



## EPISODE 14

# Set Your Birding Goals and Resolutions for the New Year

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**INTRO:** Hey there, I'm Christa, your host for the Birding Tools podcast.

Each week, I'll delve into the wonderful world of birds for birding beginners and those wanting to get the low-down on what goes into birdwatching and identifying birds.

Let's get started.

**CHRISTA ROLLS:** First, I wanted to let you know that I have a free guide to learning all about bird identification. After going through this workbook, you'll know about the five keys to bird identification: size and shape, color and pattern, behavior, habitat and distribution, and sound. When you understand the main components of identifying a bird, you'll begin to feel more confident with your birding and identification skills. This process will not just help you with identifying birds by sight and sound easier, but it will also help deepen your connection with nature. To get this free guide, just visit the podcast show notes at [birdingtools.com](http://birdingtools.com).

This week on the Birding Tools podcast, we'll be outlining your birding goals and resolutions, not just for 2021 but for this stage in your birding journey. And we'll walk through how to make the ultimate birding destination wish list.

This is a fun exercise for any time of year, but if birding is something you enjoy doing, why not have it be something you work toward on a daily or monthly basis.

I'm going to upload a PDF document in the show notes at [birdingtools.com](http://birdingtools.com) that outlines three goals you'll set for yourself – and it doesn't have to be three, it can just be one or two or more – they're your goals and resolutions. You can print out this sheet and put in the front of your field guide or field notebook so you won't forget about it. Your goals might change in the next year and that's fine too, and you can adapt it over time.

Let's talk about some of the resolutions that you can set for yourself just to give you some to think about.

Start a life list. If you don't already have a life list – or a list of the birds you've seen and positively identified – you can get started with that by jotting down the birds you're seeing when and where. You don't have to share this anywhere, and really it can just be for your personal records and information. It's just really cool when you see a bird and cross reference it on your list to tell you for sure that it's a new bird you've never seen before.

Learn how to use eBird. I'm not necessarily an avid eBird user but I really appreciate the kind of information you can get from it as a resource and as far as which species you can find where and when. On their website at [ebird.org](http://ebird.org) they have a free three hour training to teach you how to use the program. Just today I actually used it to see the most recent records of Common Eiders in Florida to verify the likelihood of one being there – low and behold, I found records of sightings that birders posted on eBird just yesterday.

Add a specific species onto your list. Sure, depending on the species, it might take actually going to an entirely new place to see the species on your goal list, but if it's a matter of just checking the bird reports a little more often or setting google alerts for the species or getting on some other kind of rare bird or bird alert listserv or Facebook group, then think about doing that. That way, if anything gets published about that species, you'll be one of the first to know

and can plan to try and spot it. Recently in my area there has been a sighting of one lone Vermillion Flycatcher, which I've never seen in person and is high on my list since it's just a stunning bird. Because of this, I'm now following some more local groups and getting pings when it's seen so that if I'm able to drop things, I can drive up to where it's been spotted. One day I'll get it!

Add a certain number of birds to your life list. Maybe you want to add five or ten new birds each month or over the course of the year to your life list, to reach a larger life list goal in a certain period of time.

Attract birds to your yard and make your yard a bird friendly space. You could do this by planning out and talking with local garden centers about native plants you could plant that provide food at various times of year for birds, work toward eliminating pesticide use, creating more shelter for birds through the addition of plants or even nest and roosting boxes, or adding bird window strike decals to your windows. All of these things take some time and planning out, so if you plan for it and get to thinking about it, you can be ahead of the game when it comes to the best time of year to do these things.

Dedicate time to learning birds by sound. This is really an expert way of identifying birds and takes a lot of skill and practice, but it's totally doable if you set up a plan for yourself to train yourself on a certain number of birds or certain families of birds over a specified period of time. This goal is particularly great if you're interested in working or volunteering doing bird surveys.

