

5-Step Guide to Leading a Bird Walk

Birds are an easy way to get people engaged in nature, and often help to inspire a passion for stewardship and conservation. While it may seem daunting at first, leading a bird walk, or helping new birders learn to ID our local species, should never be a scary experience. Keep in mind birds are tricky! Focusing on slow moving birds or using bird guides and apps can help – and it's always okay to say I don't know!

Here are some quick tips on what to discuss with your group to get started:

1. Fully Engage All 5 Senses.

Ask the group to make specific observations. How many different types of bird songs do they hear? How many different types (or colors, or heights, etc.) of plants do they see? Can they hear the water moving? How many different scents do they smell?

2. Be Respectful of the Habitat.

Stay on the trails. If necessary, explain that a habitat is the place where an animal lives, and which contains all of the things that animals need to survive (food, water, shelter, and a safe place to raise their young). Remember to warn about touching things you're not supposed to, and being too noisy – you don't want to scare away the birds.

3. What is the bird's behavior?

Is it swimming, walking through mud, picking things off the ground, flying overhead, sitting on a branch, etc.? Why might it be doing this? What is it looking for, trying to avoid, etc.?

4. What is the overall shape of the bird?

Is it tall and lean, or wide and low to the ground? Is it mostly vertical (i.e. a predatory bird) or mostly horizontal (a swimming bird) or somewhere in between? What about its legs and beak? Why might it need those specialized features; what does that particular beak shape or leg length help it do?

5. What Habitat Is This?

Consider what kinds of resources are here? What kinds of challenges do birds encounter here? For example, is water scarce or abundant (and what type of water is it...)? Is there good shelter nearby? Are there a lot of predators here? What kind of food(s) might the birds find? Encourage them to think creatively.

Bird Beaks and What They Eat

A bird's beak is one of the most useful tools in identifying what a bird eats, which in turn will help ID the type of bird it is (e.g. duck, bird of prey, shorebird, etc.). Here are some examples of the types of food that each beak is best adapted for:



Generalist



Insect catching



Grain eating



Coniferous-seed eating



Nectar feeding



Fruit eating



Chiseling



Dip netting



Surface skimming



Scything



Probing



Filter feeding



Aerial fishing



Pursuit fishing



Scavenging



Raptorial