



BACKYARD BIRDING

Tips, Tricks, and How-To's



Photo by parade.com

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A fun activity inside and out

Watching and listening to the sights and sounds of the many different species of beautiful backyard birds is one of life's great pleasures, and a captivating and rewarding way to get in touch with nature. The great thing about backyard birding is that it truly is a hobby that is open to all. Regardless of the size of your yard it can easily be made bird friendly (in fact, even if you don't have a yard you can still put out window feeders and expect to get visitors) and you can soon experience the joy of observing the beautiful birds at close range.

In this issue we'll provide all the tips, advice, and guidance you need to help you to get the most from this wonderful and fascinating pastime.

Once you've begun to get visits from different species of birds, you can use the resources provided here to learn how to identify them and to learn all about their characteristics and behavior.



THE ESSENTIALS

Creating a good environment is important when attempting to attract birds to your yard. Here are some of the elements needed to create a bird-friendly area right outside your window.



Provide running water

Birds rely on both food AND water from their favorite backyards. Providing a source of water along with your feeder will make your backyard a one-stop shop for birds.



Keep feeders clean

Cleaning feeders regularly helps prevent bacteria that can be harmful to birds. Clean feeders monthly with hot soapy water or a mixture of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water to get rid of bacteria, fungi, and mold.



Feed birds in the winter

Birds need food and water all year long, in all areas. Change the type of food you provide to protein based like suet and nuts, but never put away the feeders for the winter.



Change out seed

Change the seed in a dry seed feeder every 5-7 days to avoid mold, bacteria, or bugs in the feeders. It is important to use high quality seed and not fillers.





NEVER feed them bread

Wild birds need nutrition and a healthy diet to survive. When they are fed bread, their small stomachs fill up with empty calories, which prevent them from being able to eat the items they need like seeds, bugs, fruit, and nuts.



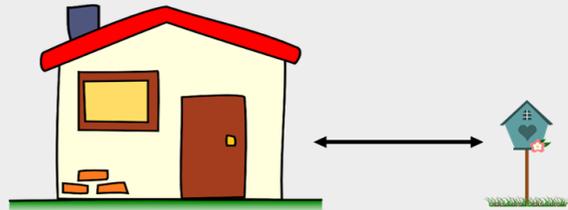
Provide nesting areas

After winter ends, birds settle into their permanent homes after returning from a long migration. Birdhouses and natural nesting areas like trees, shrubs, and bushes provide safe areas for birds to build a nest and have a family.



Provide shelter

Birds find comfort in natural shelter from shrubs, trees, and bushes. Make sure trees and taller shrubbery aren't too close to feeders to protect the feeders and birds.



Give them some space

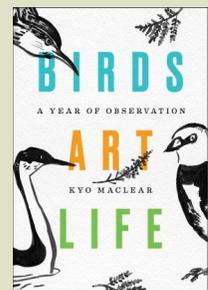
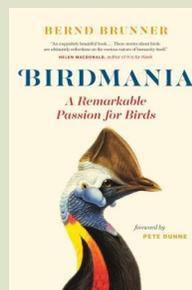
Keep a little distance between the feeders and your home. Keeping feeders too close to windows and the sides of a house could cause harm if birds fly into windows. Birds might also avoid feeders if they are too close to people in fear of predators.

GET INSPIRED THROUGH READING

[Birdmania](#) by Bernd Brunner

[To See Every Bird On Earth](#) by Dan Koeppel

[Birds Art Life](#) by Kyo Maclear



EQUIPMENT

Though bird watching can be done without any equipment, there are some things that make the pastime easier and more fun.

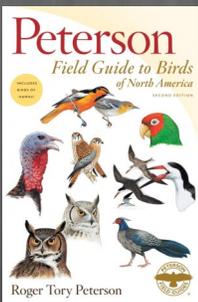
Binoculars



Your enjoyment of birds depends hugely on how great they look through your binoculars, so make sure you're getting a big,

bright, crisp picture through yours. In recent years excellent binoculars have become available at surprisingly low prices. Prices start under \$100, though it can be worth it to spend \$250 to \$300 for vastly superior images as well as lifetime warranties, waterproof housing, and light weight.

Field guide



Once you start seeing birds, you'll start wondering what they are. One of the most popular and well-known field guides is the Sibley Guide, in either its full North America version or smaller, more portable Eastern and Western

editions. Other useful guides are Kaufman's, Peterson's, the National Geographic guide, and Crossley's recently published tome. Later in this issue we will also provide information on apps and websites that can provide similar information.

