



Enjoying Nature with Your Phone Apps – the Birds and Flora

Merlin Bird ID



Starting by sharing a personal experience, our family recently traveled to New Zealand. During this trip, we visited many stunning lakes, mountains, volcanos, glaciers, and beaches, but the big surprise was ... the birds. And the main reason we enjoyed the birds so much is that we now use a phone app called Merlin Bird ID.

This app was created at Cornell University and allows you to identify bird sounds, even if you cannot see

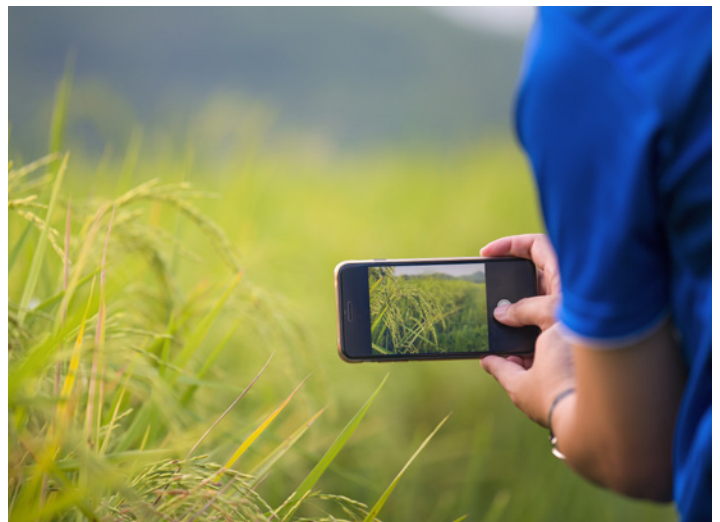
the birds. So, more often than not, most of us had this app on during our hikes and we would suddenly stop to hear a new bird call. The Tui was one of the first major birds we heard, but soon we were identifying many dozens of birds, as well as taking the time to find them hidden amongst the leaves and watch their behavior. It became a central topic of our trip – we were becoming real birders!

Back at home, we have been using this app on our back deck in the mornings for a few years, and it has thoroughly enriched our nature experience. Some mornings we can hear 4-6 bird species, and other mornings we can hear a dozen or more. As you probably know, our Town is filled with a plethora of bird songs! Not only that, but after living in our house for over 20 years, I have suddenly discovered a small magnolia tree next to our deck that produces little red fruits that attract many bird species for their meals. It's amazing what nature is doing right in front of our eyes (without our seeing it). We have also recently installed two hummingbird feeders which have attracted multiple hummingbirds that are quite territorial with each other.

It is truly amazing how this app has opened our eyes and ears to the nature that surrounds us. You should download the app and try it out for yourself!

iPhone Photo “Visual Lookup” feature for Plant ID

Another feature of the iPhone (not sure whether it is on other phones, but it probably is), is that when you take a photo of the bark of a tree or its leaves, you can hit the encircled info button at the bottom of the screen and the phone will tell you the type of flora you are looking at, whether it is native or invasive and other general information. It is so easy and allows one to get to know the names of the different trees in Rock Creek Park, Somerset, on any hike around the world that you might be on.



Keep Enjoying Nature!

Please let us know if you have any questions or sustainable ideas for the Town at tos.environmentcommittee@gmail.com.