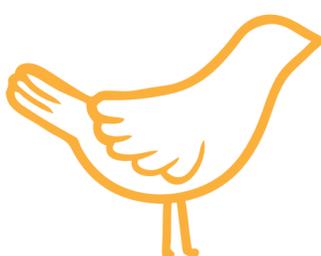


# LET'S GET BIRDING!

You might have noticed that you're suddenly hearing a lot more birdsong these days. That's because we're entering a peak season for birds: the species that stick around through the winter are singing their hearts out to claim territory and attract partners, and we're starting to see new arrivals as other birds migrate through--or to!--Montana over the next couple months.



## WHERE SHOULD WE START?

Your backyard or neighborhood is a great place to get to know some of the more common species. You'll see the most activity early in the morning, because that's when their food is most active too (the early bird really does get the worm). However, it's a busy time of year for birds, so afternoons will still yield plenty of finds too.

Even staying close to home, we're in luck, because the Bitterroot Valley is designated an Important Bird Area. Travelers' Rest has counted 138 species, and the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge has a whopping 240, thanks to a combination of protected wetlands, forest, and grasslands.

## DO WE NEED ANYTHING?

All you really need are sharp eyes and curiosity!

If you want to work on bird identification, a guide will be helpful. Luckily, there are lots of great ones online. My two favorites are:

**Cornell Lab for Ornithology** - [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org)

**Audubon Society** - [audubon.org/bird-guide](http://audubon.org/bird-guide)

It can also help to learn some birds common in your area:

**MT Beginning Bird Guide** - [fwp.mt.gov/education/teachers/birdGuide.html](http://fwp.mt.gov/education/teachers/birdGuide.html)

**Birds around Missoula** - [fvaudubon.org/whats-that-bird/](http://fvaudubon.org/whats-that-bird/)

Live elsewhere? Check [eBird.org](http://eBird.org) or your local Audubon chapter's website for bird lists and resources!

The first step to being a good birder is:

# LISTEN

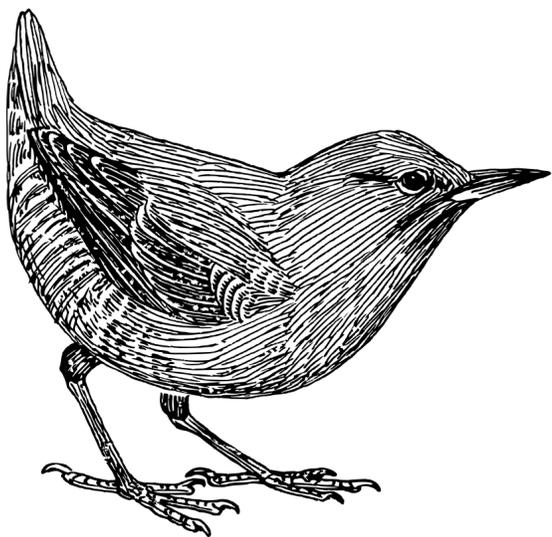
It can be a lot easier to hear a bird than to see one!

## PRACTICE YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

Go to an outdoor space. Stay silent, and for each different bird sound that you hear, put up one finger. Don't say a word until you've raised all the fingers on one hand. Or, try to see if you can hear ten different bird sounds--both hands!

### WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

Many birds have both **songs** and **calls**. **Calls** are simpler chirps and tweets that birds use to communicate. **Songs** are more complicated, and are usually used only by males to attract mates and mark territory. So, calls communicate...and songs seduce!



## SING ALONG

Play the same game as above. But, this time, for each call that you hear, point to where you think it came from and try to imitate it. Do any of them sound like words to you?

For example, some birders hear things like:

**Cheery-up, cheerio** (American Robin)

**CHEESE-burger** (Black-Capped Chickadee)

**Sweet sweet sweet, I'm so sweet** (Yellow Warbler)

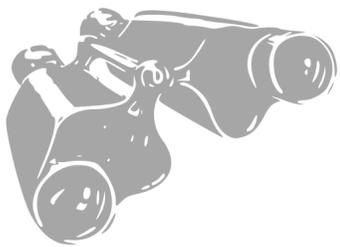
## GO ONLINE

Most online bird guides, such as those mentioned earlier, include recordings of songs and calls. Listen to some birds common in your area. (I love the Western Meadowlark!)

For more practice, try out the Cornell Lab's game, Bird Song Hero:  
[academy.allaboutbirds.org/bird-song-hero/](https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/bird-song-hero/)

The next step to being a good birder is:

# LOOK



And don't be discouraged; even expert birders sometimes have trouble telling species apart!

## MAKE YOUR OWN BINOCULARS

Binoculars help people see far-away things up close. But even this homemade pair will help you stay focused on what you're looking at.

### Materials

- Two toilet paper tubes
- A piece of string or ribbon
- Stapler and/or tape
- Decorations - markers, stickers, etc.

### Instructions

- Put the two toilet paper tubes side by side, so they are positioned like binoculars, and staple together on either end.
- The string will be the neck strap. Secure it to the inside of each tube using tape or the stapler, or use a hole punch and tie the string onto the outside of each tube.
- Decorate!

Can't picture it? Here's a short video:  
[youtube.com/watch?v=iM-oM8fPduo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM-oM8fPduo)

## CREATE A BIRD CHALLENGE

Bird walks are always fun! But if you want to add a game to the walk, try one of these:

- **Color Challenge.** Can you spot a bird of every color of the rainbow?
- **Number Challenge.** Who can see the most birds? Can you tell if it's the same species (i.e. looks similar) to a bird you've already seen?
- **ID Challenge.** Look up five birds common in your area and learn about them. See if you can find them all.

The last step to being a good birder is:

# RECORD

We can work together to learn more about birds around the world.

## DOCUMENT WHAT YOU SEE

Either on a bird walk or in your backyard, try to take a picture of some birds or write down what you see. If you don't know the name, that's okay! See what you can observe: What color is it? How big is it? What shape is its tail or beak? When it flies, does it flap its wings or soar? Does it like to be high up in a tree, or on the ground? Using a bird guide, see if you can figure out what it might be.

## DO CITIZEN SCIENCE

Birds travel far! Scientists who study birds--called ornithologists--therefore rely on the rest of us to share information about the birds that we see, so they can identify larger patterns and changes. Check out [eBird.org](https://ebird.org) to share your observations, take a bird quiz, and learn about research informed by citizens like you.

## SHOULD WE PUT UP A BIRD FEEDER?

Probably not! It can be great to observe birds each day in the same spot, and bird feeders help with that--but be careful when the weather gets warm. If you live in an area with bear activity, you need to take your feeder inside once bears have emerged from winter hibernation, so you don't attract these larger friends to your yard too.

Consider instead growing native plants that birds (or their food) love, leaving fallen logs in place for feeding and nesting, or making a bird bath--turn a garden pot upside down, balance the saucer on top, and add some water. Just be sure to replace the water regularly, so it doesn't become a bug bath instead...

# MY BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Birds do some amazing things. For example, cardinals can sing more notes than there are on a piano...in under a second! Research a species of bird that you see, and share some of your observations here.

**NAME OF BIRD:**

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**IT LIVES IN:**

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**IT LIKES TO EAT:**

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**ONE COOL FACT IS:**

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**DRAWING OF MY BIRD:**