

BIRDFREAK GUIDE for TEEN BIRDERS

{Ages 13—19}



Teenagers provide perhaps the biggest and best resource to the birding and bird conservation world. They are at ages that allow for incredible amounts of learning, energy, and deep insight and creativity. The teen years are some of the best but also definitely some of the most difficult. And unfortunately, teenagers often get mislabeled as being uncaring, arrogant, and not of much use. But, teenagers mean a lot for the world of birding, and with this guide, we hope we can help convince more teens to become birders.

This guide is designed for teenagers, 13 to 19 and has a focus on wildlife photography, citizen science, and clubs that gear themselves to this age group. For kids younger than 13 we have another guide which can be found at: <http://birdfreak.com/downloads>.

Binoculars (Optics)

Binoculars [also called bins, binochs, field glasses, optics, and optiks] are the most important item in birding besides birds. These can also be expensive but it is important to realize that you are paying for quality. Bargain bins will not be as useful as high performance ones such as Swarovski. While some of these can easily cost over \$2000.00, it is important to remember that these are built to last for many years. However, plenty of great optics can be gotten for under \$700.00. The standard saying is to buy the best you can afford. Bad optics can lead to misidentification, but worse, can turn teens off of birding.

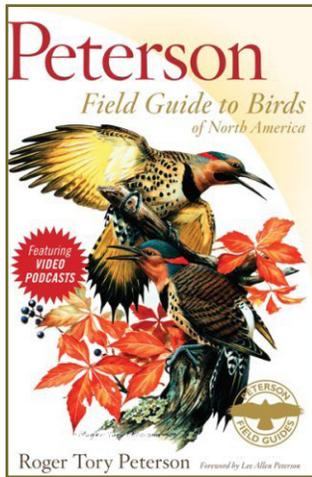


So which type of binoculars should you use? With an onslaught of brands, styles, sizes, quality, and prices, it can be overwhelming. We will not tell you what kind is best, but instead direct you to a free optic buying guide: http://www.eagleoptics.com/catalog_request.asp. If you have an optic store nearby, test out a few pairs to help find the best one for your teenager's eyes and budget.

Field Guides

The second most important item for birding is a good field guide. There is a multitude of guides to choose from and none of them are overly expensive. Consider buying a few to help cross-reference. You can start with a good compact guide, a larger "at-home" reference guide, and also specialty guides that focus on just warblers, just shorebirds, etc. We have numerous field guides

but again, personal preferences are key. We can't decide what is best for any one individual, but some are pretty great starters.



We recommend the Kaufman Field Guide to North American Birds or released in August 2008, The Peterson Guide to Birds of North America [Houghton Mifflin]. Both of these guides are complete and easy to use. They are also durable and field-tested, although the Peterson is bulkier than the Kaufman. A good at-home guide is the Sibley Field Guide to Birds.

Bird Photography

Digital cameras have advanced photography in great ways. Single-reflex lens (SLR) digitals have come down in price and provide a great way for budding birders to enhance their enjoyment. Bird photography requires quite a bit of skill, but patience and practice will improve a teenager's birding skills and give them an "out" when it comes to getting outdoors.

Unfortunately, many teenagers have a misconception of birders as being geeky, old, and completely uncool. Of course, this is totally wrong (well, mostly) but it can be intimidating for a teenage birder to face their peers with snarky comments about being a birder. Wildlife photography provides a great "talking point" to convince peers that being outdoors is definitely cooler than hanging out at the mall. Getting up before dawn, hiking several miles through muddy trails and hoards of mosquitoes, and capturing that spectacular shot of a colorful warbler is bound to impress many.

Life Lists

There have been great debates about whether or not to keep "life lists" of birds seen. We enjoy them and thus keep them. Keeping a life list (and state list, year list, county list, ect.) provides a way to keep track of what you've seen and what you wish to see in the future. These lists help to relive the memories of hard-fought sightings, rare bird chases, or a target number to beat the next year.

Of course, building a big list shouldn't be the only reason to go birding, but it definitely adds to the fun and excitement. There are even several software programs out there to help keep track of bird sightings.

SPECIES	S S F W
X Eastern Phoebe	CCC
Great Crested Flycatcher	CCC
Western Kingbird**	X X
X Eastern Kingbird	CCC
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**	X
SHRIKES	
Loggerhead Shrike	RRR
Northern Shrike	UU
VIREOS	
White-eyed Vireo	UUU
Bell's Vireo	OOO
Yellow-throated Vireo	CCC
Blue-headed Vireo	U U
	CCC

Citizen Science - eBird and Bird Counts

As fun as it is to keep lists, there is a practical reason for doing so, as long as you "unleash" your

data. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society have teamed up to make it easy to submit bird sightings through eBird [<http://www.ebird.org>]. These sightings, whether common, unusual, or rare, provide researchers, conservationists, and other birders the ability to sift through data.

