

Bird Nooz

“When a storm is coming, all other birds seek shelter. The Eagle alone, avoids the storm by flying above it. So, in the storms of life... May your heart soar like an Eagle.” ~ UNKNOWN

A Monthly Newsletter

2016.09 September Issue

Begin to Identify Gulls

Enjoy this entertaining article as you gather tips and strategies for identifying gulls. Learn these key indicators and you'll be identifying gulls in no time! Rule #20 from "The Birdist's Rules of Birding." Audubon Magazine Online, 3/23/16



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1. Rudy Mancke Event



2. Identify Owl Calls

Go online to listen to their calls and become expert.

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You Don't Have to be Expert
What Bird Guide is Best for You? Whether you're just starting or an expert, here are great ideas for you.



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Club Meeting and Info
September 7 Meeting. Adventure to find and save the Kirtland's Warbler!

Keep up with news, dates, our Club Officers' contact info.



Begin to I.D. Gulls

Living in Sun City gives us lots of opportunities to see gulls. But, can we tell one species from another?

There's no way to sugarcoat it: Gulls are the most difficult group of birds to identify. All the different species are just variations on the same basic theme: a gray back on a white body. There's no, like, Red Gull, where you can look out and say, "Oh yeah, there's a Red Gull. It's the one that's red." Nope, of the twenty-or-so gull species you may encounter in America, they've all more or less got a gray back and a white body.



Gulls as a group are easy to spot, but a challenge to identify species by species. Check out these tips for seeing past the classic gray and white body.

- Ring-billed Gull

Quick side note: These birds are called "gulls"—not "seagulls." Yes, gulls can be found by the sea, but also along rivers and lakes and even parking lots and landfills and dumpsters and lots of places. Get hip to the lingo, and call them "gulls."

To make things even more difficult, while many birds have three basic looks—juvenile plumage in their first year of life followed by alternating breeding and non-breeding adult plumages—a gull has several more. A gull's transition from brown juvenile to gray-and-white adult can take as many as four years, with a bunch of confusing plumages in between.



Ring-billed Gull



Herring Gull

A few more rapid-fire annoying things about gulls:

- Different gull species have a habit of mating with each other, producing hybrid birds with plumage characteristics of two species. Great.
- Since gulls spend so much time in open areas their feathers can get bleached by the sun, adding to the identification problems.
- Because many gull species breed in the far North, most American gull-watching is done in winter, in the dead of freezing, windy winter.

Despite these difficulties (or maybe because of them), gull-watching can be extremely rewarding. The patience



Ring-billed Gull (Close Up Photo)

and skill required to correctly pick out a rare gull is the sign of an advanced birder, and it's what makes "larophiles" (from Laridae, the family name for gulls) something like royalty in the birding world.

Ring-billed Gull

So have I hooked you yet? Are you ready for the kind of birding experience that involves standing still in a blowing February wind looking at the last page of a *Where's Waldo* book—you know, the one where it's just a bunch of Waldos? Good, so stick with me, because we're going to start with Ring-billed Gulls.

Ring-bills are the best "beginner gull" because they're common in the lower 48 (especially in winter) and have a pretty "classic" gull look: white body (duh), light gray back (of course), black wing tips (like most gulls!), yellow legs (sure). In winter, when they're more common, they'll have some amount of gray smudging or flecking on the head, typical of non-breeding gulls.

Familiar acrobats of the air, Ring-billed Gulls nimbly pluck tossed tidbits from on high. Comfortable around humans, they frequent parking lots, garbage dumps, beaches, and fields, sometimes by the hundreds. These are the gulls you're most likely to see far away from coastal areas—in fact, most Ring-billed Gulls nest in the interior of the continent, near freshwater. A black band encircling the yellow bill helps distinguish adults from other gulls—but look closely, as some other species have black or red spots on the bill.