Connect with other birders. Join a new local birding community, banding community or other program or community to harbor and harness that energy and direct it toward birds. This past year I've joined the Western Bird Banding Association and the Birding Coop as a way to get involved with the birding community, even if it's not completely local and is more virtual right now.

Learn how to draw or photograph birds. A good way to do this is to take a workshop or class on the subject, and so many of these are now doing theirs as virtual classes that it makes it easier to be able to accomplish this goal.

If birds are something you love and are interested in and something that brings you joy, why not have it be something that you incorporate into your New Years goals. Having said all this you don't have to make everything about goal-setting, but I do personally feel like I hold myself more accountable to dedicating my off-time to birds as I work through the goals I've set for myself.

My birding goals for the upcoming year are identification goals, so I'll say I'm going to learn a certain number of birds and become better versed at learning birds of a certain family by sight and sound. That's one of my favorite things to do, especially since I just moved to a new place and there are some bird species that I have still yet to see in California.

Another one of my goals is to scope out a new birding destination every month. By birding destination I don't necessarily mean some far-flung location, but I almost guarantee there is somewhere nearby or within an hour or something like that where you haven't yet explored or didn't know about. This is a good point to ask your local birding groups about their favorite or less-well-known birding destinations to give you some ideas. And of course, check out the eBird hotspot map to get ideas of places where people have submitted their own checklists. I like to take the time to find a new place to go birding. Especially after this past year and feeling more isolated, I've mapped out some of the local birding hotposts, each of which I'm planning to visit once in different months of the year. If I can make it a point to visit a new place every month, I'm making sure I'm getting out there and exploring and putting it on my calendar to make it happen, especially since it really brings me joy.

I'll also keep myself accountable by telling you here AND I'll update you every month on my progress. I'd love for you to join me in that.

Now that we've talked about some of the goals, that's a good transition into creating a birding destination wish list for yourself.

This doesn't have to be something you implement in 2021. For obvious reasons, that might be a challenge. But I find it beneficial and somewhat therapeutic to

pre-plan and think ahead to be more intentional about the time I'm spending and spending that time doing things that make you happy.

I've got one more downloadable PDF guide I'll put in the show notes to map out your birding destination wish list, too. You can type directly into it or you can print it out. This is the same destination guide that I use when I plan out the places I want to go birding. There are three components that go into this: the destination, the species, and the time of year.

The reason why these three things are separate but also joined together is that there might be a specific destination you want to go to see birds and there might be a specific bird you want to see, and you have to know the best time of year to see the birds you want to see or visit the destination you want to go to.

What's kind of hard about the timing aspect here is that it might not necessarily directly line up with when you have off work or when you're able to travel. But here's the important thing to remember: if you have your birding goals in mind and know the best time of year to see the birds or see the bird experiences you're interested in seeing then you won't be disappointed when you get the chance to go to that place to see the birds or experiences you want to see or have.

I say this from personal experience so let me tell you about it. My husband and I went to Spain a few years ago when we lived in Europe, and the only time of year he was able to get off work was in early August. I had read that Doñana National Park in southern Spain was a great place to see waterbirds and especially flamingos. I thought oh my gosh wouldn't this be the coolest trip – he's a photographer and of course birding is one of my favorite things to do so this would be a really incredible trip to take. When we arrived in early August, Doñana largely didn't have flooded wetlands. I mean in the height of summer it's seriously hot and dry and because of this the birds moved somewhere where they'd have food and habitat more to their preferences. We definitely saw some cool birds, like the European bee-eater and the Hoopoe, both birds we'd been hoping to check off on our life lists. But we'd been expecting to go to



the park to see the waterbirds and flamingos to have a certain experience and it just didn't happen that way. This happened though, because we were planning to visit based on when we felt would be the best time for us to go and not when it would be the most optimal time to see the birds and have the experiences we'd hoped to see.

I say this because after that happened, any trip after that one that had to do with us seeing birds, I created this birding destination list for myself so that if we knew we'd have a certain timeframe off, I could reference the list and say OK here are the potential destinations we could visit or potential birds we could see during that time off. I know that that's not necessarily realistic in every circumstance and you just have to go when you're able to go or when it's financially more feasible. But these are just points to keep in mind.

