



Birding 101: Birding By Ear

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What is birding?

Actively seeking out birds, often specific species of birds, to observe them in their native surroundings



What do I need?

- Ears and eyes
- Good quality binoculars
- Bird books and field guides
- Apps and the internet
- The right clothing
- An adventurous attitude



Why do I need to learn bird songs?

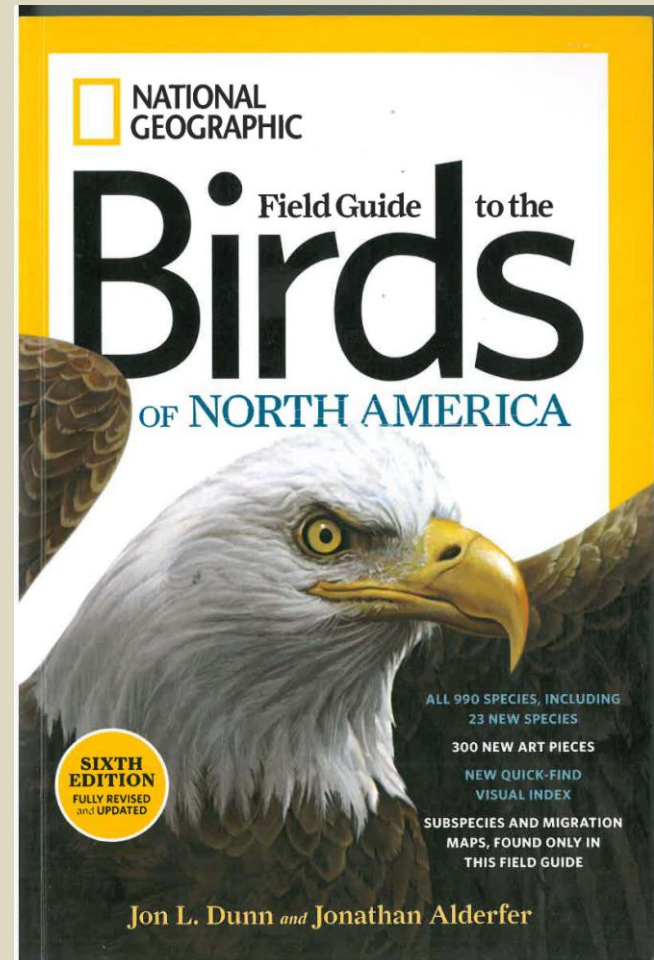
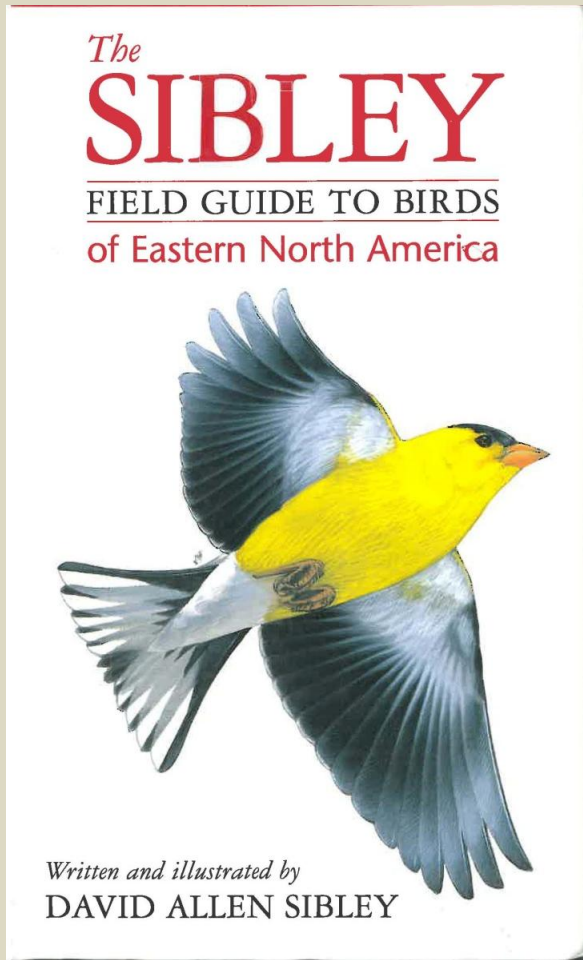
Each species has its own discrete song or vocalization, learning the differences helps birders in the following ways:

