



All About Birdwatching

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Bird Watching

Bird watching can be as simple as sitting at your kitchen table watching birds gather at the feeder in your yard. You can also take a simple walk in a nearby park and observe all the birds around you. Once you stop and pay attention to them, you will be amazed at all the different varieties you will see.

It is helpful to have binoculars, to help you see the birds even at a distance, and a field guide or guidebook of birds in your area. With these two basic pieces of bird watching equipment and a few other supplies, you will be ready to take in the winged wonders around you.

Binoculars

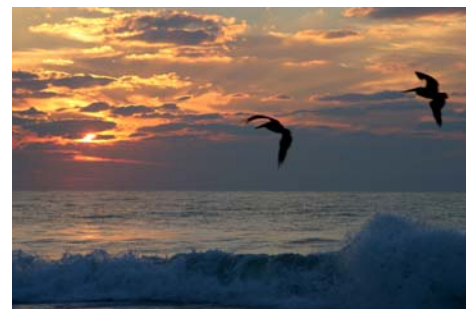
Binoculars are basically two small telescopes attached to one another, which allow you to see faraway objects as if they were much closer. In some cases, getting too close to a bird will frighten it away. In other cases, a bird may be too far away from you, like at the top of the tree while you are on the ground. Either way, a device that brings far away things into sharp, close focus can be of great benefit.

There are two basic types of binoculars, distinguished by the type of prism each have. The more common type is the roof prism, the atypical one is called Porro prism binoculars. The latter is easily identified by the offset barrels. Although Porro prism binoculars may look more complicated, roof prism binoculars actually require much greater precision for light to follow the correct path. Because of the simpler prism design involved, Porro prism binoculars are often considered to be of higher quality than roof prism binoculars of the same price.

Binoculars are generally described in terms of their power of magnification, as expressed in a number followed by the letter x, and their objective lens diameter (as in 7x50, where 7 represents the magnification and 50 is the diameter of the objective lens). The magnification indicates how much larger an object is than viewed with the naked eye (an object through a 7x50 binocular is seven times larger than without the binocular). The larger the objective lens, the more light gets in and the brighter you will be able to see the object of your focus.

If you plan to do your bird watching in damp or swampy areas, be sure your binoculars are water proof. The more compact and lightweight your binoculars are, the easier they are to carry and use. Keep in mind, however, that lightweight binoculars may be lower in quality or higher in price than heavier binoculars. Be sure to consider these issues when selecting the binoculars that are right for you. Moreover, since bird watching will often require you to switch quickly between looking through your binoculars and leafing through your field guide to identify what you are seeing, it can very helpful to have a strap by which to hang your binoculars around your neck.

For an amateur bird watcher, the binoculars need not be fancy or expensive. A simple 8x25 (which enlarges what you are seeing to 8 times its normal size) binocular will do fine. You can probably find binoculars like this for around \$100 or less, depending on the size, weight and quality. As you become more interested in bird watching, you will want to invest in a higher-quality pair of binoculars.



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Field Guides

Guidebooks used to identify the birds are commonly referred to as field guides. The field guide you select should be specific to the part of the country you are in. You may want to check a few books out of your local library to “test” them out before deciding on a book to purchase. A good field guide will provide you with detailed information and illustrations or photos to help you identify the birds you see. Details are important, but keep in mind that a good field guide should also be very organized, allowing you identify a bird quickly, and then refer back to the book for additional information about its species.

Basic information that any field guide should contain includes details about a bird’s appearance, feeding and nesting habits, gender differences, vocal calls, and habitat ranges. Photos or illustrations should include both the male and the female of the species, since they can differ a great deal in appearance. It is also helpful to know what the young of a species look like, since the appearance of some birds changes greatly with maturation.

Among the most popular field guides for bird watching in the U.S. are those by Roger Tory Peterson, commonly referred to as “Peterson’s Guides.” These books utilize a system of field marks, known as the Peterson System, to identify birds at a quick glance. Peterson’s guides are available in the Eastern U.S. and the Western U.S.

Other Supplies for Bird Watching

Along with your binoculars and field guide, you will want to keep yourself comfortable while you are bird watching. Always apply sunscreen and insect repellent before heading out the door. To be most effective, sunscreen should be applied 30 minutes before exposure to the sun, and re-applied according to the instructions on the packaging. Remember that you need sunscreen even on cloudy days.

