



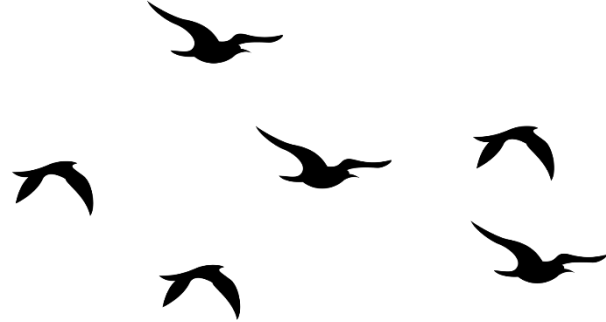
Beginner's guide to bird watching



The art observation of live birds in their natural habitat



Birding is a great way to see wildlife, but how do you get started?

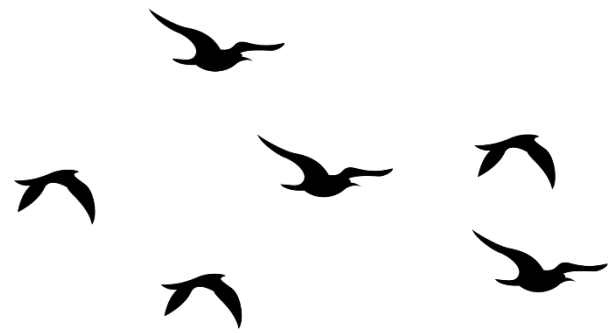


Bird Watching

Are you fascinated by birds?

When you see them chirping and flying from tree to tree, do you want to understand them more?

Bird watching, or birding, is an increasingly popular pastime that can enrich your knowledge of birds, relax you and help you bond with other enthusiasts.





What is the appeal?

Why do so many people enjoy this activity?



Birding fulfills many of our basic criteria for what makes for good outdoor recreation.

Birds are beautiful and their extravagant plumages are dazzling to the eye.

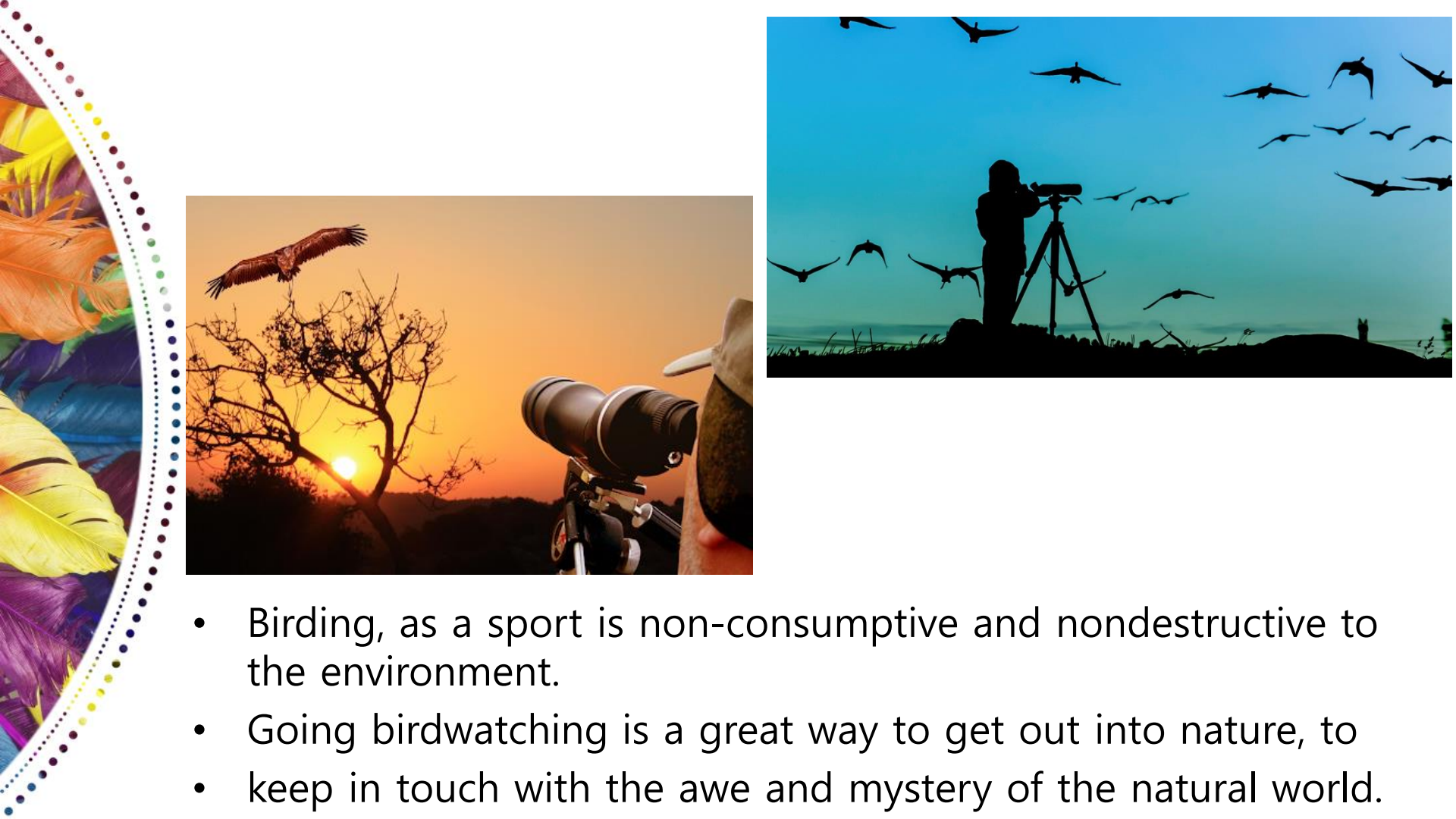
Birds appeal to our sense of aesthetics.

