



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

Founded 1972

YOUNG BIRDER GROUP WELCOME PACKET

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Overview

This welcome packet was created by the Howard County Bird Club’s Young Birder group. The “young birders” here refer to birders who are K-12 school students or younger. This packet contains information about binoculars, field guides, birding sites, young birder groups and events, summer camps, trips, and more! Whether you are a young birder or a parent/grandparent/friend of a young birder, we hope you can find something useful to help your young birder get started, improve their skills, and have some fun at the same time. Some URLs are only for a specific year of events/camps; thus, they may not link to the most current websites. We will try our best to update the URLs. But you can also use the event or camp name to search for the most current information. If you have any questions or would like to suggest resources(s) to add, please email HCyoungbirders@gmail.com.

Disclaimer: The URLs and organizations mentioned in this document are provided solely to help you dive deeper into birding for youth. The Howard County Bird Club does not have any commercial interest in these entities, nor does their inclusion imply an intent to promote or advertise their services.

Organizations

- **Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS):** <https://mdbirds.org/>. The MOS is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the study, conservation, and appreciation of wild birds through its network of local chapters (including Howard County), protected sanctuaries, and community-driven research projects. They hold [annual conventions](#) in different parts of Maryland. This is a great opportunity to bird different parts of Maryland and meet other Maryland birders. You can view MOS's publication here: <https://mdbirds.org/publications/>.
- **YMOS:** Young birders of the Maryland Ornithological Society meet once a month via Zoom during each school year and attend field trips up to twice per month. YMOS also sponsors young birders to attend the [World Series of Birding in New Jersey](#) each year. You do not have to be a MOS member to join YMOS. Contact George Radcliffe via radclifg@gmail.com.
- **Howard County Bird Club (HCBC):** The local chapter of MOS in Howard County.
 - Official website: <https://howardbirds.website/>
 - Learning how to bird for beginners: <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/learning-how-to-bird/>
 - Learning about birds for beginners: <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/all-about-birds/>
 - Resources for birdwatching: <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/resources/>
 - Backyard birding: <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/resources/backyard-birding/>
 - Become a member: <https://howardbirds.website/join-us/> (You do not need to be a member if you want to attend bird walks or HCBC meetings.)
 - Field trips and monthly meeting calendar: <https://howardbirds.website/events/month/>
 - YouTube channel with recordings from previous presentations in HCBC monthly meetings: <https://www.youtube.com/@howardcountymbirdclub/playlists>
 - HCBC holds four seasonal counts (mid-winter, spring, fall, and Christmas) <https://howardbirds.website/birding/seasonal-bird-counts/> every year. Contact the count coordinator if you are interested in helping with a count.
 - Publication: <https://howardbirds.website/about-us/newsletterthe-goldfinch/>
 - Young Birder Club: <https://howardbirds.website/young-birder/> (contact HCyoungbirders@gmail.com if you want to be added to the listserv to receive young birder-specific information)
- **Baltimore Bird Club:** The local chapter of MOS in Baltimore County and Baltimore City.
 - Website: <https://baltimorebirdclub.org/>
 - Event calendar: <https://baltimorebirdclub.org/schedule.html>

- **Montgomery Bird Club:** The local chapter of MOS in Montgomery County.
 - Website: <https://www.montgomerybirdclub.org/>
 - Event calendar: <https://www.montgomerybirdclub.org/calendar/>
 - Young Birder Club: <https://www.montgomerybirdclub.org/young-birders/>
- **American Birding Association (ABA):** <https://www.aba.org/> The ABA is a non-profit organization dedicated to serving recreational birders through education, conservation advocacy, and the maintenance of their official checklist of bird species in North America for the birding community. They offer summer camps for young birders and host the Young Birder of the Year annual contest (see [Camps/Events/Activities section](#) for more details). Check out their member benefits here: <https://www.aba.org/benefits/>. They also have a magazine, [Fledgling](#), produced by young birders.
- **Cornell Lab of Ornithology:** <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/> The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a world-renowned member-supported unit of Cornell University that integrates scientific research, citizen science, and innovative technology to interpret and conserve the Earth's biological diversity through the study of birds. [Merlin](#) and [eBird](#) are both projects from this Lab.
 - Courses: <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/course-list/>
 - K-12 resources: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/k12>
 - Become a member: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/members/>

