

Product Review

BirdsEye Application for the Apple iPhone

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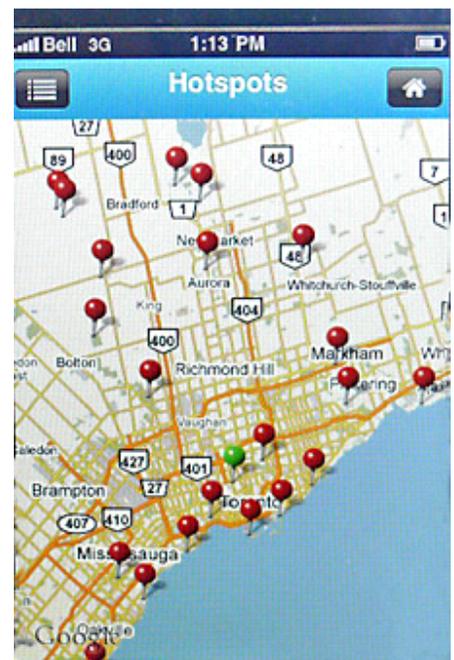
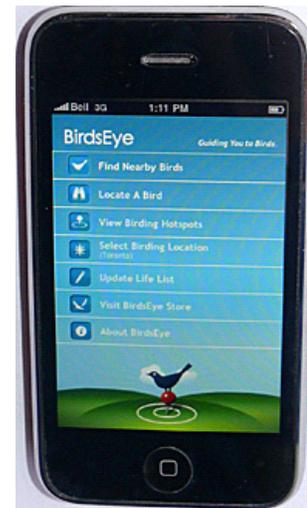
In mid November 2009 I traded in my six year old cell phone to get something more modern and selected the latest Apple iPhone 3GS. The features that attracted me are: email so you can get Ontbirds posts immediately, a connection to the Internet called Safari to check Bird-mail, a mobile phone, an iPod to listen to bird songs and calls, a GPS to find the location of a rare bird easily, a compass so as not to get lost in the woods, a camera and video to photograph that rarity, and an amazing capacity to download apps (Apple lingo for applications). All this by touching the screen.

Equipment: The iPhone comes in two models: Apple iPhone 3G starting at \$99.99 and Apple iPhone 3GS with 16 or 32 GB memory starting at \$199.99. The next step is to purchase a plan from your mobile phone provider and this may involve a three-year contract. Bell's cheapest combo plan is \$50 per month and includes a phone plan and 500 MG of data downloads. There are additional costs such as network access fees. Your choice of plan is a personal one based on needs and budget.

Apps: I quickly learned about apps. There are thousands of apps in the iTunes Apps Store online to tempt you. Many are free but the good ones cost money. Only the bird ones interest me, so with apprehension I easily downloaded my first app called BirdsEye.

What is BirdsEye? BirdsEye is a downloadable application for the Apple iPhone and iPod Touch and is the latest technology in birdfinding. It is the future of how and where to find birds. Released in early December 2009, *BirdsEye* is a cooperative venture of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The Academy of Natural Sciences, Kenn Kaufman and Apple. In this application the massive eBird database of over a million bird sightings per month is applied to everyday birdfinding on the iPhone and covers 847 species found in the United States and Canada. In the basic BirdsEye app, 470 common species are complete with Kenn Kaufman's succinct description of habitat, behaviour and tips how to find them, usually at least two excellent photos from Vireo (bird photo library at the Academy of Natural Sciences), a sound component from Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds that includes the song, call and/or wing flutter, and maps where the species were seen most recently. This basic application costs CAN\$19.99 plus tax from the iTunes Apps online store. The other 377 species are rarer and have to be downloaded separately for another CAN\$19.99 plus tax. You need both components because birders seek the rarer species.

BirdsEye the Bird Finder: BirdsEye is different from an identification field guide. Rather it is a bird location guide based on sightings inputted into eBird. How does BirdsEye Work? Decide where you want to bird, for example, Toronto. BirdsEye tells you what birds are being seen in the area, their location, when seen, and directions to get there. A map shows where the birding hotspots are. Everything is an easy touch format in colour on a large monitor with excellent resolution and quickly



rolling screens. The iPhone has a GPS so you can find your way.

You can search the list of birds already recorded in Toronto and find them on the hotspots map which shows the latest dates and locations. Birding hotspots such as High Park and Leslie Street Spit—Tommy Thompson Park have their own lists. However, these lists are only as good as the data entered, so for this to work more birders need to enter their sightings into eBird. Using the Harlequin Duck as an example, a map shows the latest sighting at Saddington Park and a gentle tap on the arrow gives directions how to get there. More information about the preferred habitat of Harlequin Ducks written by Kenn Kaufman will help you find your own Harlequins. A tap on the speaker gives its call for about 35 seconds.

Planning a Birding Trip: In mid January 2010 Eleanor Beagan and I will be going to Arizona, staying at Mesa in Phoenix and visiting Willcox, Sierra Vista and Madera Canyon. To plan the trip and find Arizona specialties, I selected the location Mesa in BirdsEye, then touched *Find Nearby Birds* to give bird sightings with the latest dates and locations. There are 332 species recorded in the area of which 143 are recent sightings within the last few weeks. We want to see Gambel's Quail. See top image where Kenn Kaufman describes the habitat. A tap on the photo produces a beautiful enlarged colour photo and a tap on the speaker gives its three different songs and calls. Another tap gives us the map on bottom right of the closest location where and when Gambel's Quail was last seen. By tapping the arrow on Neely Ranch the directions pop up. We are planning our itinerary around Arizona specialties such as Ferruginous Hawk, Gambel's Quail, Prairie Falcon, Curve-billed Thrasher, Phainopepla, Brewer's Sparrow, Cactus Wren, White-throated Swift and many more, so with the help of BirdsEye we hope to find our target birds.

Quirks: There are a few quirks because the product is new, but the support staff are an email away. At time of writing, only sightings entered into eBird's existing public hotspots are used by BirdsEye, so bird sightings on private property and those in public areas not yet marked as an existing hotspot are not accessible. It is possible to recommend public areas as birding hotspots, and I have asked eBird to add Brookbanks Ravine as a Toronto area hotspot. The BirdsEye team plans an update early in 2010.

Links: eBird: <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>

Cornell Lab for Ornithology: <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/>

