

Stanley Tate's column in the Times-Georgian, May 1, 2016.

## Take A Walk With Birds

Do you like birds?

Dumb question, of course you like birds. Most people do. You like to watch them because they are entertaining, because they brighten the world around them with their color, because they complement nature with their songs. That said, why have you never gone on an organized bird walk?

A bird walk is a field trip sponsored by a bird-oriented organization and led by an experienced birder. Millions of people have taken this step and it has opened a window to the natural world for them.

But wait, you say—the birds that you really love are the birds in your yard. They are like family. You know them and they know you. They don't hide when you approach like other birds do. They don't live in buggy places. You don't have to go out of your way to see them because they share your corner of the world.

All these things are so, but let me ask you another question. Do you like to eat?

Sure you do. And while there is nothing better than a good home cooked meal, I'll bet you enjoy eating out now and again—going to restaurants that specialize in food that appeals to your more exotic tastes or that feature dishes that are too much trouble to make at home.

Going on a bird walk is a little like going out to dinner. It doesn't replace your kitchen; it just adds another pleasurable dimension to your dining experience. Don't be afraid if you have never been on an organized walk before. Going on a bird walk isn't like appearing on *Dancing With The Stars*. All you have to do is walk along with a group of nice people and let someone else lead. No one will care if you don't show up wearing the hottest new binoculars or carrying a spotting scope that has all the features of the Hubble Telescope. It probably won't matter if you don't have binoculars. Most field trip leaders bring an extra pair or two just in case.

But there are a few Dos and Don'ts you should know before you go. Do ask questions. Do honestly evaluate whether you are physically up to a particular trip

or a portion of it. Do tell the leader if there is a particular bird you would like to see. Do know when to be quiet. Do stay with the leader. Don't try to get closer to a bird than everyone else—odds are you will make it fly and aggravate the others on the walk. Don't monopolize the leader. Don't drag significant others along unless they are really eager.

Now go do it. Check the Carroll Daybook column in this paper to find a local walk—McIntosh Reserve, Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup> 9:00 am. Go to the Atlanta Audubon Society website, [www.atlantaaudubon.org](http://www.atlantaaudubon.org), the Georgia Ornithological Society website, [www.gos.org](http://www.gos.org), and Birding Adventures, Inc., [www.birdingadventureinc.com](http://www.birdingadventureinc.com), for field trips in the Atlanta area. Your window on the natural world doesn't close at the property line or the county line. Look through it and get to know a whole new group of birds—probably friends of the birds you call family. It will open your eyes to new ways of seeing and appreciating birds. It will put you in contact with people who share your interest and put your feet on a road to wonder and discovery. And I've saved the best for last. Most bird walks are free. Search where you will, you'll never find a better deal than free.