



## GETTING STARTED WITH BIRDWATCHING

If you're looking for a hobby that connects you with nature, can be done almost anywhere and at low cost – look no further. Birdwatching could be just the activity for you! Your own eyes and ears and a perhaps a bit of patience are all you need to get started.



Bird life in Scotland is abundant and diverse. From garden birds to huge predators, seabird colonies to birds of the moors and mountains. Yet you don't need to travel far (or even leave the house) to be able to see a range of birds. Look out the window and take note of what you spot. Aim to build up knowledge of your local species first. Learn their distinguishing marks, size, shape and colours (remembering that males, females and juveniles of a same species can look different). Pay attention to the main parts of the bird—what colour is its beak, how long are its legs, what do you notice about its wings or its tail?

Note down everything that you see (and hear—each bird has a unique range of calls). Perhaps try to sketch the bird. Now you are ready to cross-refer what you have spotted with an identification guide. This could be a book, ID sheet, app or on-line resource. Some examples of resources are given below. As you see each bird over time take note of how it looks when flying as well as when perched or on the ground. Pay attention to its behaviours – is it feeding, singing, preening, gathering nest material or putting on a mating display? Start to notice changes over the seasons, as species come and go or change in appearance. You might be fortunate enough to spot unusual visitors or birds passing through on a migration journey.

### WHAT WILL I NEED?

- ✓ **Notebook and pen**
- ✓ **Bird ID Guide**
- ✓ **Binoculars**
- ✓ **Patience**



Once you can identify all the birds close to your home, you may want to look further afield (travel restrictions permitting) such as a nearby wood, park, beach or other outdoor space. Take your notebook with you, a guidebook if you have one and consider getting a set of binoculars. These will help you see birds in greater detail, aiding identification. Taking photographs with a camera or phone can also enhance the experience and help create a visual record of your sightings.

Always be respectful towards wildlife and their habitats. Leave nothing behind—no litter. Plus at present we all need to avoid excessive travel, need to be aware of others, maintaining physical distancing and wearing a face covering where required to do so. We all have a responsibility to ensure that both the wildlife and the people connecting with it stay safe. The good news is that birdwatching is not a pastime to be rushed. Start local and build slowly from there. It's a hobby that can last a lifetime! Why not start your birdwatching journey today?



## HOW DO I BIRDWATCH RESPONSIBLY?

- ✓ Respect wildlife
- ✓ Stay local
- ✓ Keep a safe distance
- ✓ Leave no trace

## FURTHER RESOURCES

The SOC's 'Where to watch birds in Scotland' free mobile app - <https://www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/app>

The RSPB's Bird A-Z - <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/>

BTO on-line resources - <https://www.bto.org/develop-your-skills/bird-identification>

FSC guides - <https://www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/>

Wildlife Trusts on-line resources - <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife/how-identify/identify-garden-birds>

