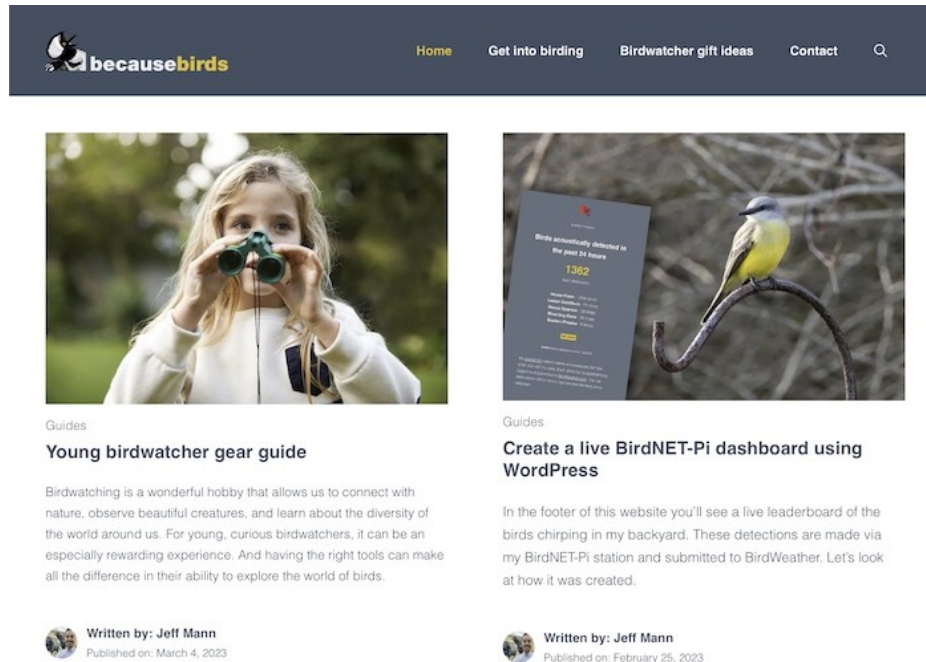# Web projects

Information about the blogs, social platforms, analytics, and this wiki can be found here.

- becausebirds.com
- birding.blog
- birding.wiki
- Self-hosted website analytics

becausebirds.com

The current 2023 design of becausebirds.com

Description

becausebirds.com is a self-hosted birdwatching WordPress blog launched in 2013. It often has a tech focus and is written to be accessible to new and seasoned birders alike.

History

Because Birds has been a passion project of mine since 2013. It began as a Tumblr blog in March 2013. After finding a humor niche and growing a large audience there, I yearned for more. I wanted my own place to write, be creative, and sharpen my technical skills. Christmas of that year, my previous companion gifted me a WordPress blog that he set up, which would get me started with formal blogging. I transferred my domain to the new WordPress and got to work.

Focus

Since launch, Because Birds has grown and evolved as I've gotten deeper into my birdwatching hobby. I write about my birding experiences & trips, reviews, guides, and anything else that sparks my curiosity. Whatever I'm feeling inspired by at the moment is a candidate for a new blog entry.

Monetization

The blog has been monetized in various ways throughout the years, with the goal of at least covering the costs of operations and ongoing maintenance.

Display ads

Initially, Google AdSense display ads were shown throughout the site. The traffic was fairly minimal at the time, and these ads brought in pennies at the expense of the website loading slower and looking spammy. Display ads were quickly removed after a few months to improve the visitor experience. To be honest, even with the traffic I get today, ads would still not be worth the compromise to the viewership.

Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing, which is linking to products sold by third-party resellers (mainly Amazon in this case) was a great fit for this blog. When visitors click an affiliate link and make a purchase, a small commission is earned by the referrer. This monetization method is a good fit for the website because it is unobtrusive and can be organically included in content without being detrimental to the experience.

Because Birds' approach to affiliate marketing has always been to only link to products I have had a personal positive experience with and would recommend to birder friends. The exception to this is the blog's *Birdwatcher Gift Ideas* page. While I have personal experience with a lot of these products, many are found through my own research on what may make good gifts for birdwatchers.

Brand sponsors

Occasionally, brands or companies will reach out to me directly to provide products for review.

