

## Birding Binocular Guide

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There are several factors and characteristics of binoculars that must be considered when you're choosing a pair for birding.

- **Cost:** The price of the binoculars is what most birders first consider when choosing a new pair of optics, and prices can range from \$20 to \$2,000 or higher. In general, the higher the price the better the quality of the binoculars and experienced birders have learned that a more expensive pair is a worthwhile investment. Good quality, durable birding binoculars can easily be found in the \$150-400 price range.
- **Magnification:** The magnification factor of the binoculars will determine how much larger they make distant objects appear. Every pair of binoculars is labeled with a pair of numbers, such as 7x20, 8x32 or 10x40. The first number is the degree of magnification. Binoculars in the 8-10 range are best for birding, though bear in mind that the higher the magnification, the more steady your hands must be to hold them still enough for careful observation.
- **Lens Width:** The second number of a binoculars' rating is the measurement, in millimeters, of the front lens of the binoculars and determines the amount of light admitted into the viewing area. The higher the number, the brighter the image will appear. This is especially important if you plan on birding in shaded areas or at dawn or dusk when there are more birds to see but less light to do it with.
- **Image Quality:** If you don't see a good image with your binoculars, you won't be able to identify the birds. When trying different optics, check for focus quality at the edge of the viewing field, the depth and frequency of focusing, whether or not the binoculars have a dual focus option to adjust to your eyes and how natural the image color is that you see.
- **Size:** The physical size of the binoculars should always be considered before you purchase them. They should be comfortable to hold securely, and you should be able to easily reach the focus wheel without moving more than a finger. Also note their weight: very heavy optics can be impractical for lengthy birding trips unless a neck strap or harness is used.
- **Construction:** The actual construction features of binoculars can make them more suitable for birding. Waterproof options are great for birders who enjoy waterfowl, shorebirds or simply live in moisture-prone or humid climates. Armored binoculars have a rubber coating to protect against minor chips, nicks, dents and scrapes that may occur in the field.

