



## Have Glass, Will Travel

Sooner or later most birders will hop on a flight, traveling to a part of the world that offers birding opportunities not found near enough for driving. With the array of optics we might take on trips, it is important to develop a strategy for arriving at our destination with all glass intact (and at the same airport!) Needless to say, this involves packing camera(s), binocular, scope, and perhaps a tripod in a carry-on. Seeing the battered condition of the large wheeled duffel that I check, confirms any suspicion that out-of-sight luggage undergoes treatment not suitable for precision optics. Carrying your glass ensures careful handling and keeps valuable items under your supervision. In the case of lost checked luggage, you will still arrive at your destination with your birding gear, ready to bird while your luggage is (hopefully) being found and delivered to you.

To insure that my gear goes where I'm going, I've settled on the WRP MP-1 camera bag ([www.moosepeterson.com/gear/mp1.html](http://www.moosepeterson.com/gear/mp1.html)). It fits in any overhead compartment I've ever encountered on commercial flights (even on small planes with three seating rows) and holds my DSLR rig, digiscoping camera and adapter, scope, bins, external hard drive, camera accessories, compact rain gear, a change of clothes that I use to pad my camera, and some travel snacks and incidentals. I wear my camera bag as a backpack, with my MacBook and other small travel items slung in a Timbuk2 laptop bag ([www.timbuk2.com/tb2/products/laptop/](http://www.timbuk2.com/tb2/products/laptop/)). While lacking the ease of a wheeled carry-on, the MP-1 bag soaks up an amazing amount of equipment in its padded compartments. It works great for carrying and organizing gear on field trip busses, pelagic boats, and rental cars. In case of inclement conditions, I keep a Granite Gear pack cover in the bag ([www.granitegear.com/products/accessories/cloud\\_cover/index.html](http://www.granitegear.com/products/accessories/cloud_cover/index.html)) along with my Sierra Designs Microlight rain gear (<http://sierradesigns.com/mens.display.php?id=226>), both packing to almost nothing.

I opt to check my tripod inside my wheeled duffel, reasoning that it is one piece of gear that will take some abuse and a tripod is something I can bird without, if necessary. (Friends

usually have scopes and I generally photograph birds by hand-holding my camera.) However, other folks I know pack their tripod in carry-on luggage. If you keep a tripod with you, I suggest getting a 4-section model, preferably with carbon-fiber legs. This combination cuts weight and collapses quite small, ideal for flights. Don't sacrifice quality—your scope is only as good as the support it has. Popular 4-section carbon tripod models for birding include the Manfrotto 190MF4 ([www.manfrotto.com](http://www.manfrotto.com)) and the Gitzo GT1540 ([www.gitzo.com](http://www.gitzo.com)).

While fitting a full-sized binocular into your carry-on isn't a big deal, having a compact scope can be a space and weight-saver. All of the major scope manufacturers include a 65-ish millimeter scope in their lines. With the current choices of amazing products, you won't sacrifice much optically by bringing the smaller, lighter glass. Check out ABA Sales to compare models and features ([www.abasales.com](http://www.abasales.com)). I suggest removing the eyepiece when packing your scope, offering one less avenue of damage in the event of an unexpected ding and cutting down the overall length of the scope is important if your space is tight.

Since many birders have significantly invested in equipment, using a loss protection and recovery service like StuffBak ([www.stuffbak.com](http://www.stuffbak.com)) is a wise choice. They offer a variety of durable labels and tags, each with a unique serial number that can be registered online. When a StuffBak-labeled item is found, the owner is immediately contacted. Finders of lost items can easily report your missing gear by going on-line or by using a toll-free number, and StuffBak takes care of arranging nearby drop-off or courier collection, plus all of the packaging, shipping, and reward payment, making it easy for someone to do the right thing if they find your lost gear. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, you should be able to fly, knowing that both you and your birding gear will arrive safely at the same destination.



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*"...cause I'm leavin' on a jet plane  
Don't know when I'll be back again..."  
—John Denver*

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