Reviews written on these products come from an honest perspective and do not necessarily skew positive because they are provided for free.

Technical details

Because Birds was originally launched on shared hosting via BlueHost but as my knowledge and experience grew, I transitioned to a faster virtual private server (VPS) on Digital Ocean.

To make managing multiple WordPress websites easier, I use the SpinupWP platform.

Content management system	WordPress.org
Domain registrar	Porkbun
Server type	Virtual Private Server (VPS)
Server host	Digital Ocean droplet
Server details	2GB memory / 50GB disk
Server management	SpinupWP
Theme foundation	GeneratePress
Analytics	Plausible Analytics (view live dashboard)

Design

Current design

Homepage

Because Birds currently leverages a Full Site Editing (FSE), open source, block-based theme from GeneratePress. This lightweight theme allows for a focus on the content with extremely-high PageSpeed scores across mobile and desktop.

Single post

The GeneratePress theme shines on single posts with a bold hero title section.
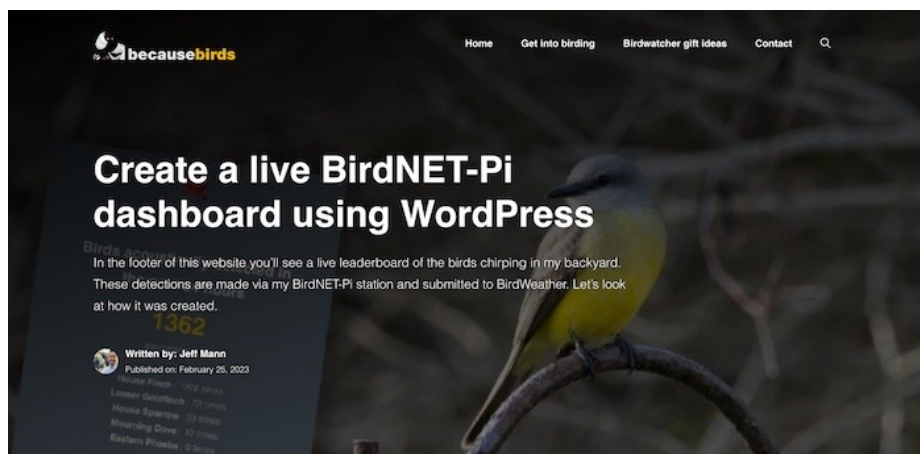
Previous design

Homepage

The initial theme for Because Birds was called *Divi* by Elegant Themes. Divi is one of the most common WordPress themes out there and the website used Divi's specific magazine-like *Extra* theme. Divi is less of a theme and more of a WYSIWYG platform with its own themes. It looks pretty, but it came at the expense of slow, bloated code and performance.
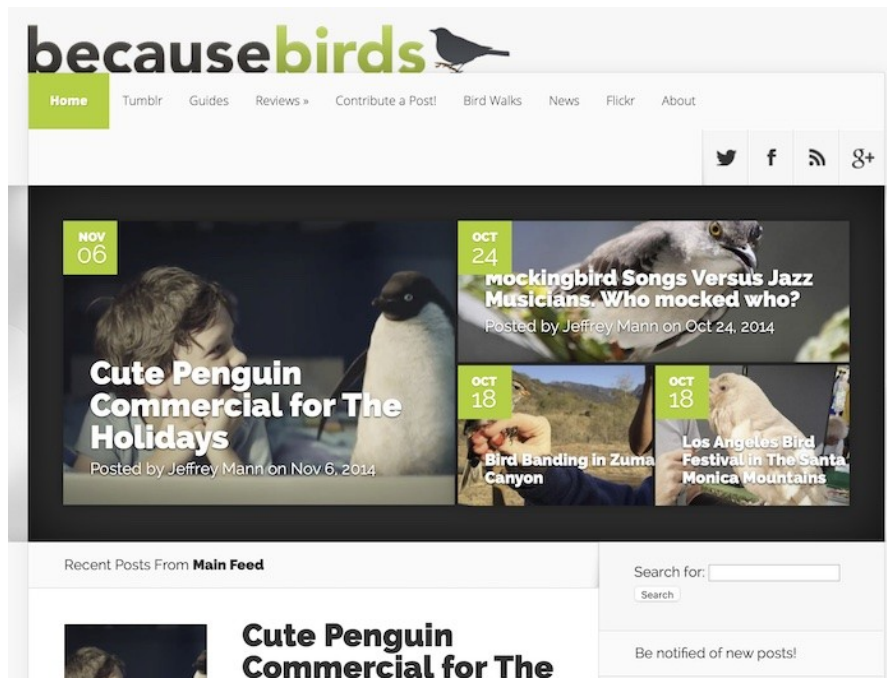
The initial design of becausebirds.com. Pretty, but it had a large variety of visible categorires to keep fresh.

