

FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS BIRDING CHALLENGE GUIDE



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METROPARKS.ORG/BIRDING



Welcome!

Are you a new birder? Have you been birding for decades? Or, perhaps you're just curious about birds? Regardless of your experience, you'll learn something new from MetroParks' Birding Challenge Guide. This guide includes information about tools and apps, a catalog of common Ohio birds and a collection of birding activities for all ages. There's also a list of resources and community groups. In the back of the guide, you'll find a quick reference sheet of the 2025 Birding Challenge Tasks and how to submit your entry.

What does it mean to “go birding?”

Birdwatching is an activity open to all ages and abilities and can be done almost anywhere. People can go birding in a variety of ways and for various reasons. Some “birders” (people who birdwatch) are casual, taking their time to passively observe birds when walking or while seated by a window. Others are more competitive and try to find as many birds in a specific time frame as possible – it's all about the chase! Whichever birder you find yourself to be, just know, there is no wrong way to bird as long as you are keeping birds safe and healthy.

Before doing any outdoor activity, it is important to plan ahead. Dress for the weather and bring items that will help you stay comfortable during your outing. These may include sun protection, bug spray, snacks, water and appropriate gear. Remember to follow Leave No Trace principles—respect wildlife at a distance and pack out what you bring in. This keeps natural spaces safe for all species, including other humans. Learn more about Leave No Trace at Int.org.

Getting Started

Five Rivers MetroParks Birding Challenge is designed to help you experience the many benefits birding can provide while encouraging you to adopt bird-healthy behaviors. There are six categories to the challenge:

- Spot! Find the Birds
- Learn! Build Your Skills
- Support! Help the Birds
- Enjoy! Birding for Well-being
- Get Together! Birding with Others
- Have Fun! Special Birding Experiences

Over 450 species of birds live in or fly through Ohio, so it may feel overwhelming when you begin. To get started, read through this booklet, then pick one of the Best Birding Areas to visit. When you arrive, start by quietly sitting or standing, taking a moment to observe the world around you. With patience, you'll start to see or hear birds arrive, and soon after, you may find yourself entranced by the act of birding.

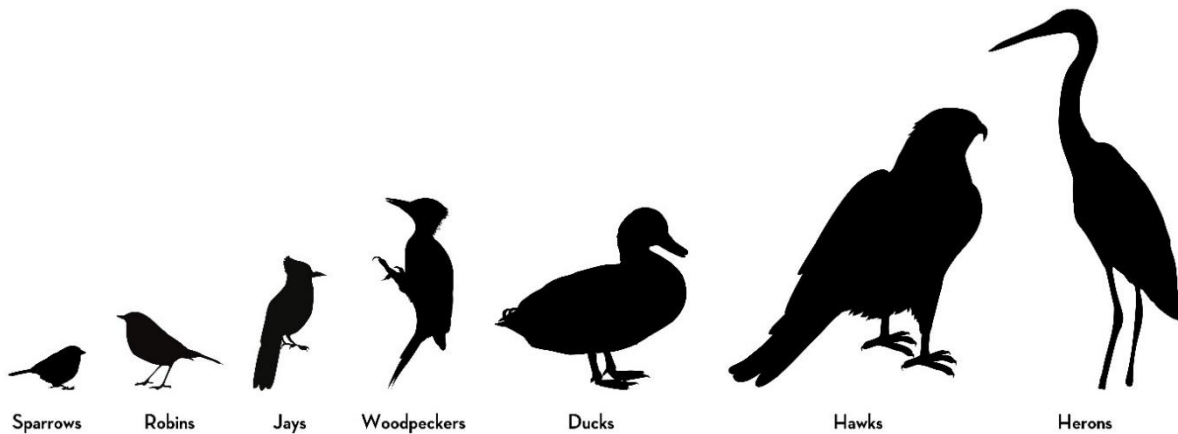
Basics of Bird Identification

When identifying a bird, keep a few characteristics in mind including size and shape, color, behavior and sound.

Size and Shape

While birds may come in many shapes and sizes, a few similarities emerge when they are grouped together. When identifying a bird, it is easiest to look at its size and shape first to narrow the window of possible species.

Start by learning typical bird silhouettes—study the various silhouettes below and consider what makes each unique. Next, think about bird sizes and how you might compare a bird you are looking at to one you already know, such as a robin. Is it bigger or smaller? Finally, start examining parts of the bird such as its bill, tail and wings. How big are the features compared to the bird itself? When starting to identify a bird, use these concepts to determine what group the bird may belong to.



Color

Once you've noted the size of the bird, pay close attention to its color. Keep your attention on the bird for as long as you can – birds are fast, so you may only have a few seconds! Scan its body for any distinct markings, such as color or patterns around its eyes or on its head, chest or wings. Once you note a few characteristics, you can start looking in your field guide.

What markings do you see on this White-breasted Nuthatch? Notice its blue-gray wings, white cheeks, and rusty, orange patches.



