SNOWMASS FIELD GUIDE

The Plants, Birds & Mammals of Snowmass Village





With more than 80 miles of hiking, trail running and mountain biking trails directly accessible from Snowmass Village, and the White River National Forest close by, the area is a paradise for outdoor recreationists. But there's even more to hitting these trails than enjoying soul-stirring views of lofty peaks.

Look down and around. The forests, meadows and mountain slopes teem with wildflowers and other plants, birds and mammals. And thanks to the village's 8,000-foot elevation, chances are these species differ from those you may be familiar with at home.



Use this guide to help you identify that striking flower, colorful bird or small brown critter scurrying by. (Note that the species most commonly found in and around Snowmass Village are covered, so you won't find the flora and fauna of high-alpine environments included here.) Even in winter, when the focus turns to exploring Snowmass' famed ski slopes, you'll see many of the trees and shrubs, as well as some of the birds and mammals, described here.

Inspired to learn even more about what you see? Consult the resource page at the end of this guide for more information. **Happy trails!**

Through the Eras

The plants, mammals and birds in this guide are living reminders of a story that goes back further than most people realize. In fact, 89% of the plant species you'll see today have been around since the Ice Age.

Back then, mastodons, mammoths, giant sloths and other prehistoric mammals thrived in what is now Snowmass Village. Fossils from 52 creatures were unearthed in Ziegler Reservoir in 2010.

For hundreds of years, the Ute people lived and hunted in Colorado, including in what is now the Brush Creek Valley. They were displaced by white settlers in the 1880s.

For the first half of the 20th century, ranchers and farmers worked the valley's land, raising cattle and sheep, and growing crops to feed local residents.

After about a decade of scouting and planning, the ski area, then called Snowmass-at-Aspen, opened in 1967, bringing increased winter recreation to the valley.

In 1977, the town of Snowmass Village was incorporated.

Every plant, mammal and bird on these pages carries a piece of that history. Snowmass Village values its land, and we hope you do, too. Please visit responsibly by not feeding or harassing wildlife, and leaving plants and flowers in their natural habitat.



Find Your Trail

DITCH TRAIL

Mileage: 1.6 miles one way, 3.2 miles round trip

Vertical: 353 ft ascent, 103 ft descent (one way)

Trail Description: The Ditch Trail is a wide, mostly flat path that follows an old irrigation ditch, offering gentle grades and scenic views of Mount Daly. In spring and early summer, water flows through the ditch—an added bonus for dogs on warm days. At about 0.9 miles, a bench provides a perfect spot to rest and take in a beautiful viewpoint of Mount Daly. The trail continues on to East Snowmass Creek, where it connects with the East Snowmass Trail.

SOUTH RIM TO SPIRAL POINT

Mileage: 1.3 miles one way, 2.6 miles round trip

Vertical: 624 ft ascent 103 descent (one way)

Trail Description: This gradual, non-technical trail features a series of switchbacks climbing a south-facing hillside toward Spiral Point—also known locally as the Yin-Yang. Along the way, hikers are rewarded with sweeping views of Snowmass Village and the surrounding mountain range. At the scenic overlook, enjoy stunning 360-degree vistas of the valleys below, Zeigler Reservoir and the peaks above.

TOM BLAKE

Mileage: 3.8 miles one way

Vertical: 471 ft ascent

Trail Description: A relatively flat trail, Tom Blake is your ideal pick for a walk through the aspen groves. While this trail crosses the Snowmass ski area and ultimately ends up at the Snowmass Mall, it is popular to start at the trailhead on Owl Creek Road, hike as far as your group's legs will allow, then turn back.

VISTA TRAIL

Mileage: 1.8 miles one way

Vertical: 1,336 ft ascent

Trail Description: This scenic trail begins in Base Village and climbs steadily through aspen groves and wildflower meadows to the top of the Elk Camp gondola. It is the only trail on Snowmass Mountain where bikes are not permitted, making it a quieter option for hikers. You can hike up and take the Gondola down for free or take the gondola up (lift ticket required) and enjoy a leisurely hike back down.

PLANTS

Trees

ASPEN

Populus tremuloides

Whether its leaves quake in a summer breeze or glow with gold in fall, the aspen tree usually reproduces by suckering, forming groves of genetically identical trees with a shared root system.



NARROWLEAF COTTONWOOD

Populus angustifolia

Large and thirsty, cottonwoods thrive along streams and rivers, where they may consume as much as 200 hundred gallons of water a day.