This is also why when you go on a birding tour of any kind, they're typically set for specific times of year. If they offer year-round tours, you might not necessarily go to the same place at different times of year or the tour schedule might change. For example, if you were coming here to visit me in wintertime, I'd love to bring you to some of the wildlife refuges nearby to show you all the waterbirds and other birds in serious abundance here right now. Some of these places are OK for birding in the summertime, but depending on how dry the wetlands are, I'd probably prefer to take you out to the coast to see the birds out there, which will be a totally different experience. You also wouldn't be able to see Snow Geese and Sandhill Cranes if you visited me here in the summertime, and instead we'd be seeing the birds that breed here.

I like to use the Atlantic Puffin as an example because seabirds have such a specific life history schedule that has them on land at certain times of the year and at sea the rest of the year. So for the Atlantic Puffin, they nest on land during the handful of months when they're tending to their nest and young from late spring to early summer. But by July and into August, they're going to be heading out together to the ocean and you won't be able to see them on land. At that point, then, you'd have to get a pelagic tour, which is also really cool, to go out into the middle of the ocean to see the birds out there. These

tours are really neat because you're in the middle of nowhere and then all of sudden you just happen on all these birds hanging out and foraging in the water together, which is crazy. However, if you're prone to sea sickness, it's kind of a toss up of whether you'd be able to enjoy the birds you want to see if you're sick the whole time. So, this is why the kind of experience you want to have matters along with how that experience lines up with when you can go out to see the bird or birds you're interested in seeing.

I like working through these life history traits and learning more about what's going on with birds at different times of the year because I'm a planner and it makes me feel really organized and happy to have my plans sorted out. I can say wow ok I have time during such and such month, let's see what kind of birding I can do then.

Let's look at three different birding experiences you can incorporate into your birding destination wish list. It's not a comprehensive list by any means, but it's a good place to start.

The first one is seeing hoards of birds at one time, the second is seeing particular charismatic species, and the third is adding tons of new birds to your life list by seeing lots of new species at one time.

I've chosen these because they are specific birding experiences and when you go on a tour, for example, these are the kinds of things they'll focus on usually – so adding a particular species to your life list or adding tons of new species.

An example of seeing hordes of birds at one time is seeing the Snow Geese in wintertime. I just recently posted about this on my social media pages, and I'll pin it to the show notes so you can find it easier, but although I'm not adding a bunch of new species to my life list, it's really fun to see thousands of one kind of bird all in one place. Particularly with snow geese when they do their fly off at sunrise and sunset, it's so impressive and people do travel from afar to be able to see them and photograph them. Especially in wintertime, this is a fun birding experience.

For adding lots of new birds to your life list, focusing your timeframe around migration is a good bet. Even in your backyard during migration you could get some really interesting and unique birds that you might not necessarily see at other times year.

Also, going to species-rich locations and places that have diverse enough habitats that would allow you to get lots of different birds at one time will really amp up those life list numbers. As one example, I was just speaking with someone in Uganda last week and they mentioned it's not uncommon when someone visits on a birding trip there, after ten or so days to get upwards of 600 individual species on their list. I mean that's crazy! If you're looking for specific destinations, places in the equatorial regions, like Costa Rica, too, tend to have loads of bird diversity.

You can also think more locally, so think about the kinds of habitats you'll see at the particular destination and find spots that allow for variable horizontal and vertical diversity in the vegetation or landscape, or diversity in habitats as you go across the landscape as well as vertically in structure, so bushes to trees. If a place has a path that traverses through wetlands, forest, grasslands, and shorelines, you'd potentially get more birds at that place because you'll get different birds that prefer being in each of those different kinds of habitats, so that's something to think about when planning out your next birding location.

