

So you think you want to try birding?

UW Retirement Association Birding Interest Group

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If you enjoy watching birds,

Consider yourself a birder.

*The term is broad, diverse and
inclusive.*

*No matter your style, the world of
Birds has something for you.*

Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance

Ethics

Mark Johnson

Ethics

- Minimize disturbance of birds, especially sensitive and threatened species and nests, by keeping your distance.
- Leave dogs at home when possible. If accompanied by a dog, make sure it is on a leash. Dogs can disturb birds and other wildlife and especially pose a risk to ground-nesting birds.
- Drive slowly and cautiously. Stay on designated trails and roads. Do not trample vegetation.
- Do not share nest locations of sensitive species.
- Limit use of pishing and playback audio recordings particularly during breeding or nesting season. Do not use these methods in heavily birded areas or for sensitive species.
- Respect private property rights; only enter with express permission.
- Bird in group sizes that are appropriate for the habitat and activity already present in an area.
- Don't point binoculars towards other people or directly into windows or personal spaces such as backyards.
- Be polite and courteous of those you encounter while birding. Be considerate and respectful of all group members while encouraging and sharing your knowledge with beginners.

Binoculars

Mark Johnson



Good binoculars will enable you to see birds more clearly and to discern details of the birds you are looking at. Following is information on terms used when describing binoculars.

Basics

Magnification

- Most birding binoculars come in 8x and 10x magnification.
- Personal preferences vary, but many find 8x binoculars are in a sweet spot, providing good magnification with a wide field of view.
- The largest drawback of higher power is that along with magnifying the object, it also magnifies the movement of your hands and body, which causes the image you see to shake or appear jumpy.
- A second drawback is that higher power models generally have a smaller field of view, causing difficulty in finding or following objects.

Objective Lens

- A larger objective lens will gather more light and usually deliver a sharper, brighter image.
- The downside of a larger objective lens is that as the size of the lens increases, so does both the weight and the size of the binoculars.

Field of View

- Magnification power also has a direct effect on your field of view.
- Lower magnification expands it.
- Higher magnification narrows or reduces it

Adjusting the Binoculars

Set eyepiece spacing

- Grasp barrels firmly. Move them closer together or move them farther apart until the image you see forms a single circular field.

Adjusting your Diopter

- If your diopter is located on the right barrel, then we begin by looking through the left barrel with our right eye close. Start by adjusting the center focus knob/diopter until the image is as crisp as we can get it.
- When we're ready to adjust the right eye, we'll go ahead and close our left eye, and adjust the diopter on the right barrel until our image is as, again, as crisp as we can get it. Once we are happy, we can use the diopter lock to lock it in place.
- Finally, we'll go ahead and open both our eyes and using the center focus knob, fine-tune the image that we see until it is perfect.

Adjustable eye cup

- Cup up for normal vision
- Cup down for glasses

Focus knob

Fine tunes the image so that it is clear and crisp

Neck strap

Always wear your binoculars. This will prevent them from accidental dropping. Two kinds:

- Around the neck
- Harness strap

Shopping for binoculars

- #1 tip is to try as many binoculars as you can before you buy
- **Birds Connect Seattle** and **Glaziers** have good selections and service

Things to consider:

- How are the weight and balance?
- Do they feel comfortable?

- Are they easy to adjust and use?
- How does the focus wheel feel?
- Do the binoculars immerse you in this scene you're viewing?
- Does the cost fit your budget?

Websites for Binoculars

- All About Birds - www.allaboutbirds.org/news/six-steps-to-choosing-a-pair-of-binoculars-youll-love/
- Wikipedia - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binoculars
- Audubon Guide - www.audubon.org/gear/binocular-guide
- Simpli Essential Guide - www.simpli.com/lifestyle/essential-guide-understanding-binoculars-parts
- REI How to Choose Binoculars - www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/binoculars.html
- Birdwatching HQ - birdwatchinghq.com/how-to-choose-binoculars/
- WikiHow - www.wikihow.com/Choose-Binoculars
- GearLab - www.outdoorgearlab.com/topics/camping-and-hiking/best-binoculars/buying-advice
- Crutchfield Binoculars Buying Guide - www.crutchfield.com/S-reJyGGLCOOZ/learn/binoculars-buying-guide.html

Field Guides and Apps

Tom Tokarz

Introduction

Before consulting a guide or an app, observe the bird for as long as possible. Take note of the following:

Size of Bird: Use a standard reference with which you are familiar. For example, is it bigger or smaller than a Robin?