TREE	FEMALE CONE
Engelmann Spruce	hanging, reddish-brown papery cones, mostly in top third of tree
Subalpine Fir	upright and deep purple; mature scales fall off
Douglas-Fir	hanging, with three-pointed bracts that resemble a mouse's tail and hind feet
Lodgepole Pine	hanging, with prickly-tipped scales

PLANTS

Where do these plants grow?

Look for these habitat icons throughout the guide to identify the natural conditions where each plant thrives.



STREAMSIDE • WETLANDS • WET MEADOWS



DRY MEADOWS



GAMBEL OAK • SAGEBRUSH SHRUBLAND



ASPEN GROVES



MIXED CONIFER FOREST



SPRUCE • FIR FOREST

NEEDLES	BARK
sharp, stiff and square	scaly; reddish-brown to grey
flat and soft, with small notch on rounded tip	pale grey with deep resin blisters
flat; pale with two white stripes on bottom	thick and deeply grooved
sharp and flat; grow in pairs	scaly; light grey to blackish

PLANTS

Shrubs



CHOKECHERRY

Prunus virginiana

The fragrant flowers evoke caterpillars, which then mature into purple-black (nontoxic) berries that bears, especially, love to eat.



RED-OSIER DOGWOOD

Cornus stolonifera

The white berries last into late fall and even winter, providing food for wildlife, while the shrub's red stems stand out once the leaves fall off.



RED ELDERBERRY

Sambucus racemosa

The stems of this rather foul-smelling shrub were once boiled and hollowed out to make flutes; the red berries are toxic when raw.



MOUNTAIN ASH

Sorbus scopulina

Large, frothy clusters of white flowers turn into glossy, orange-red berries (edible but bitter) that attract numerous songbirds.

PLANTS



SERVICEBERRY
Amelanchier alnifolia
Delicate white blossoms flower in early spring, and the ensuing blue-black fruit looks like tiny apples.



WILD ROSE
Rosa woodsii
Like domestic roses, the saucer-shaped flowers smell wonderful and, later, the bright-red rose hips are prized by squirrels, deer and other critters.

Wildflowers



Asparagus family
FALSE SOLOMON'S SEAL
Maianthemum amplexicaule
After feathery clusters of tiny white flowers bloom, the plant produces reddish berries—edible but bland.



STARRY SOLOMON'S PLUME
Maianthemum stellatum
The dainty flowers resemble tiny stars sprinkled across the leaves, and the light-green, striped berries turn purple-brown in fall.

PLANTS

Barberry family
OREGON GRAPE
Mahonia repens
Not the stuff of vineyards, the purple berries of this plant are extremely tart.



Bellflower family
HAREBELL
Campanula rotundifolia
Like the Maroon Bells, these five-petaled flowers don't "ring"–but they do flutter in the breeze.





Buttercup family
PASQUEFLOWER
Pulsatilla patens
These early bloomers with fuzzy stems show up in spring after the snow melts.



BLUE COLUMBINE
Aquilegia coerulea
Colorado's showy state flower, which inspired the colors of the state flag, is protected by law; as with other wildflowers, don't pick them.



WESTERN RED COLUMBINE
Aquilegia elegantula
Find these crownlike flowers, which look quite different from blue columbines, growing on shady hillsides.

PLANTS

Borage family

MOUNTAIN BLUEBELLS

Mertensia ciliata

Look for clusters of these flowers—pink buds that turn blue—along forest streams.



PARRY'S HAREBELL

Mertensia parryi

Commonly found in mountain meadows, these blossoms range in color from light to bright purple.





SUBALPINE LARKSPUR

Delphinium barbeyi

Tall and slender (and poisonous), these deep-purple flowers prefer wetter areas within the forest.



MONKSHOOD

Aconitum columbianum

One glance at the hoodlike petals of this highly poisonous plant, which can grow to 6 feet, makes clear the inspiration for its name.



BANEBERRY

Actaea rubra

The bright-red (or sometimes white) glossy berries are pretty to look at but can be deadly if eaten.

PLANTS



Broomrape family

NARROWLEAF PAINTBRUSH

Castilleja linariifolia

As with all paintbrush species, look for the small green flowers hidden within this plant's red bracts (the leaflike structure at the base of the primary flower).



SCARLET PAINTBRUSH

Castilleja miniata

As hemiparasites, paintbrushes partially feed off the roots of other plant species.



Evening Primrose family

FIREWEED

Chamerion Angustifolium

These tall, fuschia flowers often grow in areas previously disturbed by fire, avalanches or even construction—their root systems help stabilize the soil.



Gentian family

GREEN GENTIAN OR MONUMENT PLANT

Frasera speciosa

Growing up to 7 feet tall, these towering plants can take decades to flower and then do so only once; but the dried-out stalks often remain standing for years afterward.

