

## **BirdWatching**

### **GUIDELINES FOR WRITERS**

*Revised 14 March 2014*

*BirdWatching* (formerly *Birder's World*) is a bimonthly magazine for people with a broad interest in wild birds and birdwatching. Our readers are intellectually curious and well educated. They own many field guides and other books about birds, and they read widely.

To satisfy them, we strive to publish articles that enhance their enjoyment of the hobby and make them better birders — that is, we look for photos that make our readers say, "Wow!" and information that they can use to find birds, attract birds, identify birds, and understand how and why birds do what they do.

We solicit many articles from biologists, researchers, and nature writers with a special interest in birds, but we accept unsolicited work as well. If you have an article in mind, please bear in mind that we receive many more manuscripts and proposals than we have space to publish. (We print only six issues a year, and each contains three or four features, tops.) **Please send us a proposal first, not a manuscript, along with samples of your published writing.**

Please note: We do not accept poetry, fiction, puzzles, and product reviews. Guest posts for our blog are by invitation only. We publish photographs of rare bird sightings, but we don't publish articles about them. We don't think albino birds are newsworthy. And we scorn stories about native wild birds that have been fed, handled, "adopted," or kept as pets by anyone other than licensed wildlife rehabilitators or other professionals.

### **HOW TO PROPOSE A STORY**

Send us a query. A query is a one-page letter or succinct e-mail that describes three things:

- What you want to write about
- How you plan to write it
- Why our readers will want to read it

Write a sentence or two about the focus of your article. Describe its significance or timeliness. Tell us how you plan to organize the story — how will it open, what approach

you will take in writing it, and whom you will interview. State how the story might be illustrated. Tell us if what you have in mind is similar to anything we've published recently. Be sure to describe your experience as a writer and/or why you are qualified to address your topic. Don't be shy about reminding us if you've written for us before, and send clips if you have not. (Please provide a self-addressed, stamped envelope of appropriate size if you want the clips back.)

*Send queries and clips here:*

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*Tip: The worst queries we read come from writers who think only about what they want to say. The best come from writers who have given thought to what our readers want to read.*

## **WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR**

We publish articles in the following nine general subject areas but are always on the lookout for stories that bridge categories: hotspots with scientific content, for example, or photo essays combined with first-person accounts. Our favorite articles have crossed boundaries, combining elements of different story types.

*Tip: We believe that there is much about common birds that expert birders will find fascinating, and that exotic birds, described well, can hold the interest of beginners.*

**1. Stories about birds:** We are interested in stories about birds that haven't been told before. We like species profiles and are looking for insightful observations of bird behavior — migration, habitat selection, foraging, display, song, courtship, nesting, molt (you name it) — coupled with explanations for why birds do what they do. In general, we prefer articles on species and phenomena observable in North America but will consider well-written manuscripts about any species, including endangered species. We especially enjoy articles that compare members of bird families. We prefer articles from writers who have personal

experience with their subject matter but will welcome all articles in which scientific information is digested skillfully. We also seek articles that explain what ornithologists have learned recently and how they came to learn it. First-person, anecdotal writing works best.

*Tip: The Auk, The Wilson Journal of Ornithology, and other ornithological journals are jam-packed with fascinating descriptions of bird behavior and the methods by which scientists learn about it, as well as contact info for the researchers. You can search the journals online:*

Searchable Ornithological Research Archive

<http://sora.unm.edu>

**2. First-person accounts:** We will consider occasional stories and essays by birdwatchers, scientists, naturalists, and others about birding, attracting birds, and studying and conserving birds. Please note: We are looking for essays that deal with topics of broad intellectual or emotional interest, not what was seen on this morning's bird walk. Past first-person accounts have enabled our readers to look over the shoulder of a discoverer at the moment of discovery; to follow a scientist's thoughts as he/she conducts research; or to learn how other birdwatchers became birdwatchers.

*Tip: We like to publish birdwatchers' first-person accounts in our regular "Your View" section.*

**3. Birds in the news:** Because our magazine appears bimonthly, we can not cover breaking news the way a weekly magazine or newspaper does. We might consider a well-written first-person account about breaking news, but we are not looking for articles about what happened. Instead, we are looking to put breaking news into context by providing the big picture or historical background or by suggesting explanations.

**4. Hotspots Near You:** "Hotspots Near You" is a section that appears in every issue of the magazine. In it, local birdwatchers provide concise, single-page descriptions of accessible birding destinations that they visit often and know well. Each "Hotspot Near You" story consists of a map showing how visitors can reach the destination by car, a brief first-person description of the destination, a collection of useful information about the destination, a biographical blurb about the writer, and a list of nearby sites. We are always on the lookout

for good birding destinations in the U.S. and Canada to profile in "Hotspots Near You." If you know of one, please let us know.

You can read "Hotspots Near You" here:

<http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/hotspots-near-you/>

**5. Feature hotspots:** We also publish multi-page feature articles about individual birding hotspots, but only rarely. In general, we prefer articles about destinations in North America but will consider stories about more distant locations. Such manuscripts should be tailored to readers who may never travel there. Tone is everything: When we consider international destinations, we are looking for writing that makes distant locations relevant and provides enjoyable armchair birding. First-person, anecdotal writing works best. Beautiful photos of all hotspots, North American or more distant, should be readily available.

