



# TRICKY BLACKBIRDS

Learn to identify this challenging duo

**THE CHALLENGE:** Although similar, the Tricolored Blackbird and the Red-winged Blackbird are genetically, behaviorally, and morphologically distinct. However, there are a few simple tricks that will help you distinguish these blackbirds in the field.

## KEY POINTS:

### 1. WHERE ARE YOU?

Location is a huge clue.

### 2. SIZE AND SHAPE

Nearly identical in size and shape.

### 3. COLOR PATTERN

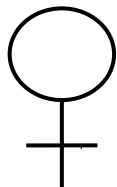
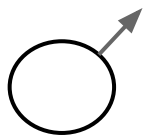
Males differ in the shade of shoulder patches; females differ in dark grey tones vs. rufous tones.

## INTRODUCTION

Which blackbirds are we talking about?

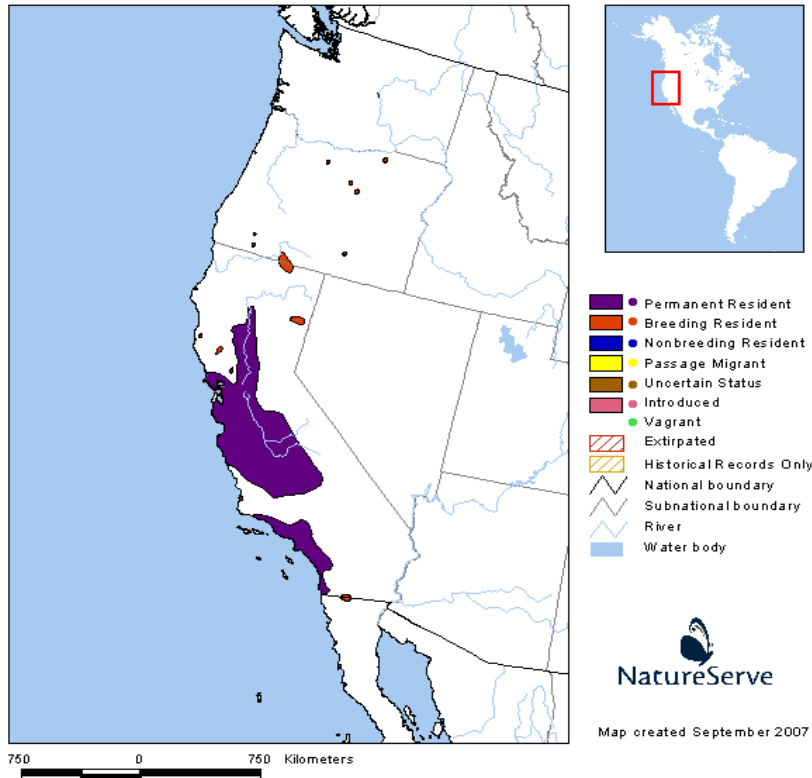
Tricolored Blackbird

Red-winged Blackbird



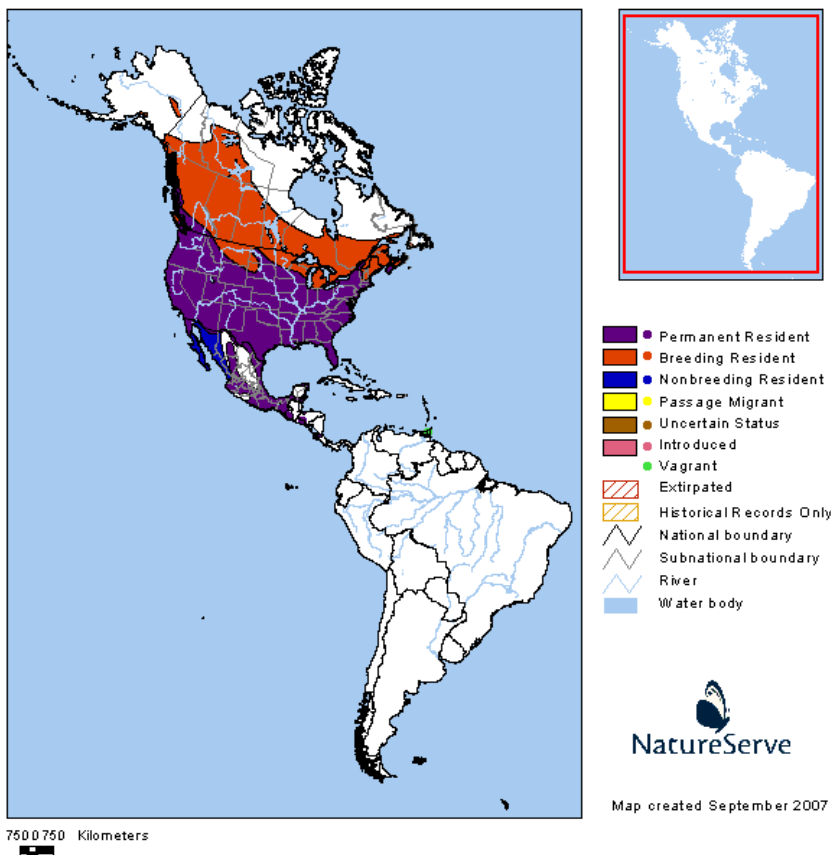
# 1. WHERE ARE YOU???