- Lets a birder identify birds without having to see them
- Allows birders to identify species of interest at a distance and move toward them rather than having to wait for the bird to move within viewing range (if it ever does)
- Provides an easy way to differentiate between similar looking birds
- Many bird songs are simply a joy to hear

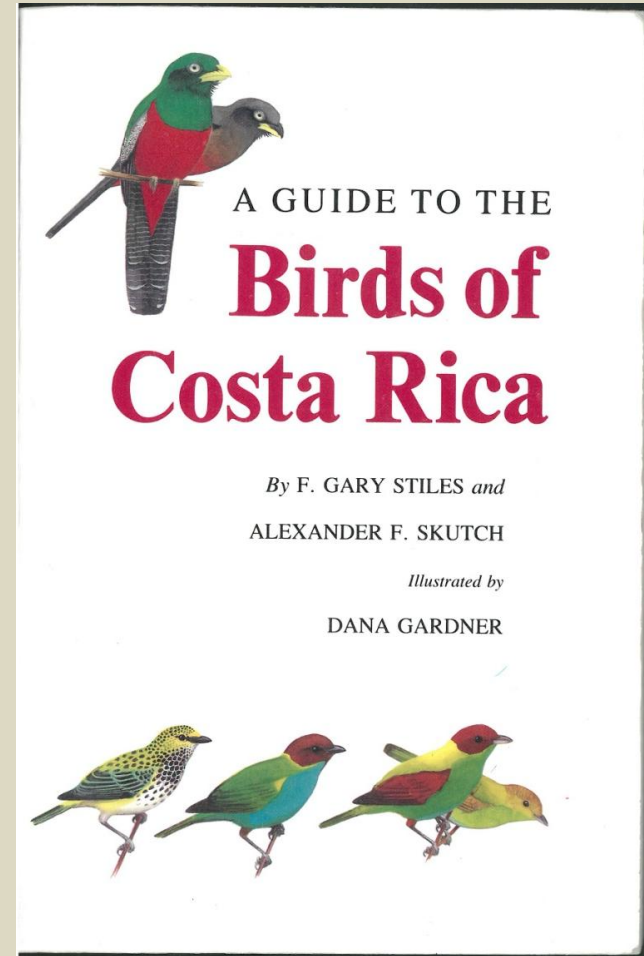
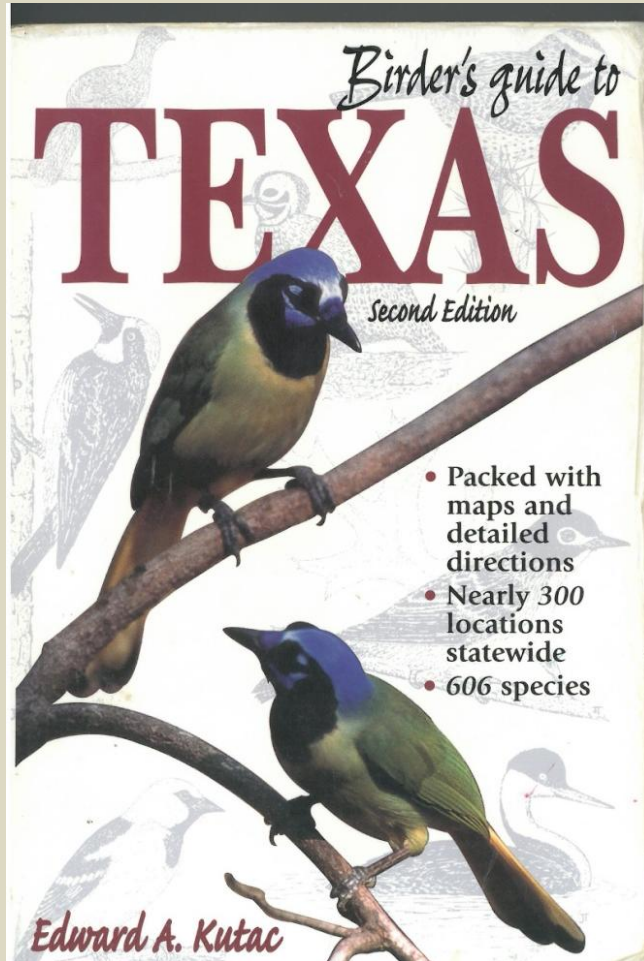
What do I need to learn bird songs?

