

Birding for Beginners Ten Tips for New Birders

by Pete Thayer

Welcome to the wonderful world of birding!

If you like watching birds in your backyard or you want to travel the world to see all 10,000 bird species, use these ten tips to get started!



Hint #1:

You need a **field guide** for your area. A [field guide](#) is a book with pictures of the birds and tips for identifying them. [[Electronic field guides](#) for you computer are a recent innovation - they sing and play videos - something books can't do.] There are many excellent books. One of the best books for new birders is the Peterson Field Guide to [Eastern Birds](#) or the Peterson Field Guide to [Western Birds](#). When you become familiar with the birds in your area, you will want the [Sibley Guide to Birds](#) or the [National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America](#). For young birders, we recommend [Peterson First Guides: Birds](#). It describes 188 common and conspicuous birds and it won't overwhelm you with too many choices. You will also want to look at the [Kaufman Focus Guide](#) and the [Stokes Field Guides](#).



Hint # 2:

You need a **binocular** to see the birds. You will soon discover an ironic fact. The best birders have the best binoculars -- even though they can identify a bird 100 yards away by its silhouette. Newcomers with a cheap binocular see a fuzzy ball of feathers and don't have a clue which bird it is. There is an unbelievable difference between a \$59 binocular and a \$1,500 binocular. For help in selecting the right binocular, at the right price, see the [Binoculars & Scopes](#) section of WildBirds.com and read the article [Which Binocular is Right for Me?](#) (Did you know that you would need four eyes to use a pair of binoculars! - to see the birds, you need a binocular)



Hint #3:

You need to know **what to expect** in your area. The giant woodpecker you saw in the woods was a Pileated Woodpecker, not an Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Checklists of birds in your area will tell you this. Many State and National parks near you have checklists of the birds seen in the park. WildBirds.com has links to [checklists](#) for every state and province in the United States and Canada.



Hint #4:

You need to be able to **find the birds**. To do this, you should learn about the habitat each species of bird prefers. Do they like to spend their time at the top of a tree or on the ground or on a lake? You should learn the songs of the birds in your yard. Later, learn the songs of other birds in your area of the country. To find a bird, you will often hear it first. WildBirds.com has a whole section devoted to helping you [find birds](#). Finally, check out the web sites about birds and birding locations in your [state](#) or [province](#). There are many very good birds that will help you [find the birds in your area](#).

**Hint #5:**

Join a group of other birders. Birders are very friendly and helpful. They are always willing to share their knowledge. We were all beginners once. Start by calling the local Audubon Society, the local Nature Center or Parks Commission, or the local Bird Club. Local and regional birding [organizations](#) are listed in WildBirds.com. If all else fails, go to the park with your binocular. Someone is sure to strike up a conversation and they might lead you to a whole new group of birding buddies.

**Hint #6:**

Try a **birding trip** or tour. Local bird trips are sometimes advertised in the newspapers. These are often led by park rangers or a local Audubon member. To find out about local trips you should also call your local [Rare Bird Alert](#) phone number. After reciting the list of rare birds seen in the area, they often mention upcoming field trips. The trips may last a morning or most of the day. These trips are usually free of charge. You might also want to join a professional guide on a tour. Tour guides charge for their services but they are worth every penny. [Birding Tours](#) can take you all over the world. One we especially like is [Victor Emanuel Nature Tours](#). VENT offers many bird tours and workshops specifically designed for beginning birders. When birding, wear neutral colored clothing, not white or bright neon colors.

**Hint #7:**

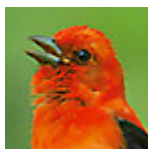
Read about birds. There are many good magazines about birds and birding. For North American birds [Birder's World](#), [Bird Watcher's Digest](#), [Birding](#) and [WildBird](#) are magazines you might like. For UK birds, try [BirdWatch](#). Subscribe to the ones that appeal to you. There are also thousands of books about birds. The [Online Nature Mall](#) has very attractive prices for [bird books](#) and field guides!

**Hint #8:**

Bring the birds to you. You can [attract birds](#) to your yard with just a little work. Planting the right flowers will attract hummingbirds. Sunflower seeds in a new [feeder](#) will bring lots of new birds to your house. You might even want to build a bluebird house. Learn about the National Wildlife Federation's "" Program. Read the article [Which Birdfeeder Is Right For Me?](#)

**Hint #9:**

Record your bird sightings. You might want to keep a "diary" or list of the birds you see in your yard. You can also keep a list of birds you see in your town or on your vacation. Birders often keep lists for their county, state or country. They may also keep track of birds seen in one day or one month or one year. This is all terribly easy to do with a computer listing program. Our favorite is [Birder's Diary version 3.6](#).

**Hint #10:**

HAVE FUN. ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS. BE KIND TO BIRDS.

Beyond the Basics

At some point you will want to watch birds that do not come to your yard. You might read an article in Birder's World or Bird Watcher's Digest or WildBird magazine about some fantastic birding spot in another part of the country.

There have been over 950 birds species seen in the U.S. and Canada. There are 10,000 species in the entire world! And your yard list probably has not yet reached 25.

"Hey, watching birds is fun! How do I see MORE??"

I'm glad you asked. The key to seeing more birds is to visit many different bird habitats. Birds carve out their own niche in nature. You will have to go to burning deserts, buggy mud flats, cold mountains and deep woods to see more birds. Or you could start with the beautiful State Park an hour drive from your house.

When the Birding Bug bites, your first trips will be to your yard or local parks. Your Life list climbs to 50..75..100. Then you get really hooked. You make plans to visit southeastern Arizona, Southern Florida, the Texas Coast/Rio Grande Valley, Colorado and the California coast. You start buying [Bird Finding Guides](#) to help you plan your next trip. You will take an all-day trip out into the ocean to look for Shearwaters. Your North American list climbs to 200 ... 300 ... 400.

Then you will start thinking about birds in [Trinidad & Tobago](#), [Costa Rica](#) and [Belize](#). Your world list tops 1,000. You are a "world class" birder.

When it is completely out of control, you will be birding in [Kenya](#), Papua New Guinea and the [Amazon jungle](#). Your world list tops 2,500. At this point you realize you are just a beginning birder with a LOT more to learn! Enjoy the journey!