

Nobody knows who the first birder was who observed: "I'd much rather bird in the rain than the wind"; but one thing is certain. The person was not an eyeglass wearer.

Eyeglass wearer or no, few would disagree that birding in a moderate to heavy rain is challenging, and that the greatest challenge is keeping your binocular lenses (ocular and objective) dry. Here are a few tips.

Step one: Buy waterproof binoculars. This should be obvious.

Step two: Buy binoculars with recessed objective lenses. Most instruments offer a quarter to a half an inch of overhanging barrel (more is better). At some point, some binocular manufacturer will come out with an instrument offering a sleeving "sun shield," similar to that on many spotting scopes, that can be extended during rainy conditions. But I've seen birders who fabricated their own removable sleeving rain shields using appropriately sized PVC pipe, cut along its length to permit both modest expansion of the pipe's diameter and a snug fit.

Any binocular R&D people reading this column? Looking for an edge to distinguish you from the competition? How about a one- to one-and-a-half-inch recessed objective?

Certainly ocular rain guards are very useful, and most work well. One word of caution: If your rain guard fits snugly when dry, when wet it can form a vacuum bond so powerful that quick removal can tear binocular eyecups off (I've even seen whole ocular lens assemblies ripped from the barrel).

Some people make their own rain guards out of a square of chamois cloth. Cut two slits in a small scrap spaced to match the distance between your binocular straps. Slip the straps through the cuts and drape the cloth over the lens. It's quick, cheap, and you never need to go find a cleaning cloth when you want to clean your ocular lenses.

Objective lens covers are, in my estimation, more troublesome than useful (I've been known to use a razor blade to cut the covers off of instruments so poorly conceived that they cannot be removed). On pelagic trips, in rough seas, I can see an argument for objective lens covers but, fair warning, they will almost certainly be obstructing your view at precisely the moment you need

to bring your binocular to bear quickly.

One thing I do is wear my binoculars bandolier fashion, so that objective lenses are protected by my overhanging arm. When raising them, quickly, I hold my free hand over the objective to keep rain droplets from collecting on the lens, and as soon as they are set to my eyes I bring that free hand forward and hold it over the objective lens, shielding it from blowing rain.

On occasions when I must bird all day in a pouring rain (there was, for instance, one unforgettable World Series of Birding that one participant likened to "birding in a car wash"), I always bring extra binoculars (that's right, not just a single spare). My arsenal includes two standard-sized instruments that alternate between my neck and the defroster on the dash, and one smaller, 32mm instrument that sits in a flap-guarded pocket on my rain jacket (the Leica 8x32 BN is a great size and fit, but so too is the Leupold 6x32 Katmai).

Sometimes, you just need a dry, unobscured glass NOW!

Hint, hint: Make sure that the focus wheel on your backup instrument adjusts for distance like your Alpha glass—i.e., that both focus down when the wheel is spun left or, in some models, right.

One last thought. Say you have only one binocular and say your lenses are heavily raindrop-spotted and say that there's a possible Smith's Longspur *heading away right now*.

Resist the temptation to wipe the lenses with a cloth or a shirt corner. It's time wasted. You'll probably do a sloppy job in your haste and only succeed in smearing the glass. Instead, just bring the binoculars to your eyes and look through and around the rain drops. You will have a drop-spattered image, but unless rain has pooled in the cups you'll also probably garner an acceptable, identifiable look—good enough to pin a name to a bird.

And isn't that the point?

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## Birding the Adirondacks

The Adirondack Regional Tourism Council and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology have developed a new website, [www.adkbirds.com](http://www.adkbirds.com), and a detailed map to help birders in the search for the wide variety of birds found in New York's Adirondack Park. The map and website provide information on 86 birding sites and more than 300 species, including boreal specialties such as Spruce Grouse and Bicknell's Thrush.

The printed map gives precise directions to each birding site, along with information about the species found there. The

interactive website lets visitors record their own observations, search by species or locality, and sign up for an e-mail alert detailing the sightings of others. Both the map and the website take advantage of the 14 Scenic Byways that crisscross the Park to lead birders to viewing opportunities in Important Bird Areas and roadside sites.

For more information about birding in the Adirondacks, or to order a free copy of the new birding map, visit [www.adkbirds.com](http://www.adkbirds.com).