- A field guide
 - Many guides have easy to understand verbal descriptions of bird songs, i.e. Carolina Wren says “teakettle, teakettle, look-at-me”
- Birding software and apps
 - iBird Pro, Thayers, CLO Merlin all have easy to use bird song catalogues
- Internet searches
 - A bird’s song can be found by a search for the bird and there are libraries of birdsongs available online
- Field experience
 - Observing a bird sing in real time and/or having someone with knowledge of bird songs point out a specific song

Examples of field guides



Examples of field guides



Field guide song descriptions

334

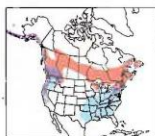
Wrens (Family Troglodytidae)

Found throughout most of North America, wrens are chunky birds with slender, slightly curved bills. Tails are often uptilted. Loud song and vigorous territorial defense belie the small size of most species.



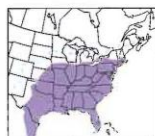
House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* L 4¾" (12 cm)

Brown above with faint eyebrow. Separated from Winter Wren by longer tail, less prominent barring on belly, and larger overall size. Western *T. a. parkmanii* breeds east to Ontario; grayer above, paler below. **Juvenile** shows a bright rufous rump and darker buff below. Birds from mountains of southeast Arizona, formerly known as "**Brown-throated Wren**," have a slightly buffier throat and breast and a bolder eyebrow. Exuberant **song**, a cascade of bubbling whistled notes. **Range:** Common in shrubs, farms, gardens, parks. Winters rarely north into summer range.



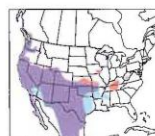
Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* L 4" (10 cm)

Stubby tail; dark barring on belly. Widespread eastern subspecies *T. t. hiemalis* from the north breeds west to northeast British Columbia; similar *pullus* (not shown) breeds in the Appalachians. Western subspecies *pacificus* is richer buff on throat and breast, darker on back. Races from Bering Sea islands and Aleutians are larger, paler, and longer-billed. Eastern subspecies give a **kelp-kelp call** like Song Sparrow; all western races a **timp-timp** call like Wilson's Warbler. **Song**, a rapid series of melodious trills, is much faster in western birds. **Range:** Rather secretive, nests in dense brush, especially along stream banks, in moist coniferous woods; in winter may be found in any type of woodland. Winters casually into summer range.