White-breasted Nuthatch

Behavior and Habitat

Sometimes birds can look similar, making it especially difficult to discern them. Another trait you can use when identifying birds is behavior and habitat. What is the bird doing when you're observing it? Is it on the ground or climbing a tree? How is it flapping its wings? In what kind of habitat are you seeing the bird? You can use the answers to these questions as clues.

For example, from a distance, the White-breasted Nuthatch and Tufted Titmouse look similar. They both have gray backs, white fronts and rusty markings on their underside. However, a quick way to tell between the two species is their behavior. The White-breasted Nuthatch climbs headfirst down trees, while the Tufted Titmouse does not. Instead, it opts for more of a flitting behavior. What was the bird doing when you saw it? If it was scampering up and down a tree trunk, it was likely a White-breasted Nuthatch.



White-breasted Nuthatch



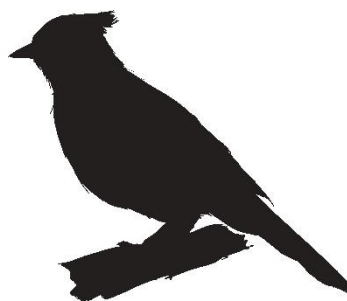
Tufted Titmouse

Sound

Don't just use sight, use sound! With practice, you can start to identify birds by hearing their songs and calls. Each bird makes distinct sounds that can be visually mapped into a spectrogram as seen below. Many websites have recordings or bird song games that can help you learn. You can also use mnemonic devices (memory techniques) to recall sounds. When listening to a Tufted Titmouse, you might hear their song as "peter-peter-peter, peter-peter-peter."



[Tufted Titmouse Recording - Macaulay Library ML559802901](#)



Bird Migration

According to Oxford English Dictionary, migration is the “...movement of an animal from one region, location, or habitat to another in order to breed, grow, or find food...” In Ohio, some birds are migratory (here for only part of the year) while others live here year-round. This means not all birds can be seen all the time in this region. Range maps (pg. 8) can help you know what to expect.

When thinking about bird migration, you can look at species in four different categories: year-round, summer residents, passers-by, and winter residents.



Year-Round

Several species of birds can be found year-round in Ohio since the region provides plenty of food and shelter. While you can find them in each season, keep in mind some species will change colors and habitats. Examples: American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, American Robin.



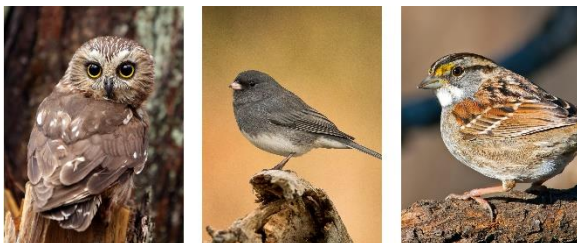
Summer Residents

Some birds only live in Ohio during the summer. They fly here in the spring to breed, then travel south in the fall. During the winter they primarily live in Central and South America. Examples: Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat, Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Passers-by (Transient)

Many birds use Ohio like a gas-station. In the spring, these birds take long journeys from the south to the north. Sometimes they need to refuel, so they stop in this area for a short time. In the fall, they make the reverse trek, and we get to see them again. Examples: Blue-headed Vireo, Dunlin, Blackburnian Warbler.



Winter Residents

Birds in this group live in Ohio during the winter and travel north in the spring for breeding season. Ohio's winter residents primarily live in Canada during the summer. Examples: Northern Saw-whet Owl, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow.

Tools & Apps

Binoculars

While it is completely possible to bird without binoculars, they make a significant difference in the ability to identify species and see the wonders of birds up close. Like birds, there are many binocular types, so it's important to weigh your options before purchasing. A variety of birding [websites](#) have recommendations for binoculars and how to choose the best pair for yourself.

When using binoculars, start by holding them to your eyes. If you wear glasses, check your binocular manual to adjust the eye relief. To adjust the focus, close your right eye and adjust the center focus wheel until you can see clearly with your left eye. Then open your right eye, close your left eye and adjust the diopter (the focus wheel on the right lens) until your right eye sees clearly. As you bird, you may

need to periodically adjust your binoculars using the center wheel to focus on objects at various distances. To use your binoculars, find where you want to look in the distance, steady your eyes on that spot, and then bring the binoculars up to your eyes.



Field Guides

There are lots of ways to learn how to identify birds. A classic approach is to use a field guide as an aide. Every field guide is unique, so you may want to consider various options by visiting your local library. As you select a guide, think about where you plan to use it; if you'll be taking it hiking, you may not want something too big. Many field guides are available in an app format as well. Recommended options include [Sibley Birds East: Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America](#) by David Sibley and the [Peterson Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America](#) by Roger Tory Peterson.

