

The link to the information below was provided by Logan Stevens, a Scout, who found the information below useful as he works towards earning his Bird Study Merit Badge (shown on the right).



Hobbies at Home: A Guide to Bird-Watching

by Stanley Gill

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many people to spend more time isolated at home, and with this isolation came a need to find more fun and interesting activities to pass the time. Many people discovered that birding, or bird-watching, is a fun activity for family members of all ages. Simply put, it's observing, identifying, and recording birds you see based on their color, song, time of appearance, and location. Bird-watching is an inexpensive and enjoyable hobby that can be done right in your backyard, at a state or national park, or at a wildlife refuge. With a sturdy pair of binoculars and a little bit of patience, you can join in on this fun and enlightening pastime.

- [Bird-Watching Tips](#): Here are some bird-watching tips from the Fish & Wildlife Foundation of Florida that are applicable to avian enthusiasts everywhere.
- [New York State Birding](#): This guide was produced for New York state but contains helpful information for bird-watchers all over the United States.
- [Watching Birds Is Fun](#): A great video series from Michigan State University covers the basics of bird-watching.
- [American Birding Association](#): The ABA is a great resource for both novice and veteran bird-watchers.
- [Backyard Birding](#): Read a quick guide about bird-watching in your own backyard.

Attracting and Finding Birds

Your own yard or a park near your home is the ideal space to start bird-watching. Use local resources to find out what birds are popular in your area. The easiest way to attract birds to your yard is with an inexpensive bird feeder. If you have more space, adding bird-friendly plants and a birdbath will increase the number of feathered visitors. Birdhouses and bird boxes are simple to build and also help to attract avian critters.

- [Gardening to Help Attract Birds](#): Set up your garden to be avian-friendly and watch it burst with wildlife.
- [How to Live Bird-Friendly](#): Believe it or not, your lifestyle can be detrimental to birds. Here are some steps to take to be more bird-friendly.

- [Hummingbirds](#): These cute, tiny creatures require a special feeder and sugar solution to attract them, but the payoff is worth it to observe this unique type of bird.
- [How to Attract Cardinals](#): The cardinal is a colorful, popular bird that's found throughout the United States. Here are some facts about them, including how to set up your yard to attract more of them.
- [Landscaping for Birds](#): With a little bit of work and some new plants, you can transform your yard into a bird-watching paradise.

Choosing the Right Binoculars

It's important to determine how much bird-watching you plan on doing before investing in a pair of binoculars. If you plan on staying at home or in your neighborhood, an inexpensive pair of binoculars should be sufficient. However, if you plan on observing birds in a large, open space or from great distances, like on a beach or at a state park, a more powerful pair of binoculars is recommended. You should also be aware of the binoculars' weight, especially if you'll be hiking long distances. A powerful yet heavy pair of binoculars can feel like a lead weight around your neck after a couple of miles on the trail, so keep this in mind while shopping. It's best to experiment with bird-watching in a few locations before deciding on a binocular purchase, as a good pair of binoculars can cost several hundred dollars.

- [Choosing the Right Binoculars for Bird-Watching](#): There are many considerations when purchasing binoculars, such as price, weight, focus, and distance.
- [Optic Lenses](#): Optic lenses are an alternative to binoculars that can be used for bird-watching and also for stargazing. Here's an in-depth look at how they work.
- [Top Ten Binoculars](#): This article has binocular recommendations for every [budget](#).
- [Adjusting Your Binoculars](#): If you're having trouble getting birds in focus while bird-watching, this guide can help you learn the ins and outs of your new equipment.
- [8x vs 10x Binoculars](#): This helpful comparison will guide you as you choose a pair of binoculars for bird-watching.
- [Wildlife Watching Kits](#): Here are some very good reviews of bird-watching binoculars currently on the market and what you can expect to pay for them.

Birding Ethics

The most important rule in birding ethics is protecting the habitat of the birds and the birds themselves. The welfare of the animals is of the utmost importance. Do not engage in any action that could damage their ecosystem. Never approach, touch, or disturb a bird nest. Excessive photography, flashes, and disturbances can cause birds undue stress and should be avoided. Avoid mimicking bird calls during mating season, as this can confuse the birds. When bird-watching in groups or in public spaces, also be mindful of others around you.