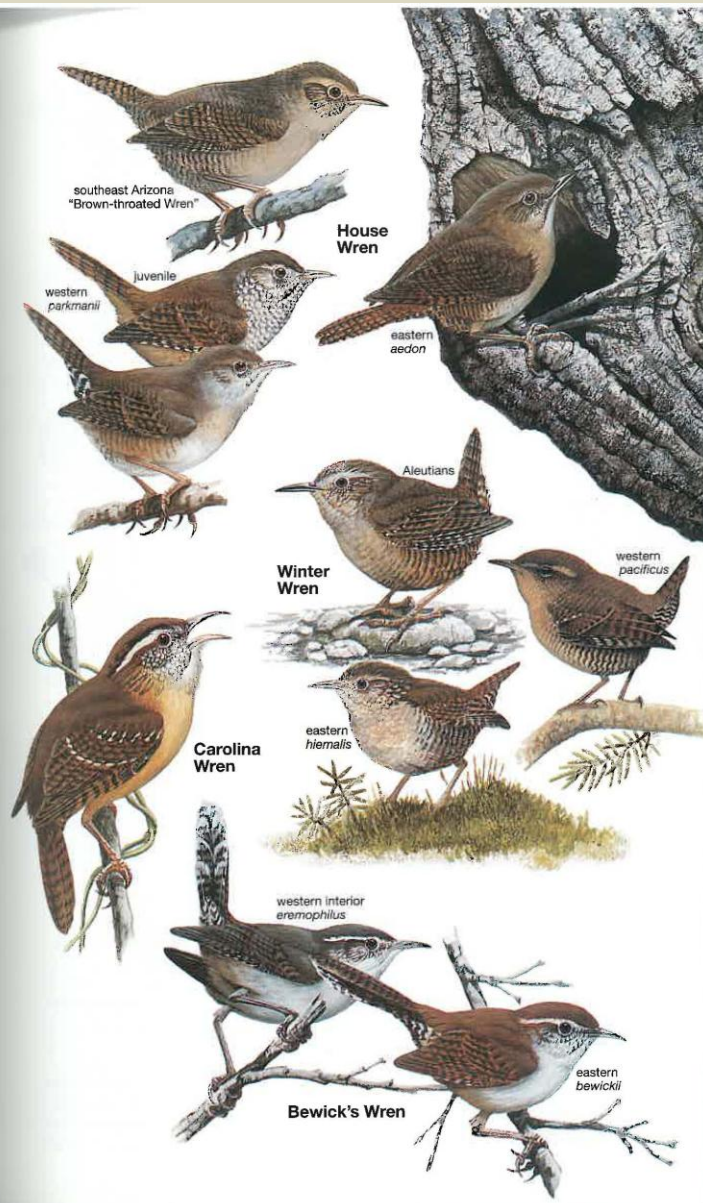
Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus* L 5½" (14 cm)

Deep rusty-brown above, warm buff below; white throat and prominent white eye stripe. Vivacious, melodious **song**, a loud, clear **teakettle tea-kettle teakettle** or **cheery cheery cheery**. Sings any time of day or year. **Range:** Common in the concealing underbrush of moist woodlands and swamps, wooded suburbs. Non-migratory, but after mild winters resident populations expand north of mapped range. After harsh winters, range limits retract. Casual to Colorado and New Mexico.



Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii* L 5¼" (13 cm)

Long, sideways-flitting tail, edged with white spots; long white eyebrow. Subspecies differ mainly in dorsal color: Eastern *T. b. bewickii*, is bright reddish-brown above; south Texas *criptus* (not shown) duller, but still tinged red. Widespread *eremophilus* of the western interior is the grayest; western coastal races grow browner and darker as one travels north. Northwest *calapponus* (not shown) is dark, richly colored, with a rufous cast. **Song** variable, a high, thin buzz and warble, similar to Song Sparrow. Calls include a flat, hollow **jip**. **Range:** Found in brushland, hedgerows, stream edges, open woods, clear-cuts in the east. Sharply declining east of the Rockies, especially east of the Mississippi.



Onomatopoeic songs

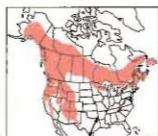
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Tyrant Flycatchers (Family Tyrannidae)

A typical flycatcher darts out from a fixed perch to catch insects. Most have a large head, bristly "whiskers," and a broad-based, flat bill.