Then there's selecting a destination based on a charismatic bird that's found there or that you want to see. I'm a little bit torn about using the word "charismatic" here because all birds are charismatic. But when I think of birds in this category, I'm thinking about Atlantic Puffins, Bald Eagles, or Snowy Owls, for example. The thing about these birds is that you're going to be contending with birders and other tourists or those who don't consider necessarily themselves birders, but they're interested in seeing these particular, beautiful birds. Snowy Owls have become popular with just about everyone who loves Harry Potter because of the beloved Hedwig. Just a couple of weeks ago a Snowy Owl was seen by many people in the Seattle area and it even got media coverage, because they're such beautiful and charismatic birds.



Also, places like the remote Skellig Islands off the coast of Ireland became popular after the newer Star Wars movies being filmed there, but also because Atlantic Puffins nest on the islands and you're able to get a good look at them there. People love puffins – I volunteered at the National Aquarium in Baltimore for a handful of years when I was in college and people would tell me all the time that they weren't sure how they felt about birds but Puffins were just so cute and special that they just wanted to see more and learn more about them.

If there is a particular charismatic bird species you're hoping to see, like these ones, just know it's possible lots of others will be hoping to do the same. An upside to this, too, is that it's potentially easier to find where they're located and there might even be more tours going out to see these birds to increase the chances of optimizing your time finding and seeing them.

So, with this part of the exercise, take the downloadable guide that I'm putting onto the shownotes at [birdingtools.com](http://birdingtools.com), write down the specific species you want to see, experiences you want to have, and destinations you want to visit on separate lines. For experiences you want to have, the question is where you can have that experience and what time of year is best for having that experience. If you want to see a specific bird, the question is where can you see that specific bird and at what time of year can you see it at that location. I emphasize that because just because you can see birds in five different locations in a country or region doesn't mean you'll be able to see that bird in all of those locations year-round.

To help out with the timing of things, I've also put a birding by season map I've created in the show notes as well. This map shows the seasons in each hemisphere and the kinds of bird activity you'll likely find in those different seasons.

It does take some time and research, but once you've compiled this list, you'll be able to more clearly understand what your birding goals are. And I truly believe when you have these things down on paper and have them prime in your mind, it makes it more intentional for you and that you follow through with yourself. Even if we can't do the things on this list next month or next year

because of family things, health matters, financial reasons, because of your job – life intervenes. But having it down as bucket list items that you want to get to as you progress in your birding journey and continue on learning birds, you'll be more intentional about doing things that bring you joy and make you happy – seeing birds. If this doesn't seem like something you're super keen on, that's totally fine, but I know I've personally felt it's helpful for me mentally to see the things I want to do someday.

Don't forget that I've got TWO downloadable guides for you on the shownotes at [birdingtools.com](http://birdingtools.com) – one to map out your top three birding goals and another for creating your longer-term birding destination list.

So to recap:

- Set some new birding goals for yourself in the new year – this can be something as easy as adding just ONE new bird to your life list or learning to use your field guide to your best advantage.
- Consider creating your own birding destination list, both for local birding destinations and far afield destinations. You'll see which places you want to visit or species you want to see and determine the best time of year to see that bird in which location.

So there you have it!

Thanks so much for tuning in to the Birding Tools Podcast and I hope this material was helpful to you.

To access information about the content I've mentioned in the show, and the show notes, visit our website at [birdingtools.com](http://birdingtools.com). You can follow Birding Tools on Instagram and Facebook with the handle @BirdingTools, and in case you didn't already know, I send out weekly emails detailing the content discussed on the podcast along with some helpful, actionable tips and information. To get on my email list simply visit the website or email me at [hello@birdingtools.com](mailto:hello@birdingtools.com).

Next time on the Birding Tools podcast, I've got the wonderfully talented Melissa Hafting, aka BC Birder Girl, joining me to talk bird photography, her BC



Young Birder Program, and Diversity and Inclusiveness in Birding. I can't wait to share this episode with you so be sure to tune in!

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See you next time.