

BIRDS OF CARL SCHURZ PARK

Pastels and photos by Jay Zemann

Written by Banford Weissmann



Lisa Zemann

Joseph (Jay) Zemann grew up in NYC and graduated from Hunter College with highest honors. City parks like Carl Schurz inspire him.

His pieces have been exhibited in Lincoln Center and National Academy; many are held in private collections.

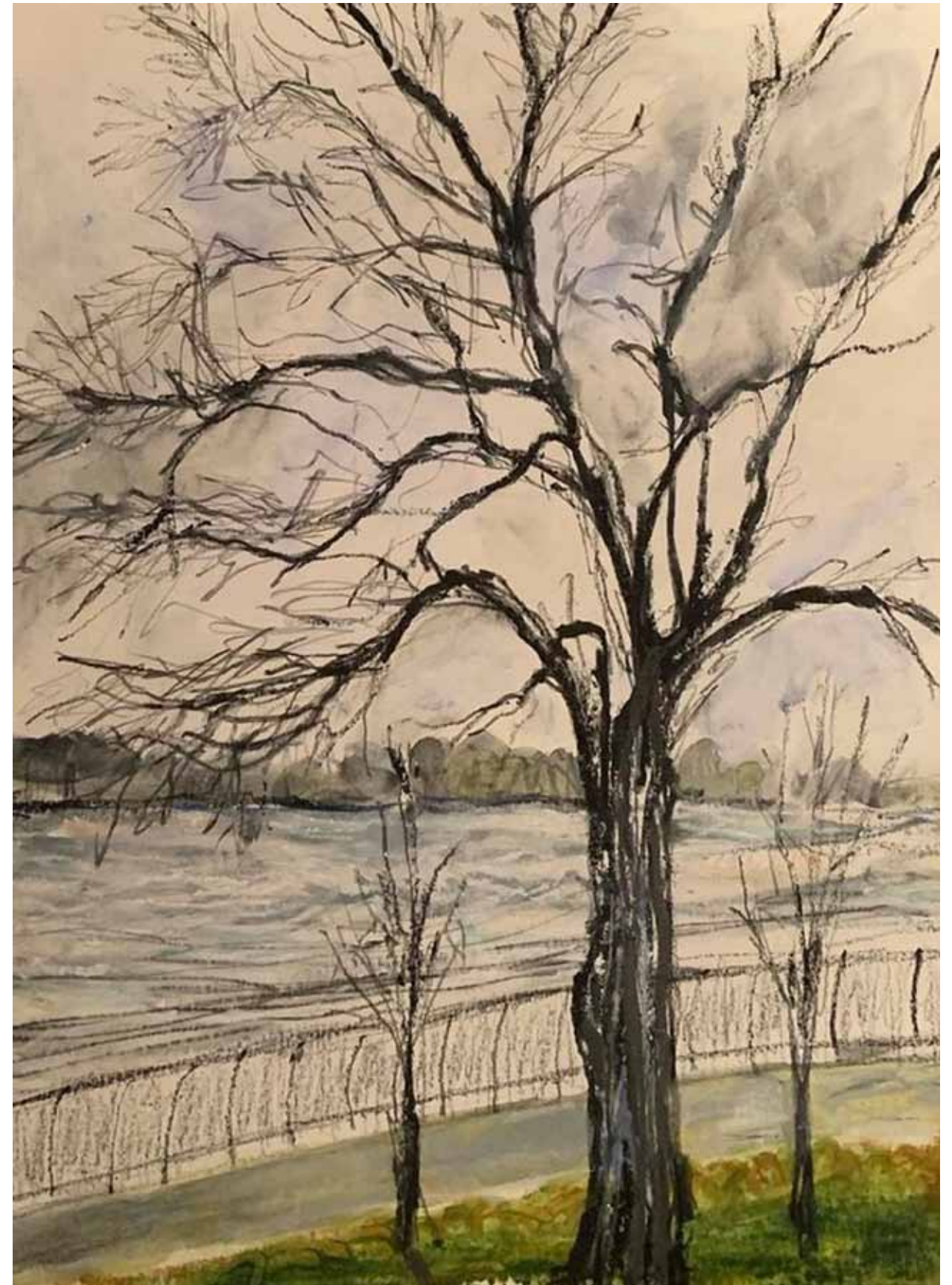
He studied jazz sax and flute at Juilliard and Lucy Moses and plays regularly at local restaurants.

His avid birding fits perfectly with his passion for art and music.

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Pastels and photos by Jay Zemann
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DEDICATION

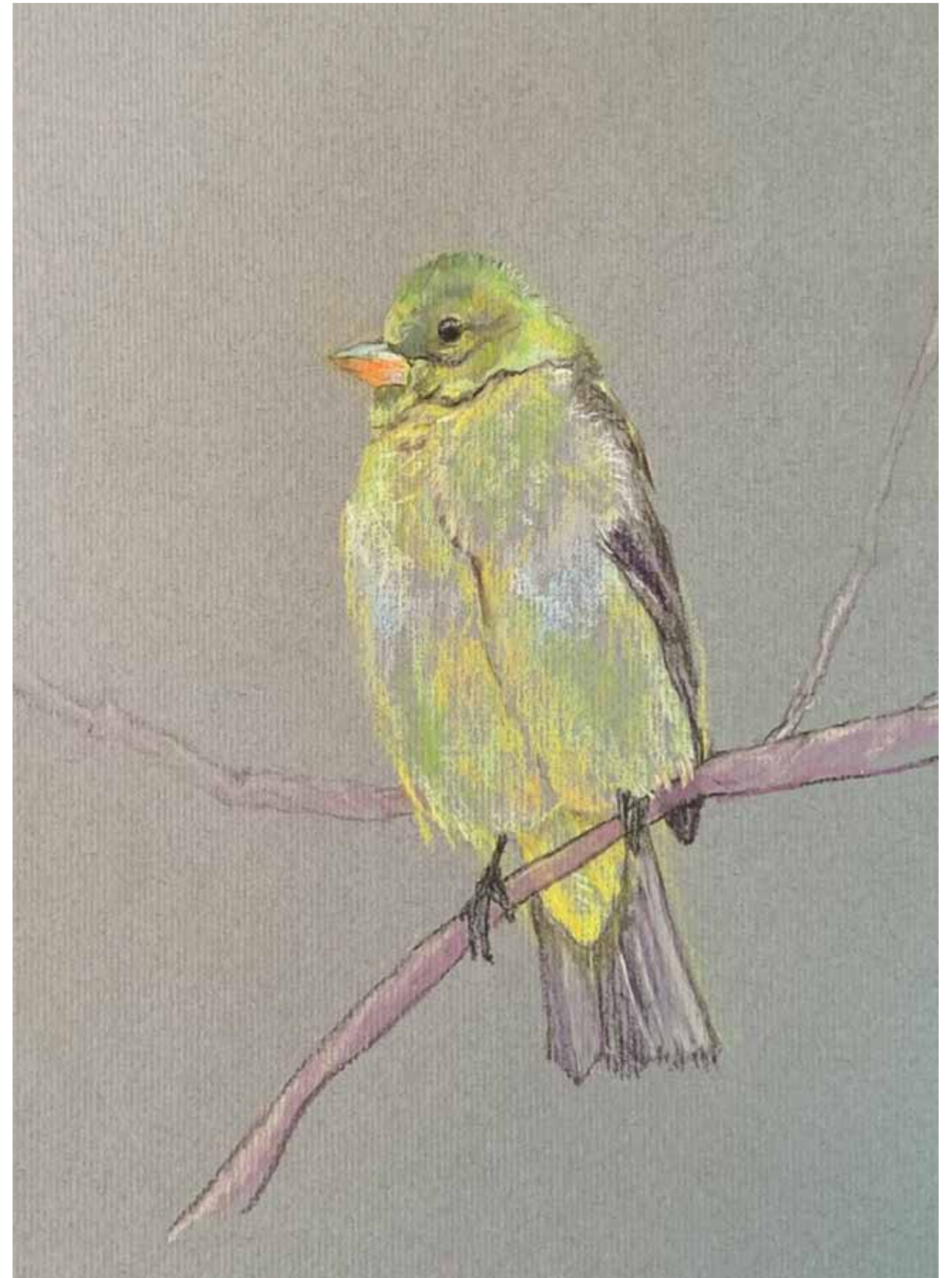
Jay Zemann



On December 11, 2020, I spotted an unusual greenish-yellow bird on the upper branches of a Siberian elm tree in Carl Schurz Park. It was identified, with Gabriel Willow's help, as a Western Tanager. Aurora, as I named her, was far off her migration route. Normally, she would have flown through western North America, but for unknown reasons got way off-track. The Conservancy and I decided to help feed her through the winter, with a diet appropriate for Western Tanagers. She flourished. Over those four months, during the pandemic, she brought joy to the many birders and photographers who came from near and far to see her. Enduring friendships developed. After spring arrived, Aurora flew back west. She was missed.

On November 23, 2021, I spotted Aurora again, on the tree where we had put her feeder log the year before. The emotional connection deepened with her surprise return. We provided food for her, she did well, and once again departed in spring. Although Aurora has not been seen since, she left me with a deep appreciation of nature and the community she brought together. I miss her indomitable spirit.

Watch a video tribute to her called "The Unexpected Guest" on Carl Schurz Park Conservancy's YouTube channel.



FOREWORD

Gabriel Willow

New York City - perhaps not first thought of for its wildlife. Nightlife, sure. But sirens and car alarms, not birdsong. Sightseeing boats, not whales. Pigeons and rats, but are these really wildlife?

These impressions are starting to change, however. New York City is located not just at the nexus of human travel and culture in the Eastern US but is also at the center of wildlife movement and diversity in the region.

NYC is located on the Atlantic Flyway, one of the great migratory flyways of birds on the continent - migratory birds follow the coastline north in the spring, and south again in the fall. NYC is located at an inflection point where the New England coast, which is largely east-west in orientation, bends due south into the Mid-Atlantic region. Birds funnel into the city along Long Island Sound and the coastal plain east of Appalachia.

On a busy migratory night (more birds migrate at night than during the day), over one million birds may be passing over the city. As dawn breaks, they look for places to land, rest, and feed. For young southbound birds in the fall, this would be their first migration, and potentially their first time encountering an urban landscape. A city can be a dangerous and bewildering place for a migrating bird, with its unfamiliar sounds and tall reflective buildings. They seek out the welcoming oases of city parks, gardens, and other green spaces.

A warbler or tanager following the edge of Long Island Sound may find itself flying over a series of bridges, then a stretch of turbulent water we know as Hell Gate. Jutting out into a bend in the sound is a small green space with a good diversity of trees, flowers, and even a fresh water source in the form of a leaky fountain. The small songbirds alight there, finding insects, fruit, and nectar to eat, and welcome shade, shelter, and rest. This is Carl Schurz Park. These birds' ancestors likely landed here as well, when there was no city nor city park here, but hills and forests with villages inhabited by the Lenape people who gave Manhattan its name (Manahatta, the 'island of many hills').

A large house set into the park is the home of New York City's mayor, but the birds are surely oblivious to this. However, alert observers that they are, the birds may notice a genial man with a moustache watching them back, binoculars around his neck and camera in hand. This is Joseph aka Jay, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood who

walks in the park often, closely observing its birdlife. I met Jay when I started leading regular bird-walks for Carl Schurz Park Conservancy - he joined the walks where his keen artist's eye and good humor were always a welcome addition.

Jay is a painter and jazz musician in addition to being a photographer. While anyone can observe and enjoy birds (part of the beauty of the hobby), Jay's musically trained ear and artistic background surely give him a particularly insightful window into their world of sound and color. Jay has channeled his passion for the natural world and regular walks in his beloved local park into beautiful photographs and paintings of the birds found in Carl Schurz Park. He also discovered the park's most noteworthy avian visitor to date: a female Western Tanager, normally found from the Rocky Mountains westward, that appeared in the park one winter and then remained, far from the tropical wintering grounds typical for the species. He worked with the Conservancy to put up feeders for her and the other birds in the park, and she must have appreciated the effort: she returned the following year.

