



# *The Chattanooga Chat*

CHATTANOOGA CHAPTER OF THE TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



## SEPTEMBER MEETING

September 11, 7pm

Ascension Lutheran Church  
720 S. Germantown Road

Our speaker will be Luke Thompson:  
"Birding Northern Peru on Public Transit"

Luke is a recent Baylor School grad and will attend Sewanee: The University of the South this Fall. About this talk, he says: "For 6 weeks, I explored the Northern Peruvian birding route by public transport, using buses, vans, boats, tuktuks, my feet, and everything in between to find birds in the lush green forests of the Amazon all the way to the cactus laden dry western slopes of the Andes. From the absurd beauty of Marvelous Spatuletail to the struggle for the endemic Atuen Antpitta, I was lucky enough to experience the magic of one of the best birding routes in the world for under \$1,000 and with one broken pair of binoculars."

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Already, we're seeing our warbler friends and other migratory birds beginning to find their way to the Chattanooga region. As usual, thanks to Kent Pennington's good work, we'll be hosting several fieldtrips this fall, giving everyone an opportunity to get the most out of this great season. My thanks go out as well to those of you who have volunteered to serve as field trip guides. Your help is greatly appreciated.

I want to encourage everyone to attend our first meeting this year on Thursday, September 11, 7 pm, at our usual meeting spot, Ascension Lutheran Church, 720 Germantown Circle. Luke Thompson will be regaling us with his travels this summer in Northern Peru, using public transport. Knowing Luke, this should be an informative and fun-filled program.

In this month's newsletter, you'll find a curriculum outline for the Birding 101 class we'll be offering to local groups as well as our new members looking for some guidance in getting off to a good start. If any of you are interested in being one of our instructors, please speak to me at the meeting, or send me an email. Our hope is that we can pair up for each class and begin scheduling them later in September. Don't worry, we'll host a practice session before we go public.

I want to wish everyone a great birding year. By the way, we'll have our new CTOS hats for sale at our September meeting, the first of many new items in our swag catalogue!

I look forward to seeing everyone on the 11th !

OJ Morgan



Gosling Photo by David Goldsmith

## Mountain Optics

Are your optics out of warranty and need restoration?? Mountain Optics is highly recommended for their quality craftsmanship, communication and delivery time. They specialize in vintage military and civilian optics, but will service any make or model, new or old.

<https://mountainoptics.com>

## September Field Trip

Bruce Dralle will be leading a field trip on September 27 at Point Park starting at 8:00am. The birding will take place, rain or shine unless the weather is stormy. Bruce is very familiar with Signal Mountain birding areas and knows what birds are typically there and what migrants might be seen.



American Goldfinch photo by David Goldsmith



## CTOS Fall Speakers

We are looking forward to some great speakers for our fall meetings! Please mark your calendars.

**October 9: Marie Landis: "Birding Big Bend: Bird and Bird-Adjacent Tales From The End of the Road, West Texas"**

Hear the good, the bad, and the ugly of birding in one of the lower 48's most rugged and remote national parks. Highlights will include daily and once-in-a-lifetime adventures from birding in Big Bend, travel and survival tips, and just enough geology and geography to explain what makes this patch of Chihuahuan Desert such a special place.

Marie Landis

Marie is a professional cartographer and recreational birder who recently returned to her hometown of Chattanooga after two decades of chasing seasonal resource management and environmental education gigs out west. She spent 8 years living, working, and birding the expanses of far west Texas within Big Bend National Park. She has a Master of Natural Resources from Oregon State University and a healthy fear of sunstroke.

**November 13, Tim Lenz: "Growing and Traveling with BirdingApp"**

**December 11, Kent Pennington: "A Summary of Birding in Colombia Santa Marta"**



American Bald Eagle Photo by David Goldsmith

## Birding 101 Course

***If you are interested in helping teach this course, please contact OJ Morgan***

A good beginner one-hour birding curriculum should be engaging, hands-on, and focused on building foundational skills for observing and identifying birds. Below is a structured one-hour curriculum designed for beginners, suitable for a small group in a park, nature reserve, or similar outdoor setting. The curriculum emphasizes practical activities, basic identification techniques, and fostering enthusiasm for birding.

### **One-Hour Beginner Birding Curriculum**

**Target Audience:** Beginners with little to no birding experience, ages 12+ (adaptable for younger with simplified language).

