



**TAKING YOUR CAMPERS
ON A
BIRD WALK AT TBC's
MASHIPACONG ESTATE
(Leaders Manual)**

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This booklet is the first of a planned series of materials to be produced by Trail Blazer Camps' (TBC) alumni on the natural and human history of Trail Blazer Camps' Mashipacong Estate. The series, envisioned by TBC's Alumni Engagement Committee (AEC), is intended to provide an opportunity for alumni to share their TBC knowledge and experiences with current staff and campers and promote a shared sense of TBC culture and values across generations of the TBC community

This booklet titled *Taking your Campers on a Bird Walk at TBC's Mashipacong Estate* provides advice to leaders on how to prepare campers for going on a bird walk and provides information about different types of bird habitats at Mashipacong and listings of the species of birds commonly found in these habitats. Photos and descriptions of the listed birds are provided in a separate booklet titled *TBC Camper Guide to Mashipacong Birds*.

As is the case for most things at Trail Blazers, both of the birding booklets are the product of a group effort. And, in the case of the birding booklets, the alumni group contributing to the effort included: Juanita Barrena, Debra Dolph, Kathy Riecks, Diane Schaefer, Mark Siegeltuch, Jeffrey Wedge, and Deborah Willis. With regard to this first booklet, TBC and the AEC wish to especially recognize and thank Diane Schaefer for developing the conceptual framework for the booklet and her primary authorship of most of the text, Mark Siegeltuch for his authorship of the section on adjusting and using binoculars, and Juanita Barrena for collecting, formatting and editing contributions to the manuscript and publishing the final document.

A. PREPARE YOUR GROUP WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is a “Bird Walk?”** No, it doesn't mean walking like a bird. Instead, it means going on a walk, usually with other people, to look for and learn about wild birds in their natural surroundings.

2. **What do your campers already know about birds?**
 - What birds do you see at home?’
 - Where do you usually see them?
 - How do you act around them?
 - How do they act?
 - How do people treat them?

Note: Don't assume that the only birds campers see in the city are pigeons, starlings and sparrows. In fact, many of the birds seen at Camp also live in the city (especially in parks and close to the rivers.

3. **Are birds different at Camp?**
 - Have you seen any of the birds that you've seen at home at Camp?
 - Have you seen and heard other birds at Camp?’
 - Everyone stop and Listen. What do you hear? Do you see any birds?
 - Might birds at Camp be different or behave differently?

- Why might we have to behave differently in order to see birds at Camp? Why?

Note: Most birds at camp are very shy. They are not used to being around people, so we have to treat them gently. It is important to be really quiet, so they forget we are here. Then they may sing for us and may even fly in so we can see them.

B. TEACH YOUR CAMPERS WHAT TO DO ON A BIRD WALK

1. **Teach campers how to isolate and identify individual bird songs and “tell” others that they have heard it.**

Ask your group to sit or stand quietly. A big part of watching and listening for birds is sitting or standing quietly. Ask your group to sit quietly on the front step of the Great Hall or in front of the DoubleTree, or some other starting point. Ask the group if they see or hear birds.

Provide instruction on how to isolate the song of one type of bird from all the rest. Explain that a good first step in finding birds is to learn their individual songs so that you can at least look at a picture of them and know what to look for.

Sometimes, there may be so many different types of birds singing that it sounds like a whole bunch of people speaking different languages; but, every once in a while, the song/language of one type of bird will stand out. And, if someone in the group knows the song of that bird, they can help others identify it.

So, to learn a song, you must watch me. When I hear a song, I will quietly say, “listen.” When the bird sings, I will point with my finger up toward the bird. You listen and when you hear the bird, we’ll both/all point together. Then we will look at the book and see if we can find the bird’s picture.

Practice learning a few songs.

Make sure that YOU (the leader) are familiar with the songs of a few birds that are often found at your starting point. For example, the House Wren (at the Great Hall) or Red-winged Blackbird (at the Wanagan).

Have the group sit quietly and listen, and when the song of a bird you know stands out clearly, raise your finger. Then, tell the group the name of the bird you heard, show the campers a picture of the bird and describe its song in words. For example, the House Wren sounds like it’s shaking notes out of a music box; the Towhee sounds like it’s saying, “*drink your tea.*” Then, have the group listen again while watching you and raise their fingers when they also hear the bird. If you have a “Bird Song Pocket ID Learning Tool,” you can also play the actual song. Then, have the campers try again. However, you should not play it before having the campers try to identify the song without that aid. After a few times and when most campers are raising their fingers, have them try it without watching you (i.e., with their eyes closed or covered. Again, show them a picture of the bird, and read about its appearance and other characteristics.

