



Steps to Implement Birdability Locally and at Bird Festivals

Below are our suggestions for how to implement Birdability in your local community, whether you're part of an Audubon chapter, a bird club, or you're a motivated individual wanting to make change! Lots of great ideas about all things Birdability related were discussed during the panel (*Birdability: Perspectives on Access from the Field*) and webinar presented by Virginia Rose (*Birdability: Access for Everybody!*) from Birdability Week 2020; we recommend you check these out first. We also have additional Birdability Guidance Documents available on our website (audubon.org/birdability/) covering language use and communication tips as well as access considerations, and we're adding more all the time.

We're already looking forward to Birdability Week 2021 (and the whole month of October!) and hope to hear about accessible bird outings held across North America and the world! Please get in touch if you're planning an accessible bird outing or event – online or in-person – so we can include it on our website, by emailing at birdabilityforeverybody@gmail.com Please note that Birdability is volunteer-run, so we appreciate your patience as you await a reply.

1. If you're a member of an Audubon chapter or bird club, invite any members who are birders who experience accessibility challenges to work with you in this process. Let their experiences inform your work and collaborate with them throughout the process.
2. Refer to the Birdability Guidance Document Access Considerations for Accessible Birding Locations, or criteria in the Birdability Review. The Birdability Review can be accessed without submitting an actual Review, so you can look through the questions and see photos of each feature that is described. Both found at audubon.org/birdability/
3. Identify potential accessible sites near you by phone or website, or via the Birdability Map. Don't forget county, city, State and National parks, and privately owned locations.
 - National Parks: Information about the accessibility of facilities, programs, and services in each park can be found on the park's website by selecting "Plan Your Visit" in the site navigation. There is an Accessibility Coordinator at every National Park who may be able to suggest trails for you to visit in-person.
 - State Parks: Each state runs its own state parks differently. Try contacting the State Park Accessibility Office to find out which trails may be worth a visit.
 - County and City Parks: Each city and county will operate differently. Try contacting the Recreation Inclusion Unit or the main office for information about accessible parks worth visiting. They may already run 'Seniors in the Park'-type events, which may link in well with an accessible bird outing.
4. Complete on-site, in-person Birdability Reviews of these potential sites, and add them to the Birdability Map.

- If you're part of an Audubon chapter, bird club, or a nature center, include the same level of accessibility information on your own website. Link to the Birdability website from your website so visitors can find out about other accessible birding locations nearby (or far away!).
5. Hold monthly accessible bird outings. See below for our suggestions on how to make sure they are inclusive and welcoming to all. It may take some time for word to get out that you are holding these events, but don't give up! Consistency is important; even if no one with an accessibility challenge shows up on the day, you can still go birding!
 6. Reach out and collaborate with local organizations. Introduce their members or clients who are potential future birders to the joys of birding! Try your local:
 - School for the Blind;
 - Easterseals and Adaptive Sports organization (like Southern Arizona Adaptive Sports, who were invited by Tucson Audubon to team up to hold accessible bird outings). Contact their local director to discuss this collaboration;
 - Support groups including Spinal Cord Injury, Multiple Sclerosis, stroke and disabled veterans;
 - Rehabilitation hospitals. You might ask to be connected with their Occupational Therapists, Recreation Therapists or Horticultural Therapists, who will likely be the best staff to help make this happen (although not always!);
 - Some local businesses or community groups, such as physical therapy clinics, yoga studios, churches, or Rotary clubs, may be happy for you to put a flyer on their community notice board to promote your outing.

Please note: so much of our work is about being welcoming and inclusive to everyone. This includes being inclusive of birders who don't experience accessibility challenges! Using the title 'accessible bird outing' rather than 'Birdability outing' may help these birders know that they are welcome to attend. As the leader of the outing your focus will be on those birders who experience accessibility challenges, not on able-bodied birders.

Bird Festivals

If you're involved in organizing a birding festival, whether it's a local one-day event or a national or international multi-day event, we want to see Birdability events as part of your annual line up! Work through Steps 1-3 above; you may find it helpful to also action Steps 4-5 to ensure that your proposed site is, indeed, appropriate.

