

UCOR 1800 Hartley  
Taking Flight: Avian Biology  
Spring 2019

## **Campus Bird Guide Assignment**

### Birding skills

Recognizing local bird species is a challenging yet rewarding skill to develop. “Birders” feel they benefit both physically and mentally from time spent outdoors in natural areas. Focusing on birds and studying their features and behaviors can reduce stress and improve one’s vision and hearing as well. In this course students will be required to learn to recognize a minimum of 8 species that live on the SU campus and they are encouraged to learn additional species here and elsewhere throughout their entire lives.

While some birds are large in size, have distinctive colors, and spend a lot of time in plain view, others are much harder to see. By paying attention to habitat, behaviors, and vocal traits, in addition to appearance, one has a better chance of identifying a bird.

We will spend one hour of every lab session outdoors looking for birds in the campus green spaces. Be sure to dress appropriately for the weather. We will aim to view and observe behaviors of representatives of several species each time.

### Binoculars

The primary tool of bird-watchers is their binoculars. Using binoculars takes practice so don’t be discouraged if you have trouble at the start. Locating a particular branch and spotting the bird perched there gets easier with time. Here are some tips for binocular use:

**CAUTION: NEVER POINT YOUR BINOCULARS AT THE SUN**

1. If you are not wearing glasses leave the rim sticking out around the eyepieces but if you do wear glasses, roll back the rim.
2. To get good focus through both eyepieces, look through one eye (the side without the ocular adjustment) and use the main focus knob to get a particular distant object clear. Then switch to the other eye and adjust the eyepiece focus to get the second eye’s view clear. Adjust the distance between the two eyepieces to match your face.
3. Get a visual spot on the bird with your bare eyes first and notice any useful features in the nearby landscape, such as a branch with yellow leaves, that will help you get your bearings.
4. Try to keep staring at the bird while you move the binoculars into viewing position. Search a bit as needed to see the bird and adjust the focus knob.
5. If you are birding with others let them know what you’ve spotted and explain the landscape features including details that will help them see the bird. People often describe the bird’s perch in a particular tree relative to the numbers on a clock (e.g., bird in tallest evergreen tree about 10 feet down from top on branch at 2 o’clock).

6. At the end of each birding session, please clean the eyepiece lenses and plastic ring around the eyepieces as instructed. Replace the lens caps, wrap the neckstrap around the binocs carefully and put them back in the case.

Making a personalized bird guide

Each student is required to make their own campus bird guide with one page per bird, including the information listed below. Students will choose their own way to organize and display the information on each page, and they will add both an attractive cover and a concluding reflection to their booklet. Bird guides will be scored based on the accuracy of information, completeness of observations, clarity of presentation, and depth of thinking.

After each birding session in lab, you should pick 2 observed species to feature in your guide. Birds we are likely to see include Anna’s Hummingbird, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, European Starling, American Robin, Song Sparrow, Northern Flicker, Steller’s Jay, Bushtit, Bewick’s Wren, House Finch, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Mallard, and Rock Pigeon. Others are possible, too.

The following information is required for each bird type:

1. Bird’s common name, scientific name in the proper format, Family, and Order.
2. Date, time, and weather when bird was observed. Give the approximate temperature and report conditions of sun, clouds, rain, or wind.
3. Specific location on campus relative to particular building or landmark. Note habitat where bird is situated in terms of height (ground, shrub, tree, or sky), vegetation or surface type (e.g., wood chips, grass, rhododendron, pine tree), and surrounding area (such as lawn or thicket).
4. Describe the bird’s appearance in terms of overall size (give metric values for length, wingspan, and weight from the field guide), and shapes and colors of head, body, tail, wings, beak, and feet. **Include your own color illustration.**
5. Write a couple of sentences indicating the behaviors, such as locomotion, foraging, vocalization, or social interactions, you observe while watching the bird.
6. After reading the species description in the field guide, considering the various topics covered in class, and thinking about your direct observations of the bird(s), write two questions about the species that demonstrate your engaged curiosity.

On the final due date you should submit all 8 bird pages plus a one-page reflection on what you learned from bird-watching on campus and what you learned from making the bird guide. Be sure to include specific examples and key moments as you compose your reflection. An attractive cover page should be added as well.

Due dates

April 23/25	Turn in first 2 completed pages	10 pts.
May 7/9	Turn in second 2 completed pages	10 pts.
May 21/23	Turn in next 2 completed pages	10 pts.
June 4/6	Turn in all 8 pages with cover and reflection	20 pts.