



OCTOBER 2025

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The Chattanooga Chat

CHATTANOOGA CHAPTER OF THE TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Merlin

Photo by OJ Morgan

OCTOBER MEETING

October 9, 7pm

Ascension Lutheran Church
720 S. Germantown Road

Our speaker will be Marie Landis

Marie Landis: 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.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope everyone is having a good fall season of birding. Nature teases us as she always does, but cooler temperatures and changing leaves are definitely coming our way soon!

This past Monday I had the pleasure of accompanying Pete Robinson, a well-known and long-time birder in Chattanooga, to the Chapman Mountain Nature Preserve just outside of Huntsville. Pete wanted to share with me the beautiful Bird Blind and Habitat located there as one of the stops on the Alabama Birding Trail. We spent most of the morning at the blind photographing a wide variety of birds including, among others, a yellow-billed cuckoo, gray-cheeked and Swainson's thrushes, and several warblers (ovenbird, magnolia, hooded, chestnut-sided, parulas, redstarts, and Tennessee). For birders and photographers, it was a wonderful way to observe these birds bathing, playing, and feeding.

Pete has a real interest in establishing a similar bird blind and habitat in Chattanooga, which I think would be a great way to give people more access to birds, especially those budding birders, both young and old. I see it also serving as a fantastic educational venue, open to the public. For both amateur and more serious photographers, it would be an excellent opportunity as well to further their craft. If you might have an interest in further exploring this idea, Pete would be more than happy to speak with you. In the meantime, I encourage you to go visit the Chapman Mountain Nature Preserve. It would be well worth your time.

OJ Morgan



Double-crested Cormorant Photo by David Goldsmith

Upcoming Field Trips

October 4 at 8am

McCoy Farm & Gardens

1604 Taft Hwy, Signal Mountain, TN 37377, USA

This will be led by Kent Pennington, Jon Andrews, OJ Morgan and Danny Gaddy.

October 4 at 8am

Old McDonald Farm

16705 Coulter Road, Sale Creek

Kevin Calhoon is leading this trip.

Monday, October 6 and October 13 at 4pm

Honors Golf Course

David Stone and Clyde Blum will be leading birding field trips at The Honors Course in Ooltewah again this fall. We will travel to several spots around the golf course in golf carts looking for birds. Expect to see many of our year round birds plus birds that are migrating through heading south to spend the winter in Central and South America. We might also see some early arriving fall/winter birds that will spend the winter in our area. The dates are Monday, Oct. 6 (only a few spots remain) and Monday, Oct. 13 (several spots still available). All start at 4:00 PM. To reserve your spot email David at rockyturf@epbfi.com. These trips are limited to 10 participants each.

October 25 at 8am

Standifer Gap Marsh

Lead for this trip TBD.

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 8am, through November 6 (weather permitting)

Dr. David Aborn will be banding birds at Greenway Park.



Great Egret

photo by David Goldsmith

CTOS Fall Speakers



Our October 11 speaker is 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"

Tim's presentation will cover BirdingApp's growth over the past two years and share practical tips that can enhance your birding experience, whether you're a beginner or advanced birder. From Florida's beaches to Alaska's cliffs to right here in Tennessee, he'll present photos and stories showing how BirdingApp has brought the community together.



Tim Lenz is a software developer, lifelong birder, and a Co-Founder of Birding App. Tim earned his B.S. and Master of Engineering in Computer Science from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York and served as a key developer on the eBird project for 17 years at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. During that time, he was also a member of the famed Team Sapsucker, including a record-breaking ABA big day in Texas in 2013 with 294 species. He has birded extensively throughout North and Central America, Colombia, and Australia.

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

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.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

photo by David Goldsmith