

# DIGITAL BIRDING RESOURCES



## Introduction

It may feel a bit intimidating to see the word “digital” associated with birding. The term “digital” is so widely used and encompasses so many different kinds of evolving technology that many people feel overwhelmed when trying to broach the subject.

Keep in mind that everyone processes information differently—some are visual thinkers, some are strategic, some are problem-solvers. Fortunately, digital technology in the birding world has a great deal of variation to fit each individual’s style. There are fantastic digital resources for birding out there—tools to help with identification, connections to the local birder community, and global-wide data on birds—that are very much worth pursuing.

## Digital Resources Include:

- eBird
- Mobile Apps
- Social Media (Facebook, Flickr, Web Blogs)
- Podcasts

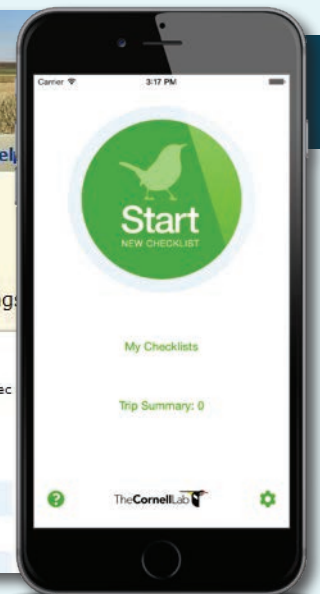
## eBird

eBird is one of the largest databases for records on bird species abundance and distribution. The site provides real-time data on bird populations, and includes region and species-specific information.

Ornithologists and beginning birders alike can submit observations to eBird. By submitting data, you are not only sharing your sightings with the local birding community, but also aiding scientists with conservation research.

The screenshot shows the eBird website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, About, Submit Observations, Explore Data, My eBird, and Help. Below that, a user greeting reads "Hello Annie Aguirre (annie\_aguirre) | Preferences | Sign Out". The main heading is "My eBird" with a sub-heading "Manage your personal lists, observations, locations, and account settings:". A prominent feature is "Your Life List: 248 Species" with a note "Updated 9 sec". Below this is a "Your Stats" table:

	Life	Year	Month
Total Species	248	232	79
Total Checklists	398	310	22



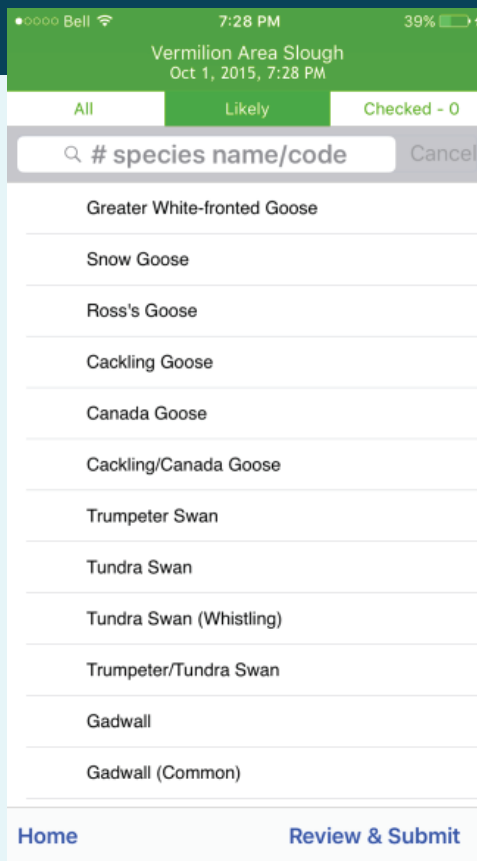
Of course, one of the big benefits of using eBird is that helps you become a more informed birder. You know where birds are, you know how to find great birding sites anywhere in the world, and you can contribute to a growing collaborative knowledge about bird status, distribution, and population shifts that aids in the detection and protection of threatened species.

# How eBird Works

In a nutshell, if you see or hear a bird and can identify it, you can report that observation to eBird. Often, birders submit reports when they are bird watching for an extended period of time, or spot an uncommon bird. Observations are submitted in the form of a checklist.

There are a few requirements, of course. To submit an observation, an eBird user should know: the location, the date and time, the bird species and the number counted, the number of people who also observed, and an estimate of the distance covered during the observation.

