

FELLOWSHIP

Flocking together

Birdwatching Rotarians from around the world connect with each other and with nature

EARLIER THIS YEAR, as the coronavirus began restricting the movement of humans — but not of wildlife — many people stuck at home began to notice and delight in the birds outside their windows. As April and May brought migrating birds to backyards in North America, birdwatchers downloaded the Audubon bird identification app at twice the rate of the year before. The Cornell University ornithology lab's Merlin app saw a similar surge. And birdwatching groups on social media provided a connection with neighbors and with nature that was acutely needed during a time of social distancing.

Rotarians have been providing those connections since 1991, when the International Fellowship of Birdwatching Rotarians (IFBR) took flight. Every year, members get together on the morning after the Rotary International Convention to catch up with one another and to see some local birds. In 2019, they visited a restored marsh outside Hamburg, Germany. In 1997, they went to the sea coast near Glasgow, Scotland, to see cliff-dwelling birds. And in 1998, after a plan to drive to southern Indiana was washed out by bad weather, the local guide suggested heading to an Indianapolis city park, and then to the airport to see some prairie birds.

"That's one of the neat things about birding," says IFBR President Julie West. "You can do it anywhere, even in a place you might not think there are birds. If you look around, I guarantee you're going to see some birds."

—JENNY LLAKMANI

The IFBR has 78 members in 17 countries. The fellowship supports projects such as raising money for a bird sanctuary in Kerala, India, and a vulture rehabilitation center in South Africa. The group has also purchased copies of a field guide for young Spanish-speaking birders in the United States and Central America to encourage them to become bird guides, which can be an economic driver for an area. Learn more at ifbr.org.

FAVORITE BIRD

American oystercatcher

We see it in Florida. It's a beautiful wading bird.
— Susan Leonard

Striated fieldwren

It's a plain but cheeky little bird that sings from the top of a reed on marsh edges.
— Don Ripper


Indian roller

When they fly, the male looks very pretty. I've seen this bird in Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary in the Indian state of Rajasthan.
— Madu Bishnu

FAVORITE LOCAL BIRDING SPOT

- **The Sundarbans**, on the Bay of Bengal, one of the world's largest mangrove forests. I visit every year just for birdwatching.
— Madu Bishnu, E-Club of Melbourne, Australia
- **Lake Guyatt** in the city of Sale. It's a manmade lake with surrounding wetlands and mud flats that attract many uncommon species to the area. It offers a wonderful ease of viewing.
— Don Ripper, Rotary Club of Sale, Australia

- **My backyard** on Mercer Island — Judy Ginn, Rotary Club of Seattle-International District, Washington
- **Boyd Hill Nature Preserve**, a city park in St. Petersburg, Florida. They specialize in nature education for kids, and they have an aviary where they care for injured birds.
— Susan Leonard, Rotary Club of Fishers, Indiana
- **Nature Center at Shaker Lake** in Cleveland is my local patch.
— Julie West, Rotary Club of Cleveland



Black-capped chickadee

They are so feisty; they chase bigger birds away from feeders.
— Julie West

MOST EXCITING SIGHTING

- **A barred owl** in Norway, near Venabygd. The bird was beautifully visible in the middle of the day in a barren and cold landscape. — Fred Dijkers, Rotary Club of Hoeksche Waard, The Netherlands
- **Kirtland's warblers** in Michigan, and **upland sandpipers**, which despite being shorebirds are not found at the shore. — Julie West
- **Kingfishers** of all types: In Sundarbans, I've spotted the pied kingfisher, black-capped kingfisher, and brown-winged kingfisher. — Madu Bishnu
- **A ruby-throated hummingbird**, which I saw in a Toronto park in 2018. While not uncommon for North Americans, it represents a genus we do not see in Australasia or Oceania. — Don Ripper
- **Birds of paradise** in Papua New Guinea. And **penguin colonies** in Antarctica. You can't imagine anything more beautiful. — Elena Laborde-Bishop
- **Any new one.** That's the most exciting part! — Steve Leonard

Pileated woodpecker

We love that guy. We had a whole family of them one year in our yard.
— Steve Leonard

MOST WANTED SIGHTING

- **Hummingbird.** We don't have hummingbirds in India, so I would need to be somewhere in the Americas to see one. — Madu Bishnu
- **Night parrot.** Thought to have been extinct for decades, it has been rediscovered in three parts of Australia hundreds of miles apart within a three-year span. — Don Ripper
- **Crossbill.** This is a bird that I know can be seen in our country, but I have not yet seen it in real life. — Fred Dijkers
- **Kiwi.** I've been to New Zealand four times with the International Fellowship of Flying Rotarians, and it has eluded me every time. — Elena Laborde-Bishop

► **Elkhorn Slough.** Because of its situation by Monterey Bay, it has a tremendous number of birds — wading birds and raptors and little birds. In one morning, you can see 100 birds. — Elena Laborde-Bishop, Soquel, California

► **Eagle Creek Park** in Indianapolis. It's a huge city park, one of the largest in the nation, and it has a beautiful nature center for birding. — Steve Leonard, Rotary Club of Fishers, Indiana

“Like Rotarians, birds connect the world.”

— IFBR President Julie West