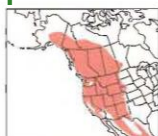
Greater Pewee *Contopus pertinax* L 8" (20 cm)
Slender crest often visible. Upper mandible is dark, lower mandible orange. Worn **summer** birds are grayish-olive above, yellowish-white below. Fall and **winter** birds are slightly greener above, yellow below, but underparts always show less contrast than in similar Olive-sided Flycatcher. Note also longer tail; unlike *Empidonax* flycatchers, most pewees do not flick their tails. **Song**, a whistled *ho-say ma-re-ah*; **call** is a repeated *pip*. **Range**: Fairly common in mountain pine-oak woodlands. Very rare in winter in southern Arizona, southern and central California.



Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi* L 7½" (19 cm)
Large and proportionately short-tailed. Brownish-olive above; white tufts on sides of rump distinctive but often not visible. Throat, center of breast, and belly dull white. Sides and flanks brownish-olive and streaked. Bill is mostly black; center and sometimes base of lower mandible dull orange. Distinctive **song**, a clear *quick-three-beers*, the second note higher; typical **call**, a repeated *pip*. **Range**: Fairly common in coniferous forests, bogs. Casual in winter on coastal slope of southern California.



Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens* L 6¼" (16 cm)
Plumage generally dark grayish-olive above, with dull white throat, darker breast; underparts whitish or pale yellow. Bill of **adult** has black upper mandible, dull orange lower mandible. **Juvenile** and **immature** may have all-dark bill. Distinctive **song** is a clear, slow, plaintive *pee-a-wee*, the second note lower; this phrase often alternates with a downslurred *pee-yer*. **Calls** include a loud *chip* and clear, whistled, rising *pwnee* notes; often given together, *chip pwnee*. **Range**: Common in a variety of woodland habitats. Casual in the west. No winter records in U.S.



Western Wood-Pewee *Contopus sordidulus* L 6¼" (16 cm)
Plumage variable; slightly darker, less greenish, than Eastern Wood-Pewee; base of lower mandible usually shows some yellow-orange. Identification very difficult; best done by range and voice. **Calls** include a harsh, slightly descending *peer* and clear whistles suggestive of Eastern's *pee-yer*. **Song**, heard chiefly on breeding grounds, has three-note *iswee-tee-teet* phrases mixed with the *peer* note. **Range**: Common in open woodlands. Casual in east. No winter records in U.S.

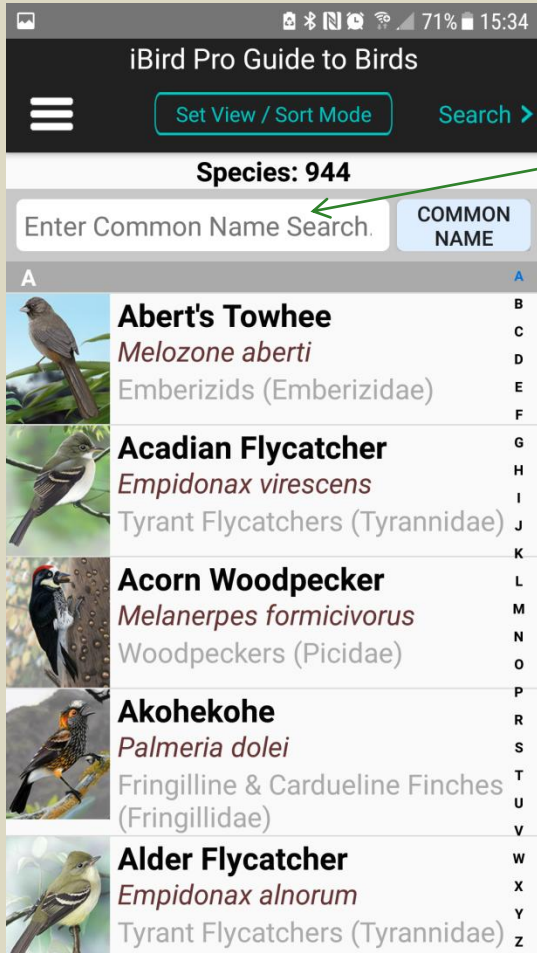
Cuban Pewee *Contopus caribaeus* L 6" (15 cm)
Range: West Indian species; accidental in south Florida. Short primary projection makes species look like *Empidonax*, but Cuban does minimal tail flicking. Note expansion of partial eye ring only behind eye; dull wing bars; faint "vest." **Call** a clear, steady *dee-dee-dee*, also a soft *dep* note.



