

PETE'S TIPS: Gollum's Dilemma

BY PETE DUNNE

“What has it got in its pocketess?” asked Gollum, of *Lord of the Rings* fame, of an unsympathetic universe; and while, as Gollum postulated, it was not a fair question (providing you are playing by strict, riddle-game rules), it is, nevertheless, an apt question. I pose it to you.

What should you, a birder, keep in your pocketess?

And before you get carried away let me qualify this. I'm not talking about *all* your pockets—i.e., all the multitudinous pouches in your birding vest or jacket. I'm talking about the stuff you can stuff into the pockets of your slacks, shorts, jeans.

In other words, the bare minimum. Sure, photographer Artie Morris can carry enough equipment in his vest pockets to cripple a camel, and if I'm ever lost in the Amazon Basin, I want Terry Moore of Leica Sports Optics at my side (Terry carries two of everything that might be found where the lines drawn by need and imagination cross).

Me? I like to travel light. I don't like gadgets. I want just what I need, when I need it, and I don't want to empty my pockets at the end of the day and discover that there was something there that I didn't use.

Accordingly, what you need (and what Gollum might have found had I been in Frodo's place) is, first:

A Swiss Army knife. I've carried one since I was nine. They're cheap, compact, utilitarian, and they can do everything from pluck thorns out of fingers to decant wine to spread cream cheese to shorten binocular straps.

But the thing I most often find myself using mine for is tightening screws on the loose heads of other Manfrotto tripod owners.

“No you can't,” you Swiss Army knife detractors turned Leatherman-firsters are saying, the screwdriver diameter is too wide to fit the recessed openings.

“Yes you can,” I say. Don't use the bottle opener. Use the can opener you use to skin the metallic hide off cans of Vienna sausage and canned peaches. It's got a narrow-gauge screw driver on the tip. Open it so that it rests at a 90-degree angle to the knife and, like an offset wrench, you can tighten the screws with the head still attached to the tripod base.

Number two: You'll need a clean, wash-softened cotton handkerchief or bandana to clean binoculars and get rain or salt spray off of them. Can you buy something more expensive—special cleaning cloth, chamois? Sure, but soft cotton works fine.

Number three: A notepad and pencil

(or ballpoint pen). This is essential equipment! Useful for taking notes in the field on bird behavior or for doing field sketches of first state records. Priceless when you meet a birder in the field who has a condo on Sanibel Island. And s/he invites you to use it the next time you visit Ding Darling NWR. And you need something to jot down their email address.

Will a folded piece of paper serve? Sure. That's what Paul Lehman uses (and he's taken down a lot of phone numbers in his time). I've noted that Kenn Kaufman never travels far without a wad of 3x5 index cards on his hip. Whatever works for you.

Why a pencil? Pencilless don't run in the rain. Speaking of which, there is an array of waterproof notepads you can buy. The “Rite in the Rain” No. 374-M, with the glued binding, is my current favorite. The models with the metal ring binding (which I used for years) tend to shed their covers under modest abuse.

A hint with regard to waterproof notebooks: They shed felt-tip pen fluid the same way they do water. Use pencil or ballpoint pen.

And finally, your cell phone. People who travel in out-of-the-way places and park on road shoulders that are found to be soft only after the fact need cell phones. And you never know when a hot bird is going to turn up or when you are going to turn one up yourself. Birders who find Curlew Sandpipers (that fail to stick) quickly find that “forgetting my cell phone” is an unpardonable admission.

Anything else worth having? Sure. Lots, depending on circumstance and need. But including your wallet, I've already filled three of your four pockets. The last one is yours to customize.

A New Website for Low-Impact Birding

www.comfortablebirdingforall.com is a new online resource with the goal of providing a central index for low-impact birding locations worldwide where birders with restricted mobility or endurance can continue to enjoy their hobby. The new website is intended to serve birders with all types of limitations, from those with moderate limitations to those who use wheelchairs. Please visit the website and check to see whether your favorite low-impact destinations are listed; if they are not, please send



any information you have so that these locations can be added to the central index. The index includes birding locations of three types: sites where the walking is easy, sites that offer some significant wheelchair access, and sites where birding is possible from a car. Submitting even just one location is a great service to other birders.

Please submit your locations to EZbirdingadventures@comfortablebirdingforall.com, and ask your friends and fellow birders throughout the birding world to do the same. — Darlene Smyth