For new eBird users wanting to learn the ropes, attending walks with other birders is a great place to start. Often times in group walks, there is a birder keeping an eBird list who can show you the basics and, (if you have an account created) share the checklist with you. When a birder shares a checklist, all of the data they observed during the walk is copied onto the other person's eBird account.



## How to access eBird

**Website:** The full database can be accessed at [ebird.org](http://ebird.org)

Submissions can also be made through the free eBird phone app (examples seen on right).

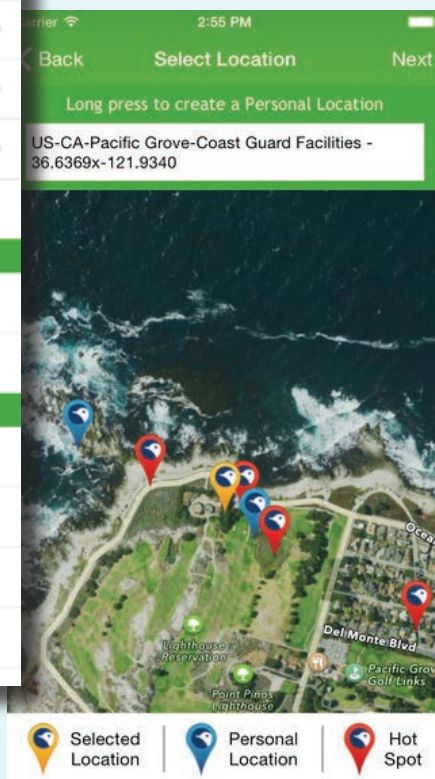
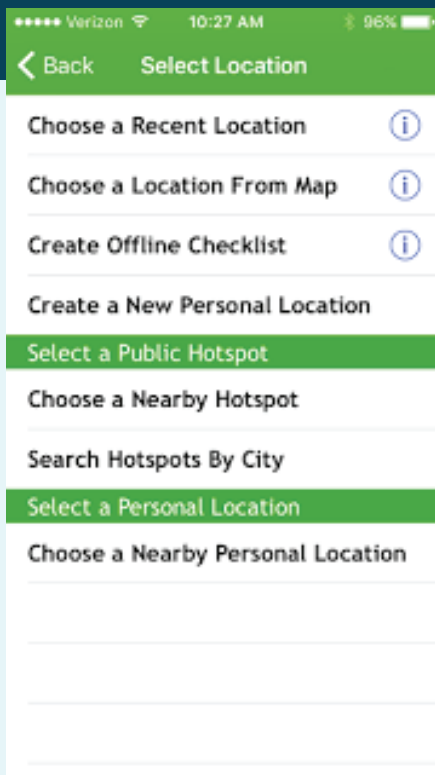
### Direct download links for the smartphone app:

**iTunes (for iPhone/iPad):**

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ebird-by-cornell-lab-ornithology/id988799279>

**Google Play (for Android):**

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=edu.cornell.birds.ebird>





# Mobile Apps

**Mobile apps** (abbreviated from “applications”) are downloadable programs designed for smart phones. The types of apps vary greatly, ranging from video games to dictionaries. For birding, this is a huge resource to take advantage of. The vast range of birding apps out there means you have the freedom to choose whichever best fits your own style. Just as some birders favor a certain field guide, the same is true for birding apps. The following are a few of my favorites.



## Merlin

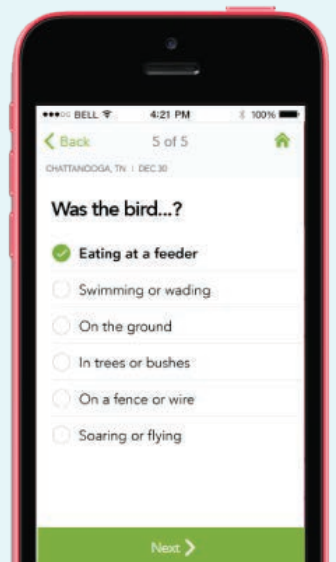
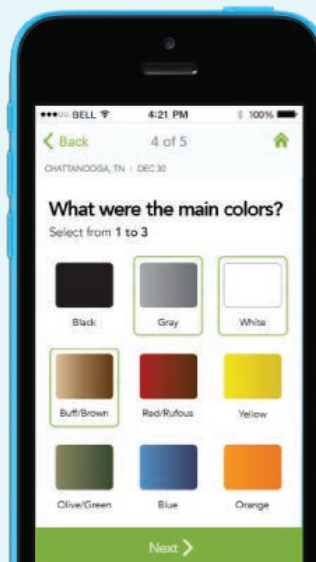
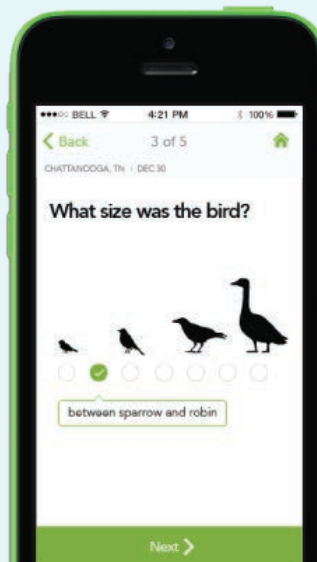
**Price:** Free **Available on:** iPhone/iPad, Android

Developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, this app is specifically designed for beginning and intermediate birders. This is a great tool for learning the steps in bird identification, and techniques that will aid you in understanding species differences. Merlin walks you through the methods of identification (size, color, behavior) using a photo ID tool, and suggests the most likely birds based on those key traits and the current season and region you found it in.

The app recently expanded to include a Sound ID tool, which uses your phone’s mic to detect and, within seconds, list the birds calling around you. Many of my birding friends use this app’s feature religiously.

### At a Glance:

- Beginner-friendly guide with Photo & Sound ID tools
- Offers step-by-step guidance
- Lists most likely species in your season and region
- Species images show differences seen with age & plumage





# BirdsEye

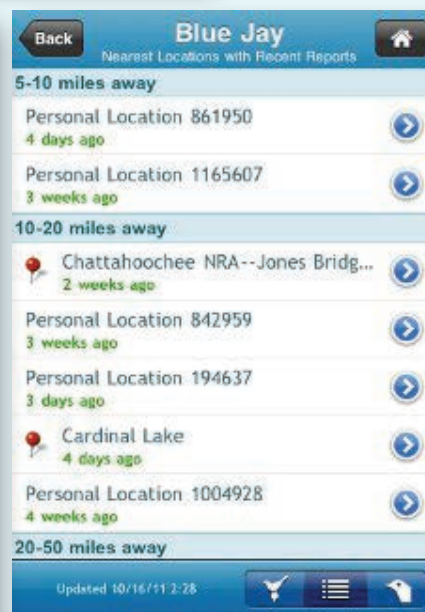
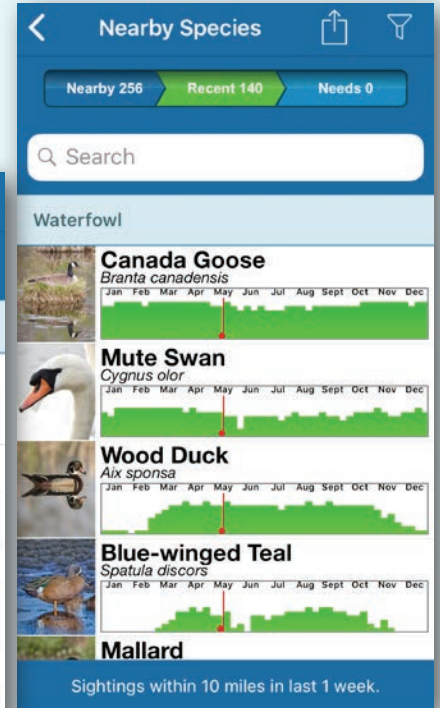
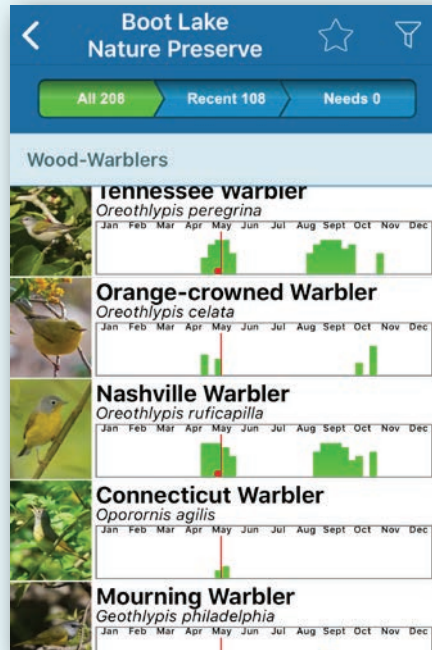
**Price:** Free (limited species)  
Full Version – \$2.99/month

**Available on:** iPhone/iPad, Android

Another great location-based app that pulls eBird sightings. This one has the added bonus of listing historical data for a specific hotspot, so you can see what species have been seen at a hotspot before, and anticipate when birds are going to be at their peak. I recommend getting the paid version (monthly subscription), as species are limited on the free version.