Song
description

Software and apps

iBird Pro



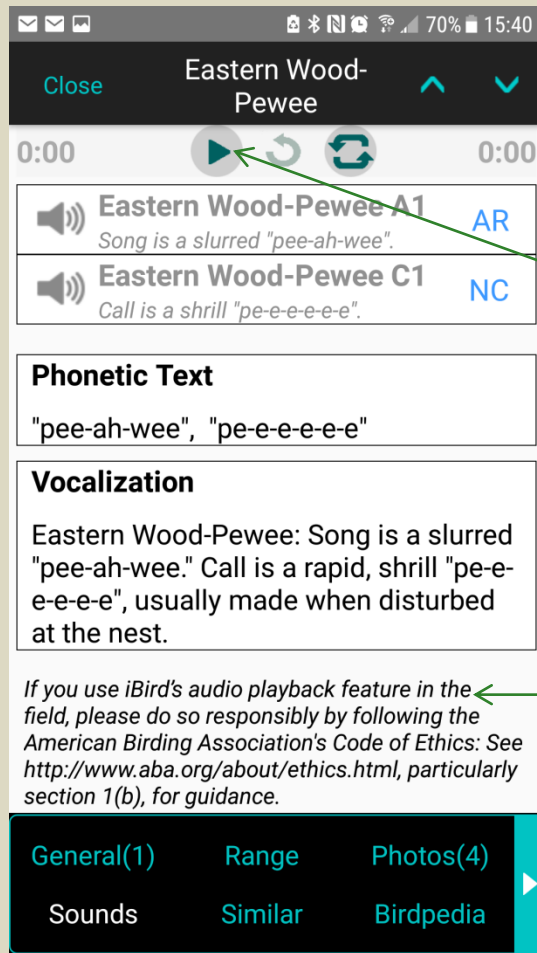
Open the program
& search for a bird

Tap the "Sounds"
button



Software and apps

iBird Pro



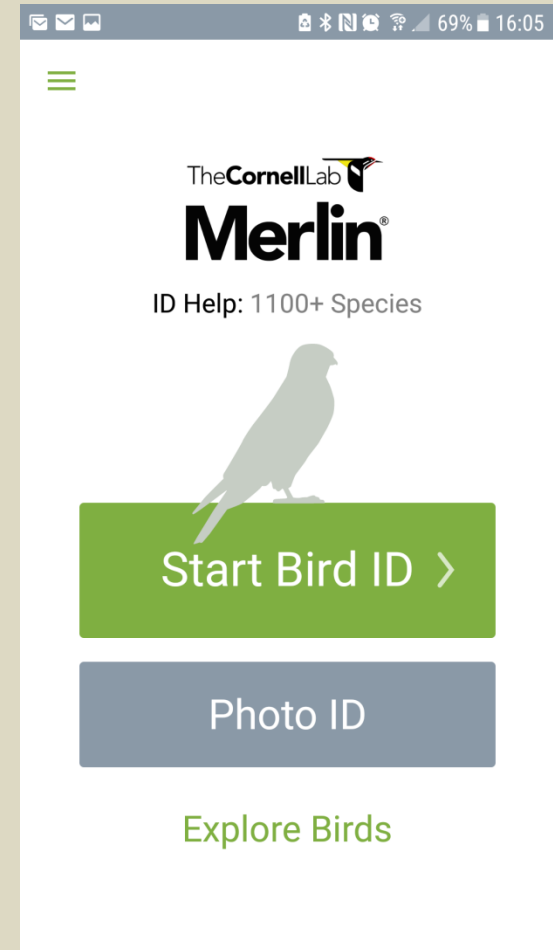
Tap the start
button

In the field, be careful not to disturb the surrounding birds by playing the song loudly. It is best to use earbuds to minimize disturbance to the birds in the area.