2. Teach campers how to spot birds.

Look for movement. As you sit and listen, also scan the trees or bushes for movement. That is the easiest way to find birds.

- When you see movement, keep your eyes on the movement and bring the binoculars up to your eyes.
- Once you can see out of the binoculars, adjust the focus to bring in the bird.
- Unfortunately, most birds don't sit still for too long and the bird you found might have moved off. If you can't find the bird, look again with your eyes.

What to notice? Once you find the bird, notice and ask yourself:

- How big is the bird? The standard bird size is a Robin since most of us know the Robin. Is this bird about the size of a Robin? Bigger? Smaller?
- What colors can you see? Is it all one color? Is the back one color and the breast another?
- What behaviors is the bird displaying? Is it flitting around from branch to branch or sitting still looking around? Maybe it is flying out to catch a bug and then back to the same branch?

Let others know you have found a bird... While keeping your eyes on the bird, try to describe where the bird is. The more eyes on the bird the better for identifying it.

If you can't identify the bird, give it your own name for now! The idea is to have fun and notice the life around you.

3. Continuing on your Bird Walk

Moving short distances as a group. When you want to move to another spot to watch birds, you and the group should move quickly and quietly and then settle by a tree or some bushes. For example, move your group down by the rocks in the middle of the lawn from the Great Hall porch. Watch the garden. You might see a Goldfinch, a Blue Bird, a Cowbird, a Robin.

Moving longer distances as a group. For longer distances, it isn't so critical to stay quiet or closely together until you get to the next location (e.g., to the Big Dipper from the Great Hall or to the Wanagan or Sluiceway from the Doubletree). Then settle somewhere and listen. Here you might hear a Red-winged Blackbird or a Common Yellowthroat or even a Yellow Warbler. Look in the book and read about these birds.

Shorter is better. Smaller bird walks might be better than a whole morning of looking for birds. Combine it with other activities. Another morning or evening take a walk to the barn, or when you are returning to your small camp, pay attention to what birds you hear or see. This can just add fun and learning to a walk along a path or down the Turnpike.

4. You can watch for birds anytime!

When you are sitting in your small group spot near the Great Hall or Wanagan. This is a great time to listen for bird songs. You might see one of the thrushes looking for their dinner.

When you are sitting at your campfire circle waiting for others. Now you don't have to "wait" for others. You can be listening and looking for birds as your group gathers.

Anytime you are walking from here to there. Birds are always around us. They can be heard and seen just about any time. You might see or hear something on your way to the Little Dipper! They do like it quieter so if there are LOTS of campers around the birds might hide away. Perhaps every now and then do a "silent" hike and see what you might see or hear!

C. TEACH YOUR CAMPERS HOW TO ADJUST AND USE BINOCULARS

1. Adjusting Binoculars

Binoculars are a bird watcher's best friend. They help you see birds that are far away from you. They may be sitting on a fence across a field, high in a tree, or flying above you. To use binoculars, you will first need to adjust them. Each person will adjust them differently.

Adjust the Binoculars for your Eyes (Demonstrate)

There are three things you will need to adjust (point to each):

- The Barrels
- The Eye Cups
- The Focus Wheel

Have your campers find these parts on their own binoculars.



Adjust the Barrels (Demonstrate)

Some people's eyes are closer together than other people's. You will need to adjust the barrels of the binoculars to suit your eyes.

- Lift the binoculars to your face.
- Place your hands on the barrels of the binoculars and pull to the left and right to adjust how wide apart they are.
- When you see a single image through the lenses they are set properly for your eyes. You should not see two images.

Adjust the Eye Cups (Demonstrate)

The eye cups help people who wear glasses. Twist them left or right to raise or lower them.

- If you don't wear glasses, twist them to open.
- If you wear glasses, make sure they are closed.

Focus the Binoculars using the Focus Wheel (Demonstrate)

The focus wheel is used to make whatever you are looking at clearer. You will have to adjust the focus often, but you can do this while looking through the binoculars by using your index finger to rotate the little wheels between the barrels.