Shape of Bird: Again, use familiar birds as references – is it duck-like, robin-like, etc.?

Habitat (where is the bird): Woods, brush, grassland, water (salt or fresh), on the ground, in the air (soaring or flying constantly)?

What is it doing?: Walking, hopping, swimming, wading, “flitting” about in foliage, perched, climbing up or down a branch/trunk?

Markings: Stripes, streaks, rings around the eyes, tail spots or stripes?

Color: General color of the bird (white, brown, black, yellow, etc.). Take note of markings (red on head, white on tail, specific color features).

Beak/Bill: Note size and shape.

*****NOW YOU MAY LOOK AT YOUR REFERENCE GUIDE! *****

Guidebooks

- There are many types of guidebooks available: covering all of North America, Western North America, individual States, Counties, specific regions, and those focused on different groups of birds.
- These books are great for browsing, but until you are familiar with the various families of birds, they can be quite time consuming and take an inordinate amount of time thumbing through to find your bird when in the field.

- There are many local guides that are geared towards beginners, having fewer illustrations and species listed. Some examples include
 - **Birds of Puget Sound Region Coast to Cascades** (Paulson, Morse, Aversa, Opperman)
 - **Birds of the Pacific Northwest** (Aversa, Canning, Opperman)
 - **Birds of Seattle and Puget Sound** (Fisher)
 - **Birds of Washington Field Guide** (Tekiela)
- There are also Guides for specific types of birds (hawks, gulls, waterfowl, warblers etc.)

For a good general reference, the following are recommended as they cover nearly all the birds one is likely to see in Canada or the western USA:

- **Peterson's Guide to Birds of Western North America**
This is a classic guide for birding. It uses illustrations rather than photos and points out key features to look for on the bird. It also has a good introduction to the basics of birding. It is compact enough to carry easily.
- **National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America**
Another classic guide. It also uses illustrations rather than photos. This book covers more species than Peterson's. It is rather large and therefore not quite as portable; it is an excellent reference.
- **Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America**
This guide uses photos rather than illustrations – geared toward beginning/intermediate birders.
- **Sibley Guide to the Birds of Western North America**

This guide uses drawings. It is an excellent and detailed field guide with many illustrations. Compact enough to carry easily. Not the best guide for beginners as the level of detail can be daunting.

Apps

The trend is toward using apps rather than books. Apps do have the advantages of portability, ability to have multiple references in one device, sound ID, searching for specific birds step by step, and birds most likely to be seen at your location. For beginner birders, some suggestions are:

- ***AUDUBON (free)***

This is a free app with many features: good summaries of each species, photos, descriptions, recordings of songs and calls, range maps, discussions, habitats, feeding, diet, nesting, eggs.

You can search for an unknown bird by starting with the U.S. state and month and then note up to eight features of the bird. (One caveat – skip features you are not sure of such as activity, voice, wing and tail shape; otherwise, it will eliminate most possibilities too quickly.)

Also, under “Explore” you can see locations in your area and what birds have been seen there. You can also use it as a standard field guide (listed by type of bird).

- ***MERLIN (free)***

Many birders already use Merlin for sound ID, but it offers much more. You can search for a bird in two ways:

- Step by step: location, date, size, color, activity. The most likely is listed first – scroll down for other possibilities.

- Photo ID: if you can, take a photo of the bird and load it. Identification is possible if there is enough detail in the photo.

Under “Explore”, the app will give you a list of the most likely birds along with a bar chart showing frequency depending upon the month. If you click on the photo of the bird, there follows a description and several more photos, sound recordings, and a range map.

A caveat regarding the sound ID feature – it should not be used as proof of ID. The identification must be confirmed visually or through matching what you hear with sound recordings provided by Merlin. It is, however, a great screening tool to get an idea of what birds may be present.

- ***SIBLEY BIRDS (\$19.99)***

This app has all the features of the book PLUS sound and the ability to compare species. It is probably more comprehensive than needed if you are just starting out!