## At a Glance:

- Species search tool lets you see exactly when and where birds are being found
- Lists birds reported from eBird near your exact location
- Lets you specify within what distance and date range
- Separately lists notable or rare species for your area
- Shows nearby “hotspots”
- Charts seasonal abundance on a species for a specific location





# Sibley Birds (2nd Edition)

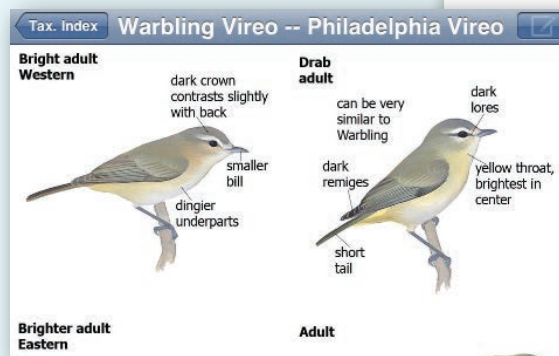
Price: \$20

Available on: All Devices

For most birders, the Sibley Field Guide is their go-to guide – both in book and app form. With the app, you get all the book's info, without the weight. Clean illustrations and streamlined ID info will aid you in quickly picking apart species in the field. The species comparison tool is incredibly useful for figuring out those tough look-a-like birds.

## At a Glance:

- Illustrated Field Guide
- Provides overview on species
- Includes sound recordings
- Compare Species tool for look-a-likes
- Shows seasonal range map of species



# iBird Pro/Ultimate Guide to Birds

Price: Free (Limited to 40 species) Available on: All Devices  
\$15 for Ultimate Version

Another fantastic digital field guide. While the illustrations may not be quite as clean and accurate as Sibley's, the app still has a lot of value. Sound recordings include a wider range of songs and calls, and the app goes much more in-depth on each species and the genus (bird family) it belongs to.

## At a Glance:

- Illustrated Field Guide
- Detailed information on each species (life history, behavior, courtship/nesting, taxonomy)
- Expansive sound recordings
- Links to online photo galleries and Wikipedia for specific birds
- Invest in Ultimate version for all the full species archive



American Redstart has an entirely black throat and face and orange wing and tail patches.  
Tap Illustration for Full Screen



