

## Binocular Buying Guide

A good article with more in-depth explanations is at [www.birdwatching.com/optics/binoculars1.html](http://www.birdwatching.com/optics/binoculars1.html)

- Buy the best “bins” (binoculars) you can reasonably afford:
  - Quality and price are tightly aligned – there is no free lunch
  - Cheap bins (less than \$100) are not much better than none at all
  - Buying a really cheap pair is a false economy if you get frustrated and then end up buying a better pair
- The ideal size for general birding is approximately 8x42
  - Bins with higher magnification are better for distant birds, but...:
    - they cost considerably more than the equivalent 8x model
    - they are heavier
    - they have a narrower field of view
    - they are harder to control – more prone to “shake”
- Roof prism design is the preferred design for top-end bins, but don’t discount porro prism bins in the middle and low price range. It is cheaper to make a good quality set of porro prism bins so in principle you may get better quality at the same price point
- The best bet if you can afford them is to get a good set of bins in the middle price band - somewhere between \$200-500
  - Two good examples – of many available:
    - Nikon Monarch 5 8x42 ~\$280
    - Vortex Diamondback 8x42 - ~\$220
- If you have trouble holding binoculars steadily, consider image-stabilized bins
- If you do decide to go for an expensive pair of bins right off the bat you will be looking at a price range (in Canada) of from \$800 - \$3600. So be sure you are really committed to birding before you expend this amount of capital.
  - The big names (for good reason) are Swarovski, Leica and Zeiss. But I would recommend looking at the Vortex Razor HD. They are excellent bins at about half the cost of the big-name brands, and backed by an outstanding warranty.
- You should try to buy your bins from a bricks-and-mortar store:
  - The most important factor in deciding among different bins in a given price range is how they work for you. Are they comfortable to hold? (You will be holding them for considerable periods). Does the eye relief work with your eyes? This is especially important if you wear glasses. You can’t assess these qualities by looking at images on the web
  - If you do not have access to a good optics shop I still recommend that you order your equipment from a real shop instead of a pure on-line business. When you need service or advice Amazon will not be there to help you
  - Two places I can personally recommend for their wide range of choice, competitive prices and excellent service are Focus Scientific in Ottawa and Pelee Wings in Leamington. Both will ship products by mail.
  - The only local spot with a decent range of binoculars is the Urban Nature store on Gardiner’s Road. They are part of a chain so they can order in just about any brand.