Organizations
Local Parks
Recurring Bird Walks
Field Trips
Birding Festivals
Top Spots within Two
Hours of Seattle

Ellen

Local Birding Organizations

Audubon Societies

- Birds Connect Seattle (formerly Seattle Audubon), birdsconnectsea.org
- Seward Park Audubon, sewardparkaudubon.org
- East Side Audubon (East King County), eastsideaudubon.org
- Vashon Birding Alliance (Vashon and Maury Islands), vashonaudubon.org
- Blackhills Audubon (Lewis, Mason, Thurston Counties), blackhills-audubon.org
- Tahoma Bird Alliance (formerly Tahoma Audubon, Pierce County), tahomabirdalliance.org
- Pilchuck Audubon (Snohomish County/Camano Island), pilchuckaudubon.org
- Skagit Audubon (Skagit County), skagitaudubon.org
- North Central Washington Audubon (Chelan/Douglas/Okanogan Counties), ncwaudubon.org

Other Organizations

- Washington Ornithological Society (WOS), wos.org
- UWRA Birding Group, retirees.uw.edu/interest-groups
- Feminist Bird Club, Seattle Chapter, fbcseattle.wixsite.com/fbc-seattle

Recommended Local Parks

- Center for Urban Horticulture/Yesler Swamp/ Union Bay Natural Area (also called Montlake Fill)
- Magnuson Park
- Meadowbrook Park
- Washington Park Arboretum
- Carkeek Park

- Seward Park
- Schmitz Park
- Lincoln Park
- Alki Point/Constellation Park/Jack Block Park
- Discovery Park
- Logboom Park
- Edmonds Waterfront and Marsh
- Your local park

Recurring Bird Walks

- **Marymoor Park**, Redmond; Thursday, check Eastside Audubon for start time; Michael Hobbs, leader; All welcome
- **Billy J. Frank, Jr./Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge**, Olympia; Wednesday, 8 am start; Shep Thorn, leader; All welcome
- **Joint Base Lewis McChord Eagle's Pride Golf Course Walk**; Lakewood; 3rd Thursday of the month; 8 am start; Denis DeSilvis, leader; All welcome
- **Seattle Parks and Recreation Friday Walks**, Rec' N the Streets, 10 am start time. Email Kat for their monthly bird walks flier: KathrynWissman@seattle.gov. Location varies. All welcome
- **Tahoma Bird Alliance**, Fort Steilacoom Park, 1st Tuesday, 8 am. (See their website for other regular bird walks)
- **Birds Connect Seattle**, Visit their website for Neighborhood Bird Walks

Field Trips

- **UWRA Birding Group**: Third Tuesday of Month. Location and start time vary. Contact UWRA: retiremt@uw.edu
- **Pilchuck Audubon**, Tuesday Birding Trips: all day, destinations and times vary. Saturday or Sunday half-day field trips. See Pilchuck Audubon website for details. All welcome. Sign and submit release form prior to field trip.

- **Birds Connect Seattle Field Trips**, by lottery. Location and times vary.
- Visit **Local Birding Organization** websites above for more information on other available field trips.

Birding Festivals

- **Snow Goose and Birding Festival**, Stanwood (February)
- **Wings Over Water NW Birding Festival**, Blaine (Spring)
- **Sandhill Crane Festival**, Othello (March)
- **Olympic Peninsula Birdfest**, Port Townsend (April)
- **Gray's Harbor Shorebird Festival** (April or May)
- **Wings Over Whidbey**, Coupeville (May)
- **Yakima River Canyon Birdfest**, Ellensburg (May)
- **Leavenworth Springfest** (3rd week of May)
- **Audubon Wenas Campout**, Memorial Day Weekend (May 31-June 2, 2024)
- **Puget Sound Birdfest**, Edmonds (June 1, 2024)
- **Wings Over Willapa**, Long Beach Peninsula (September 20-22, 2024)
- **WOS Annual Conference** (site and dates vary)
- **World Migratory Bird Day** (May 11 and October 12 yearly)

Top Birding Spots within 2 Hours of Seattle

Here are a few additional destinations. It would be best to go on a field trip or with birders who know the areas listed. This is by no means comprehensive. We have a richness of birding destinations. Visit local birding chapter websites for possible field trips.