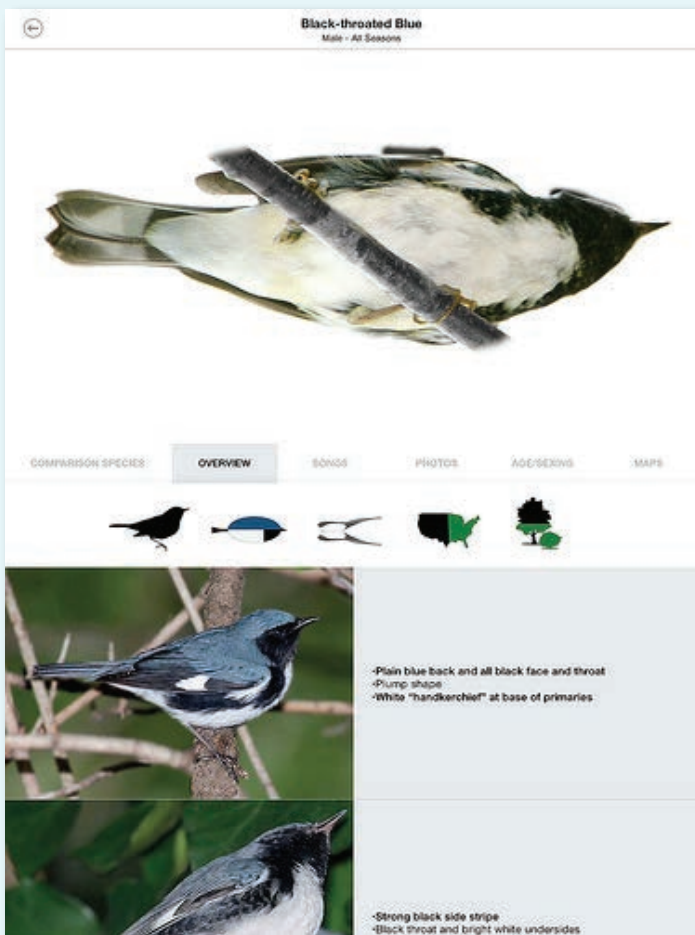
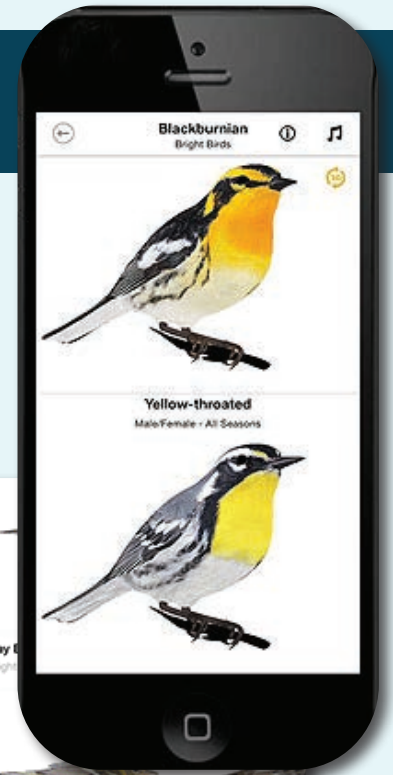
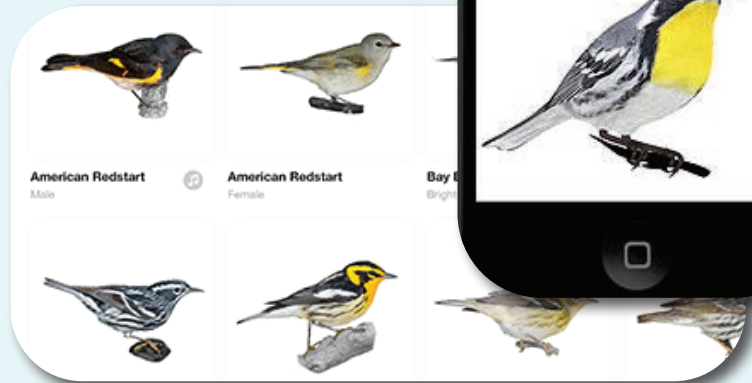
# Warbler Guide

Price: \$13 Available on: iPhone/iPad, Android

This app was developed by Princeton after the huge success of their *Warbler Guide* book. Birders love this book and know how helpful it is in the field. Birders also know that it is heavy to carry. The weight of 120 warblers (3 pounds), to be exact. So, it is a nice alternative to have a version that alternatively weighs only 12 warblers.

## At a Glance:

- Developed by Princeton University
- Everything you need to know about warblers.
- Divides info by region and season.
- Shows images from all possible angles, lists similar warblers, and has vocalization database.





