



EPISODE 6

Connecting with Other Birders

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT:

www.birdingtools.com/6-connect-with-birders

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 I've just created a new Birding Tools Facebook Community Group, so if you'd like to engage with other birders, post your bird photos or questions, and more I'd love to see you over there! I'll be adding the link to our podcast show notes, or you can search on Facebook for the Birding Tools Community.

I think there are five things that help new birders get started on their birding journey: a pair of binoculars, a bird field guide, a list of the birds found wherever you're birding, knowledge about the five keys to bird identification and how to ID a bird, and connecting with other bird loving people. Now, this process might not be for everyone, and it's totally fine if you aren't interested in downloading a list of the birds found in your area. That's the beauty of birding, right? That we can bird how we want to and what makes us feel more fulfilled.

One of the most important, I think, of these five points is connecting with your fellow birders. Of course, birding out on your own can be so relaxing and a great way to get away from the stresses of daily life. But, who doesn't love doing their favorite hobby with a friend every once in a while?

I asked some of our fellow birders their favorite ways to connect with other birders, and I'd love to hear from you about whether any of these resonate with you, or if your connection method isn't on this list.

This is of course assuming that you are interested in even having someone to bird with at the time or that you don't want to just go out by yourself to birdwatch. Keep in mind, too that other people might not necessarily be interested in having a birdwatching partner. I talked about this in one of our previous episodes, episode 4, about birding ethics and just respecting the time and space of your fellow birders. If other people don't seem interested in chatting, that's totally fine.

And, of course, not that I necessarily need to remind you, but we are still in the middle of a pandemic, so meeting new people or gathering in groups is obviously a challenge, but I'm going to give you some creative alternatives to connecting with people and just keep in mind that we'll eventually be able to do things in person again, even if that's a challenge now. More than ever, connecting with each other from afar and reminding each other that we're in this together is a huge thing.

Randomly, at your local park, refuge, etc.

If you've ever been walking out at your local park or have even gone birding there, it's probably a pretty good chance you have seen another bird watcher finding some new birds or just enjoying the scenery.

This is one of the most common ways that birders have said they meet new birders! It's pretty easy to point them out because they're the ones with the binoculars or the field guide looking out into grasslands or up in the trees. I've met some really interesting people this way, and have made new friends this way as well! If you are in an area that doesn't have as many birdwatchers or if

your friends aren't really into birding, it is nice knowing that you can go out with someone who can appreciate the birds just as much as you.

One of my favorite ways to get started in a conversation with another birder that you don't know is to ask if they've seen anything good since they've been out. Or if they've been there before and know of the best spots to look for birds. This is also something you can do while distancing and wearing a mask.

At birding stakeouts

If you have never heard of a birding stakeout then you are in for a treat! When a rare bird is reported by whatever means, sometimes on local birding Facebook groups, or eBird, for example, groups of birders will come together at the site of the reported bird.

Most of the time stakeouts are found by word of mouth and knowledge of a general location where the target bird was last seen or heard. If the spot is already a popular birding location, don't be surprised when you roll up in your car that other birders will likely already be there, especially if the sighting was reported on a wider scale. In some instances, you'll have to be really patient to see or hear the bird in question, so don't expect to get to a location and magically see the bird there, but this is where the connection part comes in.

To give you and other birders a chance to see that bird you're all waiting for, there's lots of patience and keeping really quiet to look for the see the bird. Just remember that, possibly like you, the other birders there have probably spent lots of time in the car getting to that location to see that bird, so first prioritize looking for and finding the bird. Stakeouts can be really exciting for people, especially once you've spotted the bird and got your photos and whatnot, which is why it's such a great place to meet other birders. That sense of excitement and fulfillment throughout everyone who traveled to that place to see that bird can really palpable.