Birding Websites

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, based out of Cornell University in New York, hosts a variety of web-based teaching tools and apps that can support your birding journey. Websites such as [All About Birds](#) provide information on birds and birdwatching while [eBird](#) offers a free, digital way to track your bird lists. Cornell Lab even has a site called [Bird Academy](#) with free and paid courses to become a better birder.

Using eBird

eBird by Cornell Lab of Ornithology is an app birders use to track their sightings. Over 240 million observations are recorded annually. Scientists and conservationists then use this data to determine how to manage habitat or maintain bird populations. Your sightings can make a real difference when protecting birds.

Cornell Lab offers a free eBird Essentials course to walk you through how to use the app. Check it out by visiting [their course offerings](#). They also have a page to help you [Get Started with eBird](#).

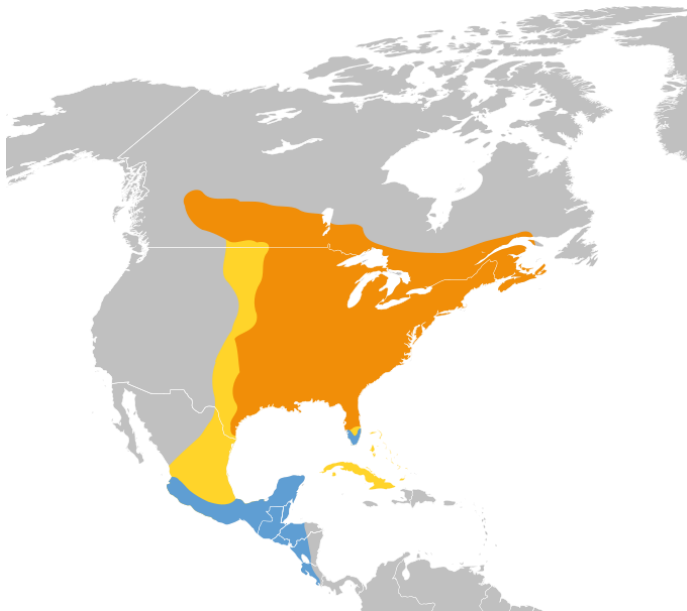
Using Merlin

If you need help identifying birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers a free tool called [Merlin](#). This app can help you identify bird species by sound, photo or a series of questions. Before you submit an observation to eBird, double check the Merlin identification by making sure you saw what it described.

Range Maps

Range maps help inform when a certain bird species may be seen in the area. Most field guides or birding websites have range maps for each species. By studying these diagrams, you can become familiar with what might be nearby at a given time which can help you eliminate possible identifications. This helps you focus on just the birds you are likely to see.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird Range Map



- Breeding (Summer Resident)
- Migration (Transient)
- Nonbreeding (Winter Resident)

Programs and Events

Programs

Five Rivers MetroParks hosts several programs that can help develop your birding skills. [Check this link often to see all program offerings.](#)

Examples of adult program offerings include:

- Waterfowl Exploration
- Woodcock Watch
- Beginning Birding
- Screech Owl Prowl
- Owl Walk
- Spring Migrant Bird Walk
- Common Birds of Ohio

Examples of youth & teen program offerings include:

- Woodcock Exploration
- Woodcock Walk
- Owl Prowl
- Baby Owl Search
- NestWatch: Join the Bird Nest Search
- Eastern Bluebird NestBox Detectives
- Woodpecker Habitat Exploration

The Biggest Week in American Birding

Did you know Ohio is home to The Biggest Week in American Birding? Each year, Black Swamp Bird Observatory hosts a 10-day festival to celebrate songbird migration. Over 2,000 people flock to northwest Ohio! Learn more by visiting [The Biggest Week In American Birding's website.](#)

The Big Sit!

In the world of birding, some people challenge themselves to complete a Big Sit and try to find as many birds as possible in a specified time without moving from a 17-foot diameter circle. In fact, Connecticut's New Haven Bird Club originated an annual, international event called [The Big Sit!](#) This year's event will take place in October.

Blind Birder Bird-a-Thon

A new event to the birding world, the [Blind Birder Bird-a-thon](#) will take place this year on May 18, 2025. Hosted by [Birdability](#), this birding event is open to any legally blind individual in the United States. Save the date!

20 Birds Commonly Found in Ohio

The birds listed below can all be found in southwest Ohio. To help you know where you might find them, we've also indicated their preferred habitat(s). Those marked with an * are common backyard feeder birds.

