

I Didn't Think Birding Was for Me. Now It's My Favorite Self-Care Hobby.

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That's a big part of what I like so much about birding: It's a way to pay attention. [Practicing mindfulness](#) and being present in the moment can be rather difficult, and doing it when you're out in the world can be especially hard because there are so many distractions. But birding is a way of leaning into the distractions and making them the main event. Instead of fighting the urge to look up every time you hear a sound high in the trees—or, alternatively, tuning out the chirps entirely—following your curiosities is the whole point when you're birding. (In "Terns," Mary Oliver writes that watching birds on the water means "you find, for hours, you cannot even remember the questions that weigh so in your mind," a sentiment that is very much in line with my experience.)

Birding is an accessible way to invoke awe, an emotion that can improve your mental and physical health. According to a review [of research](#) published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* in August 2022, awe—a distinct feeling of wonder, veneration, and relative smallness that is inspired by something sacred or sublime—can increase levels of oxytocin (a "feel-good" hormone), lower stress, and help people think outside of themselves, leading to greater social connection, cooperation, sharing, and altruism.

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