For beginning birders to improve skills

- **HCBC resource for beginning birders:** <https://howardbirds.website/beginning-birding/>
- **Field guides:** Choosing a good field guide can help young birders improve their skills. Start with one that includes most birds in your area, such as North America or Eastern North America. You can also pick a group of birds to focus on if you'd like. Going out birding frequently to apply the knowledge learned from field guides is the best way to improve quickly!
 - Birds in the United States
 - [The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America](#) (Peterson Field Guides) by Bill Thompson
 - [Sibley's Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America](#) by David Allen Sibley
 - [Peterson Field Guide To Birds Of Eastern & Central North America](#) by Roger Tory Peterson
 - [Peterson Field Guide To Birds Of North America](#) by Roger Tory Peterson
 - [Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion: A Comprehensive Resource for Identifying North American Birds](#) by Pete Dunne

- [Peterson Reference Guide To Birding By Impression: A Different Approach to Knowing and Identifying Birds](#) by Kevin T. Karlson, Dale Rosselet
- Warblers:
 - The Warbler Guide By Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle: [Book](#), [App](#)
 - How to Listen to Bird Song—Tips and Examples From The Warbler Guide <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-listen-to-bird-song-tips-and-examples-from-the-warbler-guide/>
- Hawks:
 - [Hawks in Flight: The Flight Identification of North American Migrant Raptors](#) by Pete Dunne
- Flycatchers:
 - [Field Guide to North American Flycatchers: Kingbirds and Myiarchus](#) by Ciny Lee, Andrew Birch
 - [Field Guide to North American Flycatchers: Empidonax and Pewees](#) by Ciny Lee, Andrew Birch
- Sparrows:
 - [Peterson Reference Guide To Sparrows Of North America](#) by Rick Wright
 - [Sparrow Identification presentation](#) by Bonnie Ott
- Shorebirds:
 - [The Shorebird Guide](#) by Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley, Kevin T. Karlson
 - [Shorebirds: An Identification Guide to the Waders of the World](#) by Peter Hayman, John Marchant, Tony Prater
- Gulls:
 - [Gulls Simplified: A Comparative Approach to Identification](#) by Pete Dunne, Kevin T. Karlson
 - [Gulls of North America](#) by Fred Shaffer
 - [The Gull Guide: North America](#) by Amar Ayyash
- **Identify birds by sounds:** Learning to identify birds by sounds is a good skill to have. In many situations, you hear a bird first before you are able to spot them. Listening to these CDs will help you to learn about bird sounds. If you cannot find a place to purchase these CDs, you can borrow them from the [Howard County Library](#).
 - [Birding by Ear: Eastern/Central \(Peterson Field Guides\)](#) by Richard K. Walton, Robert W. Lawson
 - [More Birding by Ear: Eastern/Central \(Peterson Field Guide Audio Series\)](#) by Richard K. Walton, Robert W. Lawson, Roger Tory Peterson