At birding festivals

While this year many birding festivals have been canceled or postponed, some are going virtual and even virtually, it's still a really great way to meet other birders. The different bird walks and talks and courses and bird meetings and camaraderie all make a really wonderful opportunity to meet others in the birding community, and really just make you feel like a larger part of the community as well. Birding Festivals are popular throughout North America and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Birding Festival webpage, which I'll link to in the show notes, has links and information about various festivals around the world.

One of the first festivals you'll see on that list is the Virtual Winter Raptor Fest, for example, which has a neat streaming program to learn about ecology and behavior of different raptors, and getting to hear from some of the key players in their conservation. The great thing about these festivals going virtual is that we don't have to travel to get involved in bird things! Take some of the inspiration and excitement and apply that to your local patch and learn about other birding areas in the process. I mean, how many other times can you "visit" birding festivals around the world so easily?

Christmas Bird Counts or other annual birding events (Backyard Bird Count, Global Big Day, etc.)

We just had the October big day and similar to this event is the Christmas bird count in December into January and the backyard bird count in February and the May big day. Not only were there different events and activities for engaging with people over these days, weekends, or weeks, but also there are live stream events on Facebook or Instagram that are really fun for jumping in, learning new things, and connecting with new people.

The Global Big Day this past weekend, for example, had people following new birders and organizations all getting out and sharing their lists and great birding finds. During the Christmas Bird Count, which is an annual bird census that takes place in North America in early winter, even if you're out collecting data on your own, you'll be coordinating with the local or regional Audubon

Society and the individuals in that group who will also be collecting Christmas Bird Count data.

Even with other events like big sits, where you sit outside in a particular location, probably your backyard or local patch would be most comfortable, and relax and watch and record the birds you see and hear during a fairly long time window. Tykee James and Orietta Estrada were just doing this to promote the Black and Latinx Birders Scholarship Fund, which by the way is for birders studying in the DMV and Delaware regions and I'll have a link to the Scholarship in the show notes or you can visit marylandbirds.org/grants to get more information about the Scholarship. I have to say, I had so much fun relaxing in my backyard, logging the birds I saw in my little patch with some coffee and having Tykee or Orietta chatting about birds things and interacting with them over the live chat. When events like this are live on social media you can talk back and forth and get to know other people even remotely!

Planned birding adventures and trips

Here's something you all might not know about me. I love to plan bird watching adventures. When my husband and I were living in Europe, we found it was really inexpensive to travel to neighboring countries within Europe, including during migration periods or eruption periods. I'm telling you, I got pretty good at figuring out where birds are located, how to figure out which birds we really wanted to see and the best places and times of year to see them, and it was just so much fun.

Right now, it's hard to travel around, but one thing that's really important to realize is that you really don't have to go very far at all to have a birding adventure. Even walks around your neighborhood can yield something completely new and open your eyes to something you might not have seen otherwise. I mean, just the other day I was walking around my neighborhood and I saw a Cooper's Hawk try to catch a mouse and a Say's Pheobe foraging in the park.

Take a look at the nearby parks, refuges, preserves, wildlife conservation areas, and more to see what kinds of opportunities they might offer as far as a new bird watching experience for you. A trip can be 5 minutes up the road, or it can be for a weekend, or even a whole week! I know I've already planned out a couple of new places that I want to go birding this winter, specifically the Sacramento national wildlife refuge, which is really close by, where cranes and other waterfowl and overwintering birds like to spend the winter.

But where does connection come in with this? Well, when you go somewhere new it's always beneficial to reach out to the rangers or biologists Or list serves or Facebook groups for those particular locations to ask about best places to see birds in that location or whether the time you're thinking about going there is a good time of year to see birds. That really just gets the communication going. And, you never know, you might even find you'll randomly run into new birders, too.

