

Many are the Ways to be a Birder

Birding is a lifelong big-tent interest! There are many ways to pursue it depending on your personality, available time, health, location, and other commitments.

The word “birder” is frequently used synonymously with “lister.” The term refers to the person who creates multiple lists of birds, amassing as many species as possible. Becoming an accomplished observer who can do this accurately requires intensive study, extensive field time, and cooperation with other birders. Most listers defy the cartoonish caricature of being highly competitive or exclusive. Instead, they may be extremely generous in mentoring those with less proficiency and experience. The Howard County Bird Club is fortunate in having a large and growing cadre of excellent birders who enthusiastically share their skills and knowledge.

But what if you are not a lister? Are you also a birder? Absolutely! There are many ways to enjoy birds. Your method may fall into one (or more) of the following categories (or one that isn't listed). Interests can change and overlap, sometimes within a short period, almost certainly multiple times in the course of one's life. What characterizes your birding interest?

Behavior. Focus is on the actions of one bird or interactions of a pair, family group, or flock.

Sounds. Songs, chip notes, and wing sounds often appeal to those with a musical ear.

Groups. Fascination with a particular group (shorebirds, gulls, raptors, sparrows, etc.). This intense interest may dictate a year's calendar, even determining vacation destinations.

Single species. Preference for one species (Wood Duck, Purple Martin, Eastern Bluebird, etc.). Enthusiasts may improve habitat, provide nest sites, or offer food.

Photography. The most successful wildlife photographers cultivate a knowledge and understanding of the behavior and habitats of certain groups or species.

Research. Even amateurs can assist in scholarly research, while involvement in Citizen Science projects is limited only by one's time and energy.

Banding. Assisting at a banding station requires deep commitment and extensive training. The intimacy of handling birds can be an excellent educational experience, as well as awe-inspiring.

Aesthetics. Appreciating birds for their grace and beauty is legendary.

Social/Family Activity. Sharing an interest with a friend, social group, or family may be more satisfying than amassing long lists of species. It may spark a lifelong interest and strengthen generational bonds.

Health and Exercise. The sights and sounds of birds can enrich a daily walk or run, while immersion in the natural world is a way to reduce stress. Gardening is gentle exercise that can also improve habitat.

Feeding. Providing food is an easy way to connect with local birds without leaving home.

Conservation. An interest in birds can lead to activism protecting habitats and species.

Journaling. Writing sharpens observational skills and preserves memorable experiences.

Art and Crafts. Birds are both subjects and inspirations for a wide variety of arts and crafts.

Whatever your method of enjoying birds, you, too, are a birder!

I am deeply grateful to the dozens of individuals who, over a birding lifetime, have opened my eyes to the size and scope of the birding tent.

—Jo Solem