# iNaturalist

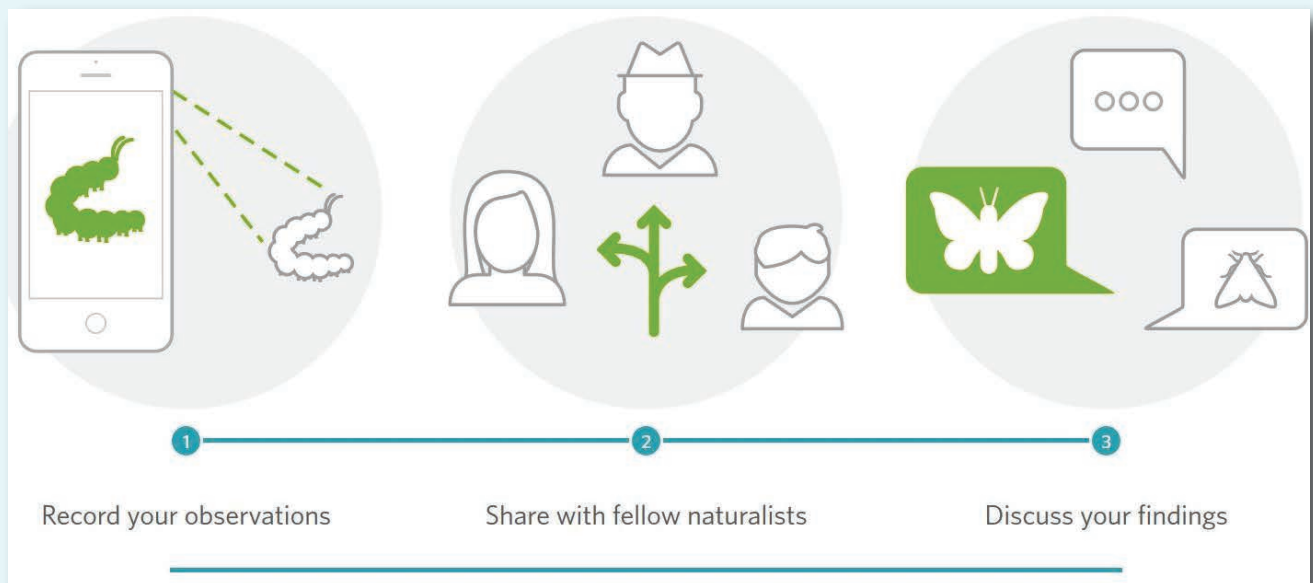
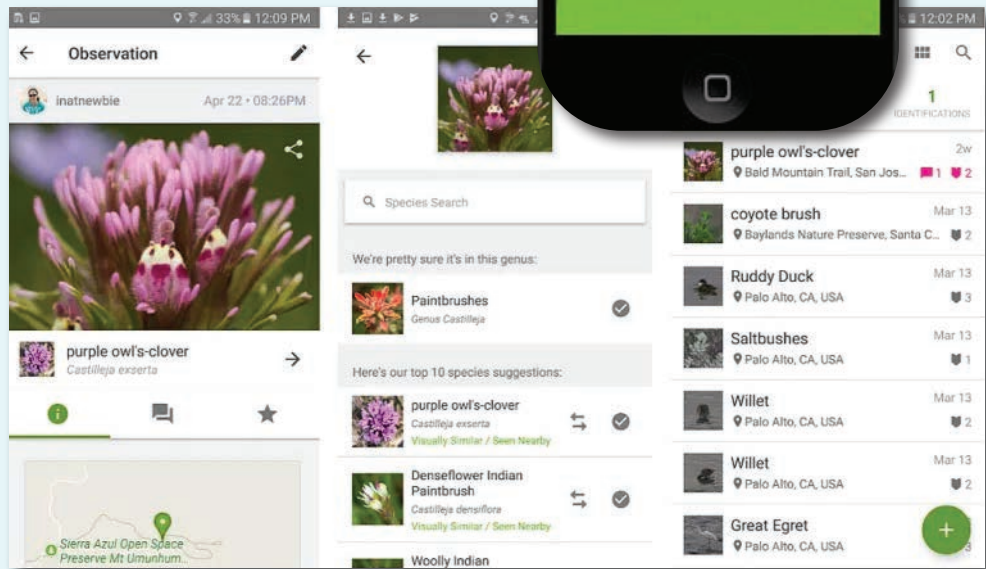
Price: Free Available on: All Devices

Similar to eBird, but expanding to all flora and fauna, iNaturalist is part field guide, part research network. You can use the app to snap a picture of your observations found in the natural world and share them with an online community of nature lovers at iNaturalist.org. The app's photo ID tool is surprisingly accurate, and suggests species based both on visual field marks and nearby observations. Even if you aren't 100% sure on ID, fellow iNaturalists will review your observations to help confirm or suggest alternate IDs, so it's a fantastic way to learn new species in a casual community setting.



## At a Glance:

- ID plants, animals, and other organisms by taking photos.
- Suggests IDs based on visual traits and local observations.
- Connect with naturalist peers and research collaborations.
- Find species observed locally.





## Other Birding Apps

There are many apps out there, with new ones coming out every day. Here are a few other popular birding apps to try:



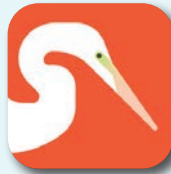
### Raptor ID

A field guide focused on raptors. Compares similar species and has fantastic video ID guides.



### Larkwire

An ear training app designed to teach you bird vocalizations through sound quizzes.



### Audubon

Another great digital field guide, similar to the Sibley Guide. Includes recordings and ID tools.



