



Black-throated green warbler © Blaine Ferrell

Spring Is for the Birds

Discover the migration in Kentucky this year

Every spring, birds migrate back to Kentucky from southern states and countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean. Some stay here, while others end their journeys much farther north. Either way, Kentucky nature lovers can enjoy watching birds all over the state.

“People are most likely to see warblers in the spring,” says Blaine Ferrell, treasurer for The Nature Conservancy’s Kentucky Board of Trustees. “From chestnut-sided warblers to hooded warblers to American redstarts, many come back to Kentucky. Birds like Wilson’s warblers and Canada warblers migrate through. There are about 32 warbler species in all.”

Ferrell recommends Dupree Nature Preserve for watching spring migrant birds. Forested land around the

Kentucky River in the Palisades region creates good habitat, and the extensive trail system enables birders to explore different areas of the preserve.

“I like to go to Dupree or Sally Brown Nature Preserve here in central Kentucky,” echoes Jeff Sole, TNC’s retired Kentucky conservation director. “They have a diversity of habitats, which means you’ll find a diversity of birds. Mantle Rock is also a great place to go if you are in western Kentucky, with its variety of grasslands and woods.”

Sole also encourages spring birders to explore the forest warbler species and nesting ravens at Bad Branch Nature Preserve in eastern Kentucky. In addition to the preserve, Sole recommends Pine Mountain State Resort Park, Cumberland Gap National

Historical Park, and the Red River Gorge for birders seeking spring warblers, since many of these birds are forest species. Both Ferrell and Sole encourage birders to explore Mammoth Cave National Park in south-central Kentucky, where the above-ground habitat can be just as exciting for bird lovers as the cave system is for other visitors.

While warblers are the stars of the spring migration, Ferrell also enjoys viewing shorebirds south of his Bowling Green home. Along with hawks and short-eared owls, shorebirds migrate through Kentucky on their northward journeys.

Learn More!

Get photos and nature preserve recommendations for dozens of bird species at nature.org/KentuckyBirds



American redstart © Blaine Ferrell

Q&A: Blaine Ferrell and Jeff Sole

Two birding experts answer common questions

What is your top advice for beginning birders? [Blaine Ferrell] Don't get frustrated. There are many tools available now, including some good apps. I recommend trying Merlin, an app that listens to birds and identifies the species for you. Another good app is eBird. Just be careful—the apps aren't always accurate; you still have to know the birds. Listen to them, track them down and look at a good birding guide. The best thing is to become familiar with the topography of a bird; get an idea of what the bird's bill looks like. I identify most birds now by posture and behavior.

Are there groups that help birders who are just getting started? [Jeff Sole] The Kentucky Ornithological Society is Kentucky's statewide birding nonprofit group. They have a spring meeting and a fall meeting for members—and anyone can be a member. At these meetings, there are numerous bird outings led by experienced birders. I lead a hike or two, and Blaine leads them as well. Going with someone experienced will help you find the birds and get on them much more quickly than if you're going alone. You should also join your local birding club. All of them do birding hikes once a month or so.

What kind of equipment do you recommend? [Blaine Ferrell] I recommend an 8-power pair of binoculars. This gives you a broader field of view than a 10-power, which has a narrower focus and is more difficult for beginning birders. Try to get a good pair of binoculars with no color aberrations around the edges of the lenses when looking for birds. Eventually, if you stay with the hobby, you're going to want to add a 60x spotting scope. This is especially helpful when viewing birds at large lakes. Start learning the birds with your binoculars, and then when you get better, invest in a spotting scope.

Any final thoughts for beginning birders? [Jeff Sole] The more you bird, the more you will get to where you're doing it by ear. I didn't start trying to learn my bird calls; I birded by sight. It would be a great thing to learn your bird calls and songs early on. It will speed up your progression to becoming a good birder.

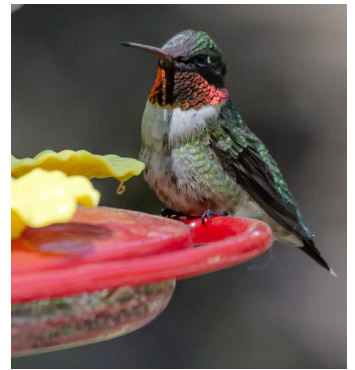
NATURE KENTUCKY

Backyard Birding

You don't have to leave your home to find birds. By preparing your own backyard with food and water, you can attract birds and watch them at home.

Begin by putting up a basic bird feeder and bath. Ferrell uses oil type sunflower seeds, which are not as expensive as thistle. Even if birds find their own food, they will come in and get a bath.

Ferrell set up a small water feature in his backyard by digging a hole and putting in a pond form from a hardware store. The form holds water, while a small waterfall attracts birds by sound.



© Blaine Ferrell

"I've had a hundred species come to this water feature," Ferrell says. "I've had water thrushes, Louisiana thrushes, scarlet tanagers, summer tanagers—it's just incredible what this little water feature did. Snapping turtles and dragonflies came in. It created a whole food chain."

Ferrell uses a UV light with his water feature to kill bacteria, keep the water clear, and prevent algae growth. It is important for backyard birders to clean and maintain feeders and baths for bird health.

A backyard birding book can help guide you to creating a yard that birds will love. Ferrell recommends "Gardening for the Birds," by Thomas G. Barnes and "North American Bird-feeder Guide," by Robert Burton and Stephen W. Kress.