PLANTS



Geranium family
RICHARDSON'S GERANIUM
Geranium richardsonii
Like little landing strips, the dark-pink veins on the petals guide pollinators, like bees, to the nectar source at the flower's center.



Flax family
BLUE FLAX
Linum lewisii
The luminous blue petals of this drought-tolerant plant last for only one day, but new blooms appear daily.



False Hellebore family
CORN LILY
Veratrum californicum
Toxic alkaloids from these tall plants that thrive in wet areas were once used to poison arrow tips.



Lily family
MARIPOSA LILY
Calochortus gunnisonii
A botanist employed by the then-expanding railroad first collected this species in 1853 near Gunnison, CO.



TWISTED STALK
Streptopus amplexifolius
Look for these unusual plants—with delicate, bell-shaped flowers that give way to oblong red berries—on shady streambanks.

PLANTS



Mustard family
BITTERCRESS
Cardamine cordifolia
These edible plants are related to broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and, yes, mustard seeds.



Orchid family
CALYPSO ORCHID
Calypso bulbosa
These beauties deceive pollinators with their sweet fragrance and distinctive flowers (a.k.a. fairy slippers)—they contain no nectar.



Parsley family
COW PARSNIP
Heracleum maximum
Large maplelike leaves distinguish these flowering giants, which favor streambanks and aspen forests.



Pea family
LUPINE
Lupinus argenteus
After pollination, a colorful spot on the banner of the flower turns reddish-purple or burgundy, a signal to bees that the flower no longer contains nectar.

PLANTS

Phlox family

SCARLET GILIA

Ipomopsis aggregata

Its red, trumpet-shaped blooms not only light up hillsides in late spring but also attract many a hummingbird.



MULTI-FLOWERED PHLOX

Phlox multiflora

These fragrant flowers are common along the Rim Trail, where they grow in mounds amid broken-up shale and stands of sagebrush.





Plantain family

ROCKY MOUNTAIN PENSTEMON

Penstemon strictus

These especially pretty plants showcase violet-blue flowers that grow in spires of intricate, tubular blooms.

? DID YOU KNOW?

The genus *Penstemon* was moved from the Snapdragon family to the Plantain family after genetic research in the 1990s and early 2000s proved the correct lineage.

Rose family

BEAUTY CINQUEFOIL

Potentilla pulcherrima

For generations in the Southwest, a tea from this plant's leaves was applied to pack animals to prevent saddle sores.



THIMBLEBERRY

Rubus parviflorus

This plant's red berries resemble raspberries (which often grow nearby) and have been beloved by many, including Native Americans and white settlers, as well as mammals and birds.







Saxifrage family

BROOK SAXIFRAGE

Micranthes odontoloma

Considered small works of art, this plant's intricate white and maroon flowers contain five white petals, five red sepals and 10 white stamens; look for them along streams.

PLANTS

Sunflower family
Plants within the sunflower family are known as composites: plants whose flower heads are made up of many tiny flowers clustered to appear as a single flower. These six varieties are among the most common sunflowers around Snowmass Village. Not all sunflowers are yellow, either—the showy daisy, for example, is light purple.

HEARTLEAF ARNICA
Arnica cordifolia



ARROWLEAF BALSAMROOT
Balsamorhiza sagittata



ASPEN SUNFLOWER
Helianthella quinquenervis



SHOWY DAISY
Erigeron speciosus





MULE'S EARS
Wyethia arizonica



ROSY PUSSYTOES
Antennaria rosea



YARROW
Achillea millefolium

BIRDS

Birds listed in taxonomic order.



DUSKY GROUSE

Large and chickenlike, these upland game birds like to forage on the ground, especially along the Rim and Ditch trails. They usually fly only in quick, short bursts.



BROAD-TAILED HUMMINGBIRD

Always entertaining to watch as they whiz around meadows lapping nectar from flowers, broad-tailed hummingbirds have lovely, iridescent green feathers. Adult males also sport magenta throat patches, and their wings emit a metallic buzz during flight.

? DID YOU KNOW?

Hummingbirds are the only birds that can fly backward.



OSPREY

You may spot the nests of these large raptors—the only ones that almost exclusively eat fish—atop dead trees or telephone poles near water; ospreys, who mate for life, usually return to the same nest year after year.

DID YOU KNOW?

Raptors, which have especially large eyes, have some of the sharpest vision of any animal.



RED-TAILED HAWK

Diving at speeds of up to 100 miles per hour, their cinnamon-red tails prominent, these raptors hunt for small to medium-sized rodents in mountain meadows. Look for them circling high overhead or perched on fences or trees near fields.