- Red-tailed Hawk | Open landscapes, urban parks
- Eastern Screech Owl | Woodlands, suburbs
- *Ruby-throated Hummingbird | Wide range of habitats, flowers preferrable
- *Downy Woodpecker | Forests, woodlands
- Pileated Woodpecker | Woodlands
- *Blue Jay | Woodlands, suburbs, parks
- American Crow | Wide range of habitats, fields, meadows
- *Tufted Titmouse | Forests, parks, suburbs
- Carolina Wren | Woodlands, parks, suburbs
- Wood Thrush | Woodlands, forests
- American Robin | Wide range of habitats
- Northern Mockingbird | Open landscapes, suburbs
- Cedar Waxwing | Wide range of habitats
- Yellow-throated Warbler | Riparian
- *Northern Cardinal | Wide range of habitats, suburbs
- Indigo Bunting | Woodlands, open landscapes
- Red-winged Blackbird | Open landscapes, meadows, wetlands
- Common Grackle | Wide range of habitats, suburbs
- *House Finch | Urban parks, suburbs
- *American Goldfinch | Open landscapes, parks, suburbs

To learn more about common birds found in Ohio, visit Ohio Department of Natural Resources' website for their [Common Birds of Ohio Field Guide](#).

Best Birding Areas

While you can find birds in all Five Rivers MetroParks locations, we have identified a few areas especially suited for birding. Locations are ranked below by level of difficulty. Those marked with an * are accessible, featuring either paved trails or sites to bird while driving. To learn more about accessibility in MetroParks, visit this page on [Accessibility Features](#).

Easier Areas to Bird

- Twin Valley Welcome Center at Germantown MetroPark*
- Medlar Conservation Area at the Great-Little Trail*
- Adirondack Boardwalk at Hills & Dales MetroPark
- Woodman Fen Conservation Area
- Eastwood Lake and MetroPark*
- Fishing Ponds at Possum Creek MetroPark*
- Argonne Lake at Possum Creek MetroPark (Black Cherry Shelter entrance)*
- Marie Aull Trail at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark
- Carriage Hill MetroPark
- Green Trail by Lake at Englewood MetroPark
- Bird Blind on Germantown MetroPark's Silver Trail
- Bird Blind at Cox Arboretum MetroPark

More Challenging Areas to Bird

*Accessible Locations

Birding Activities

Backyard Makeover

Birds need habitat as much outside of nature parks as inside them. While Five Rivers MetroParks protects nearly 16,000 acres of land, birds not only live in the parks, they live in your neighborhood or community, too. Small improvements to your backyard, patio or balcony can help birds maintain and grow their populations. Choose one of the suggestions below or try a few—any progress matters!



Add a birdfeeder

Birdfeeders come in a variety of shapes and sizes designed for different types of birds. When selecting a feeder, consider what kind of birds you want to attract and what kind of food those species eat. You will need to provide a feeder that can hold that type of food. It's also important to consider a bird's eating habits. Some birds will stay close to the ground while others will fly to a feeder. Your local bird supply store can assist you in picking out a feeder or you can learn more online. The National Audubon Society provides helpful guides about bird feeders and birdseed.

Clean birdfeeders you already own

Regularly clean your bird feeders—the best practice is at least once every two weeks. This avoids making birds sick and spreading infectious diseases. Take your feeder apart and scrub it with soap and boiling water. You can also soak your feeder in a 10% diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water). Be sure to rinse the feeder thoroughly and let the feeder air dry before filling it again.

Plant native fruit shrubs and flowers

Some birds eat berries or pump nectar out of flowers. Try adding natural food sources to your landscape by planting fruit producing shrubs or native flower species. When picking out plants, talk with your local native plant grower to ensure you select varieties native to your region. Birds and insects have adapted to these native plants and will benefit the most from them. Some plants we recommend for Ohio include serviceberry, chokeberry, spicebush and native varieties of viburnum.



Blackhaw Viburnum

Provide a water source

Access to water is essential to a bird's survival. Like humans, they need fresh water to drink and stay clean. Consider adding backyard ponds, rain gardens and bird baths to your landscape. Even puddles naturally supply water for birds, so adding water to a puddle in your backyard can be a simple way to help them.



Remove invasive plants

Invasive plants spread quickly, often smothering other plants native to a region. This can destroy habitat which can impact an animal's ability to survive. [Plants](#) to consider removing include Amur Honeysuckle, Callery (Bradford) Pear, English Ivy and Burning Bush.



Leave tree snags

Woodpeckers and owls use standing, dead trees—called snags—as a form of shelter. If you have a tree that needs to come down, save part of the trunk, so birds can use it as habitat. You can also add snags to your yard by “planting” logs in the ground.

Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds

Build-a-Nest

This is a fun craft to learn more about birds and how they build their nests. Please note that nests and materials are not intended to be used by birds when finished.

Materials needed:

- Assortment of natural elements - bendable twigs, sticks, grass, dried leaves
- Various soft materials - yarn, long scraps of fabric, raffia, seed pod fluff
- Mud (optional)

Instructions:

Start by selecting what shape you want your nest to be. As shown below, different kinds of birds build different types of nests. Will your nest be a classic cup shape or more of a pendant? How about a platform in a tree or post or simply a scrape in the ground?

Once you've decided on a shape, begin outlining the base of your nest by twisting sticks and grass together. Birds typically start by building the bottom of their nest first. Add vertical pieces to your outline and then start to weave materials in between the vertical pieces to add height to your nest. You can begin adding mud to fill in the gaps or start adding softer materials to cushion the inside of the nest.