**Location:** Outdoor natural area (park, trail, or reserve) with classroom area and diverse bird activity.

**Materials Needed:** Binoculars (1 pair per 2-3 participants), field guides (e.g., Peterson or Sibley, 1 per small group), bird checklist for local area, notebooks/pencils, optional smartphone with birding app (e.g., Merlin Bird ID).

**Objective:** Introduce participants to birding basics, including observation skills, identification techniques, and appreciation for local birdlife.

### **Curriculum Breakdown (60 minutes)**

#### **1. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)**

**Goal:** Set the stage and spark enthusiasm.

- Activity:
  - Greet participants and briefly explain what birding is: observing and identifying birds in their natural habitats.
  - Have each person introduce themselves.
  - Share a fun fact: "There are over 10,000 bird species worldwide, and you can find dozens right here!"
  - Outline the session: learn to observe birds, use binoculars, identify a few species, and explore the area.

#### **2. Birding Basics and Observation Skills (15-20 minutes)**

**Goal:** Teach how to spot and observe birds effectively.

- Activity:
  - Explain key observation tips:
    - Look for movement, shapes, and colors in trees, bushes, or the sky.
    - Listen for bird calls or songs (demonstrate a common local call, e.g., chickadee's "fee-bee").
    - Note behavior: Is the bird hopping, flying, or perched?
  - Practice without binoculars:
    - Ask participants to spot something in the environment (e.g., a leaf or branch) and describe its shape, color, and size.
    - Transition to spotting a nearby bird (if visible) or a static object to practice observation.
- Materials: None yet; save binoculars for the next section.
- Tip: Encourage participants to use all senses (sight, sound) to build confidence.

## Birding Course 101, Continued...

### 3. Using Binoculars and Field Guides (15-20 minutes)

Goal: Familiarize participants with essential birding tools.

- Activity:
  - Binocular basics:
    - Demonstrate how to adjust binoculars (focus knob, eye distance).
    - Pair participants to practice focusing on a distant object (e.g., a tree or sign).
    - Emphasize keeping binoculars handy but starting with naked-eye observation.
  - Field guide intro:
    - Show a field guide and explain its layout (species organized by type, e.g., sparrows, hawks).
    - Highlight key ID features: size (compare to a sparrow or crow), color patterns, beak shape, habitat.
    - Optional: Demo a birding app (e.g., Merlin) for quick ID or sound playback.
- Materials: Binoculars, field guides, optional smartphone app.
- Tip: Keep groups small (2-3 per binocular) to ensure everyone gets hands-on practice.

### 4. Guided Bird Walk

Goal: Apply skills to observe and identify birds in the field.

- Activity:
  - Lead a slow walk (0.25-0.5 miles) through the area, pausing at promising spots (e.g., near water, dense shrubs).
  - Leader's role:
    - Point out birds and guide observation: "Look at that tree—see the small bird with a red head?"
    - Share ID tips for 3-5 common local species (e.g., cardinals, robins, or sparrows).
    - Use field guides/apps to confirm IDs and discuss features.
    - Encourage participants to note observations in notebooks or on a checklist.
  - Participant tasks:
    - Spot birds, describe what they see/hear, and attempt IDs with guidance.
    - Mark species on a checklist to track progress.
  - Example species:
    - Northern Cardinal, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird. etc.
- Materials: Binoculars, field guides, checklists, notebooks.
- Tip: Stay quiet and move slowly to avoid scaring birds; celebrate every sighting to keep energy high.

## Birding 101 Course, continued...

### 5. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Goal: Reflect, reinforce learning, and inspire continued birding.

- Activity:
  - Gather in a circle and review the session:
    - Ask participants to share one bird they saw or a new skill they learned.
    - Tally the group's species list (aim for 5-10 species in an hour).
  - Provide takeaways:
    - Hand out local bird checklists or suggest free resources (e.g., eBird, Audubon).
    - Recommend next steps: join a local birding group, download Merlin, or visit a nearby hotspot.
  - Answer questions and share a closing thought: "Birding is a lifelong adventure —you can do it anywhere!"
- Materials: Checklists, optional resource handouts.
- Tip: Encourage participants to bird on their own and also join CTOS if not already a member.



Red-winged Blackbird photo by Diane Proffit