

BRIEF HISTORY OF FIELD GUIDES

Invented over time.

~300 BC **Aristotle** *History of Animals*. Referred to about 140 species of birds.

~80 AD **Pliny the Elder** *Natural History* became a model for later encyclopedias

1731 **Mark Catesby** *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*. It included 220 plates of birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, insects, mammals and plants.

1827 to 1838 – **John James Audubon** *Birds of America*, cumbersome, not a field book.

1828 *American Ornithology* – **Alexander Wilson** (published 15 years after his death)

1832 *Manual of the Ornithology of the United States and Canada* – **Thomas Nuttall**. Based on the work of **Wilson** (not always attributed). Included one of the first sets of field marks for the field birder. Though large, it was small enough to carry into the field. In print and in use into the early 20th century.

1840 *History of North American Birds* – **Spencer Fullerton Baird, Thomas Brewer, Robert Ridgeway**. Colored illustrations of the heads of many birds.

1872 – **Elliot Coues** *Key to North American Birds*, cumbersome, not a field book. Did much to advance ornithology. “Each key let the reader to another key, moving down the taxonomic ladder at last to the subspecies level, with ever finer gradations of size, shape and plumage”. (Scott Weidensaul *Of a Feather*.)

1889 – **Florence Merriam Bailey** – *Birds Through an Opera-Glass*, describing 70 common species. Chatty, informal and funny it focused on living birds observed in the field. Considered the first in the tradition of modern, illustrated bird guides.

1895 – *Handbook of Birds of Eastern North America*, **Frank Chapman**. Still used the “key” concept, but arranged them with an eye to color. First to use song transliterations still in use today.

1898 – **Florence Merriam Bailey** – *Birds of Village and Field*,

1902 – **Florence Merriam Bailey**– *Handbook of Birds of the Western United States Including the Great Plains, the Great Basin, Pacific Slope and Lower Rio Grande Valley*. More scientific in outlook. A comprehensive reference for the lab rather a portable book for the field. It was arranged by taxonomic order and had clear descriptions of species size, distribution, feeding, and nesting habits.

1903 – **Frank Chapman & Chester Reed** (illustrator) – *Colour Key to North American Birds*. Contained a paragraph on each bird. Art was weak.

1904 **Ralph Hoffmann** – *A Guide to the Birds of New England and Eastern New York: Containing A Key For Each Season And Short Descriptions Of Over 250 Species, With Particular Reference to Their Appearance in the Field*. A proto-field guide. Focused on field marks, behavior, habitat, call notes and songs for ID in the field but still used “keys”.

1906 – The Chester Reed Guide to the Land Birds East of the *Rockies*. **Chester Reed**. Perhaps first pocket size Guide. Also wrote other guides on various subjects. “For home or school” the words “bird guide” used. A sensation.

1927 – *Birds of the Pacific States*. **Ralph Hoffman & Allan Broos** (illustrations). Described birds as if you were in the field looking at them.

1934 – **Roger Tory Peterson** – *A Field Guide to the Birds*. Set the standard for many years. Using his fine skill as an artist, changed the way modern field guides approached identification. Using color plates with paintings of similar species together – and marked with arrows showing the differences – people could use his bird guide in the field to compare species quickly to make identification easier. The "Peterson Identification System", was used in most of Peterson's Field Guides from animal tracks to seashells and has been widely adopted by other publishers and authors.

1946 – *Audubon Bird Guide*, **Richard Pough**.

1960 – Peterson’s Field Guide to the Birds of Texas, **Roger Tory Peterson**.

1966 – *The Golden Guide: Birds of North America*. **Chandler S. Robbins, Bertel Bruun, Herbert S. Zim, Arthur Singer** (illustrator). Included spectrograms.

1977 – National Audubon Society Field Guide. Introduced color photos.

1980 – **Peterson’s** 4th edition of *Field Guide to the Birds*. Generated much discussion, admiration and signaled the beginning of a new era of revision, discovery and additional understanding. The most successful natural history work ever published and one of the most popular books of all time.

1983 – First edition of *National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, **Jonathan Alderfer; Jon L. Dunn**. Included rarities, exotics, subspecies. Had some poor illustrations.

1983– *Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding*, **John Farrand** (Editor)

2000 – *The Sibley Guide* **David A. Sibley**. Hailed by Birding Magazine with “I stand in awe”, “I have nothing but praise”, and “distills a century worth of knowledge”.

2005 – *Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America*, **Kenn Kaufman**.

2010 – *The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. **Donald W Stokes**

2011 – *The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*, **Richard Crossley**. Innovative arrangements of many photos.

Specialized Guides

Many specialized field guides are available. Examples include:

- The Warbler Guide
- Sparrows of the US and Canada
- Hawks in Flight

- Hawks from Every Angle
- The Shorebird Guide
- Peterson Reference Guide to Gulls of the Americas
- Petrels, Albatrosses, and Storm-Petrels of North America
- Rare Birds of North America

Apps for Bird ID

- Audubon Birds Guide: North America
- The Sibley eGuide to Birds
- iBird
- National Geographic Birds
- Peterson Birds
- Merlin

Apps for Finding Birds and Recording Observations

- BirdLog connected to eBird
- BirdsEye

Apps for Learning Bird Calls & Songs

- Larkwire
- Chirp! Bird Song USA
- Merlin