When finished building, consider the following questions:

- Would my nest hold eggs?
- Would my nest hold baby birds?
- What would you do to improve your next nest?



Cup Nest



Pendant Nest



Platform Nest



Scrape Nest

Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds

Treat the Birds

Did you know that birds have favorite foods? Depending on the structure of their beak, certain foods are easier to eat than others. Explore this chart to see what birds in southwest Ohio like to eat and consider making your own bird seed recipe to attract a certain species to your landscape.

	Safflower Seeds	Black Oil Sunflower Seeds	Striped Sunflower Seeds	Sunflower Chips	Dried Fruit	Cracked Corn	Peanuts	Nyjer
Northern Cardinal	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
American Goldfinch		✓						✓
Indigo Bunting						✓		✓
Carolina Chickadee	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Pileated Woodpecker		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
White-breasted Nuthatch	✓	✓		✓			✓	
Carolina Wren				✓			✓	
Song Sparrow		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Blue Jay		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds

Beak Buffet

Materials needed:

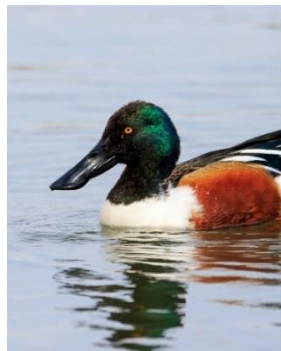
- Various beaks – soup spoon, tweezers, chopsticks, clothespin
- Various “food” items
 - Uncooked rice (ants)
 - Rubber bands or hair ties (worms)
 - Small pasta (beetles)
 - Cotton balls (berries)
- Plastic cups or bowls (one per player)
- Timer
- Paper/pencil

Instructions:

Start by sprinkling various “food” items onto the game surface – either a table or floor. Have each player sit near a cup or bowl, these will represent your bird’s stomach. Players should select one type of beak to use for the first round. Once everyone is ready, someone can start the timer for 30 seconds and yell: “Time to eat!” Each person uses their beak to maneuver the various food items into their cup/bowl. At the end of 30 seconds, stop “eating.” With the pencil and paper, make notes about your beak type, how much food you were able to get, and which food was easiest to grab. Play multiple rounds, each time swapping beaks.

Once everyone has tried each beak type, consider the following questions:

- Which beaks picked up which food items best?
- Was it more difficult to use some beaks to pick up certain foods?
- What kind of beak goes with each bird below? What does this say about their food choices?



Northern Shoveler



Dark-eyed Junco



Great Blue Heron

Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds

Games Galore

Cornell Lab of Ornithology hosts a [Bird Academy Play Lab](https://www.birdacademy.org/learning-games/) online with several games that help you learn about birds. There are options for ages six and above along with several for teens. Adults can have fun playing many of these as well.

Games include:

[Beastbox](#)

[Flap to the Future](#)

[The Wall of Birds](#)

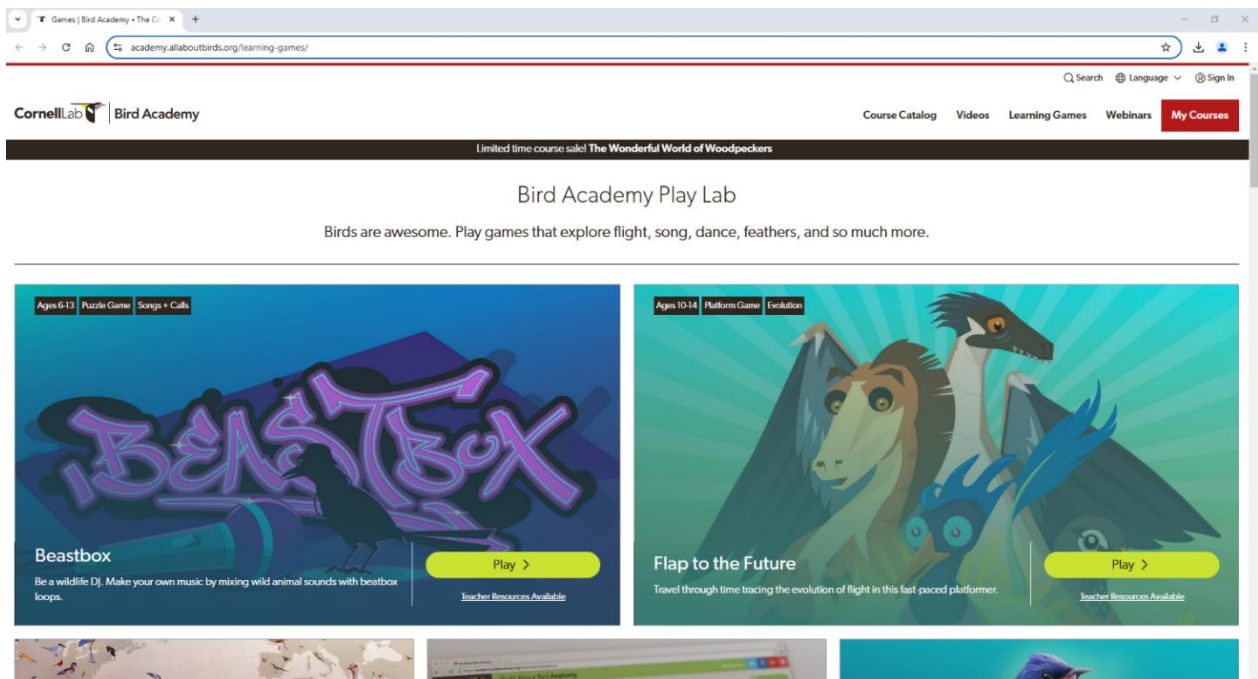
[All About Bird Anatomy](#)

