

Syllabus for Birding & Beyond

Age: All Ages
When: Wednesdays, 9:15 - 11:15 a.m.
How Often: Ten Wednesdays during the semester
Total Hours: 20
Where: Various birding spots around the county
Instructor: Sherry Manison
Contact Info: 7sherrym@gmail.com -- email is the best way to reach me

Instructor Qualifications: I love birds and I go birding 1-3 times a week year round. I have spent several years birding with previous naturalists at Love Creek, taken several birding trips with an ornithology instructor, and while I do not have a degree in ornithology, I have gained knowledge about birds through exposure.

Note: Parents are asked to accompany pre-teen students.

Birding and Beyond is a great introduction to the world of nature! One goal is that students will learn to be more aware of the birds around them wherever they go, particularly around their own homes. We will learn to recognize birds in the wild using their common names, and develop a beginning familiarity with their habits, habitats, migration, families, identifying features, ecology, etc. We will also introduce being tuned in to bird sounds, recognizing that learning the songs of birds can help us identify them.

Studying birds and being outside to observe them will open doors for other nature areas, so we will also notice other flora and fauna around us. During each semester we will have a class or two on other aspects of nature, such as frogs, flowers, ecology, etc.

Birds are more active in the mornings and evenings. Therefore, we will meet in the mornings on ten Wednesdays during the semester, in-person if possible. If we are rained out (or snowed out!), we will accommodate, possibly on zoom. Love Creek will be our in-person home base and the site of our first class, but we will also go birding at different locations and habitats around the county.

Each birding class time we will meet formally for a short time at our chosen location, then use the remaining class time to look for birds in the woods, prairie, beach, swamp, and other habitats. The internet is useful for resources, so we may opt to do a zoom class once during the semester, even if we are otherwise face-to-face.

We may also visit one or two private properties to observe birds. Should we do this, it is appropriate, and good birding etiquette, to gift the property owner with some bird seed or a donation toward bird food.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be introduced to birds and birding, and gain an appreciation of our feathered friends
2. Students will learn where to find birds, and how to behave around them (not be a bird plow!)
3. Students will identify some of the usual birds seen in our area
4. Students will be exposed to various topics about birds (feathers, migration, etc.)
5. Students will find birds around their own homes, and observe the behavior of “their” birds
6. Students will participate in the “Beyond” part of class (frogs, flowers, or environment, etc.), and be aware of not only birds, but of other plants and wildlife in nature

Note: Class content will be adjusted according to the level and interest of the students.

Schedule for Birding and Beyond

Note: These are suggested places. We may adjust, according to how migration is going, and where birds are being found at any given time. If weather cancels our class, we will either meet on an unscheduled Wednesday, or use the bad-weather class day for a zoom class.

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| 1. August 28 | Love Creek, Introduction to Birding |
| 2. September 4 | Love Creek, Reptiles and Amphibians with Derek Pelc |
| 3. September 11 | Silver Beach, Riverside Park |
| 4. September 18 | Sarett & feeders |
| 5. October 2 | Harbert Road Preserve |
| 6. October 9 | Chickaming Township Park |
| 7. October 16 | Possible Peacock Farm OR Galien County Park |
| 8. October 23 | Grand Mere / Lincoln Township Park |
| 9. Nov 6 | Dayton Wet Prairie: Mud Lake Bog |
| 10. Nov 13 | Lisa's feeders, Weco Beach |

Required Materials:

1. Dress for the outdoors, including bug spray and sunscreen when needed. We may need rubber boots at one or two places. I always plan on 10 degrees cooler at the lake than inland in late fall through early spring, so dress very warmly when at the lake, and also when near water, or around open fields.
2. Pencil or pen, crayons or markers
3. Binoculars (8x42 or 10x42 are most common). Small children may have a hard time using binoculars in the field until they have practiced enough in their own yards, so this is not a hard requirement. It is, however, a good chance for kids to learn how to use them.
4. A Bird Log – [you can purchase it here](#).
5. Field Guide (choose one)
 - a. Field Guide for younger children – one of the following
 - i. [Beginning Birdwatcher's Book \(with stickers\)](#)
 - ii. [Backyard Birds \(Peterson Field Guides: Young Naturalists\)](#)

- iii. [National Geographic Kids Bird Guide of North America, Second Edition](#)
- iv. [Birds of Michigan Field Guide \(Bird Identification Guides\)](#)
- b. Field Guide for older children, one of these
 - i. [Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America](#)
 - ii. [National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America](#)
 - iii. [Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America](#)
- c. Other resources you may want to have on hand:
 - i. [The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of North America](#)
 - ii. [Birdology: 30 Activities and Observations for Exploring the World of Birds](#) (good information)
 - iii. [DK Eyewitness Books: Bird: Discover the Fascinating World of Birds their Natural History, Behavior](#) (relies on evolution, but has good information)
 - iv. [Audubon's Birds of America Coloring Book](#)

Assignments:

1. Attendance and interested participation is expected at each class
2. Activities during our class time walks. Parents may need to hold onto writing utensils and paper 😊
3. Record yard birds and observations in the Bird Log (see #4)
4. Observation assignment:
 - a. Each child will choose one specific "sit spot," around their home or within walking distance
 - i. They will stay in this spot for 5-15 minutes at a time (depending on age of child)
 - ii. They will observe here at least two times each week.
 - iii. It should be at the same time (always at 8 a.m., or always at 10 a.m., etc.)
 - iv. Choose a spot that can be observed even in rain or snow. Your front or back yard is highly suitable for this exercise.
 - b. During this time:
 - i. Remain quiet and still; observe what is happening in the bird world around them.
 - ii. Notice such things as birds feeding, sitting and singing, giving alarm calls when danger approaches, etc.
 - iii. Take note of such things as what each bird is eating and how they are eating it, how many of each bird species there are, how they interact with each other in the same and in different species, their different songs and calls, etc.
 - iv. See if you can recognize what is normal for that spot and that time (baseline), and try to figure out what's happening when baseline is broken (such as when a cat approaches, or a hawk flies overhead).
 - c. Record observations in your Bird Log book (younger ones will need the help of parents). A short time will be allotted during selected classes to share observations. Since you may see the same birds often, record them the first time, and then add any new information for the other times they are seen.
5. Other possible small assignments based on the topic for the week.