Single post

Logo

The Hooded Merganser pixel art logo was designed by the talented pixel artist *alurasheans*.

birding.blog
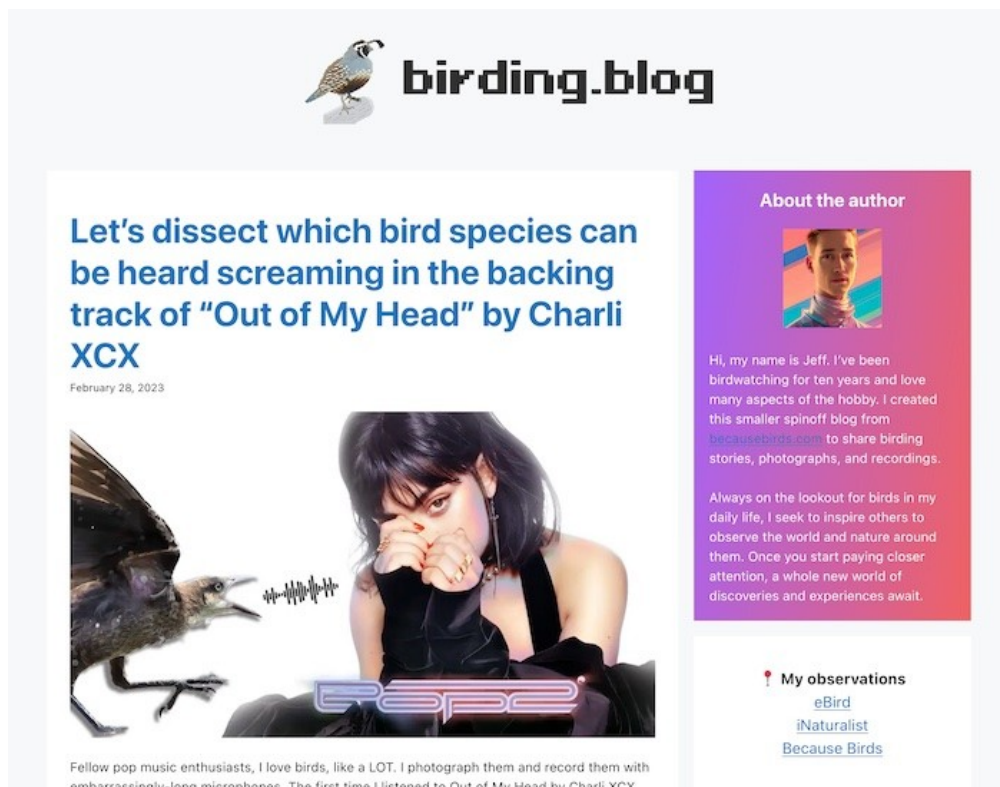
The current 2023 design of birding.blog

Description

birding.blog is a spinoff birdwatching WordPress blog launched in 2022. It is a place to share smaller birding experiences and random thoughts.

History

In December 2022, Birding Blog was launched to compliment my main efforts on Because Birds. I loved the domain name birding.blog so much I felt the need to grab it and see what it can turn into.

Focus

Birding Blog is a secondary place for me to share bird-related thoughts and experiences that come to mind. I plan to continue using it to write about ongoing bird recording trips, photography, and other fun things I may not want to post on directly on Because Birds.

Technical details

Birding Blog runs on a virtual private server (VPS) on Digital Ocean.

Content management system	WordPress.org
Domain registrar	Porkbun
Server type	Virtual Private Server (VPS)
Server host	Digital Ocean droplet
Server details	1GB memory / 25B disk
Server management	SpinupWP
Theme foundation	GeneratePress
Analytics	Plausible Analytics

Design

Current design

Homepage

Birding Blog currently leverages a Full Site Editing (FSE), open source, block-based theme from GeneratePress. This lightweight theme allows for a focus on the content with extremely-high PageSpeed scores across mobile and desktop.