In these pages, you can join Jay through the seasons in the park and enjoy the beautiful images of the birds he loves. If you're in the neighborhood, you too can walk in the park and experience its birdlife, particularly abundant on a morning during migration season. Perhaps you'll even see Jay!



INTRODUCTION

Banford Weissmann

As this book goes to press, a total of 155 different bird species have been spotted in Carl Schurz Park. Some, like Northern Cardinals and American Robins, build nests in the park and can be seen year-round. Others are migratory and stay in the park for a shorter period of time - anywhere from one day to several weeks. If you're lucky, you might see a Scarlet Tanager high up in the trees in springtime, or a flock of Cedar Waxwings eating fruit from the park's shrubs in fall.

In this book, you will be introduced to 41 of the bird species found in the park. Their images were captured beautifully through pastels and photos by artist Jay Zemann.

You'll learn unique facts about each species, find out what they eat, and discover the best time to find them here. You'll get to know your avian neighbors and begin to recognize more of them when you walk through the park.

In addition, we have included a couple of elements to make the book interactive. We encourage you to use the birdsong QR code found on the Table of Contents page. Often, you'll hear a bird before you see it. And when you know what a bird sounds like, it is easier to identify. Also, we have included a separate checklist of all the birds that have been identified in the park, to date. (You can also download one from the Conservancy's website.) Take it with you to the park and see how many birds you can check off the list!

The Conservancy is focused on providing appropriate habitat for the birds that travel through Carl Schurz Park. We plant predominantly native plants, most of which provide food for birds; shrubs and trees that produce fruits or nuts, and perennials and grasses that produce seeds. We leave leaves and sticks in the gardens to build healthy soil, and we don't use pesticides or herbicides. These efforts create beneficial habitats for insects, which is important because insects are the most vital source of protein for birds. When you learn that a baby bird can eat hundreds of caterpillars each day, you see that this work is crucial.

Enjoy the book! We hope that it helps you discover a wonderful new way to appreciate the park.

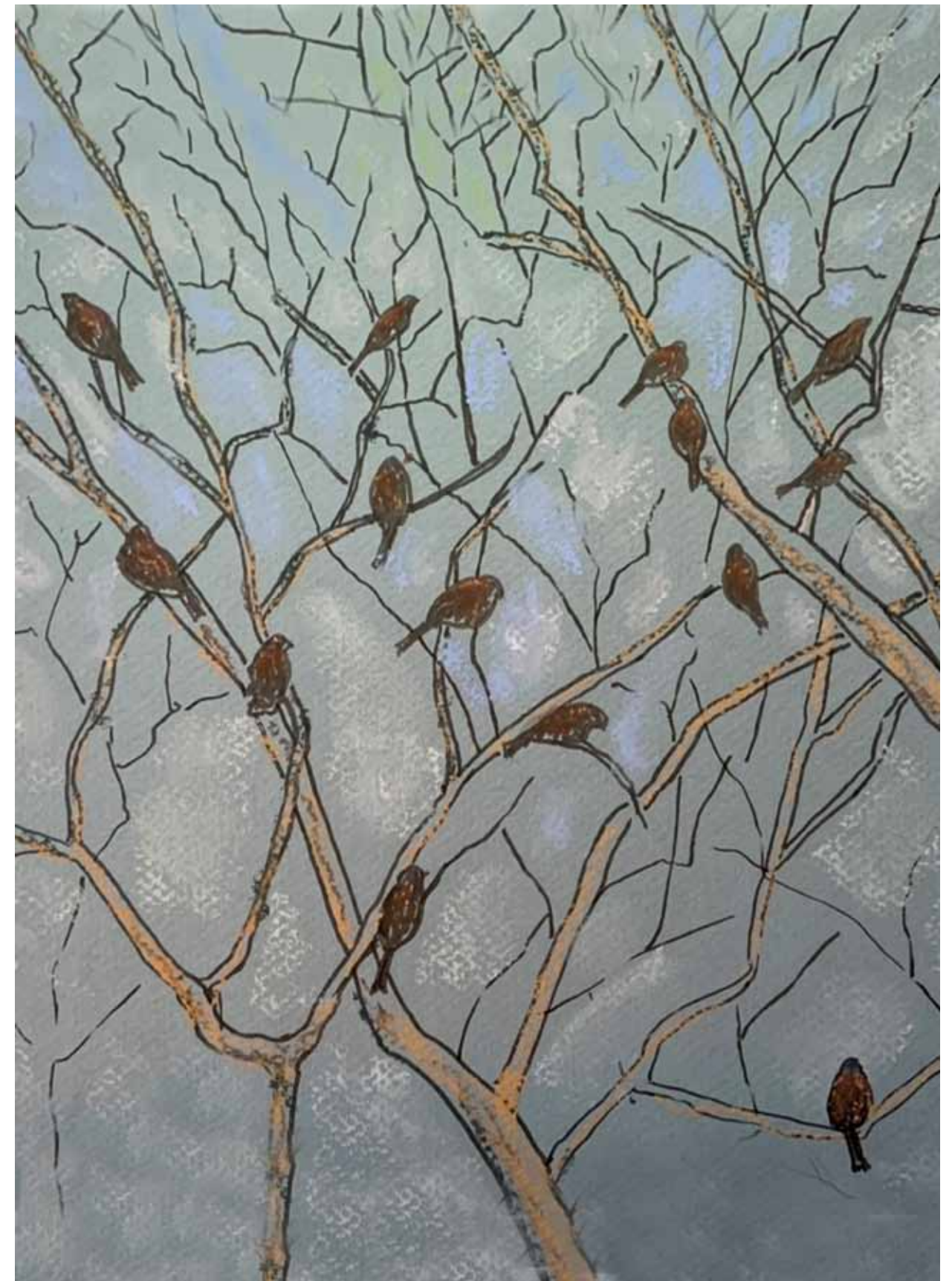


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Use the QR code below to access songs for each of the birds in the book.



AMERICAN CROW

Corvus brachyrhynchos



LENGTH
15 – 20 inches long

LIFESPAN
up to 18 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

American Crows are intelligent and curious with excellent memories. They have been shown to solve logistical puzzles and make tools. Social bonds are strong among Crows, and their offspring will help parents raise younger siblings for up to 5 years. Large groups, called “murders,” may include thousands of American Crows and they will chase away birds of prey like hawks and owls. Being omnivores, they eat everything from seeds and berries to eggs, carrion, and even babies of other bird species. You will see them in wooded areas tossing aside leaves and sticks with their beaks searching for insects.



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

Spinus tristis

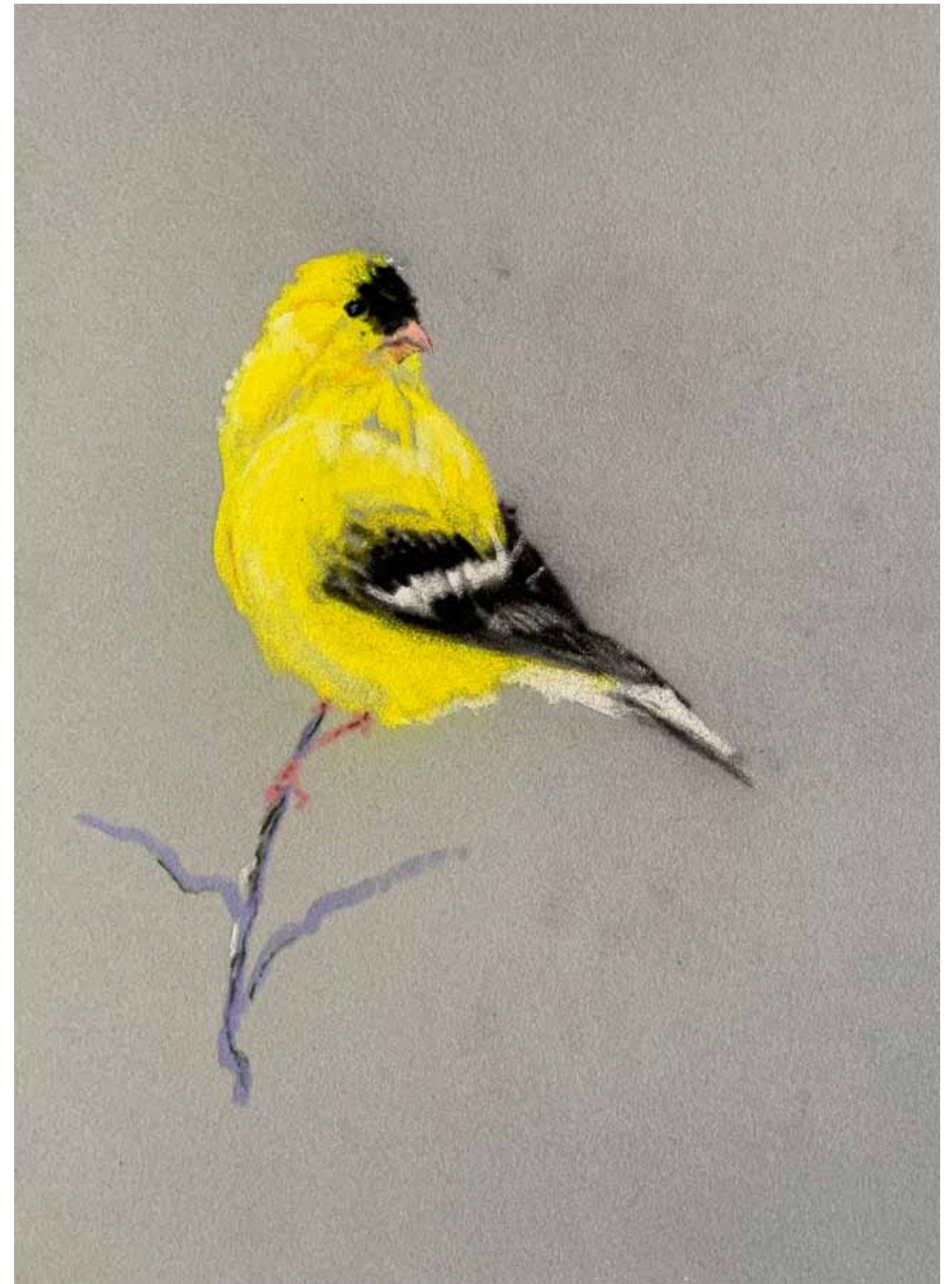


LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 11 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

American Goldfinches are unusual songbirds in that they can sing and fly at the same time. Nesting season is later for Goldfinches than other birds. Their nests, built by the females in July and August, are attached to branches with spider silk, and the interiors are lined with later-blooming flowers like asters and thistles. Seeds from these same types of composite flowers make up the bulk of their diet. You might find Goldfinches among perennial gardens in the park.



AMERICAN REDSTART

Setophaga ruticilla



LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
11 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
May, August – October

Constantly on the move, American Redstarts flit among branches while swiftly fanning and closing their tails. They are one of the most successful warblers at catching flying insects. One particular tactic they use is to flash their colorful plumage, which startles the insects and makes them easier to grab. Redstarts will strike their prey against a limb before eating it. In late spring, they can be seen eating fruits such as those found on serviceberry shrubs in the park.



