

The Most Important Tool for Every Birder is a Good Binocular.

A high quality binocular will let you see feather details and identify birds from hundreds of feet away. The singing speck at the top of a tree becomes a brilliant flame-orange bird with a black head and black wings. You even see a white wing bar through your binoculars when the bird turns just so. Instead of a tiny speck, you now can see a male Western Tanager!

The recent improvement in optics quality has led to an increase in the popularity of birding. Recently, high-tech optical coatings and new manufacturing methods have improved the performance and lowered the price of high-quality binoculars and scopes.

Binoculars are an indispensable tool for birders. The best advice is "**BUY THE BEST BINOCULAR YOU CAN POSSIBLY AFFORD.**" Top-of-the-line binoculars cost over \$2,000 and really good binoculars start at about \$250.

Which Binocular Is Right For Me?

Good News! – The quality of binoculars has improved drastically recently which has brought the prices down. To select the right binocular for you, you need to focus, pun intended, on seven important features.

1. Magnification. Binoculars have two numbers printed on them, such as 8x42 or 12x50. The first number is the magnification or “power”. Eight means that an object will appear eight times closer than it would with your naked eyes. A magnification of seven is nice for general nature viewing while magnifications of eight or ten are the most popular for birding and sporting events. Twelve is used for sailing and astronomy. A magnification of 6 is nice for a kid’s binoculars or compact binoculars you might take to a concert.

2. Objective Lens Size. The second number is the size in millimeters of the lens at the far end of the binocular. A larger lens/objective lens lets in more light. The coatings on the glass lens also have a lot to do with the amount of light that reaches your eyes. Compact binoculars have smaller objective lenses so less light reaches your eye. This is no problem in broad daylight, but it will make it harder to see things at dawn and dusk.

3. Field of View. This number tells you how wide an area you can see through your binocular when you look out 1000 feet. It is nice to have a wide field of view, but as magnification increases, the field of view declines

4. Close Focus. You may want to look at a flower or butterfly that is only a few feet away. The close focus number tells you the shortest distance (in feet) that you can focus on. For birding, you will want a binocular with a close focus of seven feet or less.

5. Roof vs. Porro Prism Binoculars. All binoculars come in two basic “shapes”. Porro prism binoculars are typically larger and bulkier and cheaper to make. But they offer a more 3 dimensional effect. Roof prism binoculars have internal focusing that makes them sturdier and more waterproof. Most binoculars used for birding are the newer roof prism design.

6. Eye Relief. This little number in millimeters is very important for eyeglass wearers and refers to the maximum distance your eye can be from the eyepiece and still see the entire field of view. Unless a binocular has a minimum eye relief of 10 to 12mm, there will be some difficulty in comfortable observing and in seeing the complete field of view when wearing eyeglasses.

7. **The 3 Ws – Weight - Waterproof - Warranty.** If you are going out birding all day, the weight hanging around your neck will soon become very noticeable. Newer binoculars are manufactured with materials that help reduce the weight. Some very inexpensive binoculars may not be waterproof. You should avoid these. Finally, make sure the manufacturer has a good warranty and will fix your binoculars if something goes wrong.

Here is a list of some websites/links with binocular advice. Save your money and have fun!

<http://www.opticsplanet.com/howto/how-to-choose-binoculars-for-birding.html>

<http://www.eagleoptics.com/articles/birding/binoculars-for-beginning-birders>

Cornell University's AllAboutBirds.org

BirdWatching.com

BirdWatchersDigest.com

Optics 4 Birding

Better View Desired

<http://featheredgeoptics.org/>