### Collins Bird Guide

A U.K.-based digital field guide. While not all species overlap, this is one of the most in-depth digital field guides I've come across.



## Social Media

The way individuals use social media depends a lot on personality. The same is true for birders. Some use it to post pictures of birds they have taken, others use it to share findings with the community, or seek assistance with identification. A good starting point is one Facebook. Indiana has many birding groups that people can join to share the latest news for their area. The easiest way to find them is to do a search on Facebook.

### Facebook Groups in Indiana:

#### Birding in Indiana

[www.facebook.com/groups/birdinginindiana](http://www.facebook.com/groups/birdinginindiana)

#### Indiana Audubon

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/indianaaudubon>

#### Elkhart County Birding

[www.facebook.com/groups/925967517488245](http://www.facebook.com/groups/925967517488245)

#### LaGrange County Birding

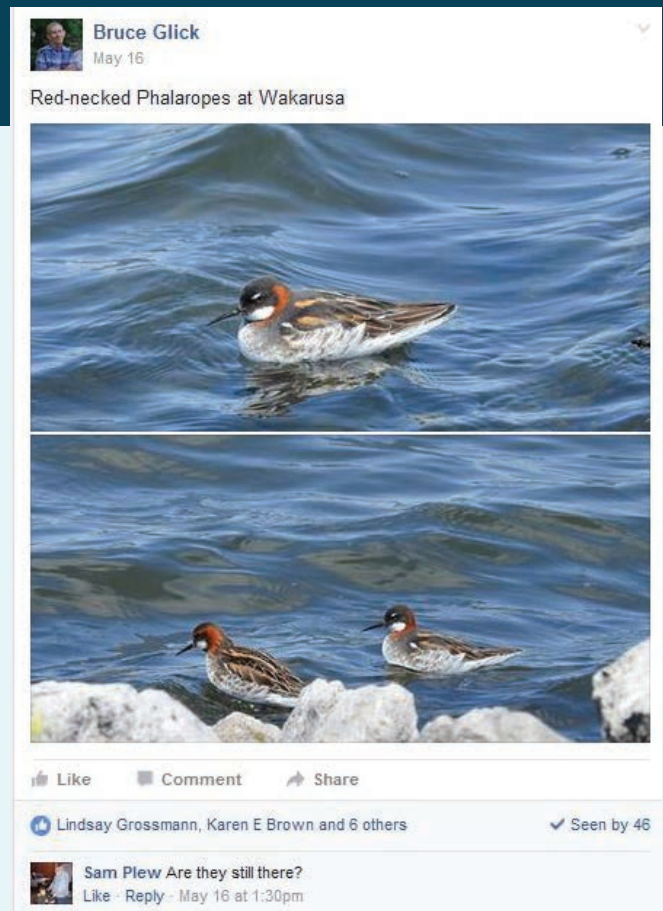
[www.facebook.com/groups/601709299896376](http://www.facebook.com/groups/601709299896376)

#### Birding in Indiana: Advanced Birding

[www.facebook.com/groups/rareindianabirds](http://www.facebook.com/groups/rareindianabirds)

#### Indiana Rare Bird Alert

[www.facebook.com/groups/INDIANARAREBIRDALERT](http://www.facebook.com/groups/INDIANARAREBIRDALERT)







# Podcasts

Podcasts are audio programs specialized by interest and published by radio or independent broadcasters for the public to download on their mobile devices or computer. Think of podcasts like bite-sized segments from the radio. Traditional radio programs, like as *Prairie Home Companion* and *This American Life* are now available to download as podcasts.

For birders wanting to expand their knowledge, this is a fantastic and often overlooked resource. There's tons of excellent podcasts out there that provide news about the birding world. Topics can range from migration and bird research to lightweight stories from naturalists and the birds they encounter. Just like a good book, there's something out there for everybody. Have a listen!

**INSTRUCTIONS:** To download a podcast, you will need access to a mobile phone or computer.

▶ **For Apple users** (iPhone, iPod, iPad and Mac) podcasts can be downloaded through iTunes.

▶ **For Windows users**, podcasts can be listened to on individual podcast websites, or via podcast programs (varies by Windows model and version). Android users can access podcasts directly through Google Play.