AMERICAN ROBIN

Turdus migratorius

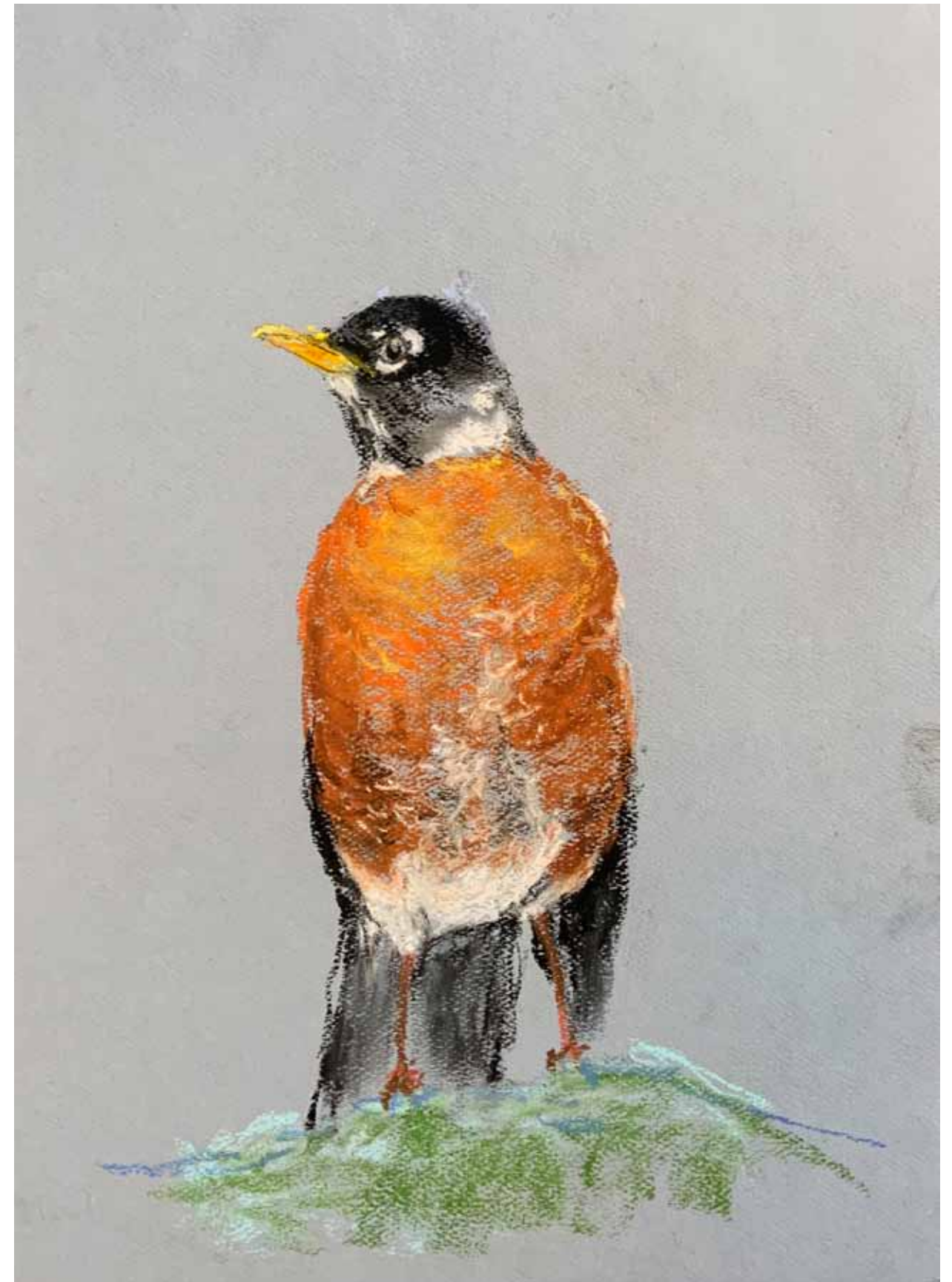


LENGTH
9 – 11 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 14 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Robins are a familiar sight on lawns pulling worms from the ground, or in trees and shrubs eating hanging fruit. Crabapples are some of their favorites in fall. The American Robin is actually a type of thrush – when young, Robins have spotted patterns on their chest typical of thrushes, but after about a year, those marks fade and the Robin's breast turns red. Early settlers named the American Robin after the European Robin Redbreast even though the birds are not related. Robins lay more than one set of eggs each year; a male will feed the fledglings while the female goes to build the second nest.



BALTIMORE ORIOLE

Icterus galbula



LENGTH
7 – 8 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 13 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – May,
September – December

Baltimore Orioles like to eat fruit that is very ripe, tearing through the skin with their beaks and lapping up the juice with their tongues. In fall, you may find them in the crabapple trees or the wooded areas in the park where many fruit-bearing shrubs have been planted. Otherwise, they will be in treetops looking for insects. Orioles help control pest species, eating webworms, tent moth caterpillars and gypsy moth caterpillars. Their unusual nests, which can take more than a week to build, look like baskets hanging from limbs high up in trees.



BARN SWALLOW

Hirundo rustica

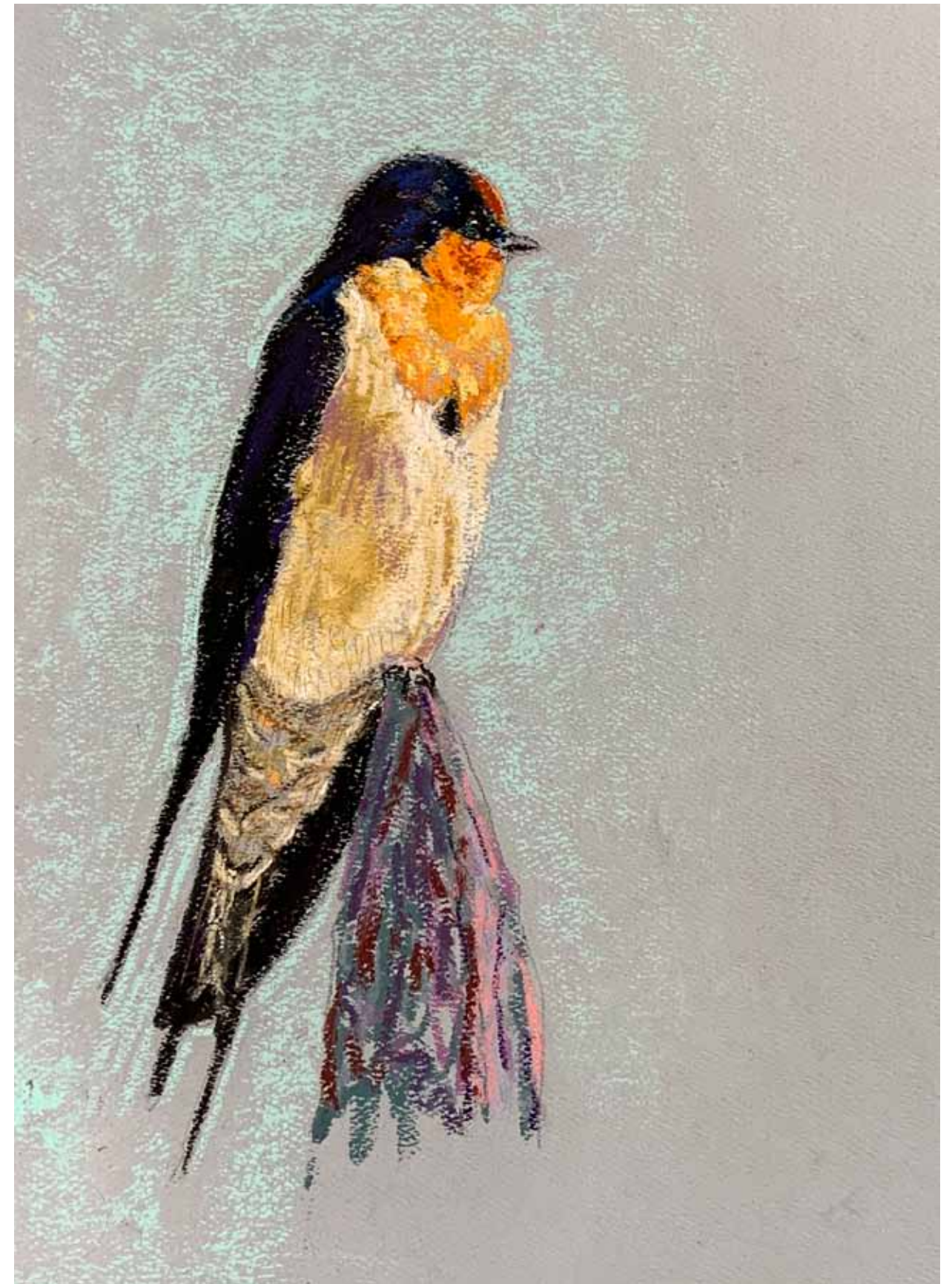


LENGTH
6 – 8 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 10 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – August

Barn Swallows build nests on man-made structures, coating the outside nest walls with mud scraped from the ground, and lining the insides with grass they collect. Swallows eat while in flight, their diet consisting almost entirely of insects caught in the air. They swoop low over grassy areas looking for food, and will skim the water's surface to drink. Sometimes, young babies are fed by Swallows other than their parents. When migrating, they travel great distances with a range from Alaska to Argentina, occasionally flying south via Caribbean islands.



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Poecile atricapillus



LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
October – April

Black-capped Chickadees are active feeders and will store thousands of seeds in a wide assortment of places. Even with such a tiny brain, Chickadees are able to remember where those seeds are stored because they can discard old brain neurons each year and replace them with new ones. They tend to perch in branches of small trees, so despite their size, it can be easy to spot them, especially in cooler seasons. When a Chickadee makes an alarm call warning of a predator, other birds like kinglets, nuthatches and warblers will understand and respond to it.



BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER

Setophaga caerulescens



LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 10 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – May,
September – October

The bold color on the male Black-throated Blue Warbler remains year-round, unlike many other songbirds whose colors become dull over winter. The females look entirely different from the males except for a distinctive white marking on their wings that looks like a pocket square. Usually, warblers can be found in the tops of trees, but the Black-throated Blue Warbler stays closer to the ground in dense, shrubby areas. Because they tend to take their time looking for insects to eat, they can be spotted more easily. Sometimes they steal food from spiderwebs.



BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER

Mniotilta varia

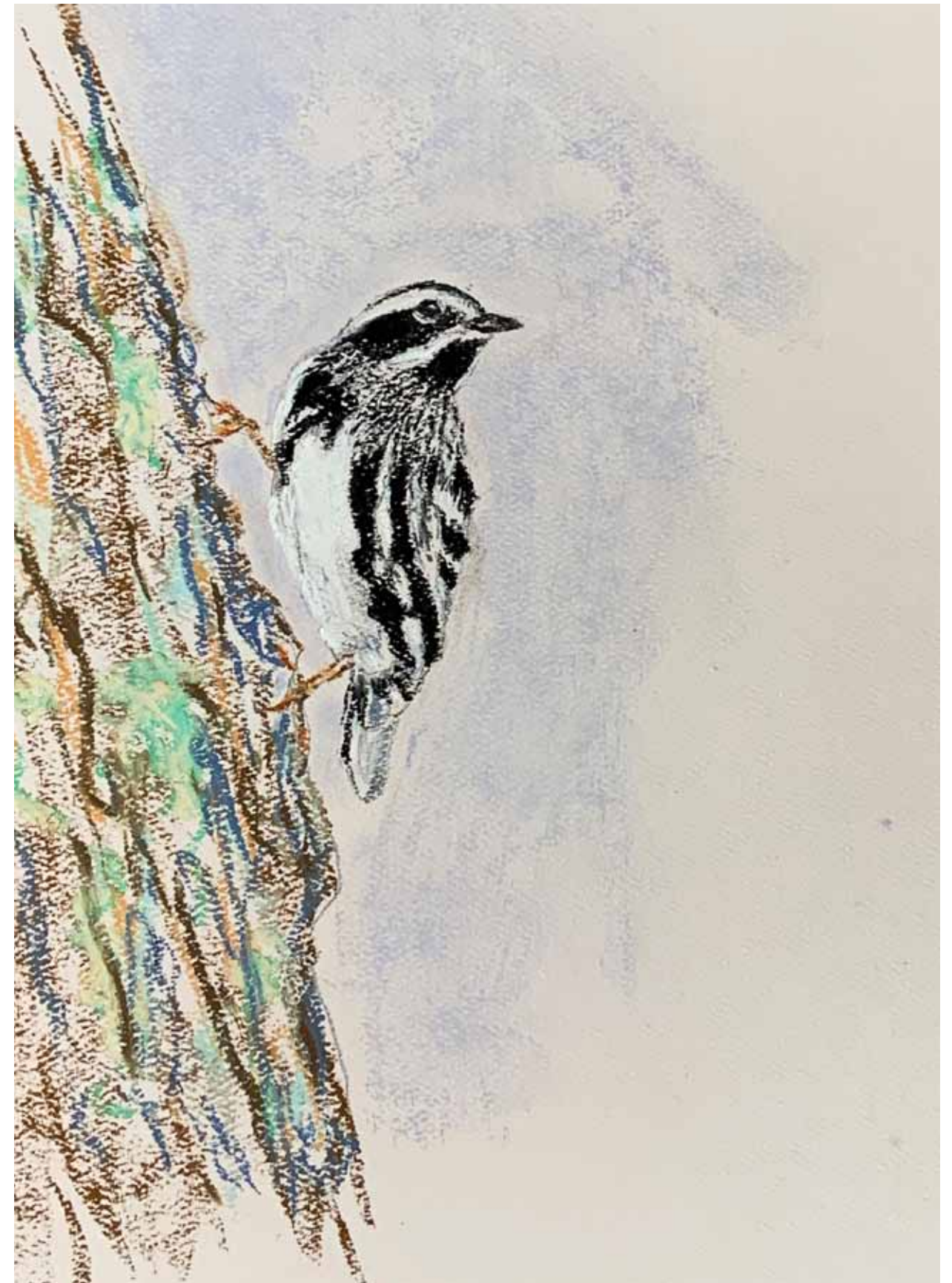


LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – May,
August – October

Using elongated and enlarged back toes and claws, Black and White Warblers can walk up, down and around tree trunks searching for insects that have burrowed in the bark and branches. One of the earliest migrants to arrive in spring, Black and White Warblers can often be found on mature elm trees. They build nests on the ground, making them vulnerable to predators like raccoons and snakes. To escape predators, fledglings must be able to get moving at an early age. Sometimes, they leave the nest after only 8 days, even before they can fly.