Before even looking at the birds, it is important to understand the range and habitat preferences of each species



## Tricolored Blackbird

The Tricolored Blackbird is gregarious and found year-round in large flocks in open country and dairy farms. These flocks are often segregated by sex. The nest in large colonies in marshes. Numbers have declined drastically in recent decades due largely to habitat degradation.



## Red-winged Blackbird

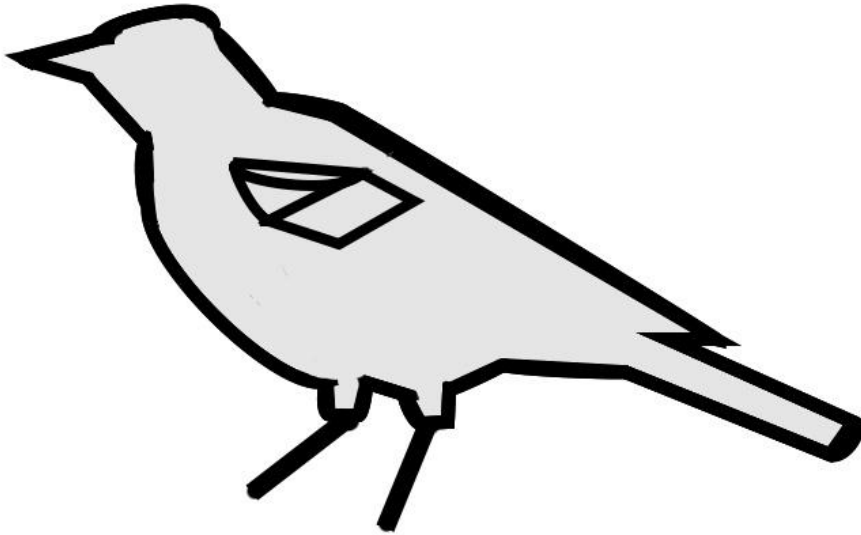
The Red-winged Blackbird is widespread throughout North America. It is abundant and often found in immense flock during winter. Generally nests in thick vegetation of freshwater marshes, slough, and dry fields. They forage in the surrounding fields, orchards, and woodlands

Range maps: [www.birdphotos.com](http://www.birdphotos.com)  
Range descriptions: Nat'l Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of N. America

## 2. SIZE AND SHAPE

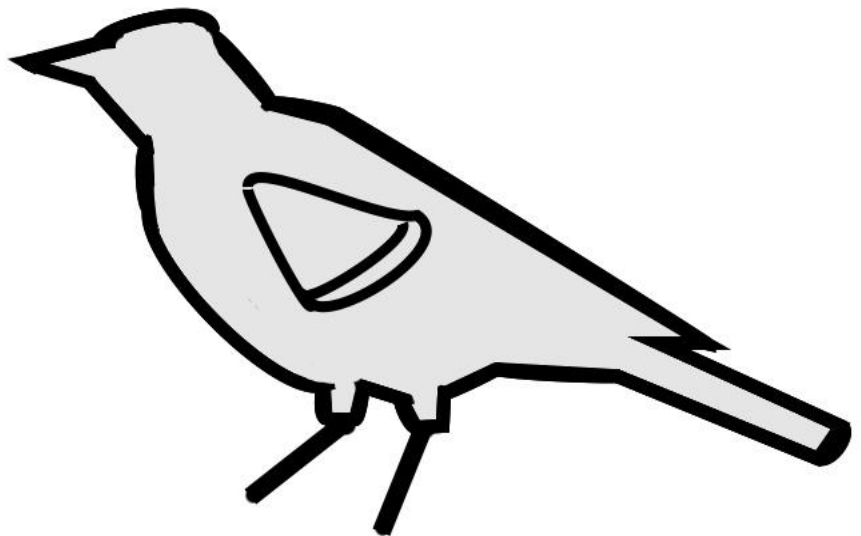
### Tricolored Blackbird

- Almost identical in size and shape, the shape of the shoulder patch colors have certain differences. The Tricolored Blackbird has three colors on the shoulder: red, black, and white. The red is often hidden (partially or fully) by the black patch.