Logo

The California Quail pixel art logo was designed by the talented pixel artist *alurasheans*.
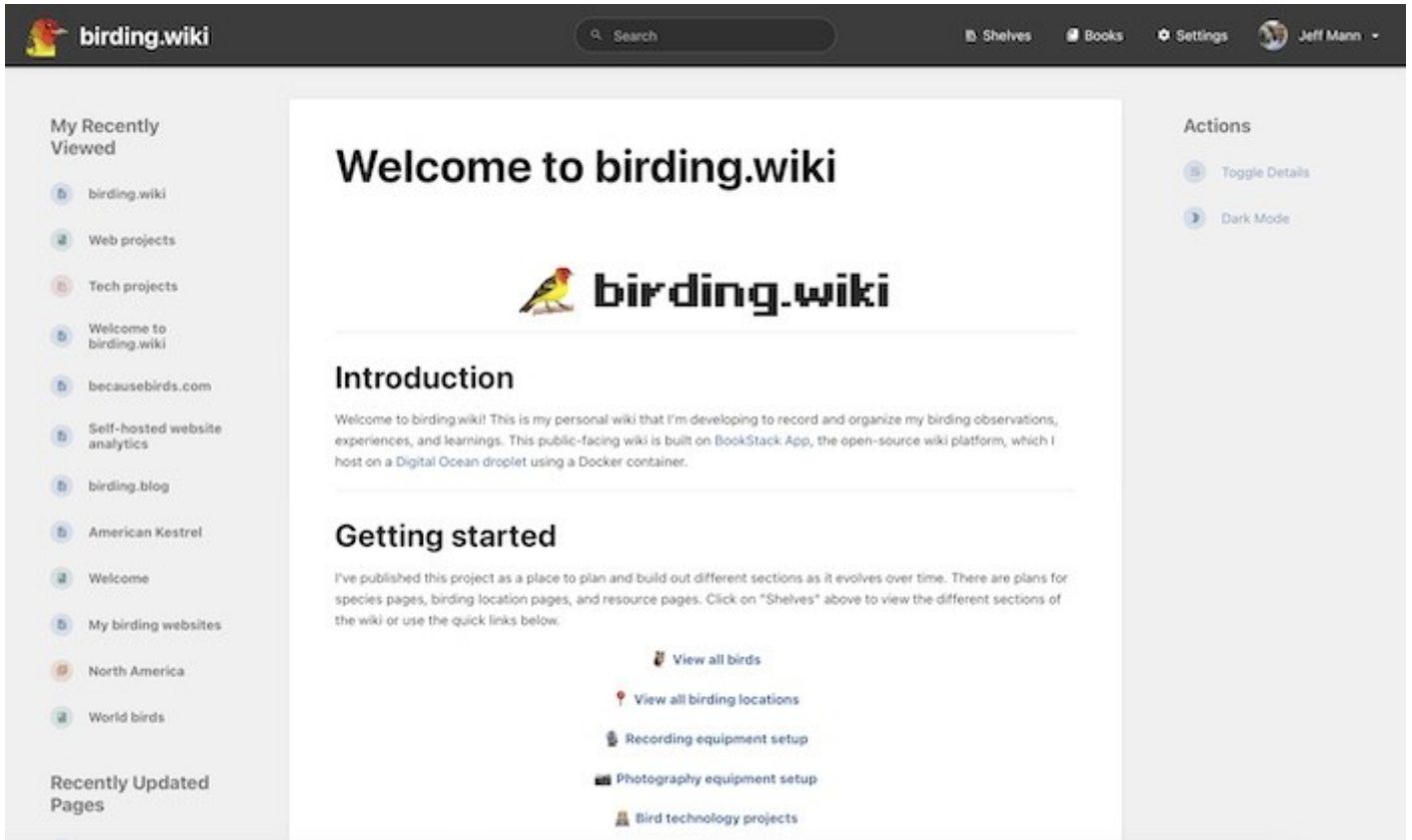
birding.wiki

The birding.wiki homepage. This wiki uses the open source BookStack App platform.