- [Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs: Eastern Region](#) by Lang Elliot, Lillian Q. Stokes, Donald Stokes
- [Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs: Western Region](#) by Kevin Colver, Donald Stokes, Lillian Stokes
- [Cornell Guide to Bird Sounds: United States and Canada](#) by Macaulay Library
 - For young children, you can consider buying these books with bird photos and sounds. It may be more fun for them to see a bird photo and press a button to hear the sound.
 - [Bird Songs: 250 North American Birds in Song](#) by Les Beletsky
 - [The Backyard Birdsong Guide Eastern and Central North America: A Guide to Listening](#) by Donald Kroodsma
- Bird sounds databases:
 - Macaulay Library: <https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/>
 - xeno-canto: <https://xeno-canto.org/>
- Nocturnal flight calls (NFC): NFC are calls that birds make when they migrate at night. This is an area that is under research, and few birders are good at. There are also not many resources online to help people learn. Identifying NFC is not for a beginner, but you should still try to open your window during migration nights and listen!
 - Flight calls of migratory birds: <https://oldbird.org/pubs/fcmb/start.htm>
 - Nocturnal flight call activity index: <https://www.oldbird.org/index.htm>
 - Nocturnal flight calls of North America: <https://nocturnalfightcalls.com/index.html>
 - Nocturnal Flight Calls by Ohio Ornithological Society: <https://ohiobirds.org/nocturnal-flight-calls/>
 - Welcome to the Dark Side: Your Guide to Nocturnal Migration Birding: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/welcome-dark-side-your-guide-nocturnal-migration-birding>
- **Birding apps:** There are two popular Apps for birding. One is eBird and the other one is Merlin. Use eBird to record birding checklists and routes. Use Merlin to help you identify birds and their sounds. Do not rely completely on Merlin because AI does not always give you the right answer. Learn the bird sounds with CDs recommended above and use Merlin to confirm your identification. LarkWire is an app that you may choose to purchase. It is a learning resource to help you practice bird identification and bird sounds.
 - eBird app (free): <https://ebird.org/home>
 - [eBird monthly challenge](#): Check out eBird News to find out each month's challenge and enter the drawing to win a pair of Zeiss binoculars

- Merlin Bird ID app (free): <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>
- LarkWire (with fee): <https://www.larkwire.com/>
 - Web version: <https://www.larkwire.com/web>
 - App version: <https://www.larkwire.com/>
- **Four-letter bird banding codes (alpha codes):** You may hear or read some four-letter codes (such as BLJA, CARW) that birders use. These are banding codes (or alpha codes) that standardize and abbreviate common names for thousands of North and Central American species. It could be confusing for beginning birders. Here are some resources for you to learn more and to look up a specific banding code.
 - The Institute for Bird Populations (IBP): <https://www.birdpop.org/pages/birdSpeciesCodes.php> The official list. You can download the PDF here.
 - Merlin App: You can type in a bird banding code to Merlin’s “Explore Birds” section and the full common name of the bird will show up.
 - Bird Codes App: If you want to install an app to help you, you can try the Bird Codes app by Nemesis Bird: <https://nemesishbird.com/news/new-release-bird-codes-app/>.

Equipment

We list some birding equipment below. However, for a beginner, you may only want to consider investing in a good pair of binoculars (about \$100 to \$250). Other equipment is not essential and just a recommendation if you or your young birder develops a strong interest in a specific area, such as photography or sound analysis.

- **Binoculars:** A good pair of binoculars can help you identify birds better. If you are not sure if you want to invest in a good pair at the beginning, try to attend an HCBC bird walk. They often have a pair of loaner binoculars that you can borrow. HCBC also holds a binoculars essay contest every March for K-12 students who live in Howard County. If your essay is selected, you will be awarded a pair of binoculars. For a beginner who wants to budget for a good pair of binoculars, you should expect a price range between \$100 to \$250.
 - HCBC Birding Optics: <https://howardbirds.website/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Birding-Basics-Equipment.pdf>
 - The Audubon Guide to Binoculars: <https://www.audubon.org/gear/binocular-guide>
 - The Cornell Lab Review: Affordable Full-Size 8×42 Binoculars: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/the-cornell-lab-review-affordable-full-size-8x42-binoculars/>
 - MOS Birding Equipment: <https://mdbirds.org/go-birdwatching/new-to-birdwatching/birdwatching-equipment/>

