

# Mountain Bluebird

By Morgan Stewart



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# Idaho's State Bird

Idaho adopted the Mountain Bluebird as their state bird in 1931. It was suggested by Idaho school children to be considered as the state bird. This bluebird gets its name because it lives in the mountains of Western North America. For most of the year, this Mountain Bluebird will remain in the northern areas of Idaho. When the seasons change to winter, the Mountain Bluebird will fly south to live in southern California and northern Mexico to enjoy the warm weather!

## Breeding Range of the Bluebird in the U.S.



<http://barnowlbox.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Blue-Bird-Map.jpg>

# Identification

Mountain Bluebirds are fairly small **thrush** songbirds, typically having round heads and straight, thin bills. Compared with other bluebirds they are lanky and long-winged, with a long tail. You can identify the difference between a male and female Mountain Bluebird by their coloring. A male Mountain Bluebird is blue and will have a white underside. A female Mountain Bluebird is brown and will have pale blue wings and tail. Mountain Bluebirds' bills are entirely black. Juveniles have fewer spots than the young of other bluebirds.



*Featured image: Mountain bluebird. Credit: iStock/RC Keller*  
<http://www.worldsciencefestival.com/2014/11/state-bird-extinct-2080/>

# Behavior

Mountain Bluebirds behavior is unlike any other bluebird species. Mountain Bluebirds will hover low over the grass in open fields and search for food. When they have sighted their insect prey, they will pounce from an elevated perch. In the winter, the Mountain Bluebird will fly in large flocks as they wander around feasting on berries, particularly those of **junipers**, which is a shrub.



*Photo and caption by Katherine Davis*

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/photo-contest/2012/entries/181229/view/>

# Habitat

Mountain Bluebirds most commonly live in varied, open terrain, like the West's wide-open spaces, particularly at middle and higher elevations. They breed in natural habitats such as prairie, sagebrush **steppe** which is a large area of flat unforested land, and alpine **tundra** which is flat, treeless, and frozen land. Mountain Bluebirds will often find nesting in bluebird boxes and hunting in pastures.



*Photo and caption by Steve Rothenberg*

<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/traveler-magazine/photo-contest/2012/entries/140757/view/>