Description

birding.wiki is a self-hosted birdwatching wiki launched in 2022. It's a place to document my birding observations, media, projects, and equipment setups. This wiki is run using a self-hosted instance of BookStack App.

History

In 2022, I toyed with the idea of creating a wiki-like experience to organize and document anything related to birds and my hobby of birdwatching.

Initial concept
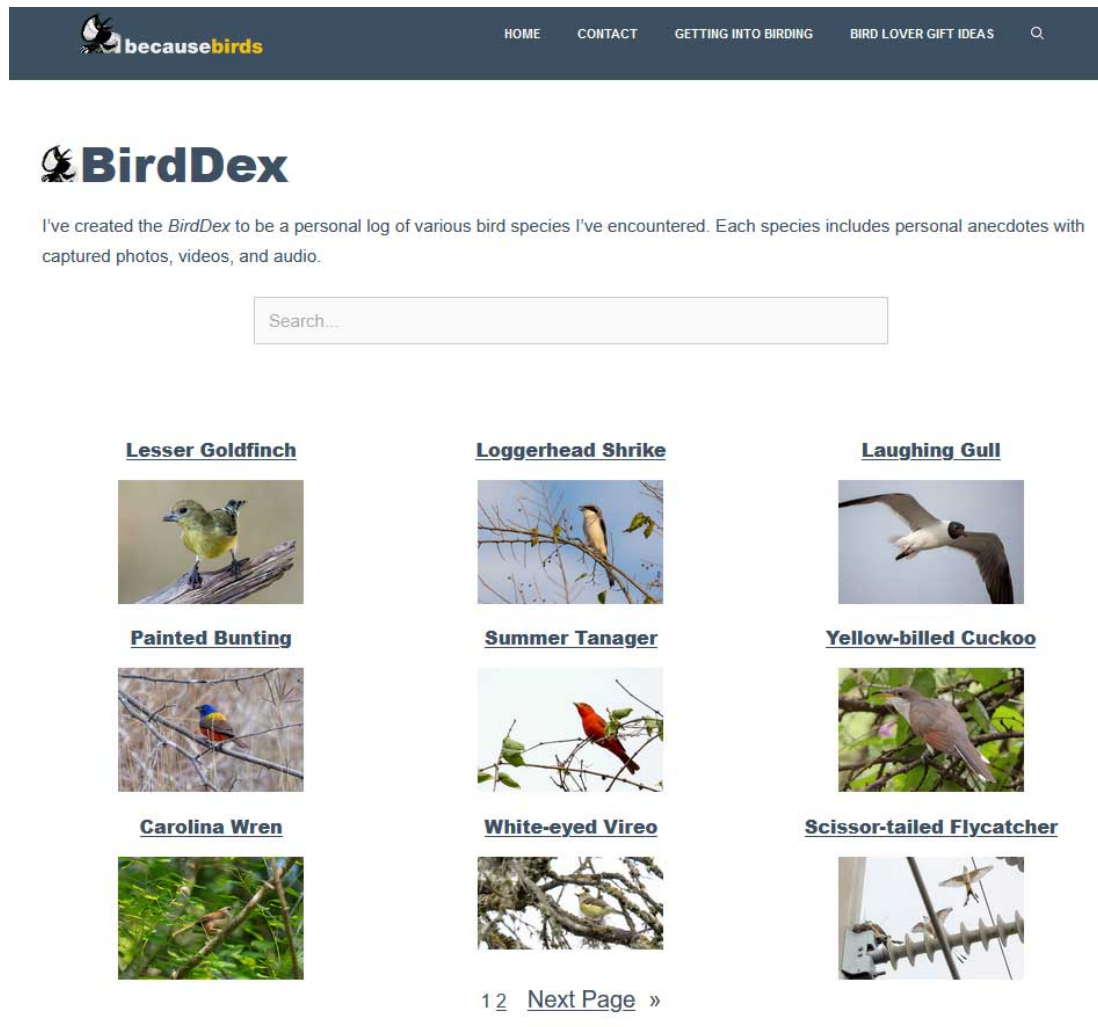
The *BirdDex* main page with search feature. Handmade in WordPress.

A *BirdDex* entry of the Painted Bunting.

