



Five Tips for Choosing Binoculars for Kids



Ben Lizdas, Redstart Birding

One of the best ways to bring kids closer to nature, literally, is with a good set of binoculars. When choosing binoculars for your young birder or naturalist, the primary rule of thumb is to provide them with an instrument that is easy to use. Here are five tips for your consideration as you navigate the world of binoculars, looking for that perfect fit:

1. No Compacts

Resist the temptation to purchase a pair of compact binoculars. Kids tend to be small so they should use small binoculars, right? Not necessarily. There are two things about compact binoculars that make them not ideal for first-time users. One is that those tiny lenses on the front of the binoculars will really limit the amount of information that ultimately gets to the user's eyes. Relative to larger binoculars, colors won't be as vibrant and detailed field marks will be more difficult to discern. Secondly, most (but not all) compact binoculars fold together via a hinge on each barrel. Compact binoculars with two hinges make it much more difficult for a young user to line-up the barrels to their eyes than a traditionally designed binocular with a single center hinge. I recommend mid-sized binoculars—with a 30–35mm objective lens—as a great choice for kids.

2. Go Low

Low magnification binoculars are easier to use. Why is this? Firstly, lower magnification typically yields a wider field of view for the binoculars. This means that when the user first spots a colorful bird with their naked eyes, finding that same bird when looking through the binoculars becomes easier with a wider field of view. A lower-power binocular also increases the amount of light that gets through the binoculars, providing a more detailed image. Lastly, lower-power binoculars are easier to hold steady. Any upper body movement of the user is magnified when looking through binoculars. The steady image provided by lower magnification binoculars is much more pleasing to experience and makes looking through the optics for any extended period of time more comfortable.

3. Narrow IPD

For small faces, a binocular with a narrow inter-pupillary distance (IPD) might be necessary. This is the distance range to which the left and right eyepieces of the binocular can open and close. The IPD range on many binoculars is such that it can accommodate most users, including kids. For youngsters with particularly narrow faces, you may need to search around for models that have an exceptionally narrow IPD lower limit. Two models that I often recommend for kids with smaller faces are the Vortex Raptor and the Kowa YF. Both are mid-sized binoculars that sell for about \$100, and both do a great job accommodating kids and adults who need a binocular with a narrow IPD.

4. Kid-proof Warranty

Consider buying a binocular with a kid-proof warranty. While most binoculars come with a lifetime limited warranty (covering manufacturing and materials defects), there are a few makers out there who go the extra mile with an unconditional warranty of sorts. Vortex comes to mind with their lifetime VIP warranty. Zeiss will extend a five-year, no-fault warranty on any of their Conquest HD models (a little pricy for use by kids, but they're worth it, aren't they?). These are warranties that cover the kind of damage that can happen when your kid drops her backpack to the ground, not thinking of the binoculars at the bottom of the bag!

5. No Toys

Don't buy a toy. Nothing is more discouraging than getting a new tool that holds the promise of showing you nature in all her glory, only to use it and have the experience fall short. Toy binoculars typically contain poor-quality glass that yields a fuzzy image with no discernable detail. They have imprecise and poor construction quality, which leads to quick mechanical failure and eye fatigue from poorly aligned prisms. If this is going to be your child's first impression of what a binocular is, make it a good one!

Bonus Tip!

Buy from a retailer that knows both birding and optics. At Redstart Birding (redstartbirding.com), we are avid birders who have years of experience working with birders—young and old—to select the best binoculars and scopes for their needs and budgets. If you have questions about optics or would like assistance in choosing new binoculars for yourself or someone else, get in touch with us today. We're happy to help.

As always, all of us at Redstart Birding are here to help. Don't hesitate to use our years of experience to make your purchase easier. Call us toll free at **833-262-1568** or send us an email at **info@redstartbirding.com**.