Notebook



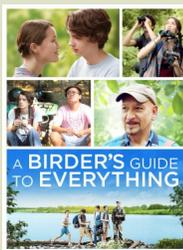
Birders like the ones who inspired *The Big Year* are called listers—people who love (or are obsessed with) compiling lists of the species they've seen. But you don't have to be a lister to reap benefits of writing down what you see—think of notes as a kind of diary with a focus, chronicling the days of your life through the birds you've seen and places you've been. Many people keep their records online or in apps, which keep track of every place and day you go bird watching, allow you to enter notes and share sightings with friends, and explore the data all users have entered.

Camera



With the increase in technology, you can take photos anywhere, anytime. Snapping even a blurry photo of a bird can help you or others identify it. More and more amateur photographers are connecting with birds through taking pictures, whether with professional cameras or a cell phone.

SEE IT IN FILM



HUMMINGBIRD FEEDERS



Keeping bees and ants off

- ⇒ Hang a small ant guard above your feeder. This cuplike device is filled with water, creating a moat ants won't cross.
- ⇒ Place double-sided tape around the wire from which the hummingbird feeder hangs. The tape isn't sticky enough to bother birds, but it does deter ants. You might have to replace it as it loses its stickiness.

Keeping nectar from going bad

- ⇒ For most, hanging the sugar-water feeder in the shade does the trick, but some may still have issues. Use the kind of ice pack that fits over a wine bottle,

but paint it red first.

- ⇒ To provide shade, attach a red plastic plate to the top of the feeder. Poke a hole in the plate that's the same diameter as the wire from which the feeder hangs, then thread the wire through so the plate covers the feeder horizontally.
- ⇒ The smartest solution is to keep it fresh. This means changing the nectar ever few days.

Cleaning your feeder

- ⇒ Use waterproof glue to attach a piece of foam to a long wooden dowel. Use soapy water and scrub away.
- ⇒ Use an old mascara brush. Wash the bristles thoroughly and let them dry.
- ⇒ Save an old toothbrush. It's perfect for reaching small feeding ports.



Photo by allaboutbirds.com

Michigan's cold winters draw to a close in March or April and hummingbirds begin their northern migration. Michigan gardeners should hang hummingbird feeders in mid-April.

BIRD IDENTIFICATION

When identifying a bird there are some main categories:

1. Size & Shape
2. Color & Pattern
3. Behavior
4. Habitat
5. Call

Here are some of the common birds that you may see within BMIC.



Red-winged Blackbird



Brown-headed Cowbird



Marsh Wren



Pine Grosbeak



House Sparrow



Mourning Dove



American Goldfinch



American Tree Sparrow



Red-shouldered hawk



American Robin



Sharp-shinned Hawk



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker



Evening Grosbeak



Downy Woodpecker



Alder Flycatcher



Killdeer



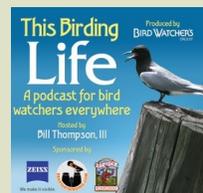
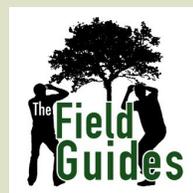
White-breasted Nuthatch



Black-capped Chickadee

BIRDING PODCASTS

- ⇒ American Birding Podcast
- ⇒ BirdNote
- ⇒ Bird Podcast by Shoba Narayan
- ⇒ Field Guides
- ⇒ Grumpy Old Birder
- ⇒ Laura Erickson's For The Birds
- ⇒ This Birding Life



RESOURCES

Many apps and websites are readily available to help you master your new pastime. These resources will assist in identification, give you new tips, and help you to keep track of the bird you have seen. Below are just a few to get you started.

Apps



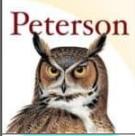
iBird Pro Guide to Birds



Merlin Bird ID



iNaturalist



Peterson

Peterson's Birds of North America



Song Sleuth



Larkwire



ChirpOMatic

Websites

Birdwatching:

<http://www.birdwatching.com/tips/birdlynx.html>

Audubon:

audubon.org

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology:

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>

American Bird Conservancy:

<https://abcbirds.org/>

Michigan Audubon:

<https://www.michiganaudubon.org/>

For questions about birding or other biological topics, please contact BMIC biological services.

Photos and information courtesy of allaboutbirds.org, kaytee.com, birdsandblooms.com, backyardbirdingblog.com, angieslist.com, parade.com, nationalzoo.si.edu, Audubon.org.



Bay Mills Indian Community
Biological Services
www.baymills.org

12140 Lakeshore Dr.
Brimley, MI 49715
906-248-3241