The first concept of birding.wiki was launched on Because Birds as the BirdDex. This was a fun project where I learned and leveraged WordPress' custom post types to create and add "Bird" entries into the CMS. It gave me space to design a basic experience and begin to solidify what type of information I would include in these entries. Think of it as a bird Pokédex. I literally researched how to create Pokédex on WordPress to serve as a starting point in the project.

On these pages I included observation statistics, photographs, audio recordings, and personal anecdotes. But as with most of my projects, I yearned for more: more ease of use, more flexibility, more space. So, I began setting my sights on a dedicated platform for this information.

In Late 2022, I bought the domain birding.wiki and began researching self-hosted wiki software solutions. I came across many options and decided to take the plunge and set one up: Wiki.js

Wiki.js
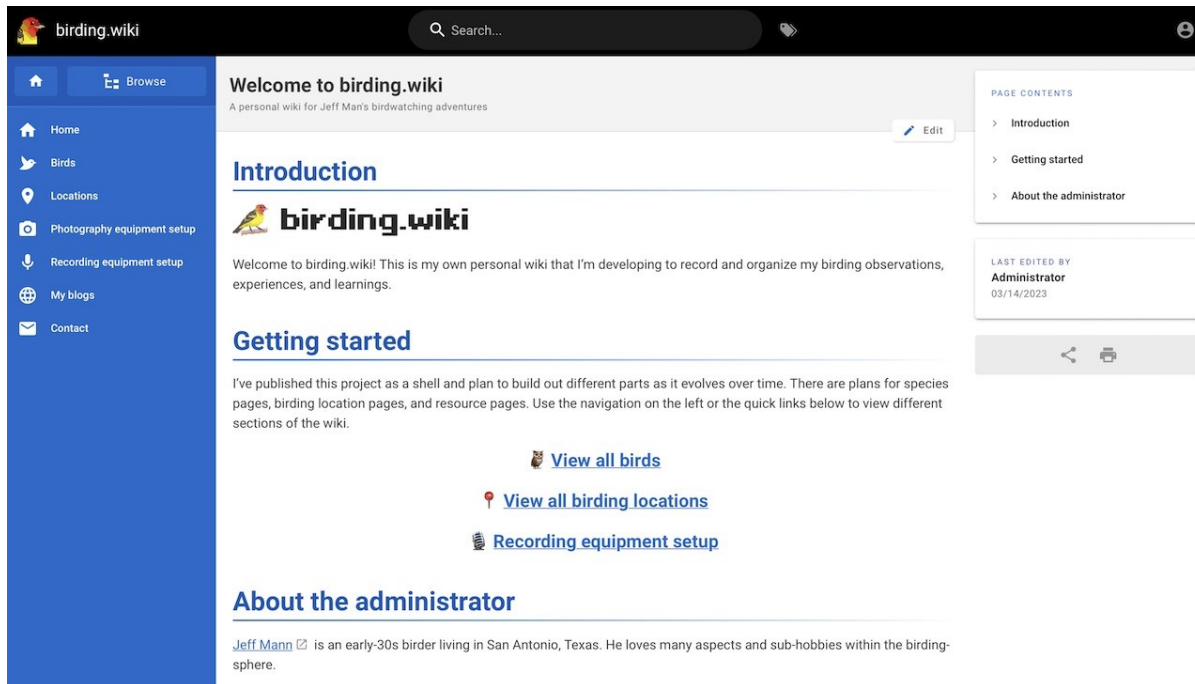
For the first few months of the birding.wiki project, I learned and began building out content in the platform. This exercise in organization and content management showed me ways in which I could display different types of content and helped me clarify what I wanted out of a wiki software.

Wiki.js is a one-man show as far as development is concerned. While the software was visually appealing, it was slow and cumbersome to use and half of the features in the platform were 'coming soon.' Development on the product felt slow, with releases of new versions coming out sporadically.

Next...BookStack App

In Early 2023, as my frustration with Wiki.js grew, I began to revisit a few of the wiki platforms from my previous research. BookStack App app intrigued me the most due to its passionate user base and high praises on Reddit.

BookStack's organization follows the idea of physical books: shelves, books, chapters, and pages. I wondered to myself if this type of structure would work for my use case so I decided to spin up an instance and try it out for myself.

