

SUZANNAH YU



What got you into birding?

I have always been enchanted by the natural world, including the animals that played in my backyard. When I was younger, I had one of those little bird ID guides you could identify based on the general color of the bird—I loved how it made the vast world of birds feel accessible. One of my earliest birding delights was realizing that not all the little brown birds were chickadees—the first non-chickadee I discovered were Bushtits, tiny balls of fluff with stubby bills that looked like they came straight out of a storybook. That sense of discovery lit a spark. I brought my bird guide everywhere, sketching birds in art class and wandering around my garden curious to see who I could discover next. Birding taught me to pause and to notice who is thriving and sharing this world with me—and that lesson continues to guide how I move through life today.

SUZANNAH YU

What can people expect from a bird outing with you?

I care deeply about creating a space where all participants feel included and welcomed as they are, with an atmosphere of openness and curiosity. Whether someone is new to birding or a seasoned observer, every presence matters. I strive to meet access needs, reduce barriers to participation, and hold space for the varied experiences people bring. I invite questions, and encourage us to share our knowledge with each other, or to linger with wonder. We move at a pace that invites connection—with the birds, with the land, and with each other. My hope is that everyone leaves knowing a bit more about birds, and feeling more grounded, joyful, and a deeper sense of meaning.

What values do you lead with?

Kindness, curiosity, and empathy are at the heart of how I lead. I believe in creating experiences that are rooted in care—where people feel safe to be themselves, to ask questions, and to share in the joy of discovery. I strive to continually reflect, listen, and grow alongside the communities I support.

How did you acquire your knowledge? Are you self-taught, trained in a school, had a mentor?

Birding for me is a constant state of curiosity—there is always more to notice, to wonder about, and to learn. My earliest bird knowledge came from watching the backyard birds and my color coded guidebook. In classes, I dove deeper into ecology and ornithology courses. Much of my learning has come from birding alongside others: asking questions, sharing stories, and listening closely. I have also gained knowledge through classes and community leaders here at Birds Connect. Of course, I also learn from birds. Every bird walk, every moment of noticing and wondering, is an invitation to learn more. I love that there is always something to discover waiting outside the door

SUZANNAH YU

What is your personal approach/mindset toward birding?

To me, every bird is an individual, and each encounter is a new conversation. I approach birding with gratitude, play, and mindfulness. It is a practice of moving with intention, and being fully present with all my senses in the moment. Birding provides a deeper connection with the Earth and reminds me of my belonging to the natural world. It invites me to look closely, to listen deeply, and to return to wonder over and over again.

How do you personally see the intersectionality of birding and creating safe spaces for folks who have often been left out of the conversation before (BIPOC, neurodivergent, queer folks)?

Birding, for me, is both grounding and expansive—it is a practice where I remember that I belong in nature. I see birding as a powerful exploration for creating safe and affirming spaces, because I know what it feels like to seek rest, joy, and connection in outdoor spaces that have not always supported historically underrepresented communities. When I lead bird walks, I center curiosity and care—because I believe in cultivating spaces where people feel welcomed, seen and celebrated. It is not about knowing all the birds; it is about showing up as our full selves, sharing moments of joy and wonder. Whether we are pausing to admire the flash of red on the Ruby-crowned kinglet, or standing in quiet awe of a Great blue heron—composed, and fully present—we're creating something beautiful: a community rooted in belonging, where people of all backgrounds have space to breathe, expand, and be present.

Do you have an area of expertise or focus that you prefer?

I am particularly fascinated by bird behavior—how birds communicate, adapt, and shape the ecosystems they inhabit. I am also drawn to birding as a mindfulness practice. For me, being with birds is a way to return to the present, to step outside of the mental chatter and into a relationship with the world around me. Birds are such generous teachers if we let them be, and I am here to learn.

SUZANNAH YU

WHAT WAS THE BEST ADVICE YOU GOT WHEN STARTING OUT AS A BIRDER?

Enjoy the process! When I was younger, my mom and I would give birds our own names, based on their colors, songs, or unique behavior. There was no rush to learn the “official” names—it was about play, attention, and connection. I think that spirit is something we can all carry. Birding does not have to be about checklists, rote memorization, or expertise. It is more like reading a beautiful book for the first time. Why rush to finish when you can linger in the discovery? The moments of delight and wonder are everywhere, and I would encourage birders to savor the process. So my advice? Be curious, take your time, and let them delight you.

What is your favorite ecosystem to bird in?

The wonder of birding is that it can happen anywhere—along a mountain trail, a local park, or from a high-rise window in the heart of the city (shoutout to the gull who visited me on my office’s ledge). In particular, wetlands have a special place in my heart. There is something magical about the layered soundscapes and the way the landscape holds both stillness and surprise. I have also been delighted by the occasional beaver and family of river otters meandering on by. I am grateful to watch Short-eared owls at Samish Flats. Witnessing them glide low over the fields during daylight hours certainly incites joy—and the accessibility of the experience makes it all the more perfect to share.

Dare I ask, what your favorite bird is?!

I am delighted by and resonate with hummingbirds. Their energy is vibrant and bold, and they understand how to rest fully and completely in their state of torpor. That balance of resilience and restfulness has been an inspiration and guide for me. They remind me to move with purpose, to savor beauty, and to fiercely protect what brings us joy.

