

A Birding Interview with Terry Moore

As Director of Sales and Marketing/Outdoor Channels for Minox Sport Optics and formerly Vice President of Sport Optics for Leica Camera Inc. (NA), Terry Moore is a recognized authority on high-quality sports optical equipment, including “glass” designed for the steadily growing birding market. Born and reared in Oklahoma, Moore exhibited an early interest in the outdoors and pursued schooling as a field biologist before focusing on business. His career grew from part-time work in a camera store to sales and sales management in the consumer photographic industry. In 1995, he established Leica’s Sport Optics Division. An enthusiastic birder himself, Moore has traveled extensively in the pursuit of this passion.

Moore gives *Birding* some professional advice on choosing binoculars, previews the optics of the future, and reveals why—when it comes to optics—birders and hunters are more alike than they might think.

— Noah K. Strycker

Birding: What’s a typical day in your business life at Minox? Is this a fun job?

Terry Moore: There are many aspects of the job that are “fun,” especially those that provide opportunity for travel and birding. As with all jobs, however, there is work involved. A typical day seems to revolve around communications—information gathering, problem resolution, pursuing opportunities, interaction with dealers and sales reps. The real fun is working within an industry that serves lifestyle user groups I identify with.

Birding: How much do you travel to represent your company? What birds have you found in your travels?

TM: Travel is an important part of my job and in the recent past resulted in my being on the road about 250 days a year. In my current position, the travel has not yet been as extensive, but I can see it increasing, as we work with dealers and our sales representatives, and participate in trade shows and user-group events. Time spent in the markets provides us with information and insights as to how we are doing and how to make more useful products for the future.

Birding is a great activity, as you can do it anywhere and at anytime. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to make multiple trips to the neotropics, and to visit every state in the union and most provinces of Canada. Business trips to Europe and Africa have also provided additional opportunities for birding. Along the way, I have been able to build an ABA list of more than 700 species and a world list of about 3,000. It is difficult to pick a bird or birds to highlight. However, the manakin

family has come to be my favorite group; manakins are demonstrative, vocal, colorful, and diverse. Birding *phenomena* are even more exciting for me: the frenetic activity of a Cock-of-the-rock lek in Ecuador, the spectacle of 500,000 shearwaters in the Bering Sea, or thousands of Mississippi Kites streaming northward over a Costa Rican rainforest.

Birding: How have binoculars changed? How has the development of high-quality optics affected birding?

TM: The basic instrument has remained pretty much unchanged. However, the materials and technologies have certainly changed, allowing us to produce instruments today that are extremely durable and deliver images that are lifelike. The binocular created the activity of birding. Prior to the general use of binoculars, “birding” was basically collecting for scientific or artistic purposes or for personal specimen collections. The binocular allowed for the detailed observation of birds without having to reduce them to “in hand.” The advances in binocular optical quality have directly resulted in our ability to see more detail; these advances allow us to observe for longer periods of time and from greater distances—thus directly contributing to the body of birding knowledge and to the benefit of the individual user.

Birding: In general, what kinds of optics are best for birders at different levels of experience?

TM: I think it makes little sense to buy a premium-quality and premium-priced binocular for children or beginning birders. The price of such instruments usually prevents this from hap-

pening anyway. Today, a good basic birding binocular will probably cost \$250 to \$300. From that point, binoculars go up in price to the premium instruments costing more than \$2,000. What I try to encourage for those just getting started in birding is to buy more than they think they need at the start—that's \$200 to \$300. From there, if they find that birding has become a passion, they should buy a glass to last a lifetime! Unfortunately, what we see is people continuing to upgrade through the various price points, trying to improve their performance without spending what is required to get what they need. In the process, they end up spending more than if they had just purchased what they really wanted to begin with.

Birding: What proportion of optics sales is generated by birders vs. other customers?

TM: Certain models may have a larger following in one market or the other. For instance, 8× binoculars have greater acceptance among birders, while 10× are strongly preferred by hunters. I also see larger-objective binoculars more widely used by hunters, while larger-objective spotting scopes have higher penetration in the birding market. But our business is split pretty much 50/50 between the birding/naturalist market and other outdoor users.