BROWN CREEPER

Certhia americana



LENGTH
4 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 6 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
March – April,
September – October

When Brown Creepers search for insects to eat, they start at the base of a tree and spiral their way up, poking at the bark with their beaks. Once at the top, they fly down, either to the bottom of the same tree or one nearby and start working their way up again. The trees where they forage tend to be mature with lots of crevices. Their curved beaks help them pluck insects from the bark's furrows. Their coloring helps them hide from predators. They just spread their wings over the bark and keep still.



CANADA GOOSE

Branta canadensis

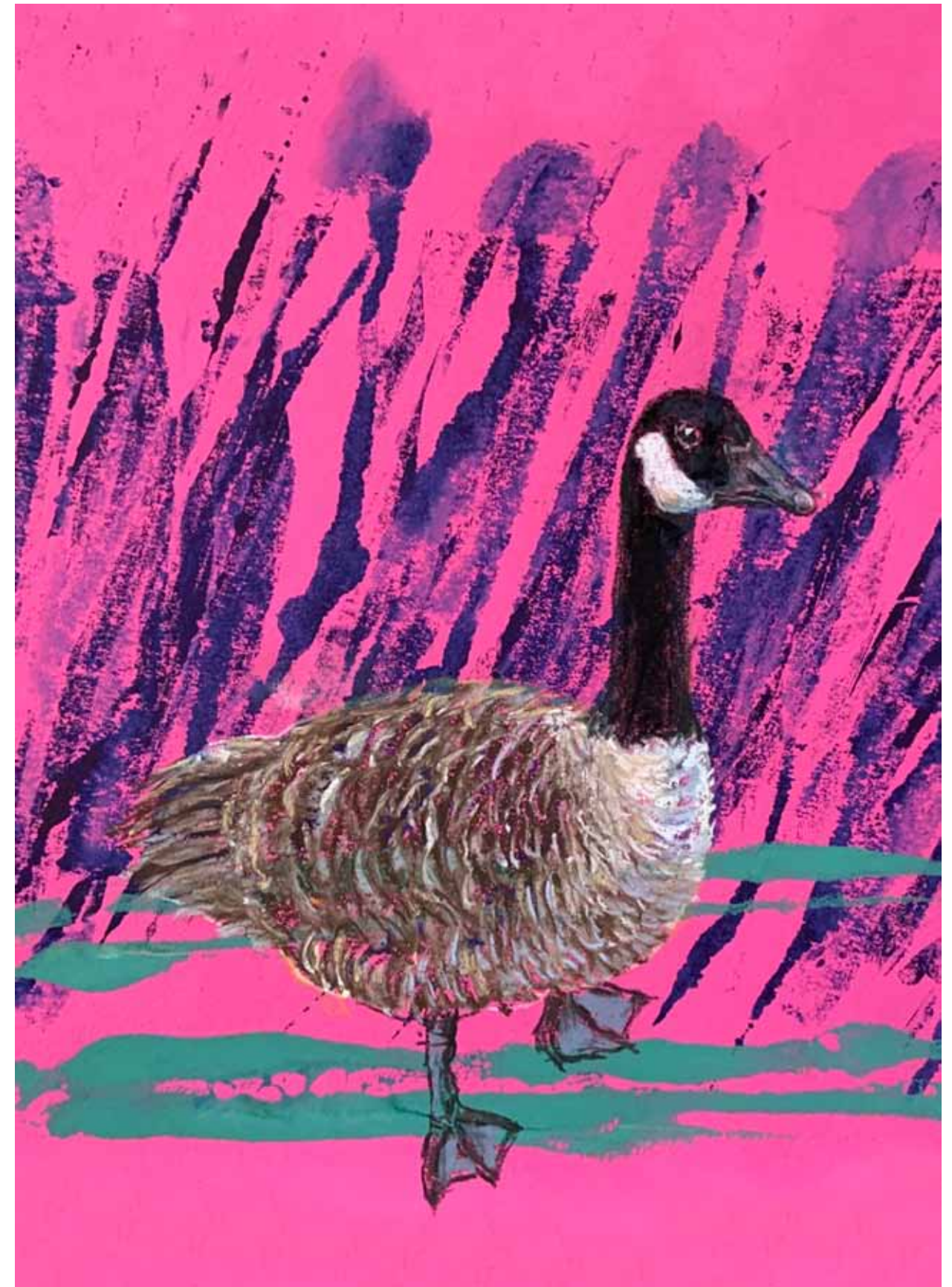


LENGTH
30 – 43 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 34 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

After being hunted almost to extinction in the early 20th century, Canada Geese were spotted near Rochester, MN in the 1960's. Through conservation efforts, populations have rebounded. Geese prefer to feed on the ground in open areas, grazing on new grasses like those found on lawns and sports fields. When flocks come through, you'll notice them gathering on the fields on Randall's Island. With such large bodies, they save energy by flying in V-shaped patterns, drafting behind the bird in front.



CAROLINA WREN

Thryothorus ludovicianus



LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 8 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Carolina Wrens are secretive and shy, typically hiding in shrubby areas of the park. But when they sing, they will perch proudly on open branches. Though they move very quickly, they can't fly for long distances. During breeding season, Carolina Wrens will build multiple nests to throw off predators from the location of the nest containing eggs. The nests are cup-shaped and domed, built of grasses and discarded materials like old cloth and ribbons. Sometimes, they'll build their nests in old clothing items. In warm months, their diet may include small snakes and lizards.



CEDAR WAXWING

Bombycilla cedrorum

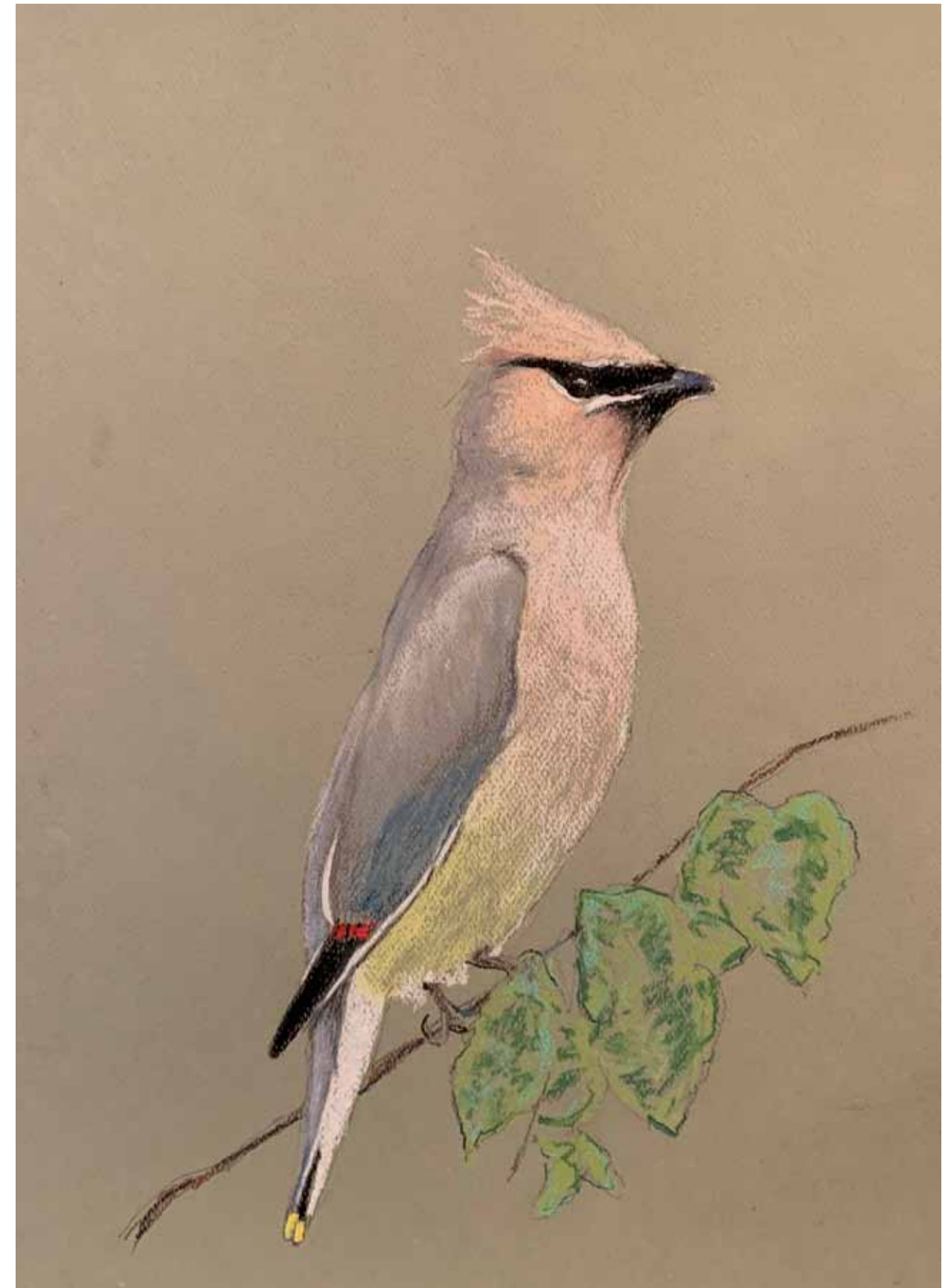


LENGTH
6 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 8 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Cedar Waxwings get their name from the waxy red secretions on the tips of their feathers that look like sealing wax. Their diet consists almost exclusively of berries and fruit like those found on serviceberries and pyracanthas. Sometimes they eat over-ripe fruit that has begun to ferment and become intoxicated. Waxings are very communal, traveling in groups. Because they migrate during the day, you are likely to see them on the move, descending on fruit-laden shrubs.