### Red Wing Blackbird

- The Red-winged Blackbird will have a broader red patch that fades into a pale yellow-orange.



### 3. COLOR AND PATTERN



#### **Tricolored Blackbird:**

The male Tricolored Blackbird has a deep red shoulder patch and a pronounced white patch adjacent to the red patch. The black feathers on their shoulders often covers a portion or most of the red feathers. Their black feathers are generally more glossy than the Red-winged Blackbird



#### **Red-winged Blackbird:**

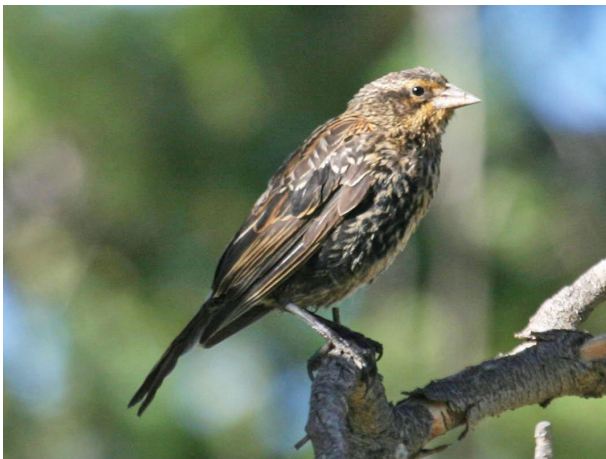
The male Red-winged Blackbird are less glossy black than Tricolored Blackbirds. The red of the shoulder patch is broad and is more of a red-orange when compared to the red of the Tricolored. The red fades into a light yellow or orangish color, which differs from the clearer white patch on the Tricolored Blackbird.





**Tricolored Blackbird:**

The female Tricolored Blackbird can be a little trickier to tell apart from the Red-winged Blackbird. Overall, they are a darker gray with less streaking.



**Red-winged Blackbird:**

The female Red-winged Blackbird has more streaking and more rufous tones throughout its plumage.

# QUIZ



## ABOVE:

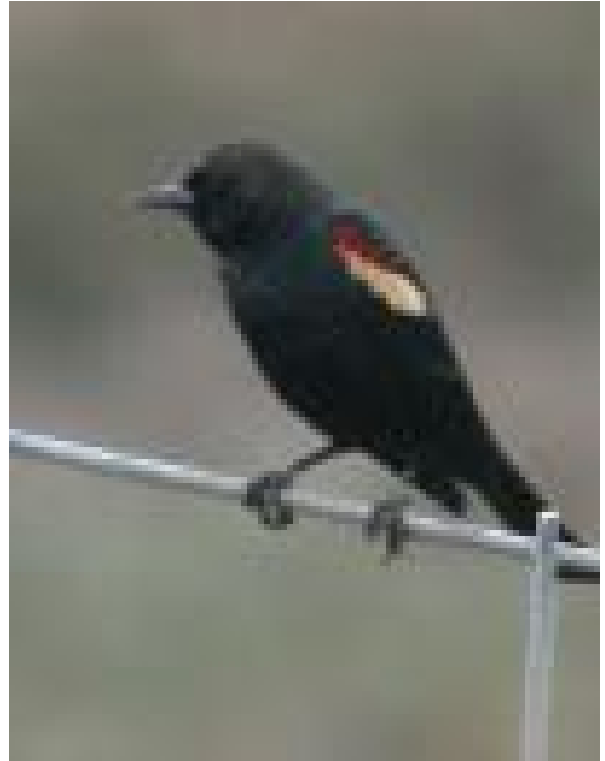
This female blackbird has a lot of streaking and noticable rufous feathers on its face. These clues mean that this is a female Red-winged Blackbird.

## TOP RIGHT:

This image is lower quality and can match what you may see in poorer lighting or with a smaller pair of binoculars. The white patch seems distinct and not orange or yellow. The red patch is covered mostly by black. This means this is a Tricolored Blackbird.

## LOWER RIGHT:

This female is dark grey and has very light streaking. These features point to the female Tricolored Blackbird.



**By: Alan Glen Evangelista  
& Jacob Hillard**