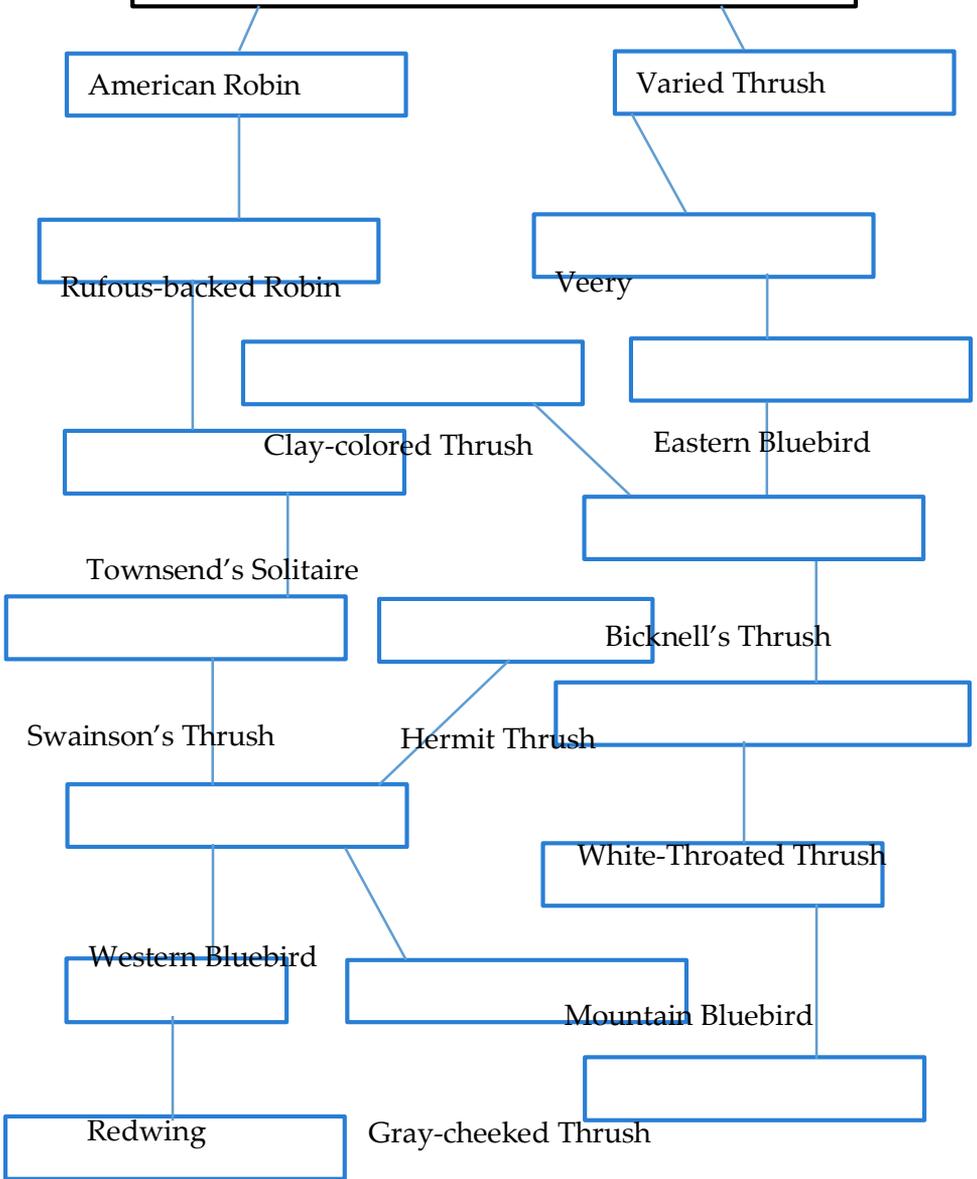
# Nesting

During nesting times, the male Mountain Bluebirds will sometimes enact a kind of symbolic nest-building whether it's acting as if they are bringing nesting material to the cavity (actually carrying nothing) or dropping their burdens along the way. On the other hand, a female will work hard in the early morning building an insulated nest all by herself. The entire process of building a nest can take several days to more than a week. Mountain Bluebirds often reuse nest cavities within and between breeding seasons.



<http://www.peeniewallie.com/2008/06/>  
Rob Kiser

# Species of Thrush Found in North America



Wood Thrush

Aztec Thrush

# Media Attributions

Media acknowledgments can be found underneath each photo. All other images are released under public domain.

# Questions

**When did Idaho adopt their state bird?  
(page 3)**

**Based on what you read, what is the  
gender of the bird pictured on page 4?**

**How do Mountain Bluebirds hunt? (page  
5)**

**What type of habitat do they live in?  
(page 6)**

**Which of the female and male bluebird  
will build the nest? (page 7)**

# Glossary

- Thrush:** any of numerous, medium-sized songbirds of the family Turdinae, usually dull brown and often speckled below; includes many outstanding singers.
- Juniper:** an evergreen shrub or small tree that bears berrylike cones, widely distributed throughout Eurasia and North America. Many kinds have aromatic cones or foliage.
- Steppe:** a large area of flat unforested grassland
- Tundra:** a vast, flat, treeless Arctic region of Europe, Asia, and North America in which the subsoil is permanently frozen.

# Works Referenced

Mountain Bluebird. (2011). Retrieved December 12, 2014, from [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/mountain\\_bluebird/life\\_history#at\\_behavior](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/mountain_bluebird/life_history#at_behavior)

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Species by Family: Thrushes. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2014, from <http://birds.audubon.org/birdid/family/Thrushes>

## **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1**

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.4**

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2**

Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

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