Birding: How has the relatively recent innovation of digiscoping affected birding—and the optics business?

TM: There is certainly great and continued interest among birders in digiscoping, and it has had an impact on how we market spotting scopes. My assessment is that it has not dramatically increased spotting scope sales. However, it has required us to produce consumer-friendly means for digiscoping. For those whose real interest is digiscoping, we see the continued utilization of external mounting systems to allow for the use of higher-performing compact digital cameras. The other development track is the digital eyepiece, providing digiscoping capability for spotting scopes. I also believe that the industry will continue to develop solutions for the integration of imaging capability within the spotting scope itself. However, the latter has limitations, as it takes away from the primary purpose of the scope as an observation instrument and moves it more toward a photographic tool. What we do know is that the consumer will determine what type of instruments and systems are successful in the future.

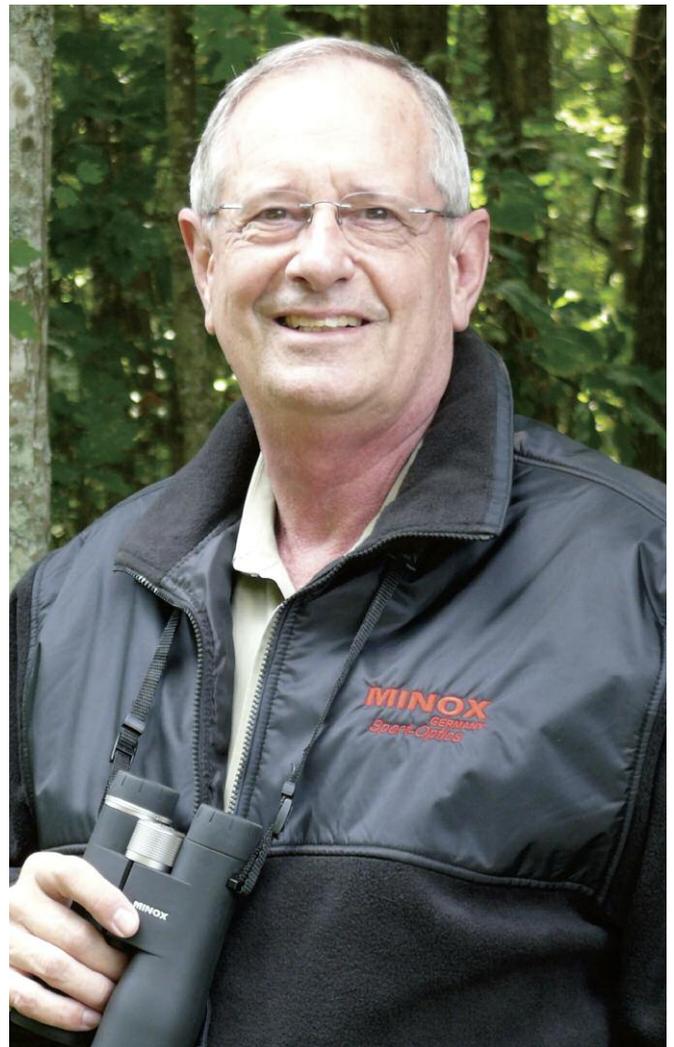
Birding: How will birding optics improve in the next 5–10 years?

TM: Improve may be the wrong word. Many of today's high-performance optics are already capable of delivering more im-

age detail than what the human eye can resolve. There will likely be continued advances in brightness and improved image contrast. However, what we will most likely see is change in what a binocular or spotting scope is. Can a full integration of virtual images—offering magnification control, night vision, color and contrast manipulation, and other “control”—be far off?

Birding: What new birding products is the industry working on? How small can you go in compact binoculars?

TM: We have a long list of new product projects, many of which will be of great interest to birders. Minox and other companies will continue to concentrate on improving overall performance and increasing value. Of course, these efforts will be reflected within existing product lines—for example, compact and full-size binoculars, along with compact spotting



Terry Moore.

scopes. Also exciting are new product categories for Minox—and perhaps even new categories for the market.

Consider compact binoculars. To be usable, compacts are constrained by objective size; 20mm to 25mm is pretty standard