

The New Earlham Birding Shirts



There is nothing quite like the discovery that occurs through Ornithology at Earlham. Experiencing one's first fall-out of migrating spring warblers is unforgettable. A new world opens, one that is unexpectedly diverse, close-by, and fascinating.

For some, ornithology is a gateway to life-long careers in field biology. For others, it creates a lasting relationship with the seasons and the outdoors, always looking for new places to find birds.

Earlham's commitment to ornithology is remarkably deep and long-lasting. Many living Earlhamites have known or met three generations of the college's outstanding ornithologists and teachers—Jim Cope, Bill Buskirk, and Wendy Tori. And, of course, the legacy goes much further back, to the 19th century and Joseph Moore – witness the specimens in the Joseph Moore Museum!

But Earlham ornithology has never been limited to campus. Students and alumni have always traversed the Whitewater valley, the Midwest, and the globe to study and enjoy the birds of the world. The birds on this shirt illustrate some of the diversity of that journey.

Thank you for buying a shirt. Ten dollars of the cost of every shirt goes to the Earlham Fund in the name of Earlham Birding Big Day. Wear it proudly and spread the word about Earlham ornithology!

The Stories Behind the Shirt's Birds

Blackburnian Warbler. A perennial highlight for students on early morning back-campus Ornithology walks. The glowing orange breast is brilliant against the emerging early spring foliage.

Vermilion Flycatcher. Earlham's off-campus Southwest Field Studies Program often encountered this amazing species along the Rio Grande in the Big Bend of Texas. The Little Vermilion Flycatcher, a recently split species, has also been found on student and alumni trips to the Galapagos Islands over the decades. Some have even had the chance to see them riding on the domes of giant tortoises, an iconic image!

Carolina Wren. This wren is a favorite, common permanent resident around Earlham. Its populations were all but wiped out in winters of extreme cold and deep snows in the late 1970s. It took more than a decade for the wrens to begin to return to their former abundance. Alumna Laurie Eberhardt studied this species' song energetics.

Scarlet Tanager. Another spring favorite for members of the ornithology class. Many remember the challenges of discriminating its song – the robin with the sore throat!

Dickcissel. This grassland species is rarely found by Earlham's Ornithology classes. In the 2020's, Jamie Coon and Wendy Tori along with their students studied the breeding biology of this and other grassland species in the prairies of the Grand River Grasslands.

White-crowned Manakin. This neotropical forest species is a favorite research subject of Wendy Tori and students. It, like many other manakins, sets up leks where males join in extravagant (some might say hilarious) communal displays to attract females.

Tree Swallow. This acrobatic and colorful bird is a common breeder around campus. Earlhamites have studied their reproductive biology and the importance of feathers as nest lining. Tree swallows have been found to heavily rely on molted feathers for their reproduction and they use feathers from up to 11 bird Orders.

Hooded Pitohui. One of the few known toxic birds in the world. They sequester toxic compounds from their diets and allocate them to their feathers and tissues. An expedition to study them took Earlhamites to amazing adventures in the altitudinal gradient of Papua New Guinea.

Black-throated Green Warbler. Another favorite spring migrant recorded on Earlham's Birding Big Day each spring. It's also a bird frequently seen on Mt. Desert Island, Maine, where Earlhamites founded and run the Acadia Birding Festival.

Eastern Bluebird. A gorgeous resident of Richmond, Indiana. Their beauty, behavior, and the fact they readily use artificial nest boxes make them ideal candidates for student research projects. So many projects, so many experiences, and many more to come.

Lilac-breasted Roller. An attention grabber, this brightly colored species has been a favorite of students on Earlham's off-campus study programs to Kenya and Tanzania and for alumni on various trips to Africa.

Pennant-winged Nightjar. During an alumni trip to South Africa in 2015, one of these birds appeared at dusk flying over a dry riverbed in the Lion Sands Reserve. Bill Buskirk's first response at seeing this most unusually shaped apparition was nearly unprintable!

Greater Prairie-Chicken. In the 1960s, Earlham Ornithology often made a spring camping trip to northwestern Indiana to observe these birds displaying on their last booming grounds in the state. In later years, after the species was extirpated here, Earlham made occasional trips to watch them strut and boom in their remaining sites in central Illinois.

Red Bird-of-Paradise. A highlight of the Earlham alumni trip to Indonesia in 2017; the group watched a lek of these spectacular birds on an island in the Raja Ampat archipelago.

Harpy Eagle. In the early 1960s, Jim Cope and former student Jim Fowler (of TV's Wild Kingdom fame) conducted an important early study of the breeding biology of this large neotropical raptor. The species was at that time still widespread; now it is rarely found as its habitat is disappearing.

Barred Owl. Many early Earlham birders associate this wonderful species with Jim Cope as he could imitate its call well and often announced his arrival on the Biology hall with a thundering rendition. During outdoor gatherings of the Cope family, when an owl calls, there are knowing looks all around. Jim's stopping by for a visit!

Sandhill Crane. Earlham ornithologists over the decades have documented an amazing increase in this elegant bird's abundance in Indiana. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was a rare migrant in small groups. Now, in the early 2020s, it is a common migrant in spring and fall and over 2000 winter at Brookville Lake each year.

These are just a few species that tie Earlhamites, memories, and places together. What are your favorites?

Credits:

Descriptions: Bill Buskirk and Wendy Tori

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