COMMON GRACKLE

Quiscalus quiscula

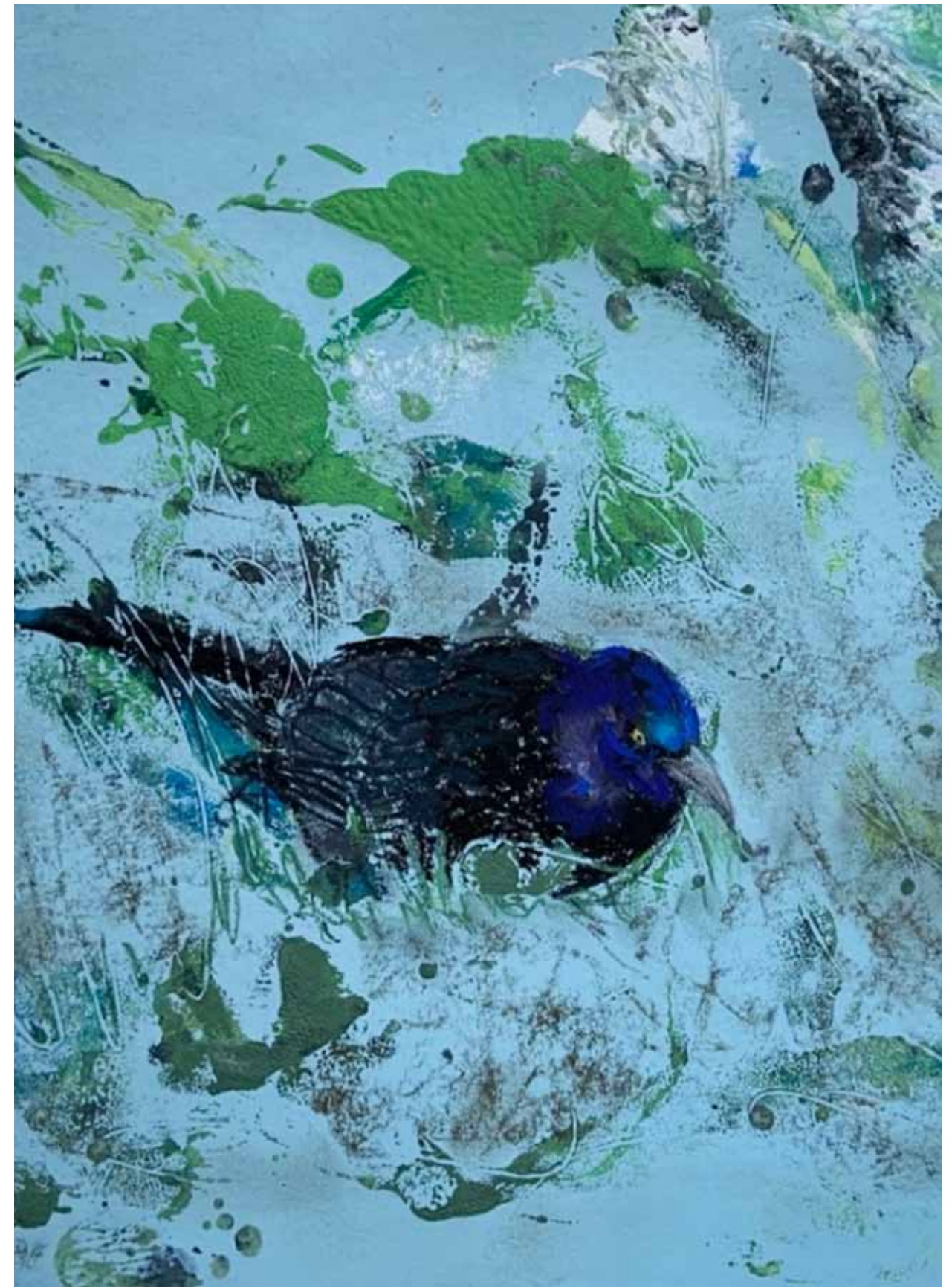


LENGTH
11 – 13 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 24 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Common Grackles are very social, sometimes traveling in groups of several thousand birds. They are omnivorous, eating anything from seeds, fruits and mice to other birds' eggs and garbage. Grackles are known to use natural insect repellents, either by dabbing oils and juices from nuts and berries onto their feathers, or by "anting," where they allow ants to crawl all over them. The ants secrete formic acid that keeps other insects and parasites away. While Grackles are very common, their numbers have declined significantly in the last 40 years.



DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

Nannopterum auritum



LENGTH
28 – 35 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 24 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

These large water birds can be found in and around the East River. During spring and summer, they nest on Mill Rock Island, just east of the ferry landing. Cormorants do not have the waterproofing that many ducks and other waterfowl have. This feature allows them to dive more quickly and stay underwater for 30 to 45 seconds while fishing. It also causes them to sit lower in the water, with their bodies just below the surface. When they take flight from the river, they have to flap vigorously to pull themselves into the air and get the water off their wings. Sometimes you'll see them standing and spreading their wings in the sun to dry.



DOWNY WOODPECKER

Dryobates pubescens



LENGTH
6 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

The smallest woodpecker in the park gets its name from the soft tuft of feathers that make up the white stripe along its spine. Downy Woodpeckers sometimes hang upside down eating seeds, insects and berries. They protect trees by consuming pests like webworms and tent caterpillars. When they drill for insects in tree trunks, a spongy substance between their skull and the base of their beak protects them from brain trauma, and special feathers around their nostrils protect them from wood dust. Downy Woodpeckers are easier to find during cooler months, high up in trees.



EUROPEAN STARLING

Sturnus vulgaris



LENGTH
8 – 9 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 16 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Starlings are not native to the U.S., but were brought from Europe in the late 19th century. To watch thousands of them join into a single flock, or murmuration, can be mesmerizing. Starlings are extremely aggressive and will kick other birds out of their nests. You can find them on lawn areas, jabbing their beaks into the ground looking for insects, or in shrubs and trees looking for berries. Starlings are great mimics and have been known to copy up to twenty songs of other birds. Their beaks turn from black to orange for the spring and summer.



GRAY CATBIRD

Dumetella carolinensis

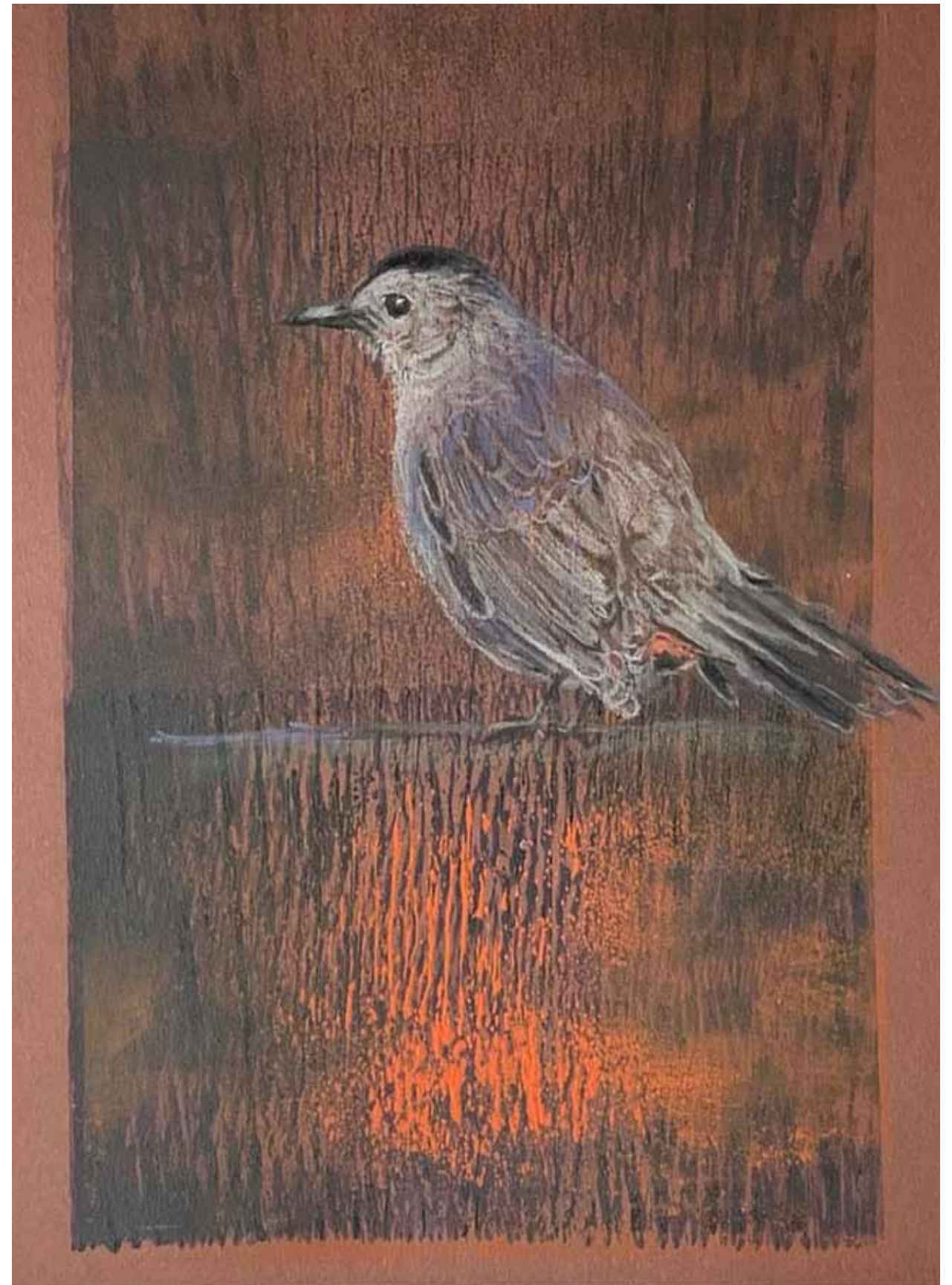


LENGTH
8 – 9 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 18 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

If you think you hear a cat meowing in the park, it is likely a Catbird. They can mimic various sounds and other birds' songs and can sing for up to ten minutes at a time. These gray birds are secretive, but you can find them in shrubs and wooded areas looking for insects and berries. They forage on the ground by turning over leaves and twigs with their beaks. The phrase "sitting in the catbird seat" comes from the fact that Catbirds will sing high up on branches in open areas, where they have excellent vantage points.



HERMIT THRUSH

Catharus guttatus



LENGTH
5 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 11 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
October – May

Hermit Thrushes prefer wooded areas and can be found perching on low branches, or flipping leaves on the ground looking for insects to eat. Sometimes, they'll stand on a pile of leaves shaking their legs. This technique, called "foot quivering", startles the insects, and makes them easier to find. Their fall diets include native berries like blueberries, black cherries and pokeweed, all of which can be found in the park. Hermit Thrushes are migrants, preferring this region during the cooler months of the year.