- **Spotting scope and tripod:** You do not need a spotting scope at the beginning of your birding journey. You may be able to share one if you go birding with an experienced birder. As your birding skills improve, you may want to invest in one, especially if you want to go birding near a waterbody, such as a lake, a reservoir, or even the ocean. It is as important to invest in a good, stable tripod as picking a good scope. A good tripod can help stabilize the scope so you can see a bird clearly.
 - The Audubon Guide to Spotting Scope: <https://www.audubon.org/gear/scope-guide>
 - Scope Quest 2008: Our Review of Spotting Scopes: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/scope-quest-2008-our-review-of-spotting-scopes/>
 - Best Spotting Scopes for Birding 2026: Our Expert Guide: <https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/gear/spotting-scopes/best-spotting-scopes-for-birding/>
- **Cameras:** A camera for bird photography is a big investment and is not essential, but it can sometimes be helpful for bird identification; often,
- a smartphone is sufficient. If your young birder is still too young to hold a heavy DSLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) camera with a long lens, you may want to consider starting with a bridge camera.
 - Birders, Consider a Bridge Camera: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/birders-consider-bridge-camera>
 - The best cameras for bird photography: <https://amateurphotographer.com/buying-advice/best-cameras-for-bird-photography/>
 - Photography Gear and Equipment: <https://www.audubon.org/photography/gear>
 - Best Compact Camera for Bird Photography: <https://medium.com/@bestoflens.com/best-compact-camera-for-bird-photography-a69dc5069312>
- **Sound recording and analysis software:** You probably can get some good recordings by using the Merlin app and your smartphone's microphone. For those who develop a particular interest in bird sounds, if you want to obtain high-quality recordings or nocturnal flight calls, you may want to invest in a good microphone.
 - Smartphone microphone and Merlin: Smartphone recording tips <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001064305-smartphone-recording-tips>
 - Record NFC: Old Bird: [microphone](#) and [analysis software](#)
 - A Beginner's Guide to Recording Bird Vocalizations: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/beginners-guide-recording-bird-vocalizations>
 - Raven sound analysis: Check out their software application and view tutorials to learn how to use it. <https://www.ravensoundsoftware.com/>

Local Stores

Listed here are local stores in Howard County where you can buy bird seed, bird feeders, and other bird-related stuff. You get a 10% discount in both stores if you are an HCBC member.

- **Wild Bird Unlimited** (6955 F, Oakland Mills Rd, Columbia, MD 21045)
- **The Wildlife Authority** (3275 Bethany Ln b, Ellicott City, MD 21042)

Local Birding Sites

You can start birding from your backyard. Then you may want to expand to sites in Howard County and nearby areas of DC, Maryland, and Delaware/Virginia on the Eastern Shore. Some birding sites are hard to find if you are not led by experienced birders. Knowing where to park is an important piece of knowledge as well. Below is information that birders put together to guide you on how to get to a birding site, where to park, what kinds of birds you can expect to find, and what to look out for.

- **Howard County:** <https://howardbirds.website/birding/site-guides/>
- **Maryland:** <https://birdersguidemddc.org/>
- **Hart-Miller Island and Poplar Island:** <https://maryland-dmmp.com/community/birding/>
(Request to be added to the mailing list by sending an email to birdingtours@menv.com with the subject line “Add me to mailing list” so you can get tour information.)
- **Book:** Birds of Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia by Bruce M. Beehler
<https://mdbirds.org/publications/birds-of-md-de-dc/>

Camps/Events/Activities

Attending a young birder camp, event, or contest, is a great way to get to know young birders from other states, or even other countries. Below are some activities for young birders, including camps, symposiums, workshops, contests, etc. Some are out of state and could be expensive. Look for scholarship information and try to apply for financial support.

- Camps
 - **A list of birding camps and events** for young birders:
<https://ebird.org/about/camps-events-contests>
 - **ABA summer camps** in Colorado and Delaware, and one February camp in San Diego: <https://www.aba.org/camps/>
 - **Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens:**
<https://hogisland.audubon.org/programs/bird-studies-teens>
 - Beaverhill Bird Observatory’s **Young Ornithologists’ Workshop:**
<https://www.beaverhillbirds.com/programs/young-ornithologist-workshop/>

