

FeatherQuest

Welcome to FeatherQuest

FeatherQuest is an interactive real-world game that encourages you to explore nature and enjoy the beauty of the outdoors. This edition focuses on Utah, home to 300+ regularly occurring bird species. An additional 150 species appear only occasionally or by accident. To add to the adventure, we classify these 150 species as *legendary* and *mythical* birds—all of which count as bonus points in scoring.

While FeatherQuest is based on scientific accuracy, we've also taken creative liberties to enhance the gaming/quest experience (for example, the Wood Duck may have inspired Darth Vader's helmet!).

How to use this book

This book is designed for active participation—grab a pen or pencil and document your birding adventure! Many areas throughout the book encourage you to write directly in the pages, track your progress, and record your discoveries.

QR codes throughout the book provide additional information. Scan them to dive deeper into up-to-date bonus content!

The heart of the book is the weekly bird family challenges, where you'll find:

- Bird Badge photos to help identify the birds
- Some fun facts and useful information about the family
- FeatherFound marker to track sightings
- Bird family checklist covering common, uncommon, and rare birds,
- Quest log for your weekly notes and experiences.

In the back, you'll find tips and tools on binoculars, cameras, apps, field guides, plants, feeders, and Utah's diverse habitats. The book wraps up with a complete bird checklist, helping you identify the best habitat and season to find each species.

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For inquiries, scan the qr code or contact:
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Chickadees & Titmice

Week 1



Fun Facts

The Black-capped Chickadee is a friendly bird often spotted at backyard feeders. The Mountain Chickadee is similar but has a black eyebrow and a raspier voice. They are typically found in the mountains but may also venture into the valley during the winter. Our sole titmouse, the Juniper Titmouse, is less predictable and a real treat when it crosses your path. Pay attention to what you hear, as these birds have fairly recognizable calls and songs.

FeatherQuest



- 1. Black-capped Chickadee
- 2. Mountain Chickadee
- 3. Juniper Titmouse



Quest Log



Jan 1 - Jan 7

Dabbling Ducks

Week 14



Fun Facts

Utah has a wide variety of dabbling ducks, and the males of these species really stand out with their bright colors. Unlike diving ducks, dabblers never go fully underwater. Instead, they tip forward to reach food below the surface or forage on land, helped by legs positioned closer to the center of their bodies. The Northern Shoveler really stands out with its oversized spatula-shaped bill, while the Northern Pintail has a long "pin" for a tail. Some say the Wood Duck may have even inspired Darth Vader's helmet design!

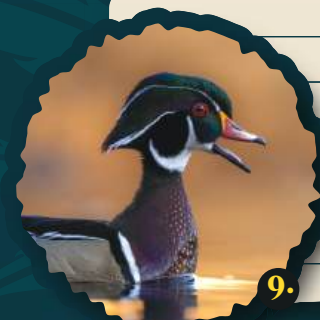
Feather Quest



- ☐ 1. Mallard
- ☐ 2. Gadwall
- ☐ 3. American Wigeon
- ☐ 4. Northern Shoveler
- ☐ 5. Northern Pintail
- ☐ 6. Green-winged Teal
- ☐ 7. Cinnamon Teal
- ☐ 8. Blue-winged Teal
- ☐ 9. Wood Duck



Quest Log



Apr 2 - Apr 8

Hummingbirds

Week 32



Fun Facts

With their beautiful iridescent colors shimmering in the sun, their speed and agility, and their ability to hover midair, hummingbirds are among the most mesmerizing birds one can encounter. Each year, these tiny birds visit our gardens, pollinating flowers and adding bursts of color to backyards everywhere. Hummingbirds' wings can beat between 50-80 times per second. If you listen closely, you might hear the Broad-tailed Hummingbird zipping around, its high-speed wing trills sounding like a tiny homing missile.

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- 1. Black-chinned Hummingbird
- 2. Broad-tailed Hummingbird
- 3. Rufous Hummingbird
- 4. Calliope Hummingbird
- 5. Costa's Hummingbird
- 6. Anna's Hummingbird



Did you know?

Hummingbirds must consume up to twice their body weight in nectar daily to fuel their rapid metabolism.