-- All About Birds, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology



Bill patterns are very helpful in gull identification. Most adult white-headed gulls have yellow bills with some additional coloring. Many species have red or black spots on the lower part of the front of the bill, called a *gonydeal spot*. Adult ring-bills, however, don't have a spot, they've got a clean black band towards the tip of the bill, surrounded by yellow. For my money, it's the most helpful common gull identification point there is. If you see a gull with red on its bill, it ain't a ring-billed. If you see a gull with a clean white body and gray back, and a yellow bill with a black ring around it, you're most likely looking at a Ring-billed Gull, especially if you're in a parking lot or, say, at a park (these guys are pretty social). Let your friends know, they'll be impressed.

Or actually, maybe wait, because it's not foolproof. For one thing, it'll only work on adult birds. If the gull you're looking at has anything but clean white, black, or gray feathers—if it has dirty gray or brown feathers on its back, say—it's not an adult and suddenly a bunch of other species are in the mix. In that case, take a picture, get a good field guide, and tuck in to the insane world of gulls.

Where to go from here? Keep studying, and keep looking at gulls. I've found that when scanning a flock of gulls (or any birds, really) the "Sesame Street" method works best. That is: "one of these things is not like the other." Look for things that stand out as unlike the other nearby gulls. Does one have a darker shade of gray on the back? Odd-colored legs? No

black in the wing-tips? Each of these markers is an indication of a different species.

Look at you! You're identifying gulls! You're not a feeder-watcher anymore, friend, you're a birder.



Q: Why do some gulls have a red spot on their bills?

A: The red spot on the adult gull's bill is a crucial visual cue to newly-hatched chicks that must tap on the adult's bill in order to get fed. (Bob Sundstrom on BirdNote)

RUDY MANCKE AT SANTEE STATE PARK



Instructor Spotlight Rudy Mancke

Rudy Mancke is USC's Naturalist in Residence and serves as a distinguished lecturer in natural history at the USC School of the Environment. He is perhaps best known as director of nature programming for S.C. ETV and for NatureScene, a nationally syndicated TV show on which he appeared for 23 years.

NATURAL HISTORY WITH RUDY MANCKE AT SANTEE STATE PARK

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16
10 AM to 1 PM
\$49

This is not just any nature walk! Spend a Friday morning exploring some of South Carolina's greatest natural treasures with renowned naturalist Rudy Mancke. Meet us at the park and enjoy an exciting and captivating lecture.

The 2,500 Santee State Park was created in 1942 and is in the Sandhills of South Carolina on the western edge of the 110,000-acre Lake Marion. The park offers boating, hiking, camping, birding, canoeing and kayaking. Well known for fishing, this park offers a chance to catch record-size Largemouth Bass.

Registration is limited to 40 participants.

Registration Information:

1. Register online by credit card or online check. Contact USC Continuing Education Programs at 803-777-9444 or pep@mailbox.sc.edu. **Courses fill up fast.**
2. Register by mail by contacting Beth Fallaw at 803-777-4954 or bfallaw@mailbox.sc.edu for information.

LISTEN and LEARN to IDENTIFY OWLS NEARBY

Online you can hear them call, then play their calls till you're sure who's who! Then you'll know which bird it is that you're hearing. Recordings are from Lang Elliott's birdsong collection, and are featured in Audubon's Birds of North America Field Guide. Get to know:

1. Barred Owl

Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you?

2. Barn Owl

Just to advertise its presence to other barn owls nearby, it says k-r-r-r-ick. To indicate distress or warning it makes a longer, more forceful shriek.

3. Great Horned Owl

This bird's gravelly hoots travel far, and can sound like a muffled foghorn from a distance. When pairs chant together, the female goes first, closely followed by the male. The second and third hoots in their series tend to be the shortest. Great Horned Owls can be found all over the US, Alaska, and over most of Canada.

4. Eastern Screech Owl

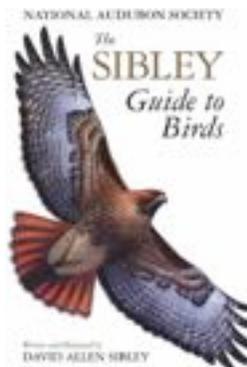
When you think you hear "a horse on helium," or a descending whinny capped off with a trill, you may be listening to this little raptor. Males usually call at a lower pitch than females.

5. Burrowing Owl

Along the border of the United States, or in Mexico, these charming little owls live all year long. Their main call is a simple little coo-coooo, coo-coooo, with a gentle wheeze at the end.

