



The Best Gift I Ever Received . . . Binoculars

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When I look back upon all the gifts I was given, one stands treetops and galaxies above the rest. It wasn't a first baseman's glove. It wasn't the Gilbert Chemistry set. It wasn't even the cherry red bicycle with the banana peeler seat.

It was the 7x35 binoculars that brought supernatural intimacy with the natural world and made the stars in the winter night sky come alive.

I've been the happy owner of many binoculars since, but none that were so catalytic; so life changing.

What was it about this gift that trumped the rest?

Well first they weren't a toy. Binoculars are a real, grown up present. Expensive and important. When you are young, there is nothing quite so important as being grown up and nothing that gets you there faster than something important that you have been entrusted with.

Second, because binoculars cut right through our ho hum, every-

day expectations and make the world come alive—bringing supernatural intimacy with birds and butterflies, flowers and the very tips of the very tallest trees.

Have you ever watched a honeybee gathering pollen from a distance nullified range of five inches? There are binoculars out there that focus close enough to give users this kind of intimacy.

Have you ever brought binoculars to bear on a bird at your feeder? It makes chickadees winsome. It makes cardinals so vivid the image is seared in your mind. And stars! Train binoculars on the milky way and you'll find a universe seeded with a million suns and infinite possibility. Train them on the moon and you're as good as walking there.

But I'm guilty of hyperbole. I've over stated to facts.

First, the expense matter.

With China's entry into the optics market, binocular prices have fallen. Now, for around \$100, you can buy binoculars that offer an image as good as a \$500 instrument did fifty years ago. Second, roof prism binoculars (in particular) are plenty rugged enough to take a measure of abuse.

Roof prism? It's just a design type. Has to do with the arrangement of prisms inside the barrels. But you don't have to be an optical engineer in order to purchase good, serviceable binoculars. All you need to know is that there are certain specifications that the glass you buy should offer.

Take my advice to heart and you are almost certain to find a binocular that is both serviceable and durable.

1 Expect to pay a minimum of \$100. That is about threshold for a quality instrument.

2 Buy a 7x (seven power) or 8x glass. Resist the temptation to buy a higher magnification. It isn't necessary.

It makes binoculars less versatile, less user friendly.

3 Never, ever buy a "zoom" binocular; one that allows you to change the magnification from low to higher. It's a gimmick. The objective lens (the big lens you point toward the object you want to study) should be 30 to 45 millimeters. The diameter of this lens is stamped right on the binocular. It's the second number in the formula 8x30 or 7 x 42.

4 The field of view (the piece of the world you see through a stationary binocular) should be no less than 300 feet at 1,000 yards or 6 degrees of arc.



For a complete list of programs and walks visit www.BirdCapeMay.org or stop by and pick up our "Kestrel Express".

Cape May Bird Observatory, Northwood Center:

701 East Lake Drive, Cape May Point 609.884.2736

Open every day 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

5 Buy a binocular that has a focus wheel (not a lever; not a no-focus or insta-focus instrument).

6 Do not buy instruments that have amber or ruby coated lenses. They turn the world a ghastly green.

7 Buy binoculars that focus down to at least eight feet (5 or 6 feet if you want to study butterflies).

8 For \$100 you should be able to find binoculars that are waterproof. Come with adjustable eyecups that can be raised (if you do not use eye glasses) or lowered if you are an eyeglass wearer. Come with a neck strap and case.

9 If you want to learn more tips about binocular buying go online to featheredgeoptics.org If you want expert advice, or want to test different makes and models, please visit one of our two stores in Cape May Court House or Cape May Point or call: 609-861-0700 or 609-884-2736.

Binoculars . . .
A grown up gift that has the power to shift the axis upon which human lives turn. They're pretty handy at concerts and football games, too.

