

Getting Started in Birding – Seeing and identifying wild birds



A. Basic equipment, low-tech.

1. Binoculars. Without them, if you get close enough to a bird to see it well, the bird will fly away! Binoculars are specified with two numbers: the first number is the magnification, the second is the width of the wider lens. The second number should be at least 4 times the first to have a good field of view.
Recommended size is 8x42 . 7x35 is also ok. Some birders use 10x42, but these are harder to hold steady. A lower-priced alternative to binoculars is a monocular (only one eye).
2. Field Guide book. Get one that has FEWER bird species, not the most. Here are some good ones:
 - i. "Sibley Birds East"
 - ii. "Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Eastern and Central North America"
 - iii. "American Birding Association Field Guide to Birds of New York", written by QCBC member Corey Finger.

B. Apps and Websites.

1. App "Merlin Bird ID" by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Free. You enter basic info about the bird (where and when seen, size, color, habitat), and it gives you a list of choices, with pictures, of what the bird might be. Merlin also has a "photo i.d." feature. You can also inquire on a specific species, get ID info, and listen to calls and songs. Very good for beginners.
2. Website www.allaboutbirds.org also from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Gives more extensive information on each species than the Merlin app. Plus many interesting articles and educational resources.
3. Website www.aba.org has information from the American Birding Association.
4. Website www.ebird.org Recommended only for "Explore" to find out what birds are in your area. Use "Explore Hotspots". After looking at the data for the hotspot, try the "Illustrated checklist" feature.
5. See Queens County Bird Club website www.qcbirdclub.org , select Links for other online resources.

C. Go birding with a group. If you go on field trips with more experienced birders, they will point out birds and help you identify them.

1. Of course, we recommend our own Queens County Bird Club. Use our website www.qcbirdclub.org and select Calendar for a list of our free field trips and presentations.
2. Other nearby bird clubs are the Linnaean Society of NY, Brooklyn Bird Club, and various Audubon chapters.

D. Learning Bird Sounds. Once you start to identify birds by sight, you may also want to try to learn their sounds. Recommended CD: "Birding by Ear: Eastern/Central (Peterson Field Guides)" by Richard K. Walton and Robert W. Lawson. Sounds are also available on the Merlin app and www.allaboutbirds.org website.

Suggestions on cleaning and adjusting binoculars:

- Clean binoculars by spraying eyeglass liquid onto an eyeglass cloth and apply gently. Do NOT use Windex or paper towels.
- Adjusting binoculars
 - Adjust the eyecups for distance to your eyes. If you wear glasses, make the eyepiece as close as possible.
 - Push the barrels together or pull them apart to match the distance between your eyes. You should see a single circular image.
 - Close your right eye. Use the center focus wheel to get an object in focus.
 - Now, close your left eye and adjust the “diopter”. It is usually on the right eyepiece, but it might be in the middle. You should only have to adjust the diopter one time.
 - The binoculars should now be adjusted so you can see equally well with both eyes.

Make your yard a better habitat for birds.

- Hang a bird feeder for regular birdseed. Get one that is squirrel resistant.
- Hang a suet cage with a suet cake. This is neater than seeds.
- Install a bird bath. Inexpensive alternative: a ceramic plant dish on a small stand or table. Put a rock in the birdbath so the birds can see how deep the water is.
- Provide some place for birds to hide in, like a or brush pile or live shrub.
- Plant native plants that attract birds. The benefits of native plants are:
 - They provide fruits and seeds that native birds can eat.
 - Our insects are adapted to using them. You may think of insects and spiders as pests, but birds use them as food.
 - See <http://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds> for suggestions on which native plants to choose.