HOUSE FINCH

Haemorhous mexicanus

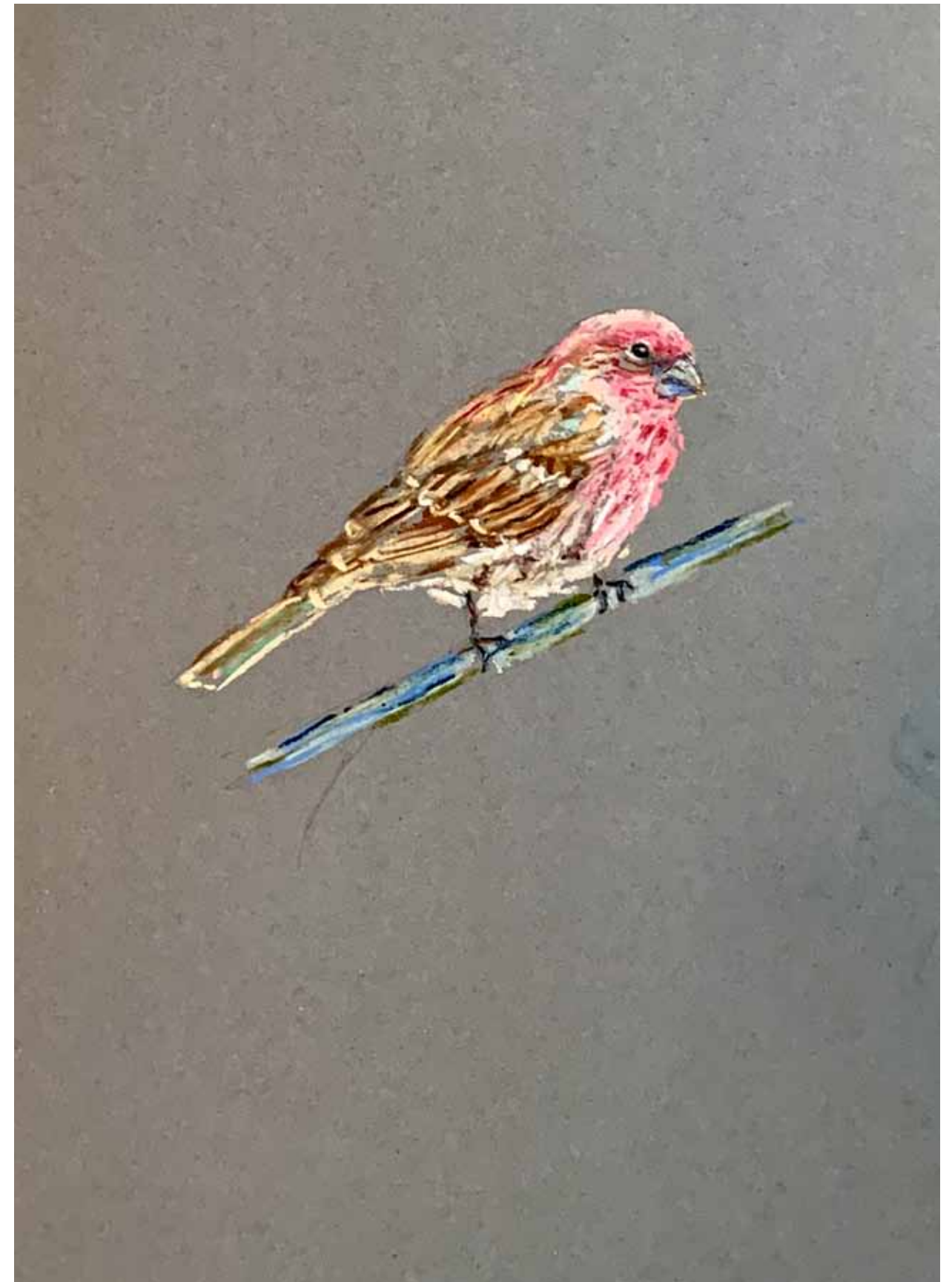


LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Originally, House Finches only lived in the western portion of the U.S. Owing to their beautiful song and coloring, they were illegally trapped in California in the 1940's and brought to Long Island to sell at pet shops. When the authorities started investigating, the birds were simply released into the wild. House Finches travel in pairs or small groups, foraging on plants that produce seeds. Unlike most other songbirds that feed insects to their young, House Finches give their babies a vegetarian diet of mashed seeds.



HOUSE SPARROW

Passer domesticus



LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 16 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

House Sparrows, some of our most common birds, live comfortably in urban environments. They build their nests either on man-made structures, or in tree cavities. Sometimes you'll see them carrying grass or ribbons in their beaks which they use to decorate their nests. House Sparrows are not native to the U.S., but were brought here in the 1850's as a way to control insect populations in cities. While chatty and social, they can also be aggressive. To keep their feathers light and dry, they frequently dust-bathe in dry, shallow depressions of earth.



MOURNING DOVE

Zenaida macroura

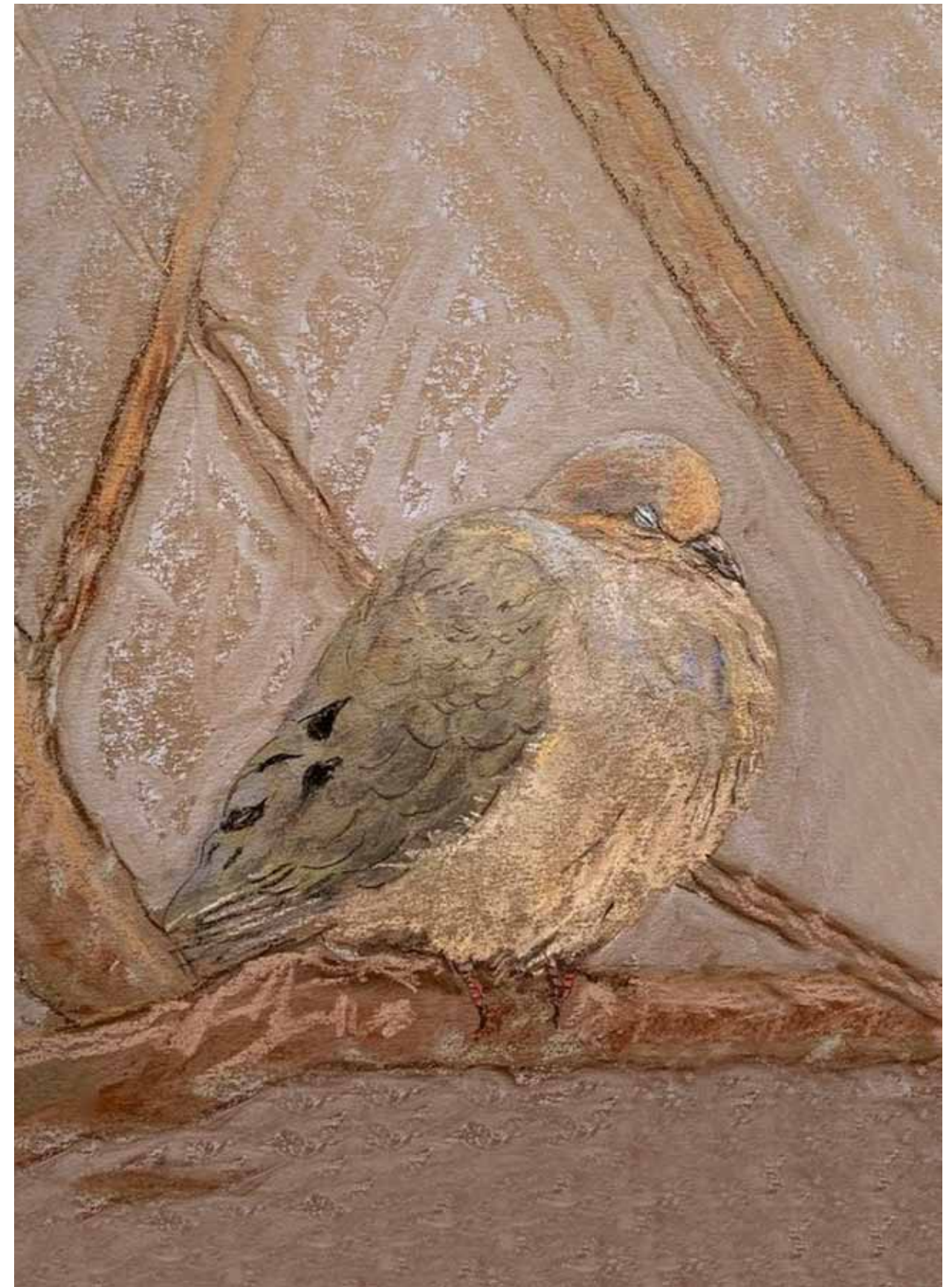


LENGTH
9 – 13 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 31 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

The Mourning Dove is a seed-eating bird often seen foraging on the ground. It will gather thousands of seeds in the crop of its throat and then fly up to a safe place to digest its meal. As it takes off, the Dove uses specially shaped flight feathers located on the backs of its wings to make a startled whistling sound. Unlike other birds, Mourning Doves can drink the brackish water of the East River. They are fast flyers, often going up to 55 mph, and quick nest-builders, able to throw everything together in just a few hours.



NORTHERN BLUE JAY

Cyanocitta cristata bromia

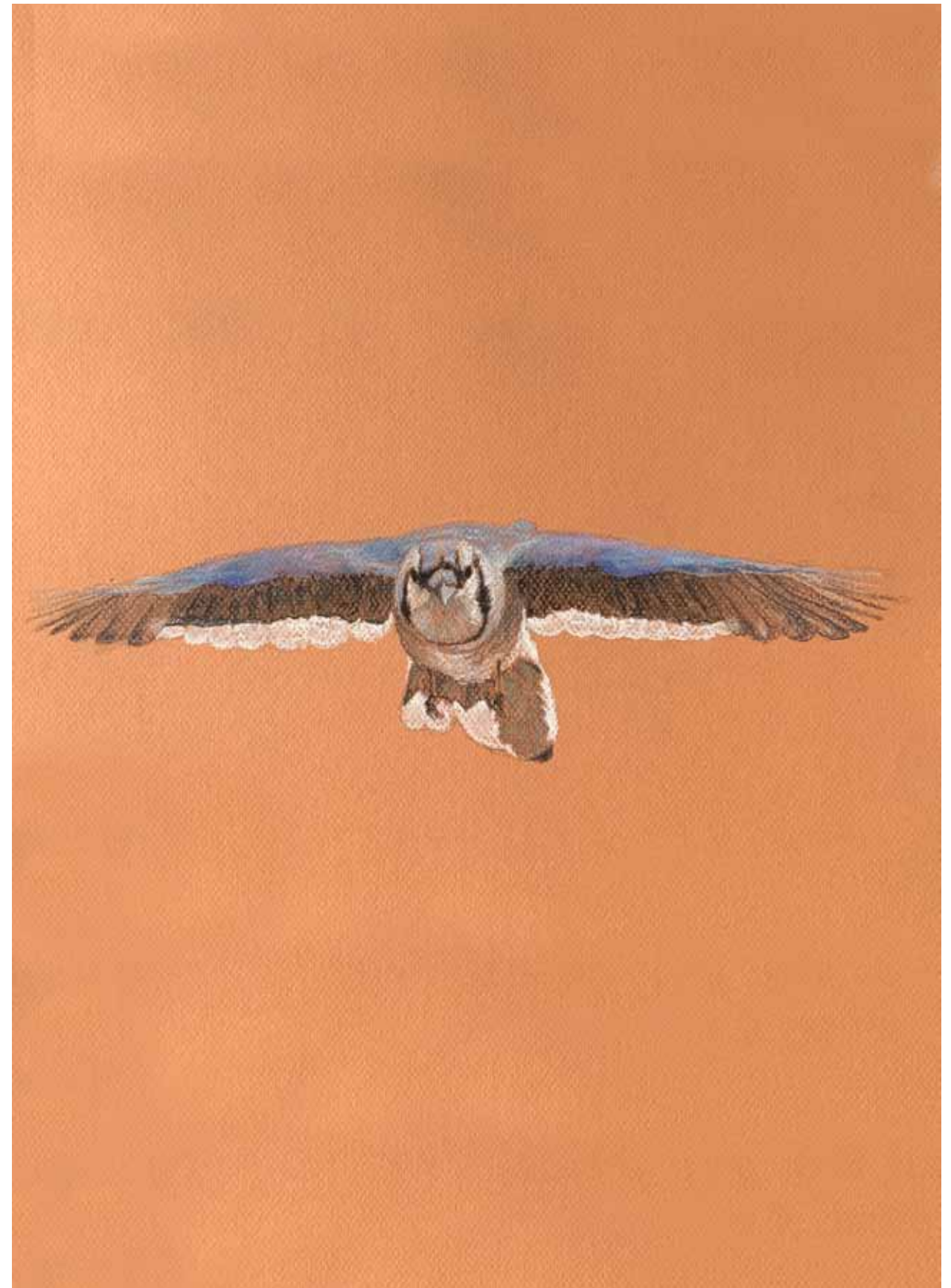


LENGTH
10 – 12 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 27 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

The distinctive color of a Blue Jay's feathers is not caused by blue pigment, but by refracted light. And unlike many birds, the females are just as colorful as the males. Their "jay" call is an alert that a predator is nearby. Other birds understand this - they will suddenly become silent and drop into bushes to hide. Blue Jays are very aggressive and will gather to "mob" an intruder. Each winter, their excellent memories enable them to find the thousands of nuts and insects they've previously stored in the ground.