You can practice setting the focus for any distant object but remember that birds move around so you may have to refocus often to see birds that are close and far away.

Exercise: Have campers practice adjusting the barrels, eye cups and focus wheel. They can take turns with available binoculars to adjust them for their own eyes.

2. Using the Binoculars (Demonstrate)

Finding birds with your binoculars can take some practice. Your eyes can see everything in front of you, but binoculars show only a limited area. This area will appear larger because the lenses in the binoculars magnify it.

- The first step is to find the bird with your eyes. If the bird is jumping around, wait until it settles down.
- Turn your body toward the bird.
- Keep looking at the bird and slowly raise the binoculars to your eyes. Don't look down at the binoculars; keep your eyes on the bird.
- Adjust the focus wheel so the bird appears clearly in your sight.

Don't get frustrated if you can't find the bird with the binoculars. It takes some practice.

3. **How to Hold Binoculars (Demonstrate)**

If you are looking through your binoculars for a long time your arms may get tired. Here's a way to hold binoculars that will make it easier on your arms.

- Grasp the binoculars with both hands near the front of the barrels so you can use your index finger to adjust the focus.
- Make sure to keep your elbows at your side and not pointing outward.



Image courtesy of Nikon

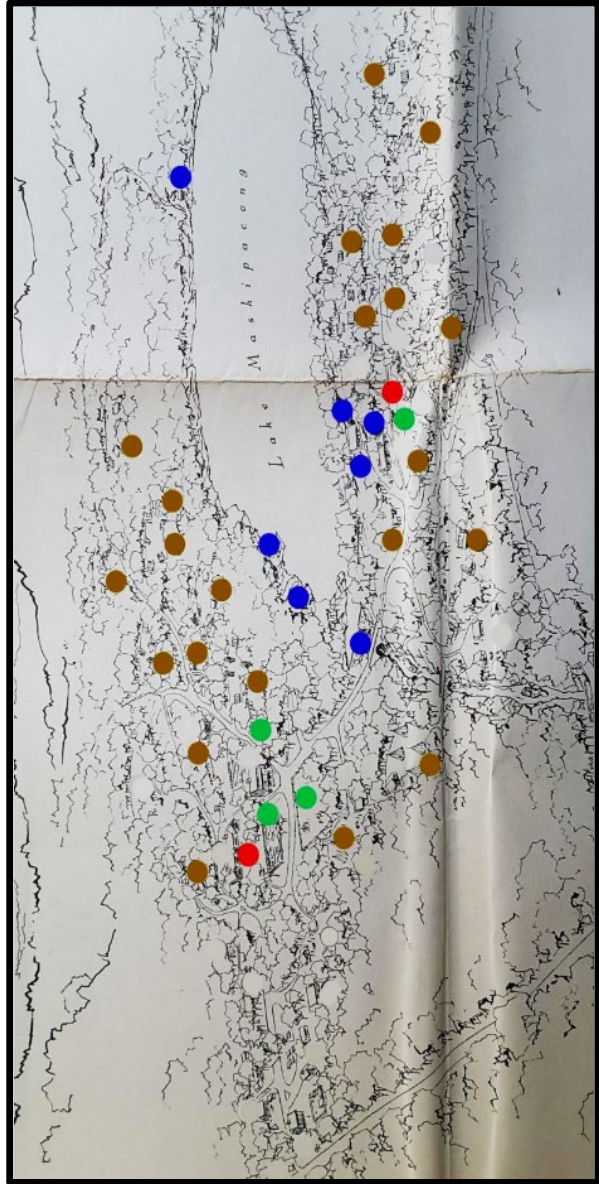
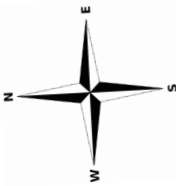
D. HOW DO I FIND DIFFERENT TYPES OF BIRDS AT MASHIPACONG?

Birds, like people, live in different neighborhoods, except that for birds and other animals, the neighborhood is called a **“Habitat.”** Like a neighborhood, a habitat is an area where the bird or other organism lives throughout the year or for shorter periods of time, and the habitat contains all that the animal needs to survive such as food and shelter. Now, since different types of birds need different things (for example, they eat different things), a particular type of bird is usually found in a particular type of habitat.

