

The Best Birding Advice I Ever Got (And the Worst...)

Birders love giving advice. Honestly, they can't help themselves. Put a couple of us together and within five minutes someone is telling you what binoculars you "absolutely have to buy," where you'll "definitely get that lifer," or how they have the "secret" call that works every time. Some of it's gold, some of it, well, let's just say you learn the hard way.

The best advice I've ever been given? Simple. "Stop, look, listen."

At the time, I rolled my eyes a little. Like, thanks for the fortune-cookie wisdom. But then I actually tried it. Instead of rushing around, stomping along the trail, I just stood still. And it was like the bush suddenly woke up.

A robin-chat called from the shadows, then I picked up the flick of a tail, then the faint tapping of a woodpecker up high. I'd walked that path dozens of times before and never noticed half of it. Turns out the birds were always there, I was just too busy charging past.

That one piece of advice has stuck with me. Birding isn't about chasing. It's about letting the world reveal itself if you're patient enough. And trust me, patience is not my strong point, so this was a big lesson.

Now, the worst advice? That one's easy. Someone once told me, "If you can't find the bird, just play the call. It'll pop right out."

I've seen this in action, and honestly, it looks like a "birding hack." Phone out, press play, and everyone waits for the bird to magically appear. But here's the reality, it's not that simple, and most of the time it just causes problems.

Sure, sometimes the bird will respond. But often, it just stresses them out, pulling them away from nesting or feeding. And let's be real, it feels a bit like cheating. You're not learning the bird's natural behavior, you're forcing it into an unnatural one.

I still remember watching someone do it, and the bird didn't even show. All that came of it was a lot of awkward silence and one very frustrated birder. Not exactly the "shortcut" they promised.

Yeah... probably the worst advice out there.

Here's the thing though, both the good advice and the bad advice actually helped me. "Stop, look, listen" taught me patience. "Just play the call" taught me what not to do, and made me think harder about the ethics of birding. Birds aren't there to perform for us. They've got their own lives going on, and we're just lucky to catch a glimpse.

Sometimes the bad advice shapes you just as much as the good.

I may be young myself, but if someone younger asked me for birding advice, I'd keep it simple:

- Use your ears, they'll find you more birds than your eyes will.
- Don't rush, the slower you go the more you'll see.
- Respect the birds, they aren't props for our lists or photos.
- And above all, keep it fun.

And maybe I'd add this, don't take every bit of advice too seriously. Everyone birds differently. Some chase lifers, some just sit in one spot all day with a pair of binos. Some are in it for the photos, some for the lists. None of it's wrong. You'll find your own way.

So yeah, the best advice I ever got was to slow down. The worst was to treat birds like jukeboxes. Both taught me something. And honestly, that's the real secret, take the advice, laugh at the bad stuff, keep the good stuff, and then just figure out what works for you.

Because the truth is, there isn't one "right" way to bird. The right way is the one where you're happy and the birds are still happy too.