

# The Basics of Bird Watching



## Binoculars are the most important tool for spotting birds.

While they aren't a requirement, they are helpful for picking out important details and will come in very handy in the field. Borrow a pair or try them out before you buy – a good pair of binoculars will be your best friend when spotting birds! Binoculars "sizes" are two numbers: the magnification and the size of the lens. We recommend 7 or 8 magnification when getting started.



## Find a field guide and read up before heading out!

Knowing what to look for is just as important as finding it. Regional field guides can be found in both book and app form! We recommend The Sibley Guide to Birds, Peterson field guides or National Geographic field guides – all of which can be borrowed from your local library! Familiarize yourself with local birds by learning their shapes or their families.



## Apps for your phone

can make identifying birds a breeze! Apps like Audubon's Bird Guide are free, and can help you find nearby birds, or browse by name or family. Apps can help you identify a bird by shape, size, habitat, or even song patterns. Merlin (Cornell Lab of Ornithology) is another great app that identifies a bird using five easy questions, or upload a picture of your mystery bird, and the app will identify it for you!



## Get outside!

The best way to find birds is to get outside. Walk slowly and quietly, and be sure to look AND listen. Oftentimes you will hear a bird before you see it. Try different habitats and different times of the year. Schodack Island State Park offers approximately 8 miles of trails throughout its 864-acre Bird Conservation Area, and is open year-round. The "trail" of bird nest boxes in the park offers a unique opportunity to easily view birds as they dart in and out of the boxes.



## Location, location, location

is everything! While some birds are found here year-round, most birds are migrants that stop in the Capital Region to breed seasonally, or as a "layover" on their flight to northern breeding grounds. Additionally, habitat type is critical to birds – you won't find shorebirds deep in the forest! Be sure to make note of what your field guide says if looking for a particular bird. At Schodack Island State Park, the unique habitats along the Hudson River provide bird watchers an incredible opportunity for a wide variety of our feathered friends.



## Find a birding group.

Bird watching with friends or with a local group makes spotting those little ones even easier! After all, another pair of eyes could mean seeing a lot more birds. Check with the park's naturalist for guided bird walks, or check out events hosted by the Audubon Society of the Capital Region.