Go online to audubon.org and search for their article called "Learn to Identify Five Owls by their Calls." Owls 1 - 5 appear in descending order.





The Sibley Guide to Birds -- Best Overall

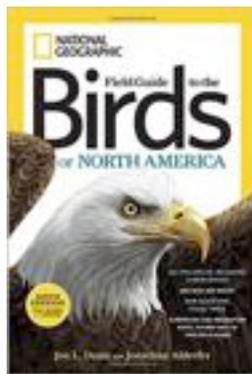
The Sibley Guide to Birds is a reference work and field guide for the birds found in the North American region as defined by the American Birding Association. It is written and illustrated by ornithologist David Allen Sibley.

The book provides details on 810 species of birds, with information about:

- identification
- life history
- vocalizations, and
- geographic distribution.

It contains several paintings of each species, and is critically acclaimed for including images of each bird in flight. Two regional field guides using the same material as *The Sibley Guide to Birds* were released in 2003, one for the western half of North American and one for the eastern half.

The guide was favorably reviewed by the [New York Times](#),^[1] [The Wilson Bulletin](#)^[2] (now *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*), and the journal *Western Birds*.



Nat Geo Field Guide to Birds -- Best Guide for the Field

With stunning artwork and comprehensive coverage, the National Geographic guide remains the favorite of many serious birders. Its compact size and relatively light weight—more than a pound lighter than Sibley—makes it the best guide to take on a hike.

National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America, 6th Edition contains the most all-new material since the first edition was published more than 25 years ago. The latest edition includes 300 new art figures; unique subspecies maps never before seen in a field guide; extensive migration information overlaid on species maps; field-mark labels on all artwork; text updates to include new species; reorganization reflecting taxonomic changes in the bird community; organization, readability, and increased page count with a fresh new design.



Apps for Identifying Birds -- Field Guide in Your Pocket

Each of these apps is basically a traditional field guide that fits in your pocket.

- [The Sibley eGuide to Birds](#)
- [iBird](#) (iBird Pro, and iBird Ultimate)
- [Audubon Birds Guide: North America](#)
- [National Geographic Birds](#)
- [Peterson Birds](#)

The **standout here is iBird**, the only one that didn't start out as a paper guide. It actually offers far more content than any other option:

- ID tips
- illustrations
- photos
- images
- facts.

Sibley is another good bet, but unlike the book, there is no second edition of the app yet. If you get this one, you'll be missing a few of the rarer species.



Love Birds? We do, so we love and care for the environment!

- We monitor our more than 100 Bluebird Trail nesting boxes to help build the Bluebird population
- We monitor our 15 Purple Martin Condos
- We participate in Okatie-Sun City Christmas Bird Count
- We sponsor/lead Field Trips, local and overnight, using our Club Birding Scope and walkie-talkies
- We participate in seasonal "Birdfests"
- We conduct or participate in periodic Backyard Birding events
- We educate Club members through our meeting programs and Bird Nooz

Bird Nooz is produced by SCHH Bird Club officers, volunteers, and other contributors, and is published online from September through June as an educational and informational newsletter. Your subscription to **Bird Nooz** is a benefit of your Club membership. It contains original Club articles, photos and information, as well as open-source material from other birding publications and sources.

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BIRD CLUB MEETING SEPTEMBER 7

4 PM - HIDDEN CYPRESS BALLROOM

Presentation:

"MEET THE KIRTLAND'S WARBLER AT ITS ANNUAL CENSUS"

Dave Davis spent a five-day "summer vacation" in the Jack Pine Barrens of Michigan hunting America's rarest songbird -- he suffered freezing dawns and sweaty afternoons in search of a little songster who's came back from the brink of extinction. Dave spins a harrowing tale of physical dangers, injuries -- even fear, lest he crush a precious nest under-foot! Dave is our Club's VP and Program Chair, and he has so much to tell!

Have More Club Fun!

Enjoy the Bird Club even more next year. Throw your hat in the ring for a 2017 Board position. Bring your ideas and creative spirit. Ask the current Board members and they'll tell you -- it's great!

suncitybirdclub.org

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