- **Young birder camps by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies**
<https://www.birdconservancy.org/what-we-do/education/bird-camps/>
- **Hog Island's Family Camp:** <https://hogisland.audubon.org/programs/family-camp>
- **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours:** <https://ventbird.com/tours/search/youth-birding-camps>
 - Camp Chiricahua – Arizona
 - Camp Cascades - Washington
- **Cornell Young Birder event for high schoolers:** <https://ebird.org/news/the-cornell-lab-young-birders-event-2025>
- **Michigan Young Birders Camp:**
<https://www.michiganaudubon.org/learn/michigan-young-birders-camp/>
- **Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Rio Diablo Birding Camp:**
<https://wildlife.tamu.edu/birding/rdbc/>
- **Youth Birding Week with the Port of Baltimore**
<https://www.portofbaltimoreeducation.org/youthbirdingweek>
- Events
 - **Frontiers in Ornithology Symposium:** <https://frontiersinornithology.com/>
- Contests
 - **The HCBC Essay Contest:** Every March. Winners receive a pair of binoculars
 - **World Series of Birding:** <https://njudubon.org/world-series-of-birding/> If you are interested in joining a team, contact George Radcliffe via radclifg@gmail.com at YMOS for more information (ideally, contact him before December for forming next year's team). If you want to learn more, here is a presentation about it:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SthHb8IsUw>.
 - **Young Birder of the Year Contest:** <https://www.aba.org/young-birder-year-contest/>
 - **Junior Duck Stamp Contest:** <https://www.fws.gov/program/junior-duck-stamp/junior-duck-stamp-contest-information>

Birding Festivals/Trips

Many US states hold annual or biannual bird festivals, featuring guided field trips. It is a great way to see birds in a place that you haven't visited before. Only a few bird festivals are listed here, but you can always search one yourself when you plan to visit a state.

- MOS annual convention: <https://mosconvention.org/>
- Baltimore Birding Weekend: <https://baltimorebirding.com/>
- Ohio's Biggest week: <https://www.biggestweekinamericanbirding.com/>

- Southeast Arizona Birding Festival: <https://www.discovermarana.org/blog/flock-with-the-southeast-arizona-birding-festival/>
- Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival: <https://rgvbf.org/>
- New Jersey Cape May Spring and Fall birding festivals: <https://njudubon.org/cape-may-spring-festival/>
- Hillstar Nature Pelagic trip: <https://www.hillstarnature.com/pelagics>

Bird data available online

With the advance of technology, many birders now can help scientists collect valuable data. Cornell's eBird is the most famous and largest platform for data contributed by birders around the world. This data is available online freely to people who are interested in analyzing it. Below are some resources for young birders who are interested in creating a research project and doing your own analysis of this data. You can use either [R](#) or [Python](#) to conduct the data analysis and visualization. Both are free and open source applications.

- Research about eBird data
 - Working with eBird Status and Trends: An online science workshop for practitioners and R users [Part I](#) and [Part II](#)
 - eBird Status and Trends: <https://science.ebird.org/en/status-and-trends>
 - Use eBird Data and Tools: <https://science.ebird.org/en/use-ebird-data>
 - eBird Status and Trends Data Products: <https://ebird.github.io/ebirdst/>
 - auk: eBird Data Extraction and Processing in R: <https://cornelllabofornithology.github.io/auk/>
 - Maryland-DC Breeding bird atlas: <https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/home>
 - How to record breeding code on eBird: <https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/about/breeding-codes>
- Motus wildlife tracking data: <https://motus.org/resources/>

Miscellaneous

These resources are just for fun or items that are hard to categorize.

- BirdCast: <https://birdcast.org/>. A tool for you to view migration activities, including live migration and migration forecast. Birders can use it as a predictor of their chances to view large migratory activities.
- Movies:
 - The Big Year (rating: PG): <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1053810/>

- LISTERS: A Glimpse Into Extreme Birdwatching: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zI-wAqplQAo>
- Board games:
 - Wingspan: <https://stonemaiergames.com/games/wingspan/>. If you are interested in this game, but need someone to teach you how to play. HCBC holds regular Wingspan Game Nights that are beginner-friendly. You can go to the [calendar](#) to sign up.
 - Audubon Bird Spotting Opoly: A birder's version of Monopoly: https://www.masterpiecesinc.com/products/audubon-bird-spotting-opoly-board-game?_pos=1&_sid=4141fde37&_ss=r
 - Sibley Birder's Trivia: <https://www.amazon.com/Sibley-Birders-Trivia-Questions-Knowledge/dp/0593578120>
- Podcasts:
 - The Science of Birds: <https://www.scienceofbirds.com/>
 - Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds: <https://www.talkinbirds.com/>
 - The American Birding Podcast: <https://www.aba.org/podcast/>
- Bird T-shirt, stickers, drawings
 - Howard County local artist, Laura Wolf: <https://www.laurawolfartist.com/>