



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

High-tech gift ideas for birders -- Aerial View

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Birding used to be so simple: Study your field guide, strap your binoculars around your neck, go look for birds.

These days, you're more likely to encounter birders on the trail carrying digital cameras, iPods and Palm Pilots along with the usual expensive array of optics.

As the ranks of birders in the United States continue to grow -- topping an estimated 46 million -- so has the money spent on binoculars, cameras, books and travel. The American Birding Association, which counts 18,000 members, places the annual amount spent on birding equipment in the U.S. at \$6 billion. Add in travel and the total more than doubles.

This year, there is a fresh wave of new high-tech birding gear and just-published literature for holiday gift-buyers.

Here are some of the latest offerings:

Wingscapes BirdCam

The hottest new offering on the birding optics market, this weatherproof, motion-activated 3.1 megapixel camera captures birds at feeders or on nests. Images and videos can be observed on television or downloaded onto a computer. More information at www.wingscapes.com.

Available at Wild Birds Unlimited, Wild Bird Centers, and the EarthWords Nature Shop at the Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks.

List price: \$249.

Handheld Birds

National Geographic's newest PDA offers a field guide, songs and calls for 867 North American species. Store your bird-sighting data and download it onto your home computer.

Available at the EarthWords Nature Shop, Wild Birds Unlimited, or online at www.shopnationalgeographic.com.

List price: \$399.95; on sale at EarthWords for \$374.46; card only: \$99.95.

BirdJam

Attracting birds by playing their songs has never been easier. The iPod-based bird song software allows the birder to dial up selected species in seconds.

Available online at www.birdjam.com catalog or at Time & Optics, Millersburg, Ohio, 330-674-0210.

Price: \$374.99 for preloaded iPod; \$99 for bird song CDs; \$59 for software only.

"Birding Essentials"

Rookies and grizzled veterans alike can learn something from this latest offering by National Geographic, containing "all the tools, techniques and tips you need to begin and become a better birder." It's co-written by former Ohioan Jon L. Dunn.

Available at most bookstores or online at www.shopnationalgeographic.com.

List price: \$15.95.

Buzz Off Insect Shield gear

Birders can repel mosquitoes, ticks, flies and chiggers with clothing protected by Buzz Off insect shield, seen at www.buzzoff.com. The invisible and odorless repellent is available in gear sold by L.L. Bean, Orvis, Ariat and ExOfficio.

Prices vary.

Bird songs

If you've never heard a three-wattled bellbird you're in for a treat when you listen to "Bird Songs From Around the World" from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Price: \$29.70 at Amazon.com.

"50 Places to Go Birding Before You Die"

Author Chris Santella interviews some of North America's leading birders about their favorite places on earth, including one in our own back yard: the Lake Erie shoreline.

List price: \$24.95.

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