

Hatching

So, you've heard about this birdwatching hobby, but you don't know how to begin. Of course there are many suggestions online, way too many! Here at Prescott Audubon Society (PAS), we would like to lend you a hand, or a wing...

First, some simple steps for going outdoors, whether you are birding or just enjoying nature.

- Dress warm and bring an extra layer, just in case.
- Wear comfortable shoes
- Bring water and sunscreen and perhaps a snack.
- If you are going afield, be safe. Tell others where you will be and, if possible, do not go alone.

Now, just where are the birds?

Some spots are better than others, but your own neighborhood is a fine place to begin. Look for what birds need—a shrub for cover, some water, and food—fruits and seeds, insects, pondweed, even small critters. And listen. Birds often call or sing, and that helps you learn where to look. Think like a hunter: look for movement, move slowly. Also, you will find that birds are most active in the early hours of the day, as they need to get out and find food after a long night's rest.

Remember, for you, it's a treasure hunt! You want to spot a bird. The bird would rather you didn't; its very life may depend on not being seen. More on respecting the birds' needs, below.

And start small. Try to recognize a few different types of birds in your neighborhood. You probably already know some bird species, like the American Robin or the Common Raven. Try to spot a bird that's smaller than a robin. Or larger. Then try to remember one or two things about that bird, like its colors, its beak shape, or its leg color. See if you can recall something about its behavior, like whether it runs or hops, how it looks for food, or how fast it moves about.

Truth is, you don't even need to leave your apartment to go birding. You can start by simply looking out your window! So, if you break out of your shell and start to observe nature around you, then you've "hatched".

Fledging

Ready for a bit more? We hope so. We think you will find that PAS is a whole community of folks who enjoy nature and who celebrate birds and the world we share. We recommend birding with others and learning from others as the best way to get into the hobby or sport of birdwatching. In the Prescott area, we offer **birdwatching field trips** you can join, as does our local birding store, Jay's Bird Barn. On a field trip, you will learn where the local birding "hotspots" are, as well as learning about birds and meeting new friends.

Let's talk **binoculars**. Not quite ready to purchase binoculars? Maybe you can borrow a pair or look for chances to use a "loaner" pair. Time spent practicing sighting through binoculars, starting with things around you that don't move, will help you grow your skills with binoculars, which are an almost-essential tool for birding.

PAS has loaner binoculars available at their monthly field trips to Watson Woods. That field trip is a good one for new birders—and it takes only two hours. Birders you meet can show you their favorite tools, not just binoculars but also bird ID books ("field guides"), apps they use to ID birds and birdsong, and all the gear from hats to harnesses (for binoculars), and from fleece to footwear. Click to go directly to the **Field Trips Page**.

We're confident that birders, in general, are a welcoming and helpful lot, folks who want you to join in the birdwatching flock. As a beginner, you will have TONS of questions. Be patient. Sometimes your group will run into a flurry of bird activity, where the action is just too quick to follow and where questions will have to wait. Our advice is for new birders to just focus on one bird in all that flutter until you have seen what you can. Then go to the next. No one gets them all, every time. When the excitement settles down again-- which it will-- then that's the time to ask your question.

Finally, one of our favorite quotes, from John Fitzpatrick, a director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Cornell Lab has become a wonderful learning tool for birders across the U.S. and abroad. They invented the amazing citizen science tool called eBird. Their bird ID app called "Merlin" provide photos, birdsong sound clips, and helpful hints to millions of young and new birders. We like this quote because it's our philosophy: birding should be both pleasurable and purposeful! Here it is:

"I'm convinced that birds can and do change peoples' attitudes and behavior – steadily, inexorably, one song at a time. We just need to make it fun and easy to learn about birds."

If you feel the spirit of this simple statement, then you have fledged. Welcome to our flock!

