

BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS



BIRDING HINTS

- Prepare beforehand--study your field guide and learn general characteristics and species expected to be seen. Practice with your binoculars to locate an object quickly and to focus. You don't want to learn how to use binoculars while birding.
- Be curious--if you see or hear a bird you don't recognize, go after it! If you have to make an effort to identify a bird, it is more likely to stick in your mind.
- Bird alone--not a hard and fast rule, but if you are alone, you are less likely to be distracted, and more likely to see and hear birds. Also, you can spend the time to concentrate on a bird without delaying others.
- Visit different habitats and utilize "edges"--different birds like different places and walking along a border between two vegetative types increases the number of possible species. Brushy areas, overgrown pastures and wetlands are particularly productive.
- Sit and wait--when you locate an active bird area, stop and wait for the birds to come close to you. If you remain motionless, birds will often approach extremely close.
- Don't go to your field guide too soon--a common error and one hard to resist, even for experienced birders, is to look away from an unidentified bird and check the field guide. Make sure you have absorbed everything you can about the bird: size, shape, field marks, action, etc., before you look for it in the book. It very well may be gone when you look back.
- Listen for agitated "chips"--often the best look at a bird is when it is upset and scolding. This is particularly true in nesting season. A "spsh, spsh" noise will elicit this response. Don't overdo it and distract the birds from their nesting responsibilities, however.
- Bird your own area--it's great to go to exotic places for birds, but not really necessary. Almost everyone has a wider variety of birds in their immediate neighborhood than they would realize, and it is much easier to spend an hour or two there than mounting an expedition to somewhere you may see no more birds. It is more exciting to see a new or unusual bird in your backyard anyway. In conjunction with this:
- Keep your binoculars and field guide handy--it's good to have two--one for the car and one at home. Birds pop up in the most unlikely places!