

Self-paced Birdwatching

Birdwatching is a great way to become more aware of the natural world with all its complexity and different parts.

With this in mind, we invite you to become a birdwatcher and learn how to be a contributing Citizen Scientist.

INTRODUCTION

Many people start birding with a backyard bird feeder and a field guide.

Alas, many birds do not visit bird feeders. Joining a bird club is a great opportunity to visit local habitats and see more plant and bird diversity. This will stimulate and exercise your brain while you benefit from gentle physical exercise. It will help keep you fit and active into a ripe old age!

On bird walks you will be welcomed and encouraged by both advanced and beginning birders. A willingness to do a little study will help you progress more rapidly with this delightful hobby.

On average, it takes about 3 years to become thoroughly familiar with the basics of birdwatching and reliably recognize many local birds. Initially, frustration and confusion will be your companions but if you don't give up, there are great rewards in front of you!

PART 1

To get started you will need Binoculars. I recommend Vortex (lifetime free repairs) 8 or 10 X 32 or 42. Excellent binoculars are available under \$200.

<https://www.audubon.org/gear/binocular-guide>

<https://www.birdwatching-bliss.com/binoculars-for-bird-watching.html>

Please acquire a recent edition of an eastern field guide to birds: Sibley, Peterson or Crossley. Read the introduction and learn how the book is set up.

Set aside 30 minutes: Using the index in your field guide turn to the pages for the Bluebirds. Find the map that indicates where the bird can be found and select the name of the bluebird most likely present in the Middle Peninsula area. Make a note whether the bird is expected in winter, summer or is present year-round. Birds that can only be seen during migration are not included in this list. Nor are most of the water/shore birds.

Continue with each category in the list below, selecting one that you can expect to see in the Middle Peninsula; e.g.: Bald Eagles are common, Golden Eagles very rare. Bald Eagle is your best choice.

THE LIST: Thrasher, Thrush, Robin, Woodpecker, Bluebird, Bunting, Chickadee, Cowbird, Crow, Duck, Eagle, Flycatcher, Gull, Gnatcatcher, Goldfinch, Goose, Dove, Hawk, Heron, Hummingbird, Jay, Junco, Kingfisher, Kingbird, Kinglet, Loon, Mallard, Mockingbird, Oriole, Owl, Parula, Pelican, Phoebe, Redwing, Robin, Sapsucker, Starling, Swallow, Swan, Raptor, Tanager, Thrush, Titmouse, Towhee, Turkey, Warbler, Vireo, Vulture, Wren.

Stop when you are tired or the time is up. Birding is fun. Always stop bird activities before you become overwhelmed or overly tired. You do not need to visit all the groups in the list. The purpose of the exercise is to introduce you to new bird names and help you know when a bird is most likely present in the Middle Peninsula.

Using a computer open and bookmark **Crossley ID Guides**. Return often to view these wonderful short videos about bird identification.

<https://crossleybooks.com/bird-id-guide/introduction-to-birding/>

Once you have completed the above preliminary exercises you are ready to request a bird mentor.

PART 2

With the help of your mentor open a free eBird account and learn how to use it.

<https://ebird.org/home>

With your mentor attend 5 Mid-Pen or Northern Neck Audubon Society (NNAS) bird walks. While attending at least three of the bird walks, complete an eBird walk list and share it, via your eBird account, with others on the walk.

Complete Cornell's free Bird Academy **eBird Essentials** with a passing grade.

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/product/ebird-essentials/>

With the help of your mentor enter your hours on your Master Naturalist volunteer page.

If you have a smart phone, with your mentor complete a back yard (or other venue) eBird mobile list. Submit it and afterwards find it in your eBird computer bird list.

Describe the 4 things birds need to survive in any habitat.

(water, food, shelter, a place to rear young).

Explain why native plants are essential to maintaining a healthy bird population.

(Insects have co-evolved with these plants and are the essential diet of nestlings).

Name the greatest threat to bird populations.

(loss of habitat, also known as habitat degradation).

Select two things you plan to do during the next year to continue learning about or identifying birds.

SUGGESTIONS: Join **Project FeederWatch** (project runs November - April)

<https://feederwatch.org/>; learn about native plants; plant natives; attend 4 bird walks;

read relevant books (especially ***Nature's Best Hope by Doug Tallamy***); take a Cornell Bird Academy course; attend a Virginia Society of Ornithology field trip:

<https://www.virginiabirds.org/field-trips-events>; Join an Audubon Christmas Bird Count:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

Enjoy the journey!

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