1. Include Birdability events on the schedule. In the event description, include:
 - Thorough descriptions of the accessibility features of the site (see our Guidance Document on Access Considerations for more on this);
 - Information on the distance of the outing, the length of the outing, and if breaks will be provided during the outing (preferably at benches in the shade);
 - If attendees are able to drive themselves to the event's starting point (which may be vital for people who drive modified vans and use wheelchairs);
 - Information on the event leader, including if they have an accessibility challenge. If they do not, include what experience they have leading accessible bird outings;

- The maximum number of people who can attend (may be important for some birders to know, including birders with Autism or who experience chronic pain).
2. When possible, assign a leader with accessibility challenges to lead the event, or invite Virginia Rose to do so!
 3. Make sure to let us know about your event so we can help publicize and celebrate it! Email us at birdabilityforeverybody@gmail.com

How to be a welcoming and inclusive bird outing leader

- Wear a name tag with good contrast (clear, dark font on a light background) for maximum readability for everyone.
- Include a welcome statement at the beginning of your outing. While it's easy to think, "Why wouldn't everyone feel welcome?", it can make a huge difference to someone if they are *actively* welcomed. This also sets the social etiquette for the outing and can make other participants more aware of their own behavior. This is inspired by the work of the Feminist Bird Club.
 - This welcome statement might sound something like, "Hi everyone! Welcome to this accessible bird outing. My name is Virginia Rose, and I'm going to be the leader. I don't know everything about birds, so I welcome your input when there are things I'm not sure about or if I make a mistake. I also want you to know that if you are a beginner birder, if you are Black, Indigenous or a Person of Color, if you have a disability or accessibility challenge of any kind, or if you identify as LGBTQIA+, you are certainly welcome on this walk, and I'm glad you're here! I love going birding, and I'm excited to spend the next hour or two with you and learning from you... and I hope you'll enjoy it too! Please feel free to ask any questions you have about anything we see or that you hear anyone say; I was a beginner once too. If you need help finding a bird we're looking at, or you didn't hear the name of the bird, please ask someone near you, and they'll be happy to help. OK! Let's go!"
- Right after your welcome statement, ask 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). Plenty of birders will forget another person's name the first time they hear it, but the fact that they've been told it can make them feel more comfortable asking questions. Start the process by introducing yourself: "Hi! I'm Virginia, and my pronouns are she/her."
- 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 for participants who need to sit down to regain energy or rest an injury.
- If you're going to be in one place for a longer time, 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.

- 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. (People can keep birding during the break if they would like!)
- 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. Not everyone can afford optics, some folks don't like using them, and beginner birders may simply not know yet whether they want to invest in them.
- 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 (even though you had the best intentions).
- The first time you meet someone, don't ask "Where are you from?" or "How long have you been birding?" These questions sound innocent, but some folks find them uncomfortable. They can also imply that someone is inexperienced and lacking in knowledge. It also isn't an effective way of gauging how "good" a birder they are. To strike up friendly small talk, why not ask about the most recent cool bird they've seen? Even if it's a bird you've seen often, respond with excitement—after all, it might be new to the person who told you.
- Don't comment on what makes someone different unless it needs to be discussed.
- 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.
- Don't assume someone needs help without asking them. 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.
- 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.
- Be aware of overt and covert racism or homophobia (current or historical) in any areas where you want to hold bird walks. Perhaps reconsider the location. No one wants to go on a bird walk in a place they feel unsafe.
- Believe someone when they spot or ID a bird. It can feel discouraging and even dismissive to have one's ID ignored or questioned. Instead, trust but verify. This can be the difference between a bird outing leader being *encouraging* and *discouraging*. Regardless of someone's skin color, physical ability, age, gender or sexual orientation, believe them! (Of course, if they were incorrect, gently point this out and perhaps explain why they might have got the ID wrong.)

Stay involved in the Birdability movement

- Join our [Birdability Facebook Group](#) to network and share resources with other birders interested in all things Birdability.
- On Instagram, follow Virginia Rose [@birdability](#) and Freya McGregor [@the.ot.birder](#) for updates, resources and ideas.
- Head over to the [Birdability Blog](#) to sign up for emails of Virginia Rose sharing stories about her Birdability adventures and triumphs.

- If you want to get seriously involved, consider volunteering in the National Audubon Birdability Affinity Group. Online meetings are held once a month, plus an additional monthly committee meeting. Open to all who want to be a part of it! Email us at birdabilityforeverybody@gmail.com to let us know you're interested.