## SUGGESTED PODCASTS:



### Bird Notes

3-minute episodes presented by Dwight Davis based in Virginia on featured species and seasonal themes. Dwight often discusses the origin of bird names, the natural and cultural history with birds, and lesser-known facts about individual species. Here are a couple tidbits I picked up from this podcast:

- John James Audubon saw a Chestnut-sided Warbler only once in his life.
- The word "plover" means "rain bird"—and technically should be pronounced like the word "lover", rather than "over" (which is how most birders say it).
- The scientific name for Eastern Bluebird roughly translates to "Bird, Bird".

**Website:** <https://mediaplayer.whro.org/program/birdnotes>

**Apple:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/bird-notes/id291388058>



### BirdNote Daily

Not to be confused with "Bird Notes", BirdNote is a daily 2-minute podcast that combines rich sounds with engaging stories to illustrate the amazing lives of birds. The show is hosted by rotating speakers, and the program has a nice mix of themes. One episode might explore the maturing voices of Song Sparrows, while another could be about Tweety Bird. The podcast is highly popular with birders and publishes a new episode daily.

**Website:** <http://birdnote.org>

**Apple:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/birdnote/id79155128>



### American Birding Podcast

One of the most popular birding podcasts out there, and for good reason. Hosted by the charismatic Nate Swick of the American Birding Association. Each show kicks off with a segment on rare birds, which recaps recent rarities found nationally, before moving on to interviews with birders, researchers, along with coverage on the latest conservation news and bird-centered stories.

**Website:** <https://www.aba.org/podcast/>

**iTunes:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/american-birding-podcast/id1186824033>



### Weekly Bird Report (Produced by WCAI)

A weekly podcast produced by WCAI in a reporter-style format by Mark Faherty. While the podcast isn't targeted for our region (being based in Cape May), I've found that the reports on species migration and seasonal changes often overlap with birding reports in here in Indiana. This podcast is an excellent way to get a sense of what seasonal birds to expect in the coming weeks.

**Website:** <http://capeandislands.org/topic/weekly-bird-report>

**iTunes:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/weekly-bird-report/id980872574>



### Laura Erickson for the Birds

The longest-running radio program on birds in the United States. In this slice-of-life style podcast, Laura Erickson shares her personal experiences as a birder and her thoughts on bird conservation for the past, present, and future.

**Website:** <http://www.lauraerickson.com/radio>

**iTunes:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/laura-ericksons-for-the-birds/id655880335>



### Peterson Field Guides

A video series with nice coverage on bird families, species profiles, and birding techniques. Since the podcasts are in video format, I recommend watching on your computer over your mobile device.

**Website:** <https://www.hmhbooks.com/peterson>

**Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIJwz8StirFQHj3k3ibt8g>

**Apple:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/hmh-podcasts/id308049944>

## Conclusion:



As a birder who got their start by through digital birding tools, I advise you not be afraid to try things out, be curious, and find something that works for you. There's no wrong way to do it. These are fantastic resources that can help you connect you to the birding community, and expand your own knowledge on the life of birds.

## Happy Birding!

# Glossary of Technology Terms

**Apps:** Mobile apps (abbreviated from “applications”) are downloadable programs designed for mobile devices.

**Citizen Science:** The collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists. The Christmas Bird Count is a good example of Citizen Science research.

**Digital:** Involving or relating to the use of computer technology.

**Digital Media:** Images, videos, or audio shared and distributed online.

**eBird:** One of the largest databases for records on bird species abundance and distribution.

**Hotspots:** Areas reported with a high amount of bird activity.

**Mobile Devices:** Smartphones or handheld tablets (ex. iPad).

**Podcasts:** Audio programs specialized by interest and published by radio or independent broadcasters for the public to download on their mobile devices or computer.

**Smart Phones:** Mobile devices that have touch screens and are compatible with apps.

**Social Media:** Online websites or networks designed for social interaction, such as sharing media, or connecting with communities sharing a common interest. Examples include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and web blogs.

**Upload:** For the most part, the act of publishing one’s own media online (such as posting a photo on Facebook, or sharing a file with another online user). On rare occasions, if you report a rare bird on eBird, you may be asked to upload media (such as a photo or video) for confirmation.



## Need more guidance?

*Have questions? Need more guidance on digital birding resources? Don't be afraid to ask! Contact me (**Annie Aguirre**) by phone at 574-535-6625, or email [aaguirre@elkhartcounty.com](mailto:aaguirre@elkhartcounty.com)*