Software and apps

Merlin – Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

- Free app
- Regionalized
- Easy to use
- Cornell has the best bird song library in the world
- Has other exciting features

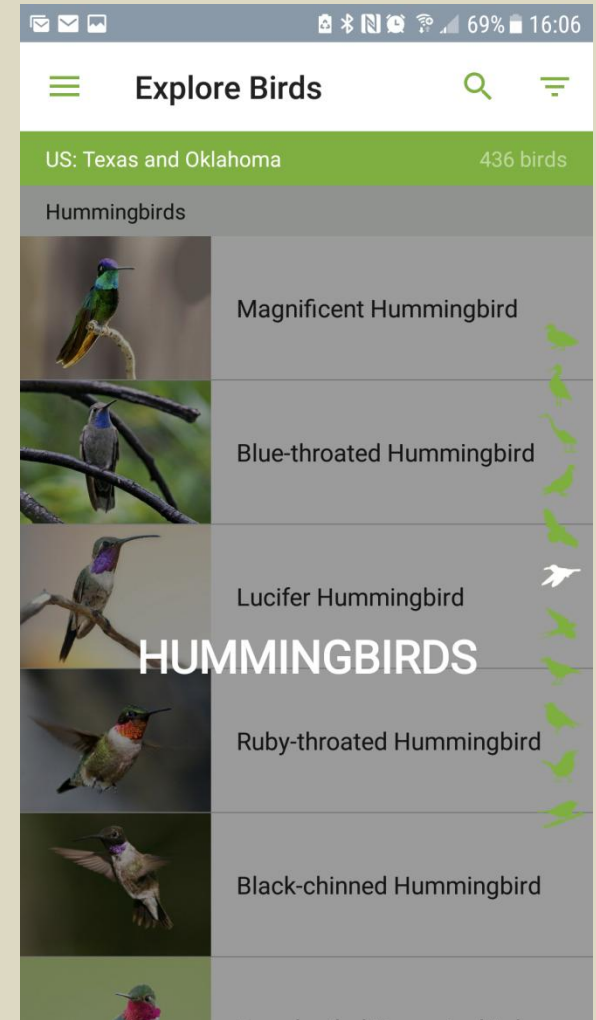


Merlin Search



Either search by name
or tap the shape icon
to search by bird
shape

Shape icon displays a
choice of birds, choose
one, then tap the
“Sounds” tab

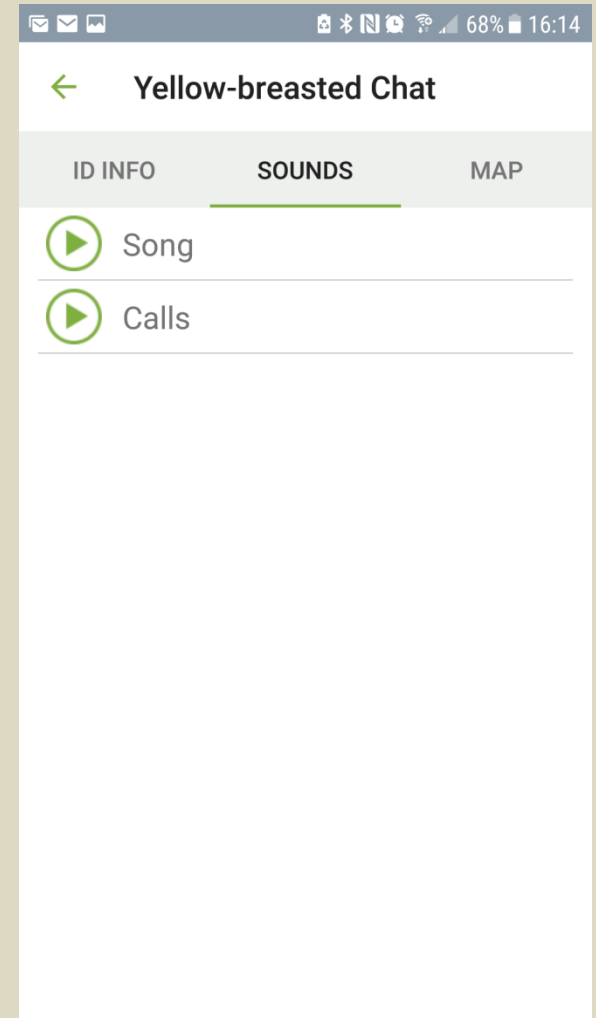


Merlin Search



The ID Info page describes the bird and displays a picture; when the “Sounds” tab is tapped the sounds screen is displayed, tap the Play Icon and the song or call will play.

Note: Only male songbirds produce a “song.” Females may have other “calls,” “chirps” or “scolds.”



Computer software

Thayer's

- Available for both Apple & Windows
- Over 900 species with range maps, pictures and bird songs
- Has regional quizzes that test your auditory skills
- Quizzes can be customized to target birds you want to learn or may see
- Includes bird ID games that children can enjoy
- Costs about \$50

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Version 7.0 Features

Version 7.0

Windows version released September 21, 2014
Mac version released October 29, 2015
Free updates released October 16, 2016

Version 7 is the most exciting software we have ever offered. It will help you become the local bird expert!

[Order Now](#)

Watch the YouTube Video: [Version 7 for Windows is Here !!](#)
Watch the YouTube Video: [Version 7 for Mac is Here !!](#)

[See what folks think about our software](#)

In version 7 you will find

989 Birds
6,528 Photos
1,503 Songs
553 Videos

Learning in the field

- Apply what you already know
 - Ducks, Hawks, Doves, common song birds
- Try to observe birds singing
 - Look for open bills
 - Watch for characteristic movements associated with song, i.e. jumping and flapping, skylarking, hovering
- Go birding with someone who has good auditory skills
 - Bird clubs
 - Master Naturalists
 - Extended education classes
 - Friends and colleagues

