

Zeiss Youth Birding Challenge



SUGGESTED STRATEGY



1. Getting the Night Birds

You need not stay up all night to tally night birds by their calls. Many nocturnal birds are vocal just before dawn. Most teams seek out a marsh with a woodland edge for nocturnals. If you are having trouble hearing distant birds, try cupping your hands behind your ears. Marshes will produce water birds (like bitterns and rails); upland edges are good for owls (like Great-horned and Barred). THERE ARE TAPES AVAILABLE FROM NEW JERSEY AUDUBON CENTER BOOKSTORES WHICH IDENTIFY BIRD VOCALIZATIONS if you'd like to sharpen your skills.

2. At Dawn

Be at your woodland site. Bird the sunny side of the woodland edge first because that is where insects will warm up first and where birds will be most active. WATCH FOR BIRDS PASSING OVERHEAD. Many birds like loons, cormorants, nighthawks, and other birds that can be identified by shape can be seen flying overhead early in the morning. Spend about three hours in woodland areas.

3. Mid to Late Morning

Move to a grassland site. Grassland birds stay vocal later in the day than woodland birds. Stop at every sizable body of water you pass. You never know what may appear on the water or along the edge. On cold mornings, swallows gather over the warmer water to feed on insects. You can see several species at a glance.

4. Late Morning or Afternoon

In late morning, or in the afternoon (after songbird activity has tapered off), go to the marshes and coastal areas. Try to time your visit to coincide with a favorable tide. Low tide is best for scanning the mud flats for shorebirds; high tide is good if you are hoping to see birds (like rails) sitting out along salt marsh edges. A spotting scope is very useful for this kind of birding.

5. Late Afternoon or Early Evening

Leave at least two hours at the end of your day for "clean up" - i.e. running down those misses in your list. There will be plenty and your end point should be some place you are familiar with - so you know where to find a woods that holds that White-breasted Nuthatch or a marsh where herons feed.

NOTE: You can aid your cause by doing some scouting of habitats before your World Series day. Birds already on territory will remain there. If you already know where a Killdeer is nesting or a Red-tailed Hawk sits out the day, you can save time on your big day. Don't waste time looking for one bird. In general, no bird is worth more than ten minutes, so when you set a timetable stick to it no matter what. The way to add birds to your list is to add stops and habitat types. ■