Quest Log



Aug 6 - Aug 12

Grosbeaks

Week 35



Fun Facts

Utah's Grosbeaks make up a colorful trio. You may recall that the Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, despite their name, are actually finches from Week 12! The Black-headed Grosbeak is common throughout Utah, using its powerful bill to crush sunflower seeds in many backyards. The Blue Grosbeak primarily stays in the south, though a nesting group has been found in Utah County. The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is rare in Utah but occasionally passes through during migration. Females tend to be more brown and streaked for camouflage.

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- 1. Black-headed Grosbeak
- 2. Blue Grosbeak
- 3. Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Quest Log



Aug 27 - Sep 2

Binoculars

Spot, Focus, Discover—Your Essential Birding Tool

Your Most Essential Birding Tool

Binoculars are the most important tool for birding. While you don't need the most expensive pair, cheap binoculars often have poor clarity, making birds harder to spot. Investing in quality glass helps you track movement and truly enjoy the experience.



If you've ever struggled to find a bird, you're not alone! The trick is to **lock eyes on your target, keep your head still, and raise your binoculars to your face**. Mastering this simple motion makes relocating moving birds much easier.



Understanding Binoculars

Binoculars have two key numbers, like 8×42 or 10×50. The first is magnification—how much closer the image appears. The second is objective lens size, which controls how much light enters. More light improves clarity, especially in low-light conditions.

But **bigger isn't always better**—higher magnification reduces field of view, making fast-moving birds harder to track. For most birders, 8×42 offers the best balance, while 10×42 or 10×50 are better for distant birds (but harder to keep steady).

Choosing the Right Binoculars

The best way to choose binoculars is to test them in person at an outdoor retailer. Look for:

- ✓ Comfort & Weight – Can you hold them for long periods?
- ✓ Ease of Focus – Can you quickly bring objects into focus?
- ✓ Close Focus – Can you see fine details on nearby birds?
- ✓ Eye Relief & Eyecups – Twist-up eyecups, especially for glasses wearers.
- ✓ Diopter Adjustment – Ensures crisp focus for each eye.
- ✓ Field of View (FOV) – Wider FOV helps see more and track moving birds.
- ✓ Lens Coatings – Fully multi-coated lenses improve clarity and brightness.

Consider a harness or padded strap for comfort on long outings. If you prefer high magnification, image-stabilized (IS) binoculars help counteract hand movement.

Scan the QR code for recommended binoculars and more tips!



Cameras

Freeze the Moment—Mastering Cameras for Birding

Capturing the Moment

Birding is all about experiencing nature, but sometimes you want to preserve those moments—to share with others, document sightings, or identify tricky species later. While phone cameras are great for people and landscapes, they fall short for bird photography.



From budget-friendly point-and-shoots to high-end DSLR or mirrorless setups, the key features for bird photography are **optical zoom and a wide aperture** (low f-number). Together, they allow you to capture birds in stunning detail, even at a distance and in low light.

Understanding Your Camera

Mastering these key settings will elevate your bird photography:

- **ISO** - Controls light sensitivity. Higher ISO helps in low-light but increases noise.
- **Aperture (F-stop)** - Controls light intake and background blur (bokeh). Lower f-stop = more light and blur.
- **Shutter Speed** - Faster speeds (1/2000s+) freeze birds in flight; slower speeds create motion blur.
- **AV Mode** - Great for most bird photography. You set the aperture, and the camera adjusts ISO & shutter speed.
- **TV Mode** - Best for fast action. You set shutter speed; the camera adjusts the rest.



A fantastic learning resource is *The Bird Photography Show* by Glenn Bartley & Jan Wegener, covering camera reviews, low-light tips, and post-processing.

Organizing & Enhancing Your Bird Photos

This workflow will help you manage, edit, and organize your bird photos like a pro:

- Shoot in CRAW – Saves storage while keeping post-processing flexibility.
- Delete the bad ones – Avoid clutter of unusable shots & duplicates.
- DxO PureRAW – Cleans up noisy high-ISO images.
- Topaz DeNoise AI – Great for sharpening and noise reduction.
- Adobe Lightroom – A powerful tool for correcting and adjusting lighting
- Export as JPGs – Quality level 9 balances size and quality.
- Cloud storage – Use iPhoto/Google Photos albums to keep photos safe.
- Crop your photos – Use the rule of thirds and be sure to leave breathing room.
- Tag your photos – Use captions to label species for easy searching.
- Geotag your images – GPS tagging makes recall & organization easier.

Scan the QR code for camera recommendations and more tips!