Their complex behavior is intriguing and their songs are varied, evocative and very pleasing to the ear.





- You don't have to be rich to go birding. All you really need is a good field guide to the birds and a pair of binoculars to start.
- Birding always presents an intellectual challenge because there are lots of different species.
- Birding generally appeals to our intellectual curiosity: Birds have amazing and varied behaviors.



- Birding, as a sport is non-consumptive and nondestructive to the environment.
- Going birdwatching is a great way to get out into nature, to
- keep in touch with the awe and mystery of the natural world.

- Tracking the seasonal movements of birds keeps you in touch with the passing seasons.
- Birding can contribute positively to your feelings of mastery and self esteem.
- Finally, amateur birdwatchers have contributed and continue to contribute much to the scientific knowledge of birds.



How to Bird Watch



- Good birders are not born—they develop their skills progressively with time and practice.
- While there are many aids on the market to help beginning birders, such as books, videos, cassettes, CDs, and computer software, there is no substitute for field experience when it comes to mastering the art of birding.
- The more time you spend out in the field, the better you will become.



PART 1: Gathering Equipment

1. Look at binoculars you have on hand.

- You don't need fancy birdwatching equipment to start watching birds.
- Anything that will help you see far away will work in the beginning.



You very well may decide to buy binoculars especially for birding, but you can use opera glasses, telescopes or anything you have on hand. Ask a friend, who may have binoculars, if you can borrow them.

2. Compare binoculars for fit and feel.



- If you decide to buy, the way binoculars fit on your face and feel in your hands is important.
- Go to a sporting goods store or find a nature center that may have different pairs to try.
- Find a lightweight pair that will be easy to carry and hold steady while you spot birds.

3. Look at the magnification and lens size

Binoculars will have two numbers that are listed like 8x29, 7x50, 10x40, or some other combination.

The first is how many times they magnify an image and the second is the lens size, or how much light they bring in.

Pick a lens on the low end, because a high one captures a lot of movement too and can be too bulky for watching birds in a forest or field.

Pick a magnification of 7 to 8 times.

