

Ornithology. Birdwatching: Wings of Discovery—A Beginner's Guide to Birds

Faculty: Sarah Wagner, PhD, Public Information Specialist, Lab of Ornithology

Week Two: July 12 – 18, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Thursday, 7:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

NOTE: Early morning bird watching times are essential to this course and will not be adjusted.

Location: The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary, classroom, one field trip

Dear Ornithology Students,

Welcome to the “Ornithology: Wings of Discovery—A Beginner’s Guide to Birds with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology” Cornell Adult University class! I am very excited to share my love of birds and the outdoors with you.

The expectation is that you won’t be coming to class with a lot of birding experience or extensive knowledge about birds; if you do, that’s fine, as I know you will enjoy new perspectives and behind-the-scenes access to Sapsucker Woods, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and various scientists and resources here. For the most part, I’m assuming you are coming with a basic interest or curiosity about birds, and we’ll build from there! In any event, the intention is not to make you competitive enough for “The World Series of Birding” (yes, it does exist!), but rather to inspire and support your curiosity about birds.

I recommend bringing the following items to class each day:

- Your favorite bird field guide (Sibley’s Guide to North America is my personal favorite)
- Electronic field guides are also useful! For iPhone and Android devices, the Lab of Ornithology has created a wonderful free bird ID app called Merlin (<http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>).
- Binoculars (or, use the ones that I’ll have with me every day)

Dress will be casual and comfortable. Be prepared to go on short hikes in Sapsucker Woods and nearby wildlife preserves in the early morning, when birds are most active. The trails are well maintained and flat, but we will be spending a lot of time on our feet, and benches or places to rest are few and far between. Closed-toed shoes work best on woodchip trails here at Sapsucker Woods and on the various paths we’ll find at other spots. As you may know, summer weather in Ithaca can range from warm and humid to cool and drizzly, so a raincoat and sun protection (sunscreen and hats) might be in order for these outdoor forays. We recommend insect repellent if

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you find mosquitoes bothersome, but I don't anticipate being swarmed, and ticks are not common in the locations where we'll be.

In the late morning, we will be indoors for lectures and talks, demonstrations, and perhaps a glimpse of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, and Passenger Pigeons in the Cornell Museum of Vertebrates, or archived video and audio recordings in the Macaulay Library. We want to give you a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology!

I also recommend bringing a sweater or jacket for the air-conditioned environment inside the Lab, and potentially for outside on the trail too. Birds are up early... and we will be too! Our class will generally meet from 7:00AM to Noon, but you'll receive a more detailed schedule in your welcome packet when you arrive.

I have also included a reading that will hopefully be both accessible and informative: a chapter from a beautifully written book entitled *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding* by Scott Weidensaul. I hope it will give you an appreciation of the rich history of ornithology, some of which has run through the Lab of Ornithology itself.

Please do let me know if you have any accessibility concerns and feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this class.

Thanks,

Sarah

Contact Information: Sarah Wagner: skw67@cornell.edu

I look forward to meeting you, discovering new sights and sounds, and learning new bird ID skills!