



Building Birding Skills: Field Identification & the Natural History of Birds

May 31–June 6, 2026

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This seminar is designed for beginning and advancing birders who really want to learn how to look at and watch birds, and to learn how to maximize their time in the field. We'll learn about the basic skills of birding (such as how to look and observe), and also how to expand upon them with tools such as radar, weather, and geography. Understanding habitat – and its associated bird food resources – will be part of the equation as well.

On most days, we'll sample different habitats in the region which will give us a chance to meet a variety of species, from forest residents to breeding waterbirds. If conditions or birding suggest otherwise, we may take to the classroom to focus on a variety of avian topics, but most of our time together will be spent in the field as the birds are our best instructors.

If conditions suggest migratory birds will be around on any particular morning, we'll use our toolkit to put ourselves in position for the best birding opportunities, so we'll be flexible in our plans. As migration winds down, we'll be in a prime location to observe, enjoy, and understand the ebbs and flows of species on the move. Early morning walks at the same place or two will offer the chance to understand how migrants come and go ("stopover ecology") or decide where to stay for the summer; consistency is especially instructive during migration, and then we might travel further afield.

While we expect to see a wide array of species, this is not a "listing" tour where we'll be working on the species count or focusing on "target birds". Instead, we'll focus on learning to identify birds by sight and sound and study their behavior to get to know them. In this seminar, we will immerse ourselves in the field, spending quality time with the species in front of us and then use afternoon time to reinforce or expand the lessons that the birds themselves are the best at teaching. We're going to be putting the "watching" back in "bird watching!"

Derek Lovitch (freeportwildbird@yahoo.com) and his wife Jeannette live in Durham, Maine. They own and operate Freeport Wild Bird Supply, a retail store that caters to birders of all levels. The store serves as a vehicle for Derek to continue to share his enthusiasm for birding, birds, and bird conservation. The store is also the home base for a growing tour guiding operation, specializing in Maine's specialties, and Derek has been guiding in Maine for 24 years now. Increasingly, his guiding focuses on introducing people to the joys of birding and building field skills. His first book, *How to Be a Better Birder*, was published in March 2012 by Princeton University Press. His second book, *Birdwatching in Maine: A Site Guide* was published in May 2017 by the University Press of New England. A completely revised and updated 2nd Edition was published in February 2024. He was also the "Tools of the Trade" Department Editor for *Birding* magazine for 6 years and remains a regular contributor to it. His writing has also appeared in *Birder's World*, *Bird Observer*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *NJ Audubon*, *North American Birds*, and *Scientific American*. Along with birding, Derek enjoys hiking, exploring new natural areas, enhancing bird habitat on his property, good food, and craft beer.