BIRDS



DOWNY WOODPECKER

The smallest North American woodpecker, the black-and-white downies are more agile than their larger relatives as they rhythmically drum on trees (a way of communicating), excavate their nest holes or forage for food.



NORTHERN FLICKER

Unlike other woodpeckers, Northern Flickers frequent the ground, digging for ants and beetles. In the western U.S., males have red markings on their faces as well as red on the underside of their wings and tails.



WESTERN WARBLING VIREO

Listen for these small songbirds among the aspen trees, where mostly the males sing a rapid, high-pitched variation of notes that can communicate their locations relative to their nests.



CANADA JAY

Watch out for anything you may be eating when these fearless, fluffy jays alight—they're not shy about stealing it, hence their nickname, "camp robbers." These opportunists frequent Elk Camp's picnic areas.

STELLER'S JAY

Known for their beautiful blue feathers and black triangular crest, Steller's jays like to perch high up in conifer trees, which they ascend by hopping upward from branch to branch.



DID YOU KNOW?

Steller's jays can mimic squirrels, dogs, cats and other birds.



WOODHOUSE'S SCRUB-JAY

Commonly found on the Ditch and Rim trails, these highly intelligent blue-and-gray birds are native to the western U.S., favoring scrub oak and sagebrush shrublands.



BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE

Their striking look—black and white, with a long, iridescent-green tail—belies these magpies' common presence and loud, raucous call. They feed on small mammals and baby birds as well as on insects.



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Bird brain is a compliment when referring to the diminutive chickadee; each fall, their brains grow up to 30 percent, likely so they can remember where they will have stored as many as 80,000 seeds for the winter.

BIRDS



VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW

Swallows spend more time in the air than other songbirds, especially over water, scooping up insects during flight. Male violet-greens are more colorful, while the females have more subdued green to purple feathers.



RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

Bigger only than hummingbirds, the males of this hyperactive species show the patch of red on their crowns when excited or startled.

CEDAR WAXWING

The best time to spot these birds is in late summer and fall, when they gather in large flocks to feast on fruit like crabapples and berries.



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

Watch for these short-tailed, long-billed birds, as well as white-breasted nuthatches, climbing up or down tree trunks in search of insects. Their song sounds like a small duck honking or an out-of-tune trumpet.



? DID YOU KNOW?

The best times to view birds are between sunrise and mid-morning and late afternoon until dusk.



MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

Like any blue bird, the brilliant hue of a male mountain bluebird's plumage is an optical illusion; light refracted inside the feathers gives the appearance of color, but the feathers themselves don't contain any blue pigment.

? DID YOU KNOW?

Female mountain bluebirds choose mates solely based on the quality of nest locations the males provide.



HERMIT THRUSH

Favoring open areas within contiguous swaths of forest—but heard more than seen—shy hermit thrushes are known for their melodic songs, which begin with a sustained whistle.



EVENING GROSBEAK

Look for the prominent white wing patches as they fly, or the yellow eyebrows and large, cone-shaped bills on males. They eat tree buds, seeds and berries year-round and, during breeding season, insects, too.



HOUSE FINCH

The red (or sometimes yellow or orange) heads and breasts of male house finches derives from pigment in the diet of these very social birds.



PINE GROSBEAK

Usually a denizen of evergreen trees, these plump grosbeaks (males are pinkish red, the female's head and rump golden yellow) are most noticeable in fall, when their cheerful chatter may resonate along the trail as they nosh on aspen buds.



SPOTTED TOWHEE

Look for these large sparrows along the Rim Trail, where they may be scrabbling through dried leaves or shrubs. They're introverts, but you may be able to coax them into view by making sounds like *kksshh-kksshh* or *psst-psst-psst*.



RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

Among the most abundant North American birds, male red-winged blackbirds are easy to identify by their scarlet-and-yellow shoulder patches, as they perch up high or near wetlands.

? DID YOU KNOW?

A male red-winged blackbird may have up to 15 female mates at once.



NORTHERN YELLOW WARBLER

Look for a flash of bright yellow atop small trees or shrubs in local riparian areas, and it may well be one of these small, active birds searching for the insects that make up most of its diet.



YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER

The most common warbler in Colorado, these clever birds hunt for insects in an unusually large variety of ways: looking on leaves or tree needles, searching in bark, scratching in leaf litter or swooping over water.



WESTERN TANAGER

Spot these tropical-looking birds on upper branches in mixed-conifer forest along the Rim and Ditch trails; or listen for their song, like an American robin's but shorter and more raspy.



BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK

Known for their singing, these birds, too, sound like robins, with a cadence that rises and falls, but their song is more sweet sounding, varied, faster and longer.



BLACK BEAR

Despite their name, these shy, smart creatures can be brown or blond, too. You're more likely to see their presence—claw marks on aspen trunks or berry-filled scat piles—than bears themselves. They rarely attack people, but if you encounter a bear, speak softly and calmly back away.



BEAVER

One of the world's largest rodents and unique for their flat, paddle-shaped tails, beavers are indeed busy, damming streams and building lodges that not only improve their own habitat but also benefit the larger ecosystem. They average 66 pounds and are dark brown to almost black.



COYOTE

Distinguished by their black-tipped tails, coyotes are larger than foxes but only about a third the size of wolves. Listen for their exuberant chorus of yips and howls at dusk or dawn. Coyotes usually mate for life.

MAMMALS



MOOSE

These large ungulates—bulls weigh more than 1,000 pounds—have been successfully reintroduced to the region over the past 20 years. Look for them in marshy areas and by lakes. And then stay away—moose are extremely territorial and can be dangerous if provoked.





ELK VS. MULE DEER

Both have hooves and antlers (males). But elk are larger, with prominent white rumps, and usually gather in herds. Listen for their bugle-like mating call in fall. Mule deer, so called for their distinctive ears, are not only smaller but more solitary.

DID YOU KNOW?

Several Snowmass trails are closed seasonally for elk migration and calving.



MAMMALS

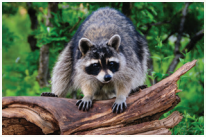




BOBCAT VS. MOUNTAIN LION
Both of these elusive cats are most active at night. Mountain lions are much larger, with long, black-tipped tails. A bobcat measures about twice the size of a house cat and its bobbed tail has black on the top half.



RED FOX
Look for these reddish (or sometimes grayish) cuties with bushy, white-tipped tails in open land or at the edge of forests.



RACCOON
Spot slim, five-toed tracks in mud or snow—on a trail or in a neighborhood—and a raccoon (a.k.a. "trash panda") may be nearby.



PORCUPINE
Crowned by some 30,000 razor-sharp quills, a porcupine feasts on buds and leaves in summer, inner tree bark in winter.

MAMMALS



PINE MARTEN

Part of the weasel family, the usually shy, extremely agile pine marten is about the size of a small house cat. Often found in spruce-fir or lodgepole pine trees, these critters like to scamper along the branches.



LONG-TAILED WEASEL

One of only four species in Colorado that change color seasonally, this adorable weasel turns from brown in summer to bright white in winter. Active during the day hunting small mammals, it lines its burrow with fur from its prey and grasses.



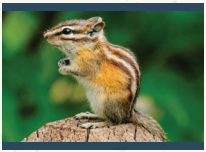
SNOWSHOE HARE

Larger than the common cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hares may be difficult to spot in winter, when the snow camouflages their white fur, but in summer their coat, like the weasel, turns brown.

? DID YOU KNOW?

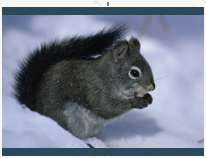
Their winter whites not only camouflage weasels and snowshoe hares from predators, but white fur holds more air, increasing its insulation.

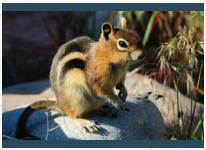
Who's that scurrying through the forest?



It might be Colorado's smallest chipmunk, the **LEAST CHIPMUNK,** usually marked by five dark stripes and two white facial stripes.

It could be the **PINE SQUIRREL** (a.k.a. chickaree), which likes to chatter and scold while protecting its forest habitat.





Or it could be a **GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL,** which looks chipmunk-like but larger and lacks stripes on its face; it's also often friendly to humans.



YELLOW-BELLIED MARMOT
Known as "whistle pigs" for their distinctive warning cries, these social rodents are about 2 feet long and weigh up to 11 pounds. They typically lounge on rocky outcrops in meadows while also fattening up for winter hibernation.



Want to learn more? Here are some great places to start:

Wild at Heart: A Field Guide to Plants, Birds and Mammals, by Snowmass Village resident Janis Lindsey Huggins (who was also an invaluable source of advice for this nature guide)

Field Guide to the Wildflowers of Independence Pass, published by the Independence Pass Foundation

swcoloradowildflowers.com

allaboutbirds.org

For more resources or to access a digital version of this guide, scan here or visit www.gosnowmass.com/field-guide

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SNOWMASS

COLORADO

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