 1865 and Birds of Today

European starling: While today it is the bird most commonly found in the village, the Civil War soldier would have been unfamiliar with the European starling. Since its introduction in 1890, the invasive starling has spread across much of North America and has contributed to the decline of many native bird populations.

House finch: The house finch is an invasive species that is native to the western U.S, but was released in the region in 1940 by a pet trader. Since the diet of the house finch consists mainly of seeds, the eastern population is largely sustained by backyard feeders. The native birds are impacted mainly by a loss of nesting cavities.

Field sparrow: The field sparrow is a native bird that relies on shrubby grasslands for food and nesting space. In 1865, the field sparrow was probably a common sight, but is declining today due to modern farming techniques. The practice of leaving fields fallow for several years to nourish the soil is little used. The loss of such habitat has led to a decline of field sparrows across the country. Today, one field at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park is managed for the success of field sparrows. This field, located about one-half mile from the village is alive with the field sparrow song during the spring and summer.

The landscape of the historic village is not the same today as it was in 1865. At the time of the surrender, much of the original forest had been cleared for fields, which were divided into small plots by fences and hedgerows. Grassland birds would have been plentiful. By the mid-1900s, however, farming had decreased, forests were returning, and new grasses, such as fescues were planted for hay. Also, diseases and non-native plant and animal species were introduced. These changes affected the habitat of many bird species. While many of the birds seen today would have been common in 1865, others such as starlings would not have been here. Some birds that were common in 1865 are rare today.

Bob-white quail: The bob-white quail occupies a habitat niche that consists of shrubby grasslands. This specific composition makes the bob-white quail population highly sensitive to changes in land use. The quail benefited from the conversion of dense forest to farmland and pasture. In 1865, the open lands were separated by hedgerows, and were riddled with weedy patches and young shrubs, a combination that supported large numbers of quail. Bob-white quail have steadily declined as some of the open land has reverted to forest and farming changes have created a uniform environment on cropland and lawns.

Passenger pigeon / Carolina parakeet: Both bird species would have been found in the region in the early to mid-1800s, but are long since extinct. The birds were adapted to the Eastern forest, and the conversion to farmland resulted in a loss of safe nesting grounds and food sources. The Carolina parakeet became extinct in 1918, after its wild population was decimated by feather hunters, pet traders, and extermination by local farmers. The passenger pigeon became extinct in 1914, as it was unable to overcome the loss of habitat and market hunting pressure.

Eastern meadowlark: The eastern meadowlark is a grassland bird that is common today, and would also have been familiar to the Civil War soldiers. The male meadowlark likes to sing from solitary trees or fence posts around the nesting site, which makes this bird well adapted to both the present and historic landscape. Eastern meadowlarks can frequently be heard singing from perches around the Lafayette Meeks gravesite as well as the Gordon-Chamberlain Salute site