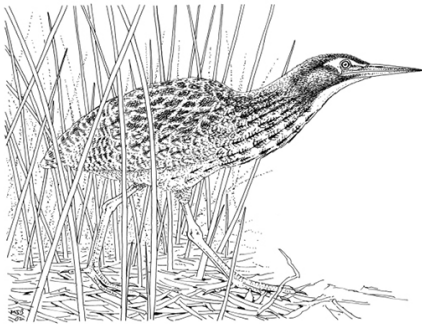


Birdwatching: Getting Started



Australasian Bittern © BirdLife Australia

Birdwatching is a great excuse to get out into the great outdoors. Wherever you go, you will see birds. On our city streets, in the parks and gardens, in farmland, forests and wetlands, in the mountains, at the beach and even out in the open ocean — they are everywhere. One of the great aspects of birding is that different types (or species) of birds live in different areas and habitats, so it is not difficult to see a whole variety of different birds. Why not give it a go? You may become enthralled with the simple joy of birdwatching.

Watching birds

When you are starting out, it is best to become familiar with the birds that live in your garden, the local park, on walking routes and at holiday spots. In this way you will soon become aware of the range of common species associated with each site, seasonal changes through the year, the breeding residents, regular migrants and occasional visitors. With practice, you will begin to recognise different species, and eventually you will notice that each has its own way of life. By gradually expanding your horizons, and birdwatching in new places, you will see more and more different species. Holidays to different parts of Australia or overseas will never be the same again.

About 800 different species of birds have been recorded in Australia. Some are unmistakable, but others are a little more difficult to identify. Luckily, most of the hard work of identification has already been done. Field guides are books with colour illustrations of all Australian birds, with notes on how to identify them, and other information, such as their distribution, calls and habits. With a little practice, they are easy to use, and essential whenever you have seen an unfamiliar bird.

Picking a field guide

- **Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (by Simpson & Day)**

This is the most popular of the Australian field guides, with excellent illustrations; the distribution maps are helpful, but the accompanying text is a little scant.

- **The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (by Pizzey & Knight)**

This has the best information and excellent illustrations. It's a bit large to fit into most pockets, but suitable for the car and for camping.

- **The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds (by Peter, Pat & Raoul Slater)**

This is the most convenient guide to take with you while birding as it slips comfortably into a coat pocket.

- **Field Guide to Australian Birds (by Michael Morcombe)**

This is the newest guide with lots of helpful hints to identify difficult species.

birds are in our nature

Listening to birds

As you gain experience, you will discover that birdwatching is not just about watching birds at all — it is also about listening to them. By listening out for bird calls you will increase your awareness of the different birds that are active in the area, as some birds are often easy to hear but difficult to see. There are cassettes and CDs which contain the calls of most of Australia's birds, and these are invaluable for learning to recognise their calls and songs. By learning a few bird calls, you will open up a whole new world of birdwatching.

Equipment

Birdwatching does not have to be an expensive hobby. Usually the most valuable item of birding equipment is a pair of binoculars. Although they may not be absolutely necessary at the start, they are useful because they make it easier to see the birds you are looking at, which, in turn, helps you to identify them. Although cheap binoculars are available, if you decide that you are serious about birdwatching, it is a good idea to invest in the best binoculars you can afford. Before buying, shop around and ask for informed advice from experienced birders or a bird club.

The only other equipment you will need to get started is a notebook and pencil for compiling lists, making notes and drawing rough sketches to aid identification. Because most birding takes place outdoors, you should be suitably dressed for weather changes. Subdued clothing is recommended, as brightly coloured clothes ('bird-scaring clothes') make it difficult to approach some birds. Hats, sunscreen and good walking shoes are all appropriate birding fashion accessories.

Bird Clubs

There are many birding clubs throughout Australia that cater for all levels of experience in birdwatching, and they all welcome new members. BirdLife Australia is Australia's oldest and largest national bird research and conservation organisation. We have regional branches that cover much of Australia, and special interest groups for people interested in seabirds, waders (shorebirds) and raptors. These regional and affiliated groups are run by volunteers, and provide many services to birders. They publish newsletters and hold regular meetings, as well as conducting outings to good birding sites. Often they run projects to discover more about the birds in their area. Most importantly, they provide opportunities for anybody with an interest in birds to meet others in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Newcomers are always welcome to come along to meetings, have a chat with Members, and see what we do for the birds.

Surveys and Projects

Once you are confident about identifying the birds you see every day, why not participate in one of Birds Australia's bird monitoring projects? For example, the Atlas of Australian Birds project needs people to simply record what birds they see, with the date and location, anywhere in Australia. Another good project for beginners is the Birds in Backyards program, recording the bird populations in urban areas. And for the more adventurous birder, the Threatened Bird Network has many different bird conservation activities to get involved in. For more information contact the BirdLife Australia National Office on 1300 730 075.

Warning!

Be warned: at first glance, birdwatching may seem like an occasional or casual hobby, occupying an otherwise dreary hour or simply providing an excuse for some healthy outdoor exercise. However, its infinite, constantly unfolding variety may lure you on a passionate adventure that will transform your life!

Australia's voice for birds since 1901

BirdLife Australia is dedicated to achieving outstanding conservation results for our native birds and their habitats.

With our specialised knowledge and the commitment of an Australia-wide network of volunteers and supporters, we are creating a bright future for Australia's birds.

Add your voice

join us

Enjoy the rewards of membership, making a real difference for our native birds

volunteer

Contributing your time is one of the most effective ways to help

donate

Help us create positive outcomes for birds and their habitats