Pick a lens number between 30 and 40 millimeters for the most versatility



4. Consider the binocular strap

- When you go into the field, you will be wearing binoculars on your neck for hours at a time, so make sure the strap is wide and comfortable.
- Use a harness that distributes weight to the shoulders and back, if you have a heavier pair.



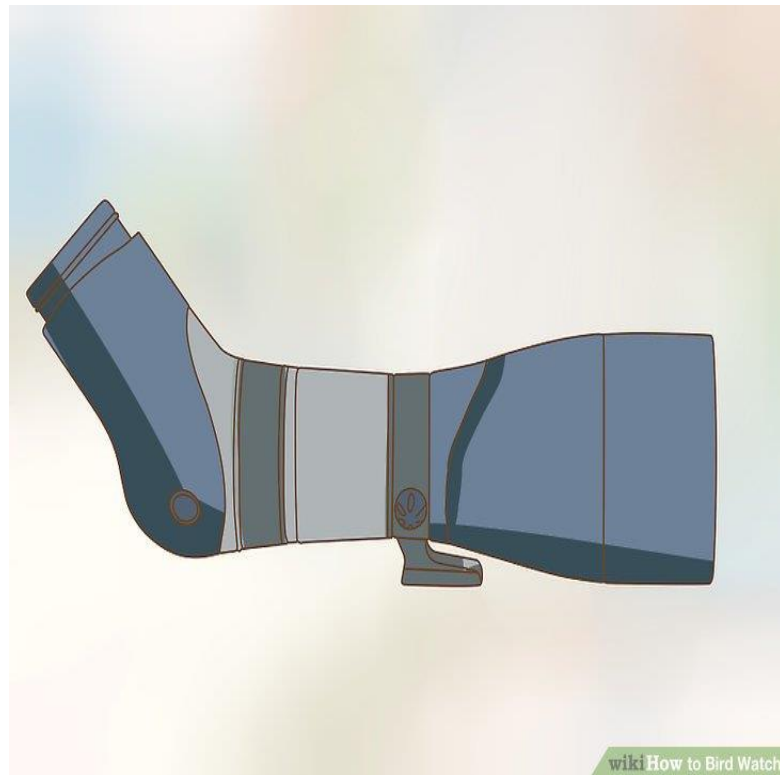
5. Use a spotting scope

A scope will offer stability, since it's used on a monopod, and has higher magnification abilities.

If you get serious about birding, invest in a scope to spot birds from greater distances, like across lakes or fields.

Look for one with at least one lens that is fully coated with magnesium fluoride.

This will give you the sharpest views of feathers and colors. It will also capture movement easier than binoculars.



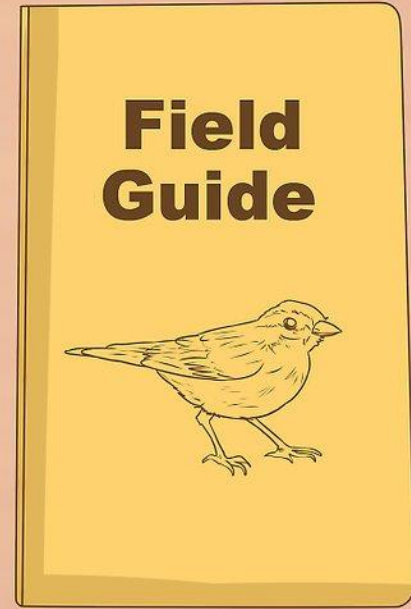
6. Get a field guide

A regional field guide can help you narrow down what birds to look for locally.

Learn about different families of birds, like swallows, warblers, and herons.

Get into the habit of studying their habits, calls, and field marks.

Other than binoculars, your field guide will be your go-to for bird watching, because it will have all the information you need to identify different species.



7. Find a good camera

Find a quality camera to take bird pictures, since they are small and do not stay still.

Look for a DSLR one with a lens attachment of at least 300 mm.