What keys to notice

- Size, shape and posture
- Leg length and color
- Bill size, shape and color
- Plumage color and pattern
- Song and vocalization
- Movements and displays

Keys to bird songs and vocalizations

Shorebirds & Wading Birds

- Sandpipers and Plovers are called “peeps” for a reason
- Large wading birds have distinctive guttural croaks and calls
- Gulls and tern all have similar, yet distinctive calls
- Ducks, Grebes and Loons are easy to distinguish with a little practice

Non-perching birds

- Hawks and other raptors have loud distinctive calls
- Doves and other “game birds” are easily distinguished from each other
 - White-winged Dove “who cooks for you”
 - Inca Dove “no hope”
 - Northern Bobwhite
- “Nightjars” have onomatopoeic vocalizations
 - Whippoorwill, Chuck-wills-widow, Poorwill, Parake

Perching birds

- Fly Catchers – very similar but distinct enough to aid in identification
- Ravens, Jays and Crows – very distinctive and a huge help in identifying different species
- Vireos – many so close as to confuse you, most say “verio” or “cheerio” in their song
- Warblers are difficult, but once learned, songs are a big help in identification
- Don’t get me started on Buntings and Grosbeaks

Major obstacles

- Hearing loss is, obviously, a problem
 - The right hearing aids work
 - Parabolic microphones can help
- Tone deafness
 - If you can't carry a tune, you will have a problem hearing melodious songs
 - Learning rhythmic and less melodious vocalizations are less of an issue
- Ambient noise and wind
 - Pick your day
 - Pick your location

Questions or requests?



- Private company, est. 1997
- Founders helped establish WMV law
- Central Texas based
- Serving Texas landowners
- Staff wildlife biologists
- Trained, dedicated field technicians
- Registered property tax consultants

Plateau Land & Wildlife

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Thank you!

Plateau Land & Wildlife Management

Working with you to protect and enhance your land!



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