[Bird Song Hero](#)

[All About Fancy Males](#)

[All About Bird Song](#)

[All About Feathers](#)



Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds

Fabulous Feathers

*Feathers are protected in the United States, and it is illegal to take them without a permit.
After studying any feathers you find, be sure to leave them behind.*

Step 1

It is helpful to learn about feathers before you try to identify them outside. Explore the following websites to become familiar with feather types and biology.

- [All About Birds: Everything You Need to Know About Feathers](#)
- [Cornell Lab's All About Feathers Game](#)

Step 2

Spend time navigating The Feather Atlas collected by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Forensics Laboratory. You can browse scans of various feathers, search for specific species and practice identification.

- [The Feather Atlas](#)

Step 3

Find a feather and practice using the Feather Atlas to identify what kind of bird the feather came from. Study it closely while asking yourself the following questions:

- What are the main colors of the feather? What are its secondary colors?
- Are there patterns on the feather?
- What kind of feather is it? Wing, down, tail, contour, semiplume, bristle, filoplume?

Step 4

Return the feather to where you found it. Feathers are protected in the United States under the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#). If you'd like to remember your feather, take a photo but don't forget to return the feather after.

Birding for Wellness

Sound Map

Observing sound is one way birding supports wellness. Research shows listening to birds can reduce stress and anxiety while simultaneously boosting your mood.

Take a piece of paper and a writing tool outside and find a place to sit. Draw an X in the center of your page and begin listening for birds and other natural sounds around you. Use your own symbols to add these sounds to your map. Continue for five to ten minutes. What did you hear? Were any sounds repeated?



Passive Bird Sitting

Like the Sound Map activity above, a passive bird sit provides an opportunity for mindfulness while birding. Start by finding a place where you can view birds, perhaps a seat in your backyard or near a window. Take a few moments to slowly breathe in and out, then begin to observe your senses. Try to find five things you can see around you, four things you can touch, three you can hear, two you can smell, and one you can taste. This will help you focus your mind and tune in to the world around you.

Begin to look around for birds. What can you see or hear? As you find them, study and ponder their behaviors. What are they looking for? Where are they going? How are they related? Repeat these steps for a few days, and you may start to see patterns emerge. You can take this a step further by keeping a nature journal where you log your daily bird sits.

Guided Mindfulness

Experience mindfulness while celebrating birds. Read and follow the prompt below.

Fly Like a Bird: Guided Meditation

Find a quiet place to sit, either on a chair, a couch or bed, or even on the grass outside. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable, and start to take a few, long breaths. In through the nose and out through the mouth. Repeat three to five times. Let your body relax, allowing your arms and legs to feel heavy and release any tension.

Begin to imagine yourself as a bird. Perhaps you are nestled inside the hole of a tree peeking out over a bit of bark or tucked safely in a nest on a tree branch. Use your mind to craft a natural landscape around you. Maybe you're in a forest or a prairie. Take another long, deep breath, then imagine your bird taking flight.

Look out toward the horizon where maybe a series of tall trees or mountains ascend into great, blue skies. Ponder what lies between you and the horizon and think about what a bird sees every time they're soaring through the air. If your scene is in spring or summer, perhaps there are lush, rolling hills full of green abundance. Or, if you're thinking of autumn then a variety of reds, oranges, and bright yellows dappling the surface of the Earth. If winter, perhaps there is snow.

Breathe deeply and feel the wind brush your wings as you flap ever higher. Notice the clouds above you and feel the sun on your back. Continue to breathe, then imagine yourself gliding back down, your wings helping you move smoothly through the air, landing safely back in the hole of your tree or cozy nest. What a magnificent sight a bird gets to see. Take a few more deep breaths then flutter your eyes open to reenter the world.

Mindfulness activities can bring up a variety of emotions. If you need help, visit: [Montgomery County Local Help Now](#) or call the Miami Valley Warmline: (937) 528-7777.

