

Beginning Birding - Ten Tips for New Bird Watchers

Welcome to the wonderful world of birding!

If you like watching birds in your backyard or you want to travel the world to see all 10,000 bird species, use these ten tips to get started!



Hint #1:

You need a **field guide** for your area. A field guide is a book with pictures of the birds and tips for identifying them. The best book for new birders in the United States is the Peterson Field Guide to Eastern Birds or the Peterson Field Guide to Western Birds. When you become familiar with the birds in your area, you will want the National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America 3rd edition. For young birders, we recommend Peterson First Guide: Birds. It describes 188 common and conspicuous birds and it won't overwhelm them with too many choices. You will also want to look at the new Stokes Field Guides.



Hint #2:

You need **binoculars** to see the birds. You will soon discover an ironic fact. The best birders have the best binoculars — even though they can identify a bird 100 yards away by its silhouette. Newcomers with a cheap binocular see a fuzzy ball of feathers and don't have a clue which bird it is. There is an unbelievable difference between a \$59 binocular and a \$900 binocular.



Hint #3:

You need to know **what to expect** in your area. The giant woodpecker you saw in the woods was a Pileated Woodpecker, not an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Checklists of birds in your area will tell you this. Many State and National parks near you have Checklists of the birds seen in the park.



Hint #4:

You need to be able to **find the birds**. To do this, you should learn about the habitat each species of bird prefers. Do they like to spend their time at the top of a tree or on the ground or on a lake? You should learn the songs of the birds in your yard. Later, learn the songs of other birds in your area of the country. To find a bird, you will often hear it first.



Hint #5:

Join a group of other birders. Birders are very friendly and helpful. They are always willing to share their knowledge. We were all beginners once. Start by calling the local Audubon Society, the local Nature Center or Parks Commission, or the local Bird Club. If all else fails, go to the park with your binoculars. Someone is sure to strike up a conversation and they might lead you to a whole new group of birding buddies.



Hint #6:

Try a **birding trip** or tour. Local bird trips are sometimes advertised in the newspapers. These are often led by park rangers or a local Audubon member. To find out about local trips you should also call your local Rare Bird Alert phone number. After reciting the list of rare birds seen in the area, they often mention upcoming field trips. The trips may last a morning or most of the day. These trips are usually free of charge. You might also want to join a professional guide on a tour. Tour guides charge for their services but they are worth every penny. Birding tours can take you all over the world. When birding, wear neutral colored clothing, not white.



Hint #7:

Read about birds. There are many good magazines about birds and birding. For North American birds Birder's World, Bird Watcher's Digest, Birding and Wildbird are magazines you might like. Subscribe to the ones that appeal to you. There are also thousands of books about birds.



Hint #8:

Bring the birds to you. You can **attract birds** to your yard with just a little work. Planting the right flowers will attract hummingbirds. Sunflower seeds will bring lots of new birds to your house. You might even want to build a bluebird house. Learn about the National Wildlife Federation's "Backyard Habitat" Program.



Hint #9:

Record your bird sightings. You might want to keep a "diary" or list of the birds you see in your yard. You can also keep a list of birds you see in your town or on your vacation. Birders often keep lists for their county, state or country. They may also keep track of birds seen in one day or one month or one year. This is all terribly easy to do with a computer listing program. A favorite is the Birder's Diary.



Hint #10:

HAVE FUN. ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS. BE KIND TO BIRDS.

Birding Caution

Caution! To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording or filming. Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas and important feeding sites. Disturbing or harassing federally Threatened or Endangered species such as the Piping Plover is against the law. This is especially critical in their nesting areas. Please observe and enjoy these birds from a distance. Also stay on roads, trails and paths where they exist and respect private property.