BIRD WATCHING AT THE NEBRASKA STATE CAPITOL

Many different kinds of birds are at home in the Capitol. They are used to represent the state and its history. Capitol artist Hildreth Meière and sculptor Lee Lawrie created over 25 images of birds throughout the building. This handout is a guide to finding and viewing these birds and real birds too.

EXTERIOR--NORTH ENTRANCE

Look up, beneath the gold glazed tile dome, eight mosaic thunderbirds circle the Capitol. Nebraska’s first farmers, Native Americans, believe the thunderbird brings rain and causes thunder and lightning. The blue background tile mimics the blue sky.

There are four eagles on the north facade of the Capitol. On the north portal eagles represent the United States of America. The eagle was chosen as a symbol of the United States in 1782. On each corner pylon an eagle rests on the shield of the United States opposite Capitol architect Bertram Goodhue’s bison seal of Nebraska. Above the door an eagle leads pioneers westward. Best viewed from the promenade deck at the northeast corner of the base, Columbia, a female representation of America, sits on an eagle throne in front of the federal Capitol in Washington, D.C. Nebraska, portrayed as a pioneer woman wearing a bison robe and carrying a corn scepter, holds the 37th star symbolizing statehood for Nebraska on March 1, 1867.

Once you’ve found four eagles on the Capitol’s north side, walk to the south facade and find more eagles. Across the upper wall of the south pavilion, great lawgivers through the ages are shown. The eagle has been used as a symbol of courage, strength and power since ancient times. The Roman Empire’s legions, or armies, carried banners topped with eagles. Roman emperor Julius Caesar is carved with an eagle insignia on his belt.

A Peregrine falcon pair call the Capitol home. Their custom-built nest box is on the northeast side of the tower just below the Thunderbirds. The nest box was designed to fit the geometry of the limestone buttresses. Below, the left circle locates the nest box, the center circle indicates the location of the camera installed by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to monitor the pair. The arrow points to one of the Peregrine falcons sitting on a ledge and shows the size of the bird. The Peregrines often perch on the tower’s many facets to survey their territory. When on the 14th floor observation decks, look up, rather than out. Careful observation may reveal a falcon perched above. For information about the falcons at the Capitol and other interesting non-game birds, check out Game and Parks bird blog.

http://magazine.outdoornebraska.gov/category/nongame-bird-blog/

Another great lawgiver sculpted on the south pavilion is Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor. He is represented with an eagle at his side. This eagle is a reference to the unification of Western European land once part of the Roman Empire by the Frankish leader Charlemagne. The Germanic tribes, including the Franks, used a black eagle as a symbol, as does modern Germany.

Lincoln Monument--West Side

Dedicated on the grounds of the second Capitol in 1912, Henry Bacon’s plaza design for Daniel Chester French’s first statue of Abraham Lincoln features two granite eagles flanking the Gettysburg Address.

For more information about the Nebraska State Capitol visit www.capitol.org or call tour staff at (402)471-0448.
Start your birdwatching in the **Vestibule on second floor**. In the oil on canvas murals representing pioneers settling Nebraska, artist James Penney placed black birds in *The First Furrow* and domesticated birds, the chicken and turkey, in *The House Raising*. Around the Vestibule dome in the arches, Hildreth Meière’s Guastavino tile mosaics depict native animals. At the top of each arch are birds. They include a Great Horned Owl, a Bald Eagle, a Mallard Duck and an unknown raptor.

On the west side of the Rotunda, in the walnut beams of the **George W. Norris Legislative Chamber**, there are gold leaf symbols of the three nations which have claimed Nebraska. The central beam features the Napoleonic bee, a flying insect, a reminder of the Louisiana Purchase. Barely visible in the bottom of the front beam, the Bald Eagle, left, represents Nebraska’s statehood March 1, 1867.