It's worth mentioning that if you're trying to connect with knowledgeable birders in a certain area, whether it's your local area or a new state or country, that Birding Pal is a really neat option. You can find more information about Birding Pal on their website at birdingpal.org, but they help connect with you birders in a certain area that are up to date on where to see which birds at what time of year. For \$10 a year you can get connected with other birders and go out birding with them. While there isn't any fee for going out with the birders themselves, it is really nice and appreciated to help pay for their gas or get them a coffee or lunch to thank them for their time and the experience. Again, right now we can't really do this, but if you become a birding pal member, you can still get in touch with and connect with those birders. Now, I'm not affiliated with BirdingPal in any way, I just wanted to share this platform with you all.

Local bird club meetings or bird walks

Local bird clubs through Audubon societies, universities, community groups, and more is a really good way to connect with people in your community and learn birds as well as other techniques or skills that other people often bring to bird watching groups.

There are of course different levels of groups where sometimes people use these groups as an opportunity to try and count as many birds as they can during a specified period of time, or they are really looking more at the naturalist perspective of sort of taking your time and spending more time with nature and behavioral aspect of what birds are doing and what you're actually observing.

So keep this in mind when you're looking at bird walks, sometimes it's a matter of going to one to see what it's actually going to be like and whether you drive with the group but don't be discouraged if you go to a walk or a group and they're doing things a little differently than maybe you might like, if you feel comfortable you can always make the suggestion to add other components to your walks, or try out another group or walk. Usually in most locations there will be more than one.

And honestly if you're not keen on the format of a bird walk that you go on, so for example if you really want to take the time to sit and watch birds and learn more about bird behavior but the local bird walk is more interested in trying to count as many birds as possible, you can even consider starting your own bird watching club or group and that meets those needs. Because I can almost guarantee that there is probably someone else that feels the same way as you.

And this is also a really good time to bring up the fact that everybody is a different birder. When talk about connecting with other people, this also often means connecting with people that have similar ways of bird watching and it can be beneficial to learn from people who might bird watch a different way than you, and just remember that everyone birds differently and you can bird your own way.

You don't have to feel intimidated by groups that want to count all the birds at once or feel like you're not fitting in with groups that want to sit and really appreciate the behavior. Sometimes, it might even depend on your mood and you might even want both of these things! Not just one or the other. This is the way that I am, I can literally sit and watch a bird and take in all of its behavior in one location for hours, but sometimes I really like to do a little bit of a blitz

and challenge myself by looking for lots of new Birds or keeping up on my counting skills. So just keep this in mind as you are working on connecting with other birders to not put too much pressure on yourself and to birdwatch the way that you want to birdwatch, even if that is just on your own, because that's a huge part of birding your own way

Social media groups

There are loads of wonderful groups out there connecting with birders in different ways, and social media makes it so easy to do this virtually now.

A handful of our fellow birder friends mentioned that a birds and brews gathering is a fun and laid back way to connect with other birders. Of course, we can't exactly gather like this right now, but local Audubon societies or birding clubs are now doing this virtually, where a guest speaker will come in and do a zoom or video chat with everyone to talk about a birdy topic, and those joining in can sit back and relax with a brew (or any other drink) of their own. If your local area isn't hosting these virtually, but did them in person before, reach out and see if you can get one started up!

There are also virtual hangouts with other birders where you still get to learn or talk about birdy things, like the weekly virtual Wingspan livestream that Cliff Hawley aka Vermfly hosts on Twitch, which is a video livestreaming service. Oh, and if you haven't played wingspan, this is a fun game for birders who are interested in getting into the nitty gritty of bird ecology for birds in North America, and now more recently they've come out with a pack for Europe. But basically you play against other players to see who can attract birds to their wildlife refuge.

And there you have it!

What's your favorite way to connect with your bird loving friends? Join me on socials to let me know!

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 websites and freebie I mentioned in the show, and the show notes, visit our website at birdingtools.com.

Next week, I'll be delving into facts, myths, and legends surrounding different kinds of birds. Is there even such a thing as a spooky bird, or are they all just spooky? Join me to prep for Halloween!

If you enjoyed this episode and want to get updates on the latest Birding Tools has to offer, subscribe to the podcast wherever you're listening now.

See you next time.