Utah Habitats

Exploring Utah's Diverse Landscapes

Utah is a land of remarkable diversity. From sun-soaked deserts to alpine forests and marshy wetlands, each habitat offers a unique environment where birds thrive. But habitats aren't always as straightforward as they seem. Many places contain overlapping habitats, and small microhabitats attract surprising species. Utah's rapid landscape transitions and birds' adaptability mean you can encounter unexpected sightings everywhere!

Explore Utah's iconic bird habitats, featuring:

- What makes each habitat unique
- Key bird families to spot
- Visual highlights of each habitat
- Key spots to explore



Wetland/Marsh

Reeds, cattails, reflective water channels, open marshes
Look for: Herons, pelicans, avocets, and ducks



Uinta Mountains

Key Locations: Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Farmington Bay WMA, Antelope Island Causeway, Fish Springs, Ogden Bay WMA

Forest/Woodland

Dense forest canopy, aspen groves, conifer stands
Look for: Warblers, owls, woodpeckers, and nuthatches



Lake Creek, Wasatch County

Key Locations: Tony Grove Lake, Mirror Lake Highway, Alpine Loop, Fishlake National Forest, Millcreek Canyon

Grassland/Prairie

Open grassy fields, rolling prairie with minimal trees
Look for: Meadowlarks, sparrows, falcons, and harriers



Spanish Fork River Bottoms

Key Locations: Antelope Island, Deseret Ranch, Nine Mile Canyon, Parker Mountain, Skull Valley

Quest Scoring



FeatherQuest Scoring

Level up your birding adventure by completing quests and discovering new birds! Each challenge earns points—fill in the score chart below to track your journey and rise through the ranks.

Each grid box = 5 points.

Reach **1000 points** to become a *Champion* birder, with bonus levels like *Master*, *Grand Master*, and *Legend* waiting for those who go even further.

Ready to begin? Let's get this Quest started!

To track 1-4 point increments use the marking system shown below.



0-99

Nestling

0				
25				
50				
75				

100-199

Fledgling

100				
125				
150				
175				

200-299

Watcher

200				
225				
250				
275				

300-399

Explorer

300				
325				
350				
375				

400-699

Tracker

400				425				450				475			
500				525				550				575			
600				625				650				675			

700-999

Hunter

700					725					750					775				
800					825					850					875				
900					925					950					975				



Champion



♦ Bonus Levels – for the Ultimate Birding Masters! ♦

1000-1499



1,000					1,025					1,050					1,075				
1,100					1,125					1,150					1,175				
1,200					1,225					1,250					1,275				
1,300					1,325					1,350					1,375				
1,400					1,425					1,450					1,475				

1500-1999



1,500					1,525					1,550					1,575				
1,600					1,625					1,650					1,675				
1,700					1,725					1,750					1,775				
1,800					1,825					1,850					1,875				
1,900					1,925					1,950					1,975				

2000-2499



2,000					2,025					2,050					2,075				
2,100					2,125					2,150					2,175				
2,200					2,225					2,250					2,275				
2,300					2,325					2,350					2,375				
2,400					2,425					2,450					2,475				

2500+



About the Author

Mike Marshall's journey into the world of birding.

A New Adventure Begins

In 2020, my wife Stacy and I moved with our 4 kids to a new home in Mapleton, Utah—surrounded by towering trees, open fields, and the winding waters of Hobbie Creek. A few years later, in March 2022, she casually said, "I've noticed we have a lot of birds here. We should find out what they are." That simple comment set me on an unexpected journey.

I downloaded the Merlin app, and she bought a field guide—Birds of Utah by Stan Tekiela—which I immediately claimed as my own. Though I had binoculars, tracking birds was difficult, so I turned to photography. After stumbling along with my wife's old Canon Rebel, I upgraded to a Canon R7 in mid-2022, and from that moment, my camera has gone everywhere with me.



From Pixels to Plumage

By day, I lead a team of software developers at Namify, a branding company that connects and unites people one brand at a time. Years of mentorship from my colleagues and friends, Bryan Welton and Chris Jensen, gave me the confidence to build a brand of my own—one that could unite birders in a shared quest. At the same time, birding has become my escape. After long hours in front of a screen, stepping outside with my camera provides a mental reset—trading pixels for plumage.