8. Bring microphones to record songs

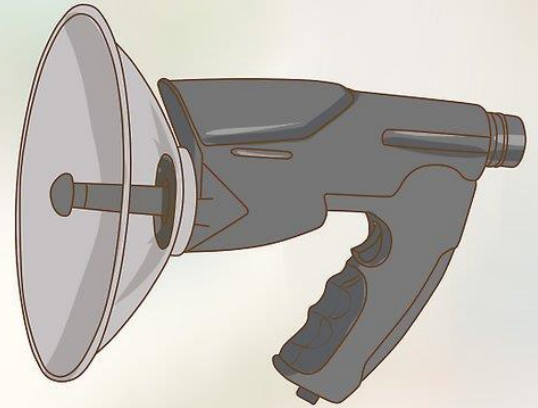
Learning bird songs and calls are a helpful way to identify them.

You may want to record their sounds while you're out spotting.

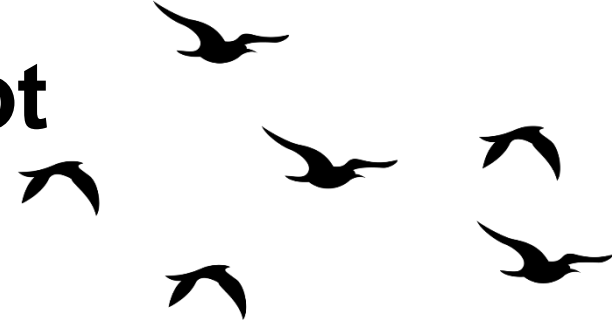
Take either a parabolic microphone or a shotgun mic that you can attach to your camera.

Use your camera to record.

Regular microphones will be ineffective at recording soft or distant bird sounds and will capture too much background noise.



PART 2 : Preparing to Spot



1. Find a birding group

What better way is there to learn about birding, than from other birders?

The more sets of eyes and ears there are, the more birds you'll find, especially if you go with bird watchers who are more experienced than you are.

2. Dress appropriately



Wear waterproof boots, so you'll be prepared if you encounter puddles or mud.

Wear dark, neutral colors, like brown and gray, so you don't frighten birds away.

Bright or white colors enhance movement around them.

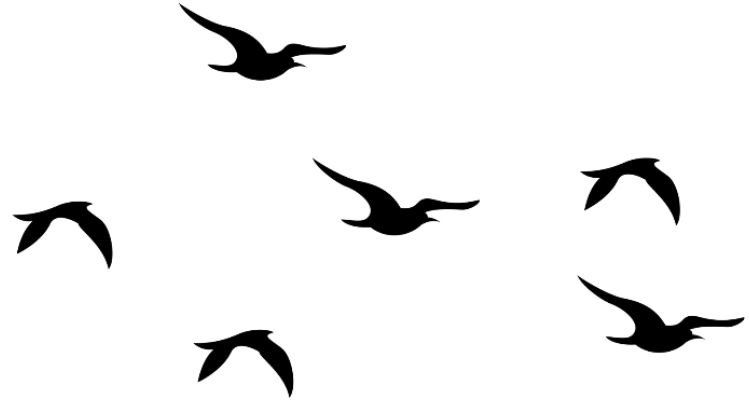
3. Be quiet



Loud talking or laughing can cause birds to flee before you even get close. Put your phone on silent, and speak softly or use hand signals and gestures to communicate with a group.

Don't be tempted to yell "Look over here!," no matter how excited you get by spotting a rare bird.

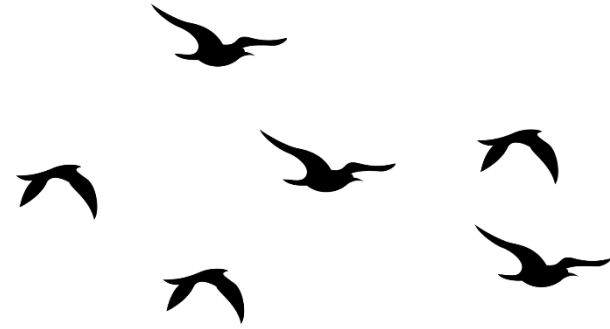
4. Go at the right time



Depending on where you're located and what birds you're trying to spot, the time of day you venture out can greatly impact successful birding. Songbirds are normally spotted two hours after sunrise and right before sunset.

