

Welcoming and inclusive birders

Whether you're birding on your own or leading an accessible bird outing, every birder and bird outing leader should strive to be welcoming and inclusive of everybody they meet: long-time birders, potential future birders, able-bodied birders, birders with accessibility challenges, BIPOC birders and LGBTQIA+ birders. This resource has been compiled from the point of view of a bird outing leader, but most of these suggestions apply to all birders.

Planning

- Assess the birding location for accessibility and submit a Birdability Site Review to include your birding location on the [Birdability Map](#). Link to the individual Site Review in your event description. For more information, check out [Writing bird outing event descriptions](#).
- Read up on some suggested [Inclusive Language Use](#) for birders with accessibility challenges, but remember that individuals may have their own preferences.
- Wear a name tag with [good contrast](#) (clear, dark font on a light background) and large font size for maximum readability for everyone.
- Be aware of overt and covert racism or homophobia (current or historical) in any areas where you want to hold bird walks. Reconsider this choice of location. No one wants to go on a bird walk in a place they feel unsafe.



Photo: Emerson Milam.

Beginning your outing

- **Smile** at people! It's the easiest way to help them feel welcome and at ease.
- Assume people are here to go birding too, whether they have binoculars or not.
- Include a **welcome statement** at the beginning of your outing, with a brief **land acknowledgement**. (Learn more about how to do that [here](#).) This can make a huge difference to someone if they are *actively* welcomed. This also sets the social etiquette and friendly tone for the outing. For an example, visit the [Welcoming and Inclusive Birders Guidance Document](#) on the Birdability website.
- Invite everyone to **share** their **names**, their **pronouns** (such as "he/him" or "they/them"), and anything else they'd like other participants to know (for example, not to crowd them because they don't like being touched).

- **Don't single someone out** no matter how excited you are to see a certain kind of person on your outing. That can feel really uncomfortable.
- The first time you meet someone, **don't ask "Where are you from?"** or "How long have you been birding?" These questions can feel like you are implying that they are inexperienced and lacking in knowledge. Instead, ask about the coolest bird they've seen or heard recently!

Throughout

- Incorporate **five-minute rest breaks** into the outing in places with benches (preferably in the shade), every 30-60 minutes. Take these breaks, even if no-one says they need them.
- **Believe someone** when they spot or identify a bird. It can feel very discouraging and unwelcoming to have your ID ignored or assumed to be inaccurate. Instead, trust but verify. If they were incorrect, kindly explain why so they can learn.
- **Don't assume someone needs help** without asking them directly. If they say 'no' to your offer of help, be gracious and let them know you'll be around if they would like a hand later. If they say 'yes', don't assume you know what help they need. Ask, "What would you like me to do?" and let them guide you. (They are the expert on their needs!)
- Don't comment on what makes someone different from you unless it needs to be discussed. If you must do so, do it quietly, and not in front of the entire group.
- **Don't touch someone's mobility device** without their permission. A wheelchair, for example, is part of someone's personal space, and you can cause balance difficulties for the wheelchair user by leaning on or pushing it. Moving someone's long cane 'out of the way' can be incredibly disorienting and isolating for the long cane user.
- Ensure you're aware of participants who might need to come to the front of the group to see a bird (for example, because they're seated in their wheelchair) or of participants who need to sit down to regain energy or rest an injury. Provide these opportunities by incorporating their needs into the outing.
- **Set up a scope at wheelchair height** before anyone asks you to do this. It shows you're aware of the potential needs of the birders on your outing.
- **Keep listening and learning.** Examine your biases. Reflect... and then act. And if someone corrects you, don't give up. Thank them for their feedback and try again.

Thank you for your work to ensure that birding and the outdoors truly is for everybody!