

Suggestions for newer birders and first-time tour goers

By Wayne Petersen

What follows is a series of simple suggestions that should help enhance the birding and wildlife watching experience for first-time natural history travel participants.

- Be sure to have a decent pair of binoculars for use on the trip, ideally something in the 7-10x range; 8x42 is about right for many folks. Definitely avoid small, compact binoculars for birding and wildlife viewing. It will significantly detract from your viewing pleasure and appreciation of the trip.
- Bring your own field guide to the birds or other wildlife of the region where you're going so you don't have to constantly bother the guide or other participants for a look at their copy.
- Refer to your field guide *before* the trip, *during* the trip, and *in the field* if the opportunity presents itself. This can significantly add to your understanding and pleasure of what you're seeing during the tour.
- Try to minimize unnecessary conversation when in the field, especially if the leader has encouraged the group to be quiet. Excessive noise, movement, or talking can be as disruptive to birds and other wildlife as it can be to other members in the group.
- In the field, try to listen to what the leader is saying or pointing out at the time to avoid needless repetition. If you're preoccupied at the time that everyone else is observing something, it may depart before you see it. If everyone at least makes an attempt to look at the same thing at the same time, frustration later can often be minimized.
- If you are unable to see something that is being pointed out, be patient but persistent in your efforts to do so. Discreetly let the leader know if you miss something so hopefully you'll have another opportunity to see it. At the same time, don't monopolize the leader's time; remember, you're not the only member in the group.

- When a bird is being viewed, avoid blocking or standing in front of others in the group. Be especially careful not to block telescopes that may be trained on a bird, and don't monopolize a telescope if it's not your own. Have a brief initial look through a scope then stand aside until everyone in the group has at least obtained a first look.
- When walking on trails or narrow roadways try to remain behind the leader whenever possible and generally stick as close to the group as you can. Whatever you do, don't wander off on your own so that needless time has to be spent waiting for you or searching for you when it is time to move on.
- When traveling in vans offer to change your seat location frequently and avoid always sitting up front. If you are seated in the front of a van, it is your responsibility to try to help those seated inside the van with the sliding door behind you; specifically, try to *open and close* that door for the convenience of others since it is often difficult for them to do so from inside the vehicle.
- If the vehicle you are traveling in is cramped for space, try to avoid leaving things on the seats or near doorways where they will inconvenience other travelers. Place objects you're not using under your seat or in the rear of the vehicle whenever possible.
- If you're uncertain about what to wear in the field, double check with the leader about the desired footwear or clothing for the day before you depart so you're not caught short once your underway.

These guidelines may help you and the rest of your group have a great trip!