- Hawks and eagles are best seen when the sun first rises.
- Spot ducks any time of day.
- Shorebirds are out when ocean tides change.

5. Lure birds to you



- Start with simple black oil sunflower seeds and diversify with things like mealworms and fruit.
- Place a birdbath or fountain in your yard. Birds love shallow or running water.

Part 3: Identifying Birds



- Start by learning to quickly recognize what group a mystery bird belongs to.
- **You do this in two ways:**
 - By becoming familiar with the general shape, color, and behavior of birds, and
 - By keeping a running tally in your head of what kinds of birds are most likely to be seen in your location and time of year.





Put The 4 Keys Into Practice

Bird watchers can identify many species from just a quick look.

They're using the four keys to visual identification:

- Size & Shape,
- Color Pattern,
- Behavior, and
- Habitat.

Practice with these common birds to see how the 4 keys work together:
You can also see the 4 keys in action in free Inside Birding series of instructional videos.

https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/inside-birding-size-shape/#_ga=2.78792468.1061969188.1592042604-1844625336.1591690830

Size & Shape



Blue Jay. Jays are large, stout-bodied songbirds with long, full tails and straight, powerful bills. Blue Jays (and Steller's Jays) have a prominent crest.



Great Blue Heron: A classic silhouette: long, spear-like bill, elegant S-shaped neck, long legs.

The combination of size and shape is one of the most powerful tools to identification.

Though you may be drawn to watching birds because of their wonderful colors or fascinating behavior, when it comes to making identifications, size and shape are the first pieces of information you should examine.

Color Pattern



Male **Harlequin Ducks** are so strongly patterned that it's very difficult to mistake them for anything else. *Photo by [Jim Paris](#) via [Birdshare](#).*



Even with a brief view of a flying bird, color patterns can lead you to an ID. **Northern Harriers** always show this conspicuous white rump patch. *Photo by [Bob Powell](#) via [Birdshare](#).*

As soon as you spot a bird, your eyes take in the overall pattern of light and dark.

And if the light allows, you'll probably glimpse the main colors as well. This is all you need to start your identification.

Behavior



Kingbird The heftiest and most tyrannical of the "tyrant flycatchers." Erect, thick-headed, with a broad, flat bill.



American Robin Sturdy, strong-framed, and sure of itself.



House Sparrow Large-headed and plump, often hunched over crumbs or watching out for cats and shopkeepers.

Bird species don't just look unique, they have unique ways of acting, moving, sitting, and flying. When you learn these habits, you can recognize many birds the same way you notice a friend walking through a crowd of strangers.

Habitat



In spring and summer, **Bullock's Orioles** overlap with Baltimore Orioles only in a narrow region where the Rockies meet the Great Plains. *Photo by [Sam Wilson](#) via [Birdshare](#).*



Brown-headed Nuthatches look very similar to Pygmy Nuthatches, but the farthest west they occur is the pine flatwoods of East Texas. *Photo by [Mike Powers](#) via [Birdshare](#).*



Gambel's Quail live in the Desert Southwest. Their range overlaps very little with California Quail. *Photo by [Joan Gellatly](#) via [Birdshare](#).*

Habitat is both the first and last question to ask yourself when identifying a bird. Ask it first, so you know what you're likely to see, and last as a double check. You can fine-tune your expectations by taking geographic range and time of year into consideration.