Being colorblind presents a challenge in birding, but it's also an advantage. It pushes me to rely on others, forging stronger connections in the birding community. I've also developed a sharp ear for birdsong and a keen ability to recognize subtle differences in shape and pattern—skills that have become invaluable in my birding.



The Birth of FeatherQuest

As 2025 began, I considered ways to share my bird photography with a wider audience. A calendar? Too common. A weekly flipbook? Close, but not quite right. Then, an idea clicked—gamifying birding with a structured challenge. Over a weekend, I categorized Utah's birds into 52 groups, laying the foundation for FeatherQuest.

With the help of graphic designer Morgan Bronson, the brand came to life. What started as a simple idea evolved into an immersive adventure that has brought together a growing community of birders, explorers, and storytellers. FeatherQuest wouldn't be what it is today without the early encouragement of friends, family, and fellow birders who embraced the challenge, and made it their own.



FeatherQuest Contributors

A special thanks to those who helped shape this adventure.

Arthur Steinberger

A dedicated birder and photographer, Arthur has spent 12 years capturing birds across the country. His 32 stunning images helped bring FeatherQuest to life, filling key gaps with species rare in Utah.

His daily submissions over two weeks felt like Christmas morning, each one expanding the book's visual depth. It all started with his striking Long-tailed Duck—the spark for an incredible collaboration.

Notable contributions: American Bittern, Bobolink, Glossy Ibis, Painted Redstart, Pine Grosbeak, Scott's Oriole, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Greater Scaup, Lapland Longspur, Semipalmated Plover, Long-tailed Duck, and more!



Jenner Bryson

A passionate birder with an eye for rare finds, Jenner played a key role in expanding FeatherQuest's species diversity. His 28 images—spanning warblers, swallows, and more—filled critical gaps in the book's collection, including his Vaux's Swift, one of the trickiest birds to capture in flight.

Years ago, when asked about publishing his own bird photography book, he replied, "Maybe someday. I still need a few more." We're honored to showcase his work.

Notable contributions: Baird's Sandpiper, Bell's Vireo, Red-breasted Sapsucker, Vaux's Swift, Townsend's Warbler, Sabine's Gull, Juniper Titmouse, Western Grebe, Western Wood-Pewee, Peregrine Falcon, Neotropic Cormorant, and more.



James Loveless

A dedicated birder and family man, James played a key role in helping FeatherQuest reach the finish line. With years of experience behind the lens, he contributed 26 stunning images, ensuring the book captured a complete range of species.

With a deep archive built over years of birding, James quickly dug in, selecting an incredible set of images that filled key gaps in the book.

Notable contributions: American Goshawk, Broad-winged Hawk, California Condor, Common Black-Hawk, Gunnison Sage-Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, White-tailed Ptarmigan, Zone-tailed Hawk, Least Flycatcher, and more.



What's Next

The Journey Continues – New Quests Await!

Future Books & Expansions

FeatherQuest doesn't end here—this is just the beginning! Whether you've reached Champion status or are pushing toward Legendary goals, there's always more to explore.

Utah may be where FeatherQuest began, but the adventure doesn't stop here. Our goal is to expand into new regions, diverse habitats, and even a nationwide edition—bringing birders across the U.S. together in an epic birding quest.

FeatherQuest Season Two will introduce new challenges, fresh photos, and even more ways to level up your birding adventure. Stay tuned—your next quest awaits!



The FeatherQuest Community

FeatherQuest is more than a book—it's a growing community of birders, adventurers, and nature lovers. Whether you're spotting your first species or chasing a legendary sighting, you're part of something bigger.



Not every photo in this book is perfect—and that's the beauty of birding! Capturing birds is a challenge.

FeatherQuest exists thanks to many contributors who made this adventure possible. Birding isn't about perfection—it's about lifelong discovery, patience, and love for the wild.

Join the Community

Connect with fellow birders, share sightings, and stay updated on all things FeatherQuest! Join discussions, celebrate milestones, and get the latest updates. Visit us at <https://thefeatherquest.com/social> or scan the QR code above!



Expanding the Adventure

FeatherQuest is always evolving! We're exploring ways to bring this adventure into the digital world, with potential online tracking, expanded challenges, and even a mobile app.

Whether it's through interactive tools, new features, or digital quests, we want to make tracking your birding journey even more exciting. The future of FeatherQuest depends on demand—if you'd love to see an app or online platform, let us know! Stay tuned for updates and be part of shaping what's next!