*Tip: When considering feature hotspot articles, we look for good answers to one question: Why will readers who will never visit the destination want to read about it? The better your answer, the better your chances of selling your article.*

**6. Attracting, feeding, and identifying:** We regularly look for short articles offering novel approaches to attracting, feeding, sheltering, and identifying birds. We are looking for articles that contain tips readers can use; narratives drawn from personal experience; manuscripts that do not repeat what's already been said; and writing that's grounded in science. First-person, anecdotal writing works best.

*Tip: Think about all four seasons. We try to match the tips we publish to the time of year in which an issue appears.*

**7. Birdfinding:** We like first-person narratives about successful searches for hard-to-find or difficult-to-ID bird species, and we look for articles that provide tips readers can use to find and identify birds.

**8. Photo essays:** We are on the lookout for beautiful photographs that show places and birds our readers may have never seen before, display familiar birds in a new way, and educate our readers. We want our photo essays to have journalistic or educational value and so look for strong or novel organizational themes. We do not publish nuts-and-bolts

articles about photographic equipment and how to use it, but we will consider articles about the creative process and the circumstances under which photographers make and have made good bird photos. As a rule, we are interested in articles about birds more than articles about taking pictures of birds.

*Tip: Coming up with a good idea for a photo essay is an excellent way to get your work published in BirdWatching.*

Our guidelines for photographers are available on our website:

Submission guidelines

<http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/the-magazine/submission-guidelines/>

**9. History:** We will consider occasional articles that explain how ornithology and birdwatching have changed through the years. Topics of interest: early ornithologists, explorers, collectors and collecting, extinct species, bird art and artists, etc.

## **HOW MUCH TO WRITE**

Feature articles are 1,750-2,250 words long.

"Attracting Birds"-type features are 700-900 words.

*Tip: When writing, avoid formality and sentimentality equally. We publish articles about science, but we are not a scientific journal. We do not publish citations, foot- or endnotes, or lists of works cited. What's more, our writers are usually as interesting as the birds they write about, so we prefer articles written in the first person — that is, articles written using the words "I" and "we." On the other hand, we avoid referring to birds as if they were people. With few exceptions, we use the pronoun "it," not "he" or "she," to refer to a bird.*

## **HOW TO WRITE BIRD NAMES**

Capitalize common names of birds when they are complete (Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal); use lower-case when they are incomplete (bluebird, cardinal). Include the Latin names of birds only if the common name alone might confuse the reader. We rely on *The A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, Seventh Edition*, and its supplements to answer

questions about spelling and capitalization. The check-list is available on the website of the American Ornithologists' Union:

Check-list of North American Birds

<http://checklist.aou.org>

## WHAT TO INCLUDE WITH YOUR MANUSCRIPT

If you want your manuscript to stand out from the stacks of paper that clutter the editor's desk and often prevent him from finding his car keys, include the following five items:

1. **Contact information:** Include your name, postal address, daytime phone, fax, and e-mail address above the title of your article.
2. **Headline:** Please give your article a title.
3. **Deck:** A deck is a one-sentence, informative, or curiosity-evoking blurb that appears along with the title of the article. Its purpose is to give readers a compelling reason to start reading. (Think of it this way: If you were to write on the back of a business card what your story is about and why a reader should read it, what would you say?) Please submit two or three versions.
4. **Internal decks or pull-quotes.** These are short, informative, or curiosity-evoking blurbs that appear on second or third spreads of a story. Quotations work well for these. After you have finished your draft, please read it through and select decks and quotations that can be used for this purpose. Please include two or three with your manuscript.
5. **Sidebar:** Please submit at least one list along with your manuscript. (Examples: Ways to tell Species A from Species B, sources of more information, citizen-science opportunities, food to offer/flowers to plant to attract birds, etc.)

## HOW TO PREPARE ELECTRONIC FILES

We prefer to receive submissions electronically, sent by e-mail. Send your article as an attachment to an e-mail message. Please do not encode attached files. Include your name, postal address, daytime phone, fax, and e-mail address above the title of your article.

*Send electronic files here:*

[mail@birdwatchingdaily.com](mailto:mail@birdwatchingdaily.com)

We will also accept files saved on CDs submitted with a high-quality printout. We use Microsoft Word for the Mac but can accept files saved in many formats. Include your name, postal address, daytime phone, fax, and e-mail address above the title of your article. Send your disks to the address below.

### **HOW TO PREPARE PAPER FILES**

If you cannot prepare an electronic version, send a typed, double-spaced, letter-quality manuscript that we can read by optical scanner. Include your name, postal address, daytime phone, fax, and e-mail address above the title of your article.

*Send paper files and CDs here:*

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### **HOW MUCH WE PAY**

Queried articles are accepted on speculation only. Payment is made upon publication, and we can't always guarantee when or if the piece will be published. We pay \$400 for most features and less for shorter pieces. There is no payment for submissions to "Your Letters," "Since You Asked," or "Your View." All contributors to the magazine earn the editor's undying affection. Paid contributors receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears; contributors to "Your View" receive one copy.