1. Find a bird with your own eyes first



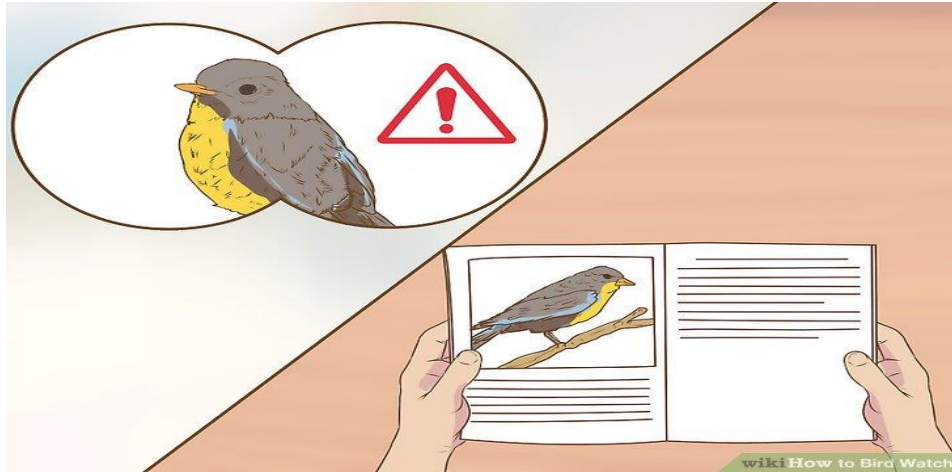
No matter what type of binoculars you use, they will lessen your field of vision. Avoid missing birds by spotting them with your own eyes first. Find birds around trees and overhead in fields, and then use your binoculars to have a closer look.

2. Use your field guide



- The shape and size of the bird, including whether it's big, small, round or oval.
- What the bird is doing. Is it searching for insects, circling overhead or soaring?
- Places where field markings are normally, like wing bars or the tail feathers.

3. Don't use colors alone



- Focusing on bird colors can lead to misidentification.
- Light and shadow can make colors appear different than what they really are.
- A bright red feather can look brown in certain light. Focus instead on shape, size, markings, posture, behavior, etc.

4. Listen to their songs



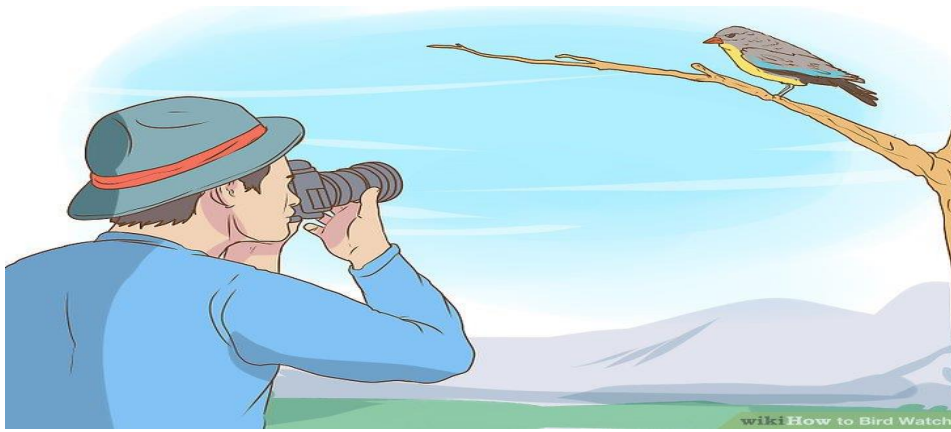
- Sometimes the only way you can identify a bird is by their songs and calls because they are good at hiding.
- Listen to bird chirps to determine where they may be coming from.
- Keep in mind what birds you may see on an outing and look up their calls beforehand.
- Record sounds with a parabolic or shotgun microphone.

5. Look at the surrounding environment



- You wouldn't expect to see a heron in the desert. Moreover, you should expect to see different birds in a forest than you would see in the city park.
- There will also be different birds by oceans than by lakes. Always consider the known habitat of species you're looking for.

6. Take a picture



- Use a camera, without a flash or clicks to prevent frightening birds, to look back on after an outing.
- This way, you can record what you've spotted, but also help identify birds later on, when you're not in the field.
- With time, you'll become an expert and may only need the camera to record all the interesting birds you encounter.

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