Be sure to bring paper and a pen or pencil along with you to record the birds you see on each bird watching adventure. You may wish to designate a specific notebook to serve as a bird watching journal where you can jot down your notes from each trip and add more observations later. Other bird watchers prefer to make a few notes on loose paper tucked into their field guides, to avoid having to carry an extra notebook.

If you wish to keep a more visual record of your bird watching, you may want to bring along a camera. Since most of your subjects will likely be a good distance away, the most important feature of a bird watcher’s camera is a good zoom lens. You can photograph birds with any type of camera, but the best photos will be those taken with a high-quality 35 mm SLR camera equipped with a lens with a focal length of at least 300 mm. The longer the focal length of the lens you are using, the better quality photos you will be able to obtain.



Great Gifts for Birdwatchers

- [Feeding Backyard Birds](#)
- [Bird Backyard Habitat](#)
- [Backyard Bird Identification Guide](#)
- [Attract/Feed Hummingbird](#)



[Hummingbird Standing Birdbath](#)



[Audubon Binocular 10x40](#)

Wild Bird Identification

Your field guide will be invaluable in helping you identify the wild birds you see. As you become more experienced in bird watching, you will be able to more quickly identify the birds around you – sometimes merely by hearing them. To quickly identify a bird, it helps to be familiar with the general terms associated with bird anatomy and identification. For instance, it is important to know the difference between the crest (the feathers at the very top of a bird's head) and the crown (the shorter feathers below the crest) when trying to identify a bird. This can be especially important if you do not have time to locate the bird in your field guide and simply jot down a few notes to refer to later. When making notes, it will help if you can add quick drawings. These can include the whole bird or simply parts of the bird, such as a distinctive color pattern on the wings or an unusually-shaped bill. Such drawings need not be works of art, but can be very helpful later as you are looking through your field guide. Things to note include size, coloring, the length of the bird's tail feathers and legs in relation to the body, and any specific distinguishing features. If you see a nest, you may also want to make notes about it, since different species with similar appearances can have vastly different nesting habits.

Where to Watch

You can bird watch from the comfort of your own home, in local parks, or in specially designated bird sanctuaries. The beauty in bird watching is that you can do it virtually anywhere, at almost any time, from before dawn until dark. Remember to be patient and quiet while bird watching, to prevent frightening the birds away. You may be able to see a wider variety of birds, though, by going to a park or bird sanctuary, than from your own back yard. Many parks provide brochures or maps showing the birds indigenous to the area. Some parks also offer organized trail hikes or other bird watching events.

To attract birds to your yard, hang one or more bird feeders and provide the birds with a source of water. Use your field guide to determine which birds you are most likely to attract, since this will help you determine what type of seeds and even what kind of feeder to use. The three main types of bird feeders are hoppers, platforms and tubes. Hoppers hold seed in a main cavity that feeds out onto a small platform area. Platform feeders, on the other hand, include flat trays and cages that hold suet. Tube feeders are cylinders to be filled with seeds, with holes or ports on the sides for feeding. There are also bird feeders specifically for particular breeds, such as hummingbird feeders. Bird houses can range from simple structures to attract birds, to elaborate constructions with spaces for birds to nest. Most bird houses though, are made of wood, although other materials may be used. Quality bird houses should mimic the natural habitats of birds you are trying to attract. The type of bird you are trying to attract will dictate where you should hang the houses.

Finally, keep in mind that the types of birds you will see and the numbers of them will vary depending on the time of day, weather and season. To know more about a specific bird species, you can visit bird stores in your area - the staff there can likely provide a great deal of information for the bird species you have in mind. The parks department is another excellent resource for this type of information.



Popular Birdwatching Products

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- [Deluxe Birdhouse](#)
- [Combo Feeder/Nest Box](#)
- [Victorian Wren House](#)
- [Balloon Hummingbird Feeder](#)
- [Hummingbird Food](#)
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- [Victorian Standing Birdbath](#)
- [Audubon Binocular](#)
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- [2-in-1 Suet Feeder](#)
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