So, why would it be important to know about different bird habitats and which birds might live there? Well, if you wanted to find a friend and you knew that they lived in a particular neighborhood, you would be more likely to find them if you went to that neighborhood. And the same is true about birds. This doesn't mean that you would never find your friend in a different neighborhood or a particular type of bird in a different habitat, but it just makes sense to go to the places where they normally hang out. In the map below, we have identified four different bird habitats at Mashipacong (represented by different colors) and some of the places at Camp where each type of habitat can be found (represented by dots of the assigned habitat color). In the narrative that follows, the habitats are described, some camp locations for each habitat are noted, and the types of birds that are commonly found in the habitat are listed. Similar kinds of habitats and birds can be found in other places, including places in NYC (e.g., Central Park and Prospect Park). Photos and descriptions of the named birds are provided in a separate booklet titled **“TBC Camper Guide to Mashipacong Birds.”**

Note: The map has been rotated 90°, so turn your booklet horizontally so that the compass is at the top left of the page and North (N) points upward.

To orient yourself to the map, please note that the red dot on the left (W) is The Great Hall and the red dot on the right (E) is the Doubletree.



E. HABITAT DESCRIPTIONS, LOCATIONS, AND BIRD COMMONLY SEEN THERE

1. Buildings and mowed lawn areas (RED)

Habitat Description: These are areas where the lawns are mowed and kept up. There are edges of trees and bushes along the lawns. Many birds also like to nest under the roof eaves.

Locations: Great Hall, Doubletree

Birds commonly found here: House Wren, American Robin, Black-capped Chickadee, Flicker, Phoebe, Mourning Dove, Barn Swallow. Black-capped Chickadee. Catbird, Chipping Sparrow.

2. Grasslands and garden areas (GREEN)

Habitat Description: This is an area that is less kept up. The grass will be longer and there may be small shrubs and bushes. There may be thickets of brambles and piles of brush that provide places for the birds to hide and forage.

Locations: These areas are at the bottom of the Great Hall lawn by the road. They border both sides of the road as you approach the Lodge. The old Donkey pen pasture is also a grassland habitat.

Birds commonly found here: American Goldfinch, Bluebird, Chipping Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, Black-capped Chickadee, Flicker, American Robin, Song Sparrow, Mourning Dove, Tufted Titmouse, Catbird, Cowbird.

3. The Lake area (BLUE)

Habitat Description: These are areas with water such as the lake. It is also swampy areas or areas near streams. The birds like to hide in the brushy bushes that grow along the watery areas.

Locations: The Big Dipper, The Sluiceway, The Wanagan, Fisherman's Cabin, The Old Dock, The Dam, Old Vesper Glen (Wanagan-side of Lake)

Birds commonly found here: Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, House Wren, Phoebe, Catbird, Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole.

4. Woodland (deep woods) (BROWN)

Habitat Description: For the most part this is an undisturbed forest with a mix of many trees. At camp you will find many of these birds in the tops of tall trees looking for bugs or under the trees on the ground scratching in the leaf litter.

Locations: The "Hollow" (lowland between the Great Hall and the Wanagan sides of the lake), most Small Camps, up Ridge Road, the woods around the Great Hall (e.g., near the Goodrich House, and Chimney Corner) and woods between the Wanagan and the Turnpike.

Birds commonly found here: Oven Bird, Wood Thrush, Veery Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Phoebe, House Wren, Flicker, Tufted Titmouse, Pileated Woodpecker, Barred Owl, Eastern Towhee, Flicker.

F. ALMOST FOR SURE... SUCCESSFUL PLACES TO DO A FIRST BIRD WALK!!!

1. **Start at the Great Hall.** (this should be early in the morning or after groups have left and it is quieter.) There is a really good chance you will find these birds:

- The House Wren is often heard and seen from the porch on the Great Hall.
- The American Robin can be heard and seen from the porch of the Great Hall.
- Maybe a Black-capped Chickadee, a Flicker or a Phoebe.

2. **Move down toward the garden/ road area (near the Lodge).** This is a great place to spot the following birds:

- American Goldfinch flying over the open field.
- A Song Sparrow or Chipping Sparrow singing from the fence or a bush top.
- If you're lucky you might see a Catbird or an Oriole!!!

3. **Then wander down by the Lake.** Here you have a good chance of hearing or seeing:

- The Red-winged Blackbird and Cowbirds
- The Yellow Warbler or a Common Yellowthroat in the bushes near the lake.