Artmaking

For centuries, birds have inspired artists and writers, now it's your turn to be creative! Try one of the following artistic activities:

- Write a letter to a bird. Ask it questions, ponder what experiences it's had during its life.
- Make an entry in a nature journal, perhaps draw a feather or a nest.
- Write a story or poem about your favorite bird species.
- Attend a MetroParks' Paint-a-Park program and paint a bird or habitat you find.
 - Paint-a-Park occurs once a month and takes place at different locations around Five Rivers MetroParks. Click here to view [upcoming Paint-a-Park dates](#).



Additional Resources

Ohio Department of Natural Resources Field Guides

Check out the following field guides on the [Ohio Department of Natural Resources' website](#). Their helpful guides are available to download, or you can order any of them for free by calling 1-800-945-3543.

[Common Birds of Ohio](#)

[Common Owls of Ohio](#)

[Raptors of Ohio](#)

[Warblers of Ohio](#)

[Waterbirds of Ohio](#)

Conservation Websites

[Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#)

[Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative](#)

[American Bird Conservancy](#)

Local Organizations

[Aullwood Audubon](#)

[Audubon Miami Valley](#)

[Dayton Audubon Society](#)

[Ohio Young Birders Club - Southwest Chapter](#)

[Ohio Ornithological Society](#)

[Birding Hotspots - Important Bird Areas in Ohio](#)

Adult Books

[What It's Like to Be a Bird](#) by David Sibley

[Where Have all the Birds Gone? Nature in Crisis](#) by Rebecca E. Hirsch

Children's Books

[Ruby's Birds](#) by Mya Thompson

[A Garden to Save the Birds](#) by Wendy McClure

[What It's Like to Be a Bird \(Adapted for Young Readers\)](#) by David Sibley

[Sylvia and the Birds](#) by Johanna Emeney

[What's Inside a Bird's Nest?](#) by Rachel Ignotofsky

Other Places to Bird Outside of Five Rivers MetroParks

[Aullwood Audubon](#)

[Buck Creek State Park](#)

[Bruckner Nature Center](#)

[Caesar Creek State Park](#)

[Centerville-Washington Park District](#)

[City of Kettering Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts Department](#)

[Glen Helen Nature Reserve](#)

[Grange Insurance Audubon Center](#)

[Greene County Parks & Trails](#)

[Hueston Woods State Park](#)

[Miami County Parks District](#)

WELCOME TO THE 2025 FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS BIRDING CHALLENGE



Birding provides countless ways to learn about and experience the world around you. Complete challenge activities between Mar. 1 and Nov. 9 for your chance to win fun, bird-themed prizes.

Over 450 species of birds can be found in Ohio, and they need our support so they can thrive. Join the Five Rivers MetroParks Birding Challenge today to contribute to important citizen science projects and help birds in your own backyard! With 30 tasks to choose from, the challenge has something everyone will enjoy.

- We've designed this challenge with both beginner and advanced birders in mind, so anyone can participate.
- Activities can be completed alone or in a group.
- While all Five Rivers MetroParks locations provide opportunities to bird, we've identified 12 Best Birding Areas to get you started.
- The 2025 challenge runs Mar. 1 through Nov. 9.

Over the course of the challenge, you'll develop birding skills, learn how to help birds and reap the many benefits of birding, including improved mental and physical health. Also, you'll help build a conservation community by sharing your experiences with others, so Get Out & Bird today!

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

To enter, complete at least one task in each challenge category for a minimum of six tasks completed. Everyone who enters will receive a MetroParks' Birding Challenge Sticker as well as one entry into this year's raffle. Complete additional tasks to earn more raffle entries!

- You will need to complete at least six tasks to qualify for a sticker and raffle entry - one from each category.
- For every additional six tasks you complete, you'll receive one additional raffle entry. Additional tasks do not need to be in each category, so you can pick and choose which tasks interest you the most.

- For a bonus entry, submit a photo showing all the fun you had during the challenge.
- The maximum raffle entries one participant may earn is six.

RAFFLE PRIZES

- A pair of Nikon PROSTAFF P7 8 x 45 binoculars
- An EcoClean® Medium Seed Tube Feeder and 20lbs of Wild Birds Unlimited Supreme Blend Bird Seed
- A basket of bird-themed goodies including shade-grown, bird friendly coffee, a copy of *Birds of the Photo Ark* by Joel Sartore and Noah Strycker, and a Charley Harper mug

GETTING STARTED

Many of the tasks coordinate with our new Birding Challenge Guide. Get started by reading through this helpful booklet of how-tos, activities and resources.

Learn about the best places to bird by visiting sites identified on our Best Birding Areas map. These locations are marked onsite with park signage, so you'll know when you've arrived at a Best Birding Area.

The 2025 MetroParks' Birding Challenge features 30 tasks from which you can choose to customize your own birding adventure. Complete at least one task from each category to be eligible for prizes. To download the list of challenge tasks, scan the QR code or visit metroparks.org/birdingchallenge.