NORTHERN CARDINAL

Cardinalis cardinalis

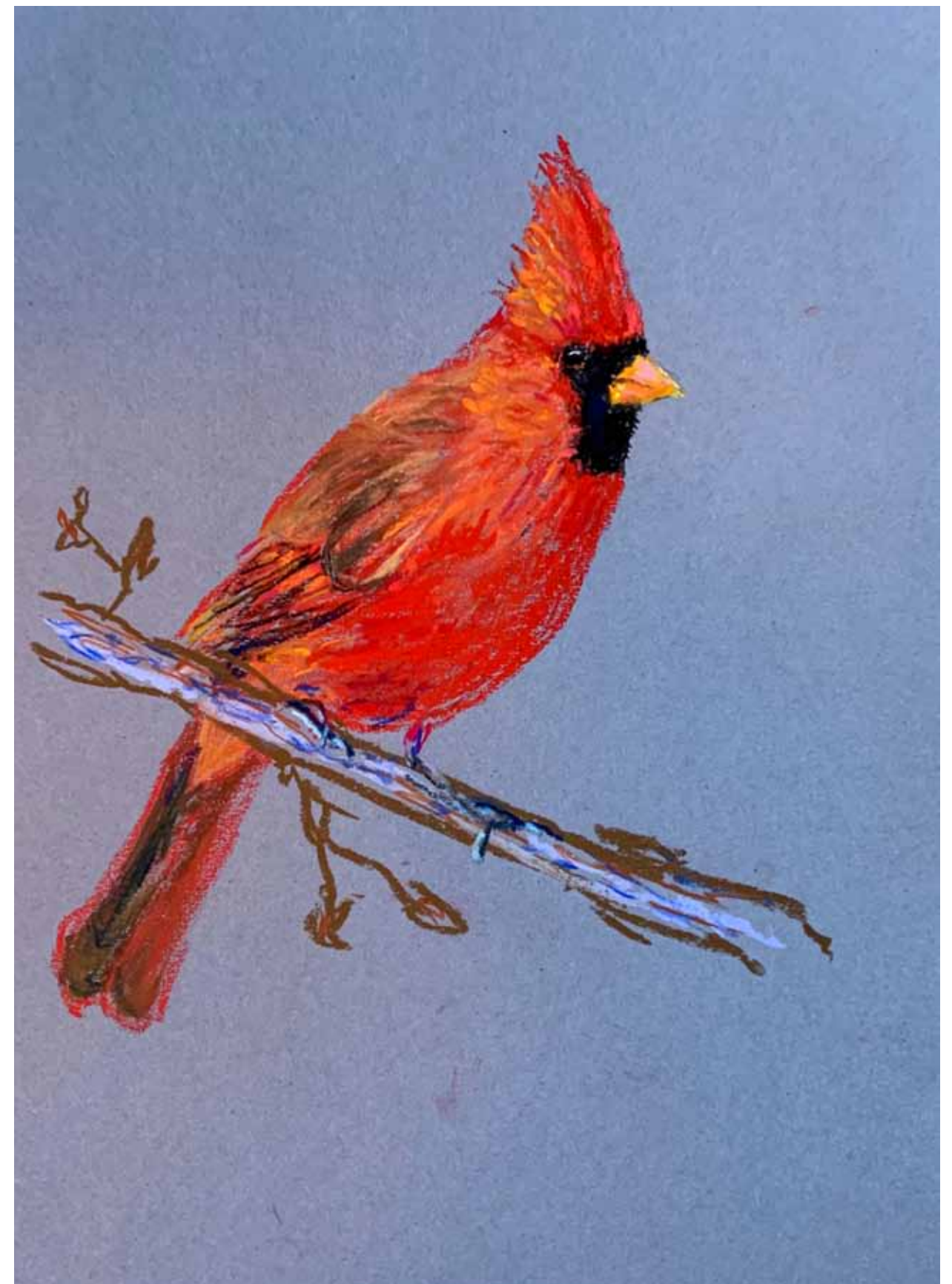


LENGTH
8 – 9 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 16 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Cardinals can often be seen in shrubs and lower tree branches foraging for fruit, seeds and insects. Their bright red color comes from pigments in the berries they eat. Their favorites include mulberries, chokeberries and viburnum berries, all of which can be found in the park. While the females aren't as colorful as the males, they have a wide variety of songs and sing more frequently than other female birds. Before the 20thth century, Cardinals only lived in the southern U.S., but their range has since expanded northward.



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

Mimus polyglottos



LENGTH
8 – 10 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 15 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Despite the gray plumage, Northern Mockingbirds stand out among birds. They are some of the most prolific singers, with repertoires of up to 200 different songs. In addition to their own songs, they mimic other birds, as well as barking dogs and honking horns. Their songs can last 30 seconds, repeating certain phrases multiple times. Mateless males will sing even at night, which is quite unusual. Favorite fruits in fall and winter include rosehips of invasive, non-native multiflora roses. Mockingbirds have inadvertently helped distribute this troublesome shrub throughout North America.



RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

Melanerpes carolinus



LENGTH
9 – 10 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 13 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

The common Red-bellied Woodpecker has a satiny red cap and nape. Just like other woodpeckers, it has zygodactyl feet, where two toes point forward and two point backwards, enabling it to climb up and down while its body stays in a fixed position. Its long, sticky tongue is barbed, making it easy to pull insects from deep crevices in tree bark. Red-bellied Woodpeckers often prefer dead trees for both foraging and nesting. Away from natural, forested areas, it can be difficult for them to find this type of important habitat. The reddish blush of feathers on their lower bellies gives them their name, but can be hard to see.



RED-EYED VIREO

Vireo olivaceus



LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 11 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
May – June,
September – October

Red-eyed Vireos are prolific singers with a repertoire of more than 10,000 songs. They sing constantly – even on hot summer days. Because they tend to stay in the treetops and their greenish coloration blends in with the leaves, you are more likely to hear than see them. The red in their iris doesn't develop until after their first winter – why they turn red is a scientific mystery. During spring and summer, their diet consists mostly of insects, and in late summer and fall, they feed on fruit from spicebush, elderberries, dogwoods and viburnum.



RED-TAILED HAWK

Buteo jamaicensis



LENGTH
18 – 22 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 31 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

With a wingspan of four feet, the Red-tailed Hawk is one of the largest carnivorous birds that can be seen within the park. Its strong build and hefty shoulders enable it to soar thousands of feet in the air on thermal columns. Cruising speeds can reach 40 mph, and when diving to catch prey, they can go as fast as 120 mph. Red-tailed Hawks have keen eyesight - they can see a mouse from 100 feet in the air. Pigeons, squirrels and rats are a favorite and reliable source of food. If you see a pile of feathers on the ground, look up and you may see the Hawk still in the tree, feasting on its prey.



RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

Agelaius phoeniceus



LENGTH
7 – 9 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 16 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
December – May

Red-winged Blackbirds, common and abundant across North America, tend to hang around in large flocks. The males aggressively defend their territory, even going after people if they get too close. Males and females don't pair off - females may raise 2 or 3 clutches in one year, each from a different male. In the park, they can be seen on lawns eating grass seeds or looking for insects. Because they also eat crops like corn, Red-winged Blackbirds are considered a nuisance to farmers who use everything from loudspeakers to poison to get rid of them.



RING-BILLED GULL

Larus delawarensis



LENGTH
17 – 21 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 28 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

While we usually think of gulls as sea birds, Ring-billed Gulls live mostly inland and are highly accustomed to human-built environments. Their colonies are large and can number in the thousands. Occasionally, two females will share the same nest. Many Ring-billed Gulls go back to the same breeding and wintering sites each year. In winter here, you will often see them along the promenade sitting on the fences and benches. Because they eat just about anything, including fish, food scraps and small rodents, Ring-billed Gulls are often found at garbage dumps.



ROCK DOVE/PIGEON

Columba livia

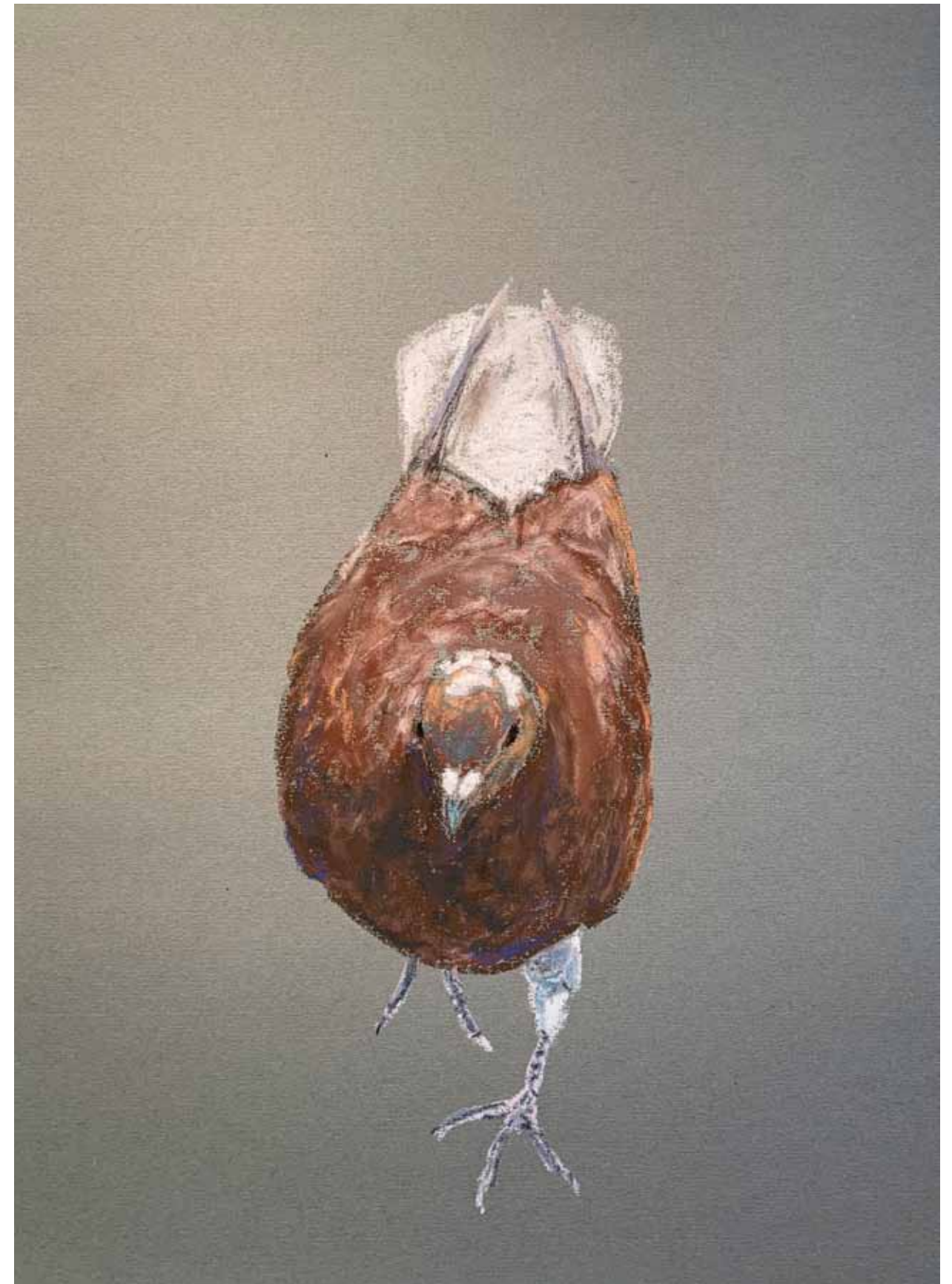


LENGTH
11- 13 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 7 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

With their large chest muscles, Pigeons are one of our fastest – and highest – flyers. They can move at speeds of up to 90 mph and can soar as high as 6,000 feet. The ones we see today are the descendants of domestic Pigeons that were used for centuries to deliver messages around the world. Even though we may think of them as more of a pest, they are very intelligent - they recognize themselves in their reflection and can even learn the alphabet. Pigeons typically mate for life. The male Pigeon builds the nest, and both parents care for the young.



RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

Corthylio calendula



LENGTH
3 - 4 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 9 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
September – May

Beating their wings rapidly, Ruby-crowned Kinglets can hover in the air while gleaning their food and will occasionally grab flying insects in mid-air. In the fall you may see them eating seeds from perennials in the gardens. They rarely sit still, constantly moving among branches and flicking their wings. Kinglets are one of our tiniest songbirds, yet the females lay a whopping 9-12 eggs per clutch. They lose approximately half their body weight once they have laid their eggs.



RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

Archilochus colubris



LENGTH
3 - 4 inches

LIFESPAN
9 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
May & September

The only hummingbird you will see in the park is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. For such small birds that weigh less than a nickel, they can fly great distances – as far as 500 miles – without stopping. During the day, they constantly feed on nectar and small insects, and to conserve energy at night, they lower their body temperature to about 40 degrees and drop their heartbeat from 500 to 50 beats per minute. These acrobatic flyers can go forwards and backwards, hover in the air, and stop on a dime. They are quite territorial and are surprisingly vicious fighters.