North:

- Everett: Spencer Island, Langus Waterfront Park,
- Skagit area/Fir Island north to Samish Island. Best in winter with swans, snow geese and raptors
- Blaine Marina/Semiahmoo

East:

- Juanita Bay Park, best Oct - Apr
- Snoqualmie Valley, including Three Forks, Stillwater Wildlife area
- Cle Elum area, especially Swauk Cemetery, Bullfrog Pond, riding along rural roads. Best April – June

South:

- Des Moines Marina, Salt Water State Park, Dash Point State Park
- Hylebos Wetlands
- Fort Stillacoom Park, Billy Frank, Jr./Nisqually NWR

West:

- Whidbey Island
- Point-no-Point, Foulweather Bluff
- Dungeness Spit, Ediz Hook, Elwha River mouth
- Grays Harbor area: Best for shorebirds, year-round, but especially in April and October

Consult the **Birders Guide to Washington** by Hal Opperman for statewide suggested birding routes. Washington Ornithological Society provides an online version.

Online Resources

Etta Cosey

1. Check out the birder's online toolbox as described by Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance: swibirds.org/blog/2021/2/24/a-birders-online-toolbox
2. Cornell Lab of Ornithology Bird Academy (academy.allaboutbirds.org) offers online bird and nature classes for all levels, with costs for classes starting at \$29.99. Described as media-rich content for all learning styles. For example, Joy of Birdwatching is a beginner course with tools for getting started. Other courses include a series on the basics of bird ID (size and shape, color pattern, birding by ear) and courses specifically about ducks & waterfowl, sparrows, backyard birds, etc.
3. Cornell Lab All About Birds website (allaboutbirds.org) features the following:
 - A bird guide w/ ID aids, life history info for 600+ North American bird species
 - ID skill development tools i.e., how to tell a Sharp-shinned Hawk from a similar looking Cooper's Hawk
 - In-depth discussions of the four keys of bird ID, etc.
4. Dupage Birding Club: YouTube tutorials on hundreds of species. (youtube.com/@DuPageBirdingClub) The goal behind their production is to provide opportunities for learning regardless of experience level.
5. **Bird Blogs**: non-technical articles on bird identification w/ photos
 - Nature by Nancy (naturebynancy.zenfolio.com)
 - Union Bay Watch (unionbaywatch.blogspot.com)
 - BirdNote Podcasts (birdnote.org)

6. **Live Bird Cams** (there are lots)
 - [Audubon](http://audubon.org/birdcams) (audubon.org/birdcams)
 - [Cornell Lab](http://allaboutbirds.org/cams) (allaboutbirds.org/cams)

7. **World of Birds** (birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home) is a comprehensive online guide with life histories, distribution, habits, etc. with an extensive audio and photo library on the 11,000+ bird species

8. **YouTube Videos:** In-depth, as well as, personal accounts of birds from around the world. These are some of my favorites:
 - [Sparky Stensaas of Sax Zem](https://youtube.com/c/SparkyStensaas) - youtube.com/c/SparkyStensaas
 - [BTO \(British Trust Ornithology\)](https://youtube.com/@BTOvideo) - youtube.com/@BTOvideo
 - [CEAP: avian training series](https://youtube.com/@d.j.mcneiljr.2751) youtube.com/@d.j.mcneiljr.2751
 - [Peterson Field Guide Series](https://youtube.com/@petersonfieldguides) - youtube.com/@petersonfieldguides

Many birding organizations have uploaded their education programs, which makes this a wonderful resource.

9. **Facebook:** join a group and share experiences.
 - Pacific NW Birders
 - Inland NW Birders
 - Whidbey Island Rocks
 - Tahoma Bird Alliance
 - Puget Sound Estuaries

10. **Tweeters** is a UW email list serve with more than 3,000 subscribers. FYI: archived messages are consulted regularly by land-use planners, biologists for various agencies and organizations, educators, journalist and conservationists.

11. **WA Birder's Dashboard** (birddash.net/us/wa) is an app, as well as a website that displays recent eBird sightings in an easy-to-use format organized by WA counties.

12. **Bird Photo Galleries** (a few of my favorites)

- [Denny Granstrand granstrand.net/gallery](http://granstrand.net/gallery)
- [Wayne Weber flickr.com/people/wcweber/](https://www.flickr.com/people/wcweber/)
- [Jeff Poklen Photo Galleries pbase.com/jpkln](http://pbase.com/jpkln)
- [Mike Danzenbaker's Nature Photography avesphoto.com](http://avesphoto.com)
- [Joseph V. Higbee's Photo Galleries pbase.com/jvhigbee](http://pbase.com/jvhigbee)
- [Khanh Tran Photo Galleries pbase.com/spruce_grouse](http://pbase.com/spruce_grouse)