I began by recreating all my existing Wiki.js content into a few "Books" on my new BookStack server. The ease of use and speed of the platform became apparent as soon as I started. The content organization approach started simple and I reworked it as more content was added.

Organization

The wiki has four main "shelves".

- Birds
- Locations
- Equipment
- Tech projects

Birds shelf

The bread & butter of the birding.wiki is the Birds shelf. In the "World birds" book there are entries about many species throughout North America and the world. Birds are organized into chapters based on geographic region and contain personal statistics, media, anecdotes, and links to related blog posts on Because Birds.

Locations shelf

The Locations shelf is home to the book of "World places" where I have started to create entries for birdwatching locations that I have enjoyed. Chapters organize these locations based on geographic region. Each page includes photographs, recordings, descriptions, and experiences I've had.

Equipment shelf

The Equipment shelf and respective book contain a detailed breakdown of the gear setups I use in my photography and audio recording endeavors. You'll find the tools I use and why I use them, as well as links to learn more about each.

Tech projects

The Tech projects shelf contains several books describing the various bird-related web and home projects I use or have created. There is a book for workflows that details the processes I follow to find, capture, and catalogue bird observations and media.

Technical details

birding.wiki is run on a virtual private server (VPS) on Digital Ocean.

Wiki software	BookStack App
Domain registrar	Porkbun
Server type	Virtual Private Server (VPS)
Server host	Digital Ocean droplet
Server details	1GB memory / 25GB disk

Logo
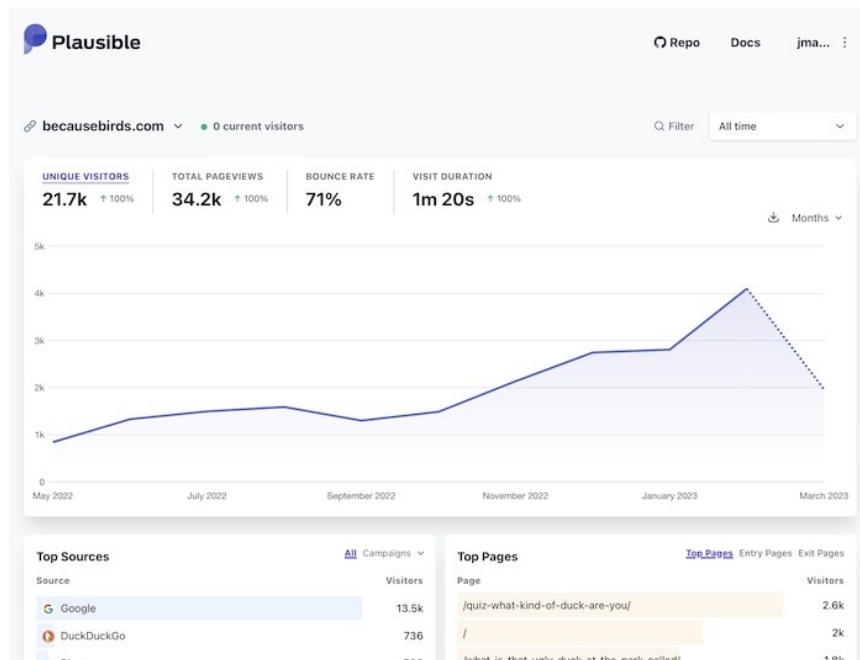
The Western Tanager pixel art logo was designed by the talented pixel artist *alurasheans*.

Self-hosted website analytics

The Plausible Analytics dashboard which shows aggregate data only.

Description

I value user data privacy and have made efforts to remove unnecessary tracking scripts and code from organizations like Google from my websites. For many years I ran, like most websites, Google Analytics to measure and understand visitors.

In May 2022, I learned of an open-source website analytics software with a focus on user privacy, called Plausible Analytics. I chose to set up a new webserver to run this self-host this software and replaced Google Analytics completely with it.

In the spirit of transparency, my website analytics are public-facing and can be viewed by anyone.

Technical details

Plausible Analytics uses no cookies and is fully compliant with GDPR, CCPA, and PECR. It's lightweight and easy to set up in a Docker environment.

Platform	Plausible Analytics
Domain	metrics.becausebirds.com
Server type	Virtual Private Server (VPS)
Server host	Digital Ocean droplet
Server details	1GB memory / 25GB disk