SCARLET TANAGER

Piranga olivacea



LENGTH
6 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
May, September, October

With their bright red plumage, male Scarlet Tanagers may seem easy to spot, but the most likely place you'll find them is hidden in the tops of large trees – particularly oaks - where they like to perch. In striking contrast to the males, females are yellow-green in color. Tanagers eat many insects but prefer bees and wasps. They kill their prey by beating it against a branch with their beaks. If a Tanager leaves its eggs unattended, cowbirds may take advantage by laying theirs in among the Tanager's. When this happens, the Tanager ends up raising the baby cowbirds as their own. Scarlet Tanagers migrate as far south as Bolivia.



SONG SPARROW

Melospiza melodia



LENGTH
5 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
year round

Not all Song Sparrows look the same – it depends on where they live. For instance, the southwestern Song Sparrows are much paler than our local ones. Song Sparrows are abundant, partly because they can live anywhere – from Arctic grasslands to U.S. suburbs – and they eat whatever insects, grass seeds and fruits are available. In the park, look for them in shaded areas, where they're more likely to be foraging for food. Because they usually build their nests low to the ground, they are vulnerable to predators like outdoor cats.



TUFTED TITMOUSE

Baeolophus bicolor



LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 14 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
October – April

Tufted Titmice are acrobatic feeders, hanging upside-down to gather insects, seeds or nuts. To break open the nuts, they pin the shell beneath their claws and hammer away with their strong beaks. Nests are built with warm, comfortable linings sometimes made of hairs plucked directly from sleeping animals. Though males and females look identical, males will chase away other birds when eating while females will tolerate other birds being nearby. Titmice tend to travel in mixed flocks with chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers.



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

Sitta carolinensis

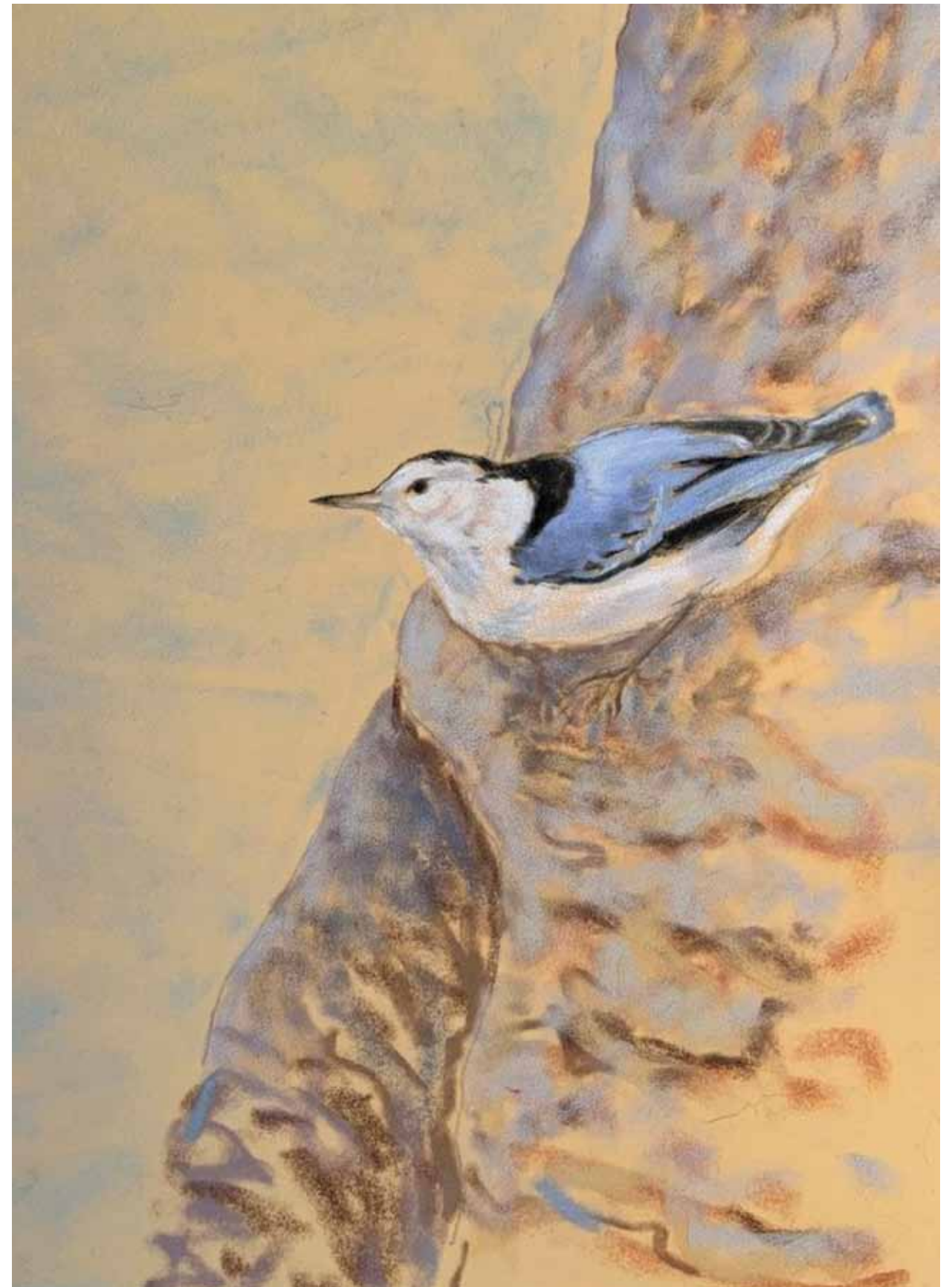


LENGTH
5 – 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 10 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
October – April

White-breasted Nuthatches are unusual in that they climb headfirst down tree trunks. When they pause, they cock their head up, creating a distinctive profile that makes them easy to identify. Nuthatches store substantial caches of food for the winter. They wedge their shelled nuts and seeds into crevices of tree trunks and then hide the cache under materials they find nearby, like lichen and loose bark. They “bill sweep” their nests, rubbing mud, fur or crushed insects around the entrance to cover their scent and fool potential predators.



WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

Zonotrichia albicollis

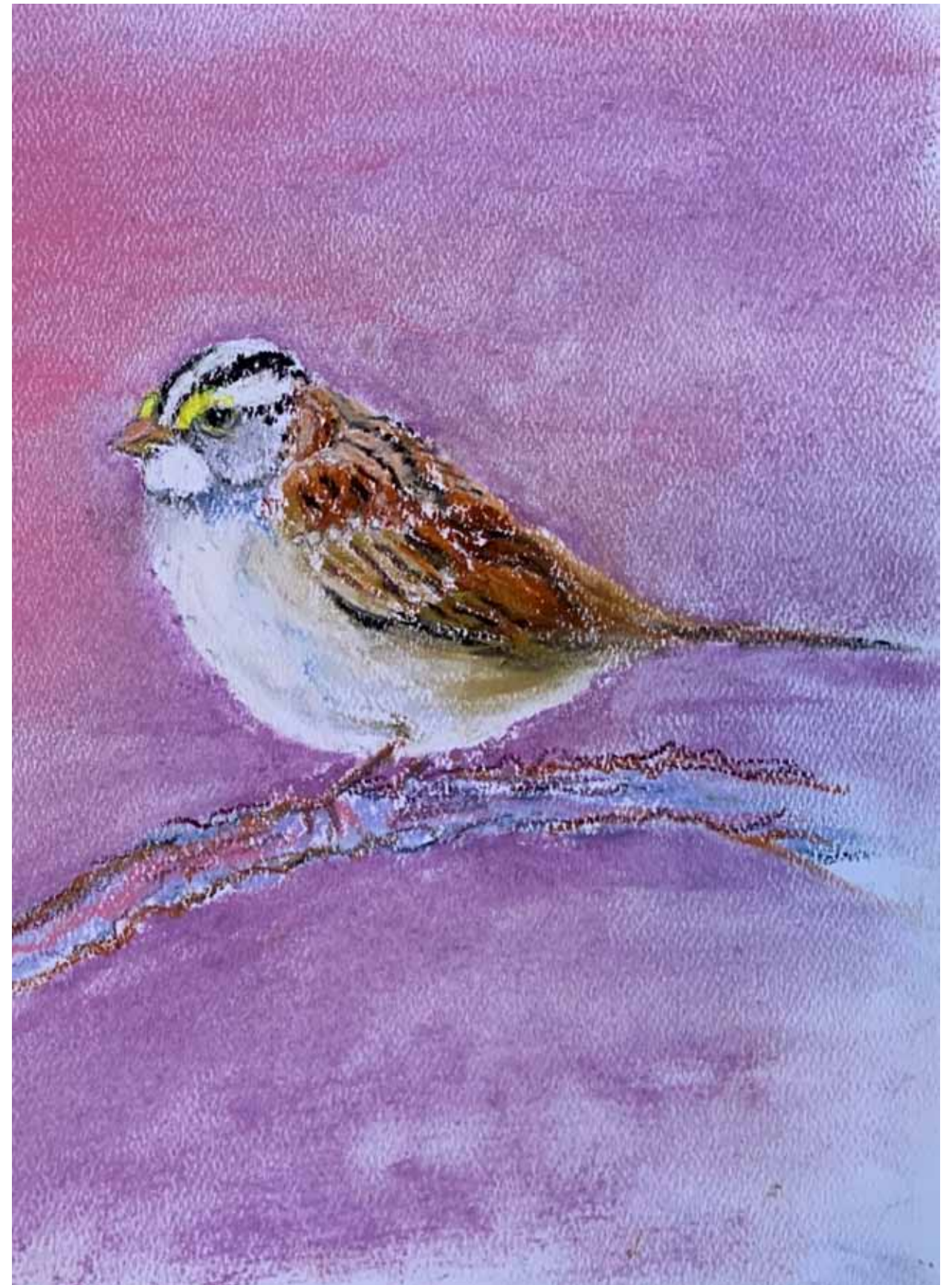


LENGTH
6 – 7 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 15 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
September – July

During most of the year, White-throated Sparrows can be seen poking around the ground in wooded areas looking for insects. When they forage, they hop backwards, pulling leaves out of the way to uncover the startled insects beneath. They can be distinguished from other sparrows by the prominent white stripes on the top of their heads and yellow spots above their beaks. Occasionally, they will mate with another species, the Dark-eyed Junco, creating hybrid offspring. When they are around, their whistled song is one of the most frequently heard in the park.



YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

Sphyrapicus varius



LENGTH
7 – 9 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 8 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
September - May

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are woodpeckers, drilling holes (sap wells) in neat, horizontal patterns around tree trunks and large branches. Despite their name, they don't actually suck the sap, but lap it up with their bristle-lined tongues. They also eat insects that get stuck in the sap wells. Because trees are able to heal quickly from the drilling, the wells must be tended regularly to keep sap flowing. Other birds will try to take advantage of their work, so they constantly have to defend their wells. When migrating through the park, Sapsuckers can often be found on elm trees.



YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

Setophaga coronata



LENGTH
5 - 6 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 11 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – May,
September – November

Yellow-rumped Warblers are the only warblers that regularly spend winters in New York City. They are able to digest the waxy fruit of bayberry shrubs and cedar trees, which ripen in winter and are plentiful in the park. Because of their yellow rumps, these warblers are often affectionately called “butter butts.” Of all the North American warblers, the Yellow-rumped are the most abundant. During migration, they fly in large flocks. The more colorful males often forage higher in trees than females.



YELLOW WARBLER

Setophaga petechia



LENGTH
4 – 5 inches

LIFESPAN
up to 12 years

WHEN TO SEE IT
April – May, September

Found throughout most of North America, Yellow Warblers are one of the most widespread warblers. While their populations are relatively stable, their nests are often taken advantage of by cowbirds, who lay their own eggs in them. When this happens, the Yellow Warbler simply adds a layer of grasses right over the intruding eggs, which prevents their incubation. This action/reaction can happen more than once in the same nest. Yellow Warblers eat mostly insects. On their wintering grounds in the tropics, they assist coffee growers by preying on the Coffee Berry Borer, an invasive insect that can destroy the crops.



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CREDITS

Aside from information that has been collected through personal observations at the park, facts about the birds in this book can be found in the resources listed below.

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