Submitting data to eBird is citizen science—where many birders provide small (and large) amounts of data that “real” scientists can use. Without the assistance of “regular” people, massive research projects such as Breeding Bird Surveys, bird counts, and studies on declining birds could not be feasible.

Teenagers can help get involved in counts such as Christmas Bird Counts, Spring Bird Counts, Breeding Bird Surveys, or by starting their own counts or bird studies. There are never enough birders to cover all the areas, so teenagers can get involved and many times get extra credit for biology classes. The experience is well worth it for birders as well as birds.

Young Birder Clubs

In just the last few years, birding clubs geared towards young birders have been created in New York, Delaware, Ohio, and most recently, our home state of Illinois. These clubs are essential for attracting young birders together in an area where they can interact freely while enjoying nature and birds.

Every state should create young birder clubs and for the best model, check out the Ohio Young Birder’s Club [<http://www.ohioyoungbirders.org/>].

If a young birder club is not in your state, local bird clubs including Audubon Chapters can provide a great place for teenage birders to meet other birders, go on field trips, and learn about identifying and finding birds. Most bird clubs are more than willing to accept younger birders into their ranks.



Eddie (Birdfreak) at a young age

Internet, Social Networking, and Birds

The Internet as a whole, has perhaps made the largest positive impact on birding since Roger Tory Peterson released his first field guide to birds. Birders of all ages are now better connected to bird sightings, other birders, and detailed knowledge about birds, their behaviors, and efforts to conserve their habitats.

Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and more recently, BirdPost all help to connect birders. Personal publishing through blogs has also increased the ability for birders of all skill

levels to voice their ideas about birding as well as share their bird sightings. Teenage birders have a distinct advantage over older birders (even those just out of college) as they grow up around more advanced technology and connectivity. Not that long ago, everyone wasn't on high-speed internet or had cell phones. Future web-based technology will continue to get better and birders will make use of these new advancements.

Careers in Birding and Conservation

Choosing what to do when you go to college is often difficult and even as someone who loves birds, the outdoors, and the environment, it can be a hard decision to choose a major. High schools have limited courses on science and nearly zero focus on anything relating to birds or conservation. However, there are many careers that involve birds and not all of them mean a degree in biology.

When I (Birdfreak) entered college, my knowledge of computers led me to a major in computer science. This quickly was not where I wanted to be, so I switched to biology, thinking that was the only way to get a job that would mean working in conservation. As I struggled with biology, not wanting to learn all the scientific terminology, I changed my focus on marketing. This turned out to be where I belonged, as I understood it well and realized it was a way I could help birds by promoting their conservation.



Northern Illinois University

There are other fields as well that are vital to the conservation movement that do not involve biology. My sister Jennie is getting a degree in Geography which includes many forestry, soil and land management classes, as well as courses about GIS mapping. There is a need for upgrading to digital maps in many environmental fields. This field of study is deeply connected to conservation careers, and while by no means is it easy, it provides a great alternative to those that may not enjoy biology. Law, English, and computer degrees also help birds, among others, as long as you take what you learn and apply it to bird-related fields.

Besides these college majors, there are many other jobs out there that put you in the front lines of bird conservation and birding. Numerous entrepreneurs have created businesses around birds: leading field trips to far away places, running eco-friendly lodges in secluded places, or creating products that are geared towards birders.

Parting Thoughts

We began birding at a very young age but did not really get involved fully until our late teenage

years. Birding has advanced greatly even in the short number of years from our teens to today. Now there are much better optics, great technology and connectivity (cell phones and the Internet), and an overwhelming supply of reference books. Teenage birders can be a driving force for the conservation movement. Anyone that thinks that caring for the environment is geeky is either stupid or lying.

This document will be updated as we learn new things that will help teen birders. It only takes a spark to set a fire of lasting enjoyment of nature. We truly feel sorry for those teens that miss out and never see a Northern Harrier browsing for rodents or hear the haunting sound of a Wood Thrush. Nature is too wonderful not to enjoy.

Conserving bird habitat is the best thing you can do environmentally.

Please distribute this document to as many people as possible & credit <http://birdfreak.com>

Recommended Books

- The Kaufman Field Guide to North American Birds
[<http://birdfreak.com/kaufman-field-guide-to-birds-of-north-america/>]
- The Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America
[<http://birdfreak.com/review-of-peterson-field-guide-to-birds-of-north-america/>]
- The Sibley Guide to Birds
- Birder's Conservation Handbook by Jeffrey Wells
[<http://birdfreak.com/birders-conservation-handbook/>]
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology Handbook of Bird Biology
[<http://birdfreak.com/cornell-lab-of-ornithology-handbook-of-bird-biology-review-part-2/>]

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