- [The Code of Birding Ethics](#): This guide is a must-have for every bird-watcher. Print it out and take it with you.

- [Impacts of Bird-Watching](#): Here's an academic viewpoint about the impact of bird-watching on both the birds and people.
- [Complete Birding Etiquette](#): This printable PDF discusses birding rules and ethics in depth.

Timing and Observation

Different species of birds appear at different times of day. Owls are nocturnal, songbirds prefer the morning, and so forth. Try bird-watching at different times and see how many species you can identify. Remember that some birds are seasonal as well, so you may see a different variety on a December morning than you would see on a July morning. Keeping detailed notes about your bird identification is crucial to successful bird-watching.

- [The Basics of Owling](#): You can even bird-watch at night! Here's how to get started spotting owls.
- [How to Find an Owl](#): After listening to some owl calls online and getting familiar with their sound, head outside at night and put your new auditory skills to the test.
- [Bird-Watching Guide for Beginners](#): If you're serious about your birding hobby, make sure to set your alarm clock! Songbirds are known for being early risers, so if you want to check a few species off of your list, you'll need to be up at dawn.

Bird Identification

A good field guide to birds is recommended for easy identification. Audubon publishes an excellent field guide with details about most North American birds. Today's smartphones make bird identification much easier than ever before. Although some enthusiasts still use the old method of looking up birds in a book, there are a number of websites and smartphone apps that can make bird-watching a snap.

- [All About Birds](#): This searchable database is a handy tool for researching various bird species.
- [Bird Sounds](#): Xeno-canto is a project devoted to collecting and sharing bird sounds from all over the world. You can listen to the calls of hundreds of different birds and even add your own recordings.
- [Whatbird](#): Whatbird is an initiative that brings bird-watchers together to share knowledge and bird sightings.
- [Bird Identification Tips](#): The U.S. Geological Survey has an in-depth list of identifying characteristics for hundreds of birds.

Birding Clubs

As you discover the enjoyable world of bird-watching, you'll probably want to share your new hobby with others. There are birding clubs all over the United States and even the world. The most famous is the National Audubon Society, which boasts hundreds of chapters. There are also many

community bird-watching groups. Check with your local parks, state park system, and colleges to see if they offer any bird-watching activities.

- [Find Birding Clubs](#): *Bird Watcher's Digest* has a handy tool to find local bird-watching clubs all over the world.
- [DuPage Birding Club](#): DuPage is one of the oldest bird-watching clubs in the country. Located in Illinois, it covers most of the Midwest.
- [Carolina Bird Club](#): This is a club for avian enthusiasts in the Carolinas as well as Georgia.
- [Biggest Week in American Birding](#): This yearly event in Ohio attracts bird-watchers from around the globe.

Additional Bird-Watching Tips

There's lots to explore in the world of birding and ornithological study. Keep up with your hobby by carrying a small notebook with you everywhere to record every new bird you spot. You can also stay engaged with local bird-watching groups and societies. The Internet has made it easier than ever to share this passion with others around the world. But remember that the birds' welfare always comes first!

- [Finding Birds: Where Should I Go?](#) The U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife is a terrific federal resource not only for bird-watching but also for all things related to nature and conservation.
- [National Park Service Guide to Bird-Watching](#): As you discover the wonderful world of bird-watching, consider planning a trip to a national park to see them in unspoiled nature.
- [Cornell Ornithology Lab](#): Cornell has one of the foremost programs for birding and ornithology.
- [Bird-Watching as a Career](#): This overview from Unity College is ideal if you're serious about this hobby and want to make it your profession.
- [Intro to Birding](#): This printable packet is useful for teachers and educators as well as the casual bird-watcher.
- [Bird-Watching Book for Kids](#): This printable booklet is perfect for kids wanting to get into bird-watching and provides a fun activity for parents to do at [home](#) with their children.