BIRDING CHALLENGE TASKS

Complete at least one task in each challenge category for a minimum of six tasks completed.

SPOT!

Find the birds

LEARN!

Build your skills

SUPPORT!

Help the birds

ENJOY!

Birding for well-being

GET TOGETHER!

Birding with others

HAVE FUN!

Special birding experiences

A

Birder's choice: Select a bird you've never seen using a field guide or a site like e-Bird. Try to find this bird by the end of the challenge. For more difficulty, try to find one of the following: American Bittern, Great Horned Owl, Blue Grosbeak, or an American Kestrel.

Read the Birding Challenge Guide provided online at metroparks.org/birding.

Update the habitat in your backyard. Use the "Backyard Makeover" activity in the Birding Challenge Guide as a reference.

Birding provides a way to reconnect with nature. Challenge yourself to go birding at least once without using your phone. Just listen and observe the birds. How did this change your experience?

Attend a Five Rivers MetroParks birding program. Check out all offerings at metroparks.org/birding.

You can bird almost anywhere! Pick a place you've never been and go birding there.

B

Ohio is a wonderful place to bird! Find 10 species of birds that can commonly be found in Ohio. Use the list in the Birding Challenge Guide as a reference.

Choose a birding tool and learn how to use it. Examples include: field guides, binoculars, e-Bird, apps like Merlin, and spotting scopes.

Birds are often caught in fishing line near ponds and lakes and have a difficult time getting unstuck. Find a fishing area and pick up trash to prevent this from happening.

Complete one of the "Birding for Wellness" activities listed in the Birding Challenge Guide.

Birding can be a great social activity. Take a friend birding with you.

Complete an activity from the "Five Fun Ways to Learn About Birds" list in the Birding Challenge Guide. Activities can be done solo or in a group. They make great party games, too!

C

Germantown MetroPark is an Important Birding Area. All seven of Ohio's woodpecker species can be found there. Visit the park and see how many you can find. Try for at least three different species. Many of these can be found at the Twin Valley Welcome Center, an accessible Best Birding Area.

Learn how to identify birds by sound. Each bird has a unique song. Try identifying a bird in the wild by only using your ears.

Go birding at Possum Creek MetroPark and document how many birds you find. Submit an e-Bird checklist using the Possum Creek MetroPark hotspot or fill out the Possum Creek Birding Checklist form on the Challenge home page at metroparks.org/birding.

Birds have interesting behaviors. Find a bird or a nest and watch it for a few minutes. Consider the following questions: What is the bird eating? What is it looking at? Does it make any noise? Fun observations may include an adult feeding its young or a killdeer faking an injury.

Volunteer for Five Rivers MetroParks at a conservation or park maintenance opportunity! Remove invasive species or maintain trails at Adopt-A-Park or an upcoming Service Saturday. Volunteering connects you with other nature lovers while helping birds and their habitats.

Visit one of the Best Birding Areas within MetroParks. Pick an easy one or challenge yourself with one of the more difficult locations. Accessible locations are noted, as well. Find the list on the Birding Challenge webpage or in the Birding Challenge Guide.

D

Spring and fall are abundant with warblers in Ohio. Go on an adventure trying to find as many species of warblers as you can. Try to see or hear at least five. Tip: use Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Warblers of Ohio Field Guide to prepare.

Learn more about birds and birding. Read a conservation article, look up the history of the Audubon Society or check out a book from your local library.

Help us learn more about the birds in Five Rivers MetroParks. Submit an e-Bird checklist to one of the following hotspots: Wesleyan MetroPark, Sunrise MetroPark or Island MetroPark.

Choose a location and visit it three times throughout the challenge. What birds did you hear when visiting? How did they change each time you went back?

Host your own birdwatching party. Play bird games, make bird-themed crafts, eat bird-themed food. Use the activities in our Birding Challenge Guide as inspiration!

Birding often provides awe-inspiring ways to connect with nature. To experience this yourself, attend a MetroParks program, such as Night Hike, Owl Prowl or Woodcock Watch.

E

Choose a bird species you saw in the spring and try to find it again in the fall. Sometimes the same species of bird will look different depending on its age and whether it's breeding season. Notice their different plumage. Why do you think this happens?

Go birding in four different habitats. Make a list of the birds you find in each one, then think about why you saw different birds in different places.

Participate in a citizen science activity such as NestWatch, Ohio Lights Out or another conservation initiative. By involving community members, citizen science connects researchers directly with the public.

For centuries, birds have inspired artists and writers, now it's your turn to be creative. Complete one of the artmaking activities described in the Birding Challenge Guide.

Help us spread the word about MetroParks Birding Challenge. Make a public social media post about something cool you've seen during the challenge and tag us on Facebook and Instagram: @metroparks.

Go birding while you recreate in your MetroParks. See what you can find while paddling, hiking or fishing. You can even bird while completing MetroParks Trails Challenge! Don't forget to Leave No Trace.