

YOU LOVE TO WATCH BIRDS...WHERE DO YOU BEGIN?



BY: Janet M. Hug

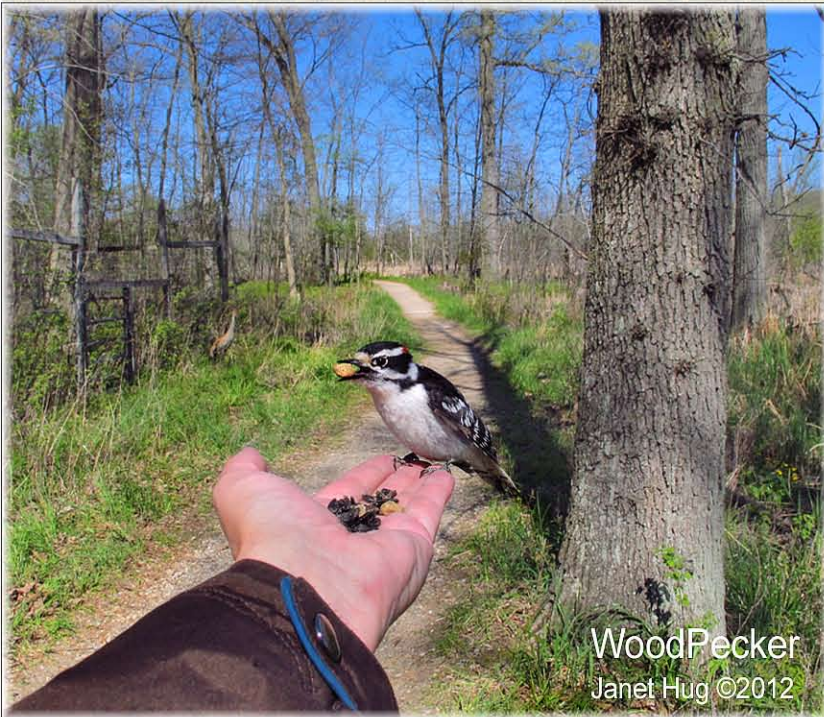
We are so very pleased to have Janet doing our Birding in S.E. Michigan column. Janet is not only an avid Birder, but an accomplished photographer. So she just does not study and observe birds in the wild, but has the talents and patience to capture their images. All the photos as well as the text is Janet at her finest. Her forth installment is on How to get started in Birding. We hope you enjoy the wonderful writings and pictures



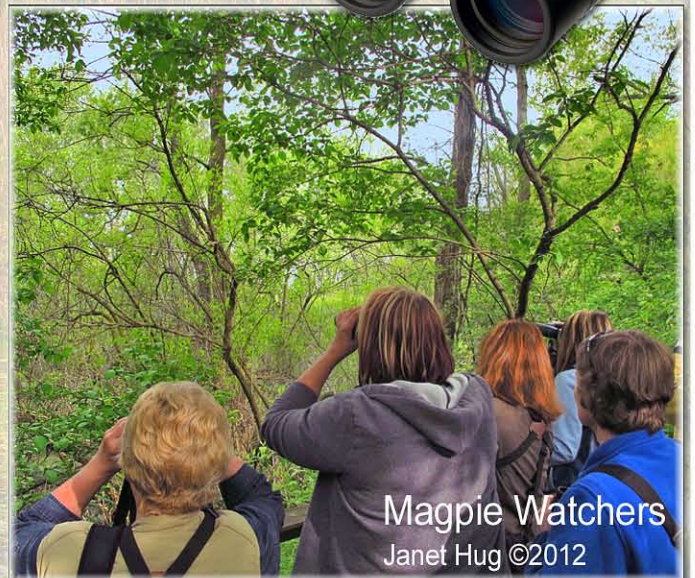
Birding can be anything you want it to be. Birding can be as simple and uncomplicated as noticing the birds in your yard to making it your career as a wildlife biologist. What makes birding a rewarding activity is the ability to observe them wherever you happen to be, all it takes is for you to be observant of the birds around you. Blind individuals are birders, too. They use their listening skills to identify birds. As a birder, you will be joining the millions of people who participate in this rewarding hobby. You are not alone in your love of birds.

When birders first start out they often feel overwhelmed and may ask themselves, will I ever master this hobby? Don't be concerned if you can't identify a House Sparrow from a House Wren. You will gain birding skills with experience. Even expert birders, on occasion, get stumped by a bird identification. You are not alone if you find yourself confused by a bird that doesn't quite fit the description in the field guide. Bird plumage is the brightest during the breeding season and some warblers look dramatically different in their fall plumage. Birds going through a feather molt can look ragged and disheveled. You may even encounter a curve ball in the form of a hybrid bird or duck. Knowing that birds change their appearance throughout the year will help you to identify them and be open minded to a wide variety of identification possibilities.

eBird



WoodPecker
Janet Hug ©2012



Magpie Watchers
Janet Hug ©2012

There is always the bird that gets away without an identification - it is part of the fun and excitement of birding. You admire the birds for their incredible survival skills and move on to the next bird you spot. Birds needs to keep moving to avoid predators. If you can't see a bird, then a predator probably can't, either.

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As you decide to look more closely at birds, your first purchase should be a field guide and a pair of binoculars. A birding field guide is a must for every birder. A field guide will have techniques on how to identify birds by learning their anatomy and the accompanying descriptions. Birding field guides are written in different styles using photographs or illustrations of birds. Field guides will also include a range map and descriptions of the bird's habitat. It is a personal preference which field guide you choose to use. Binoculars range in price from \$100 to well over \$1,000 for a top-of-the-line pair of binoculars. A typical binocular used for birding is an 8X42 model. Binoculars are also offered in 10X50, however, they are very heavy and difficult to hold still when birding. To help choose your next pair of binoculars, visit your local camera or sporting goods store. Organized birding festivals will often have optics representatives on hand displaying a variety binoculars and price ranges. Also, check out birding and nature magazines and their



Eastern Screech Owl
Janet Hug ©2012



Kirtland's Warbler
Janet Hug ©2012

websites for articles on optics and binoculars recommended for birding. The following link from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology gives an in-depth explanation of binoculars. <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/gear/binoculars/>



Prothonotary Warbler
Janet Hug ©2012

As you study birds, you will discover that birds live in different habitats. Michigan bird habitats can be classified as deciduous forest, coniferous forest, grasslands, prairies and wetlands. For instance, would you typically find a Ring-billed gull in the middle of the deep forest or a woodpecker on the beach? Each bird is suited to its particular habitat and requirements for survival.

Before you set out on a birding hike, find out the type of habitat you will be visiting. Having knowledge of the area you are visiting will help you to narrow down the type of birds you may encounter at that location. A book on Michigan birds is another great tool to add to your reading list. A resource not to be overlooked is your local Audubon Society for help in finding great birding habitats.

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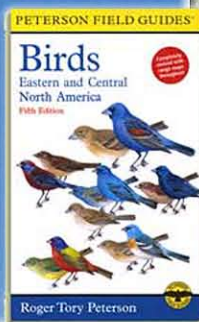
The use of computer technology has been invaluable to the scientific and birding community. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, a research unit of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, is a world leader in the research and conservation of birds

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx?pid=1609>

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has created a web-based data entry program called eBird, to help birders keep track of their bird sightings. By using this data, the research staff at Cornell are able to monitor the health and well being of birds. Ebird has a range of features including maps and graphs, e-mail alerts to birds in your area, lists of birds by location in your county, state and by year. By contributing bird sightings through eBird and participating in Project Feederwatch, an entire network of birders from across the country are helping to fill in the pieces of the puzzle about where and when birds migrate, what time of year they occur, and their distribution. Ebird has an iPhone / iPod application "app" for submitting your sightings on-line. The eBird app is called BirdLog NA. A companion app to eBird is BirdsEye, which accesses eBird data giving you access to bird sightings, birding hotspots and rare birds found near you. Check for birding apps through your smartphone app store.

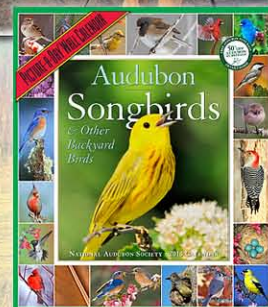
Osprey/Kensington Metro Park

Janet Hug ©2012



Belle Isle/Late Fall

Janet Hug ©2012



<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/page.aspx?pid=1162>

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/about> <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

While current birding publications and social media pages are great tools for birders, having a network of birding friends is indispensable. When I started out birding, I didn't know any other birders, and I longed for the companionship of people who understood my passion. Joining your local Audubon chapter will do wonders for your growth and knowledge about birds. Your local Audubon chapter members are the birding experts for the area. Audubon groups offer field trips to help you learn about the birds in your area. An out-of-state field trip may also be on the agenda. During the month of May, witnessing the warbler migration at Magee Marsh, east of Toledo, Ohio, has to be the highlight field trip of the year. In early May, this birding festival dubbed the Biggest Week in American Birding is devoted to the celebration and conservation of birds. At this festival, you will meet 1,000 of your best birding friends all searching for that elusive life bird they came to see. While there, you may even be lucky enough to find the rare Kirtland's Warbler during its migration to northern Michigan.

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Being out on a field trip with experienced birders helps you improve your observation skills. By watching experienced birders use their own skills - looking for subtle movement in the trees or shrubs to detect birds, keeping their eyes on the target location and bringing the binoculars up to their eyes instead of looking down and trying to relocate the birds, you will gain skills and knowledge that a book can't teach you. Birders also listen for birds, for many are able to identify birds by their calls and sounds. These are small things you pick up when you go birding with experienced birders that improve your skills and increase your confidence. In addition to field trips, Audubon chapters have monthly meetings featuring speakers discussing their area of expertise or presenting programs of their birding adventures. My home chapter, the Oakland Audubon Society in Oakland County, Michigan, welcomes all birders to attend the meetings and field trips. Audubon chapters are also looking to the next generation of young birders and are creating Young Birders Clubs designed specifically for their age group. The Flying Wild curriculum is available to young birders to help them learn about birds and nature.

<http://www.flyingwild.org/aboutus.htm>

New opportunities for young birders are on the horizon. Stay tuned for more information, or contact me by e-mail.

As you begin your birding hobby, remember to make it fun and don't get discouraged if you feel overwhelmed. You don't have to be an expert ornithologist to be a birder. You are the designer of your birding hobby. You can make it a casual hobby or you can make it your career - just get outdoors and enjoy the world of birds. There is someone out there just like you watching the birds. Welcome to the club.

Happy Birding,
Janet Hug



Social Media Administrator
Oakland Audubon Society

Audubon



Wood Duck

Janet Hug ©2012



Ring-necked Drake

Janet Hug ©2012



The best way to describe me would be to say, I am an outdoors woman at heart who grew up in the city of Ferndale, Michigan (just outside Detroit). As a kid, I couldn't wait to escape to the lakes, woods and fields outside the city limits. Our small backyard and surrounding neighborhood offered a limited glance at the beauty of nature. I enjoy spending time in the outdoors and learning new things just for the sake of knowledge. There is joy in finding things out.

Flickr:

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eBIRD:

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/about>