

## Queens County Bird Club – Birding Etiquette

**Introduction:** Birding is a popular and growing pastime. There is a code of conduct and a system of ethics in place. These guidelines for the behavior of birders are generally accepted by birders around the world, and penned by the ABA (American Birding Association). For a copy see: <https://www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/>

For many people, these ideas may seem to be obvious and second nature. Other people might find the formal presentation of these rules to be interesting, informative, and personally helpful. The general non-birding public will have a better appreciation and be more accepting of the activities of the birding community when they know that birders really do follow an organized code of conduct, that for the most part they are respectful, caring, and sensitive to others, and that they are really nice and accommodating people.

Here then, without preaching and without interpretation, is our informal presentation of the internationally recognized code of conduct for birders. Accepting and practicing these guidelines is a responsibility of every birder, and doing so makes you a better birder. When participating in a birdwalk, be considerate of the other birders.

**Principles:** The welfare of the bird and its world takes priority over your desire to add another bird to your life, state, county, year, or whatever list or your desire to photograph or record a bird. Don't stress birds, especially when they are nesting. Don't unduly draw attention to birds; predators do watch the watchers. Birders do not smoke, chew or spit. Try to stay on trails and avoid

trampling vegetation. Never be discourteous or disrespectful toward people who are not birders.

Don't forget to respect private property rights. Sometimes a rare or otherwise desirable bird will show up on private property, such as their feeders. Birds found on private property have the potential to cause issues if not handled with the proper etiquette. These issues include but are not limited to blocking traffic, trespassing, or just being rude or unruly; believe it or not. Because of past problems, there are some birders who discourage disclosure of the location in an effort to prevent more problems. You don't want to be known as the cause of birders being prohibited from experiencing a good bird.

### **What to Expect:**

Group birding requires some special considerations. Here we describe a typical birdwalk; this scenario provides a convenient way of describing some important rules of conduct.

**Meeting:** The group meets somewhere and at sometime. Always try to be on time at the meeting place. Recognize that the other birders put out just as much effort as you did to get up at 4:00 a.m., and they are all anxious to get to the birds.

**Introductions:** Brief introductions are made and the group gets to know each other. Birding is a very social event. Meeting new or old friends and enjoying friendships is a very important part of this activity.

### **Etiquette: Birdwatching and sharing etiquette during the walk:**

Keep the noise level down. This will minimize the disturbance to the birds. It will also ensure that your fellow birders will be able to enjoy a quiet experience, will be able to locate birds by sound, and will be able to enjoy their beautiful songs. Social time can be reserved for the list making session after the walk or that gourmet meal together. Be considerate of other birders by helping them find and enjoy the birds you see. Always try to make sure that others get an opportunity to see a bird, too.

Learn how to describe the location of a bird you find. "It is in that big green tree" won't cut it. You will increase your enjoyment of the whole natural experience if you learn the names of common plants, and you will be able to teach others at the same time. "The Owl is in the Pine tree near the trunk in the center" is much more informative. The analog clock model is also useful in describing the location of a bird. "The Crossbill is in the largest Pine tree on the right at 3 o'clock" is very informative. Often it is best to start by pointing out a unique landmark and describing where the bird is relative to that: "Its to the left of that clump of dead leaves..."

It is a responsibility of all participants to keep the group reasonably together when walking or during a caravan. It is important for people who leave the walk early for whatever reason to notify others in the group, so that no one will need to search for them.

Every birder was once a beginner and can probably remember the excitement, the challenges, and the inevitable mistakes of fledgling birders. Be considerate of beginners and help them advance to intermediate and advanced levels of their new avocation. Beginners also have a responsibility not to over burden the leaders and other advanced birders.

Be humble. Even the most skilled birders can make mistakes during the excitement of the hunt. Lighting, the weather, familiar birds in unfamiliar situations, expectations, and many other factors can play tricks on your perceptions. Be prepared to discuss and defend an identification, but don't be afraid to be wrong. We can all learn by our mistakes.

Birders shouldn't exaggerate or lie about birding experiences. Leave that to hunters and fishermen.

After: What happens after the birdwalk is over?

The creation of a birdlist is frequently a shared and cooperative group effort. Some groups may appoint someone to create the "official" birdlist for the birdwalk, but they are missing half the fun. Chattering and tweeting about the birdwalk experiences is a complex and fun time. Don't miss out on the fun and the surprises. The group may create an "official" birdlist, but you can keep your own bird list too!

Birding groups are like any other social group that you may know about or in which you participate. While participating in group activities before and after the birdwalk, you can just be yourself. These guidelines are only about birding responsibilities; they have nothing to do with the rest of your behavior and personality. As in any group activity, the dynamics of the group will support you or punish you for your good or bad behavior.

Birding Alone or in Small Groups:

Birding alone is not a lonely experience. You get to be your own leader and to set your own pace. You may see some really interesting birds or other things. You can always share your experiences with your birding friends later.

Birding in small groups (2 to 5 people) with good friends can be the most rewarding and fun birding experience. Usually everyone gets to see the same birds, and shared memories that last a lifetime can be the result. Although these informal walks are more relaxed and flexible than a formal birdwalk, many of the same rules of conduct still apply.

Birding is competitive, but the object of birding is not to seek competitive advantage over others. Birders do maintain extensive and multiple birdlists. Birders energetically share information about the content and the length of their various personal birdlists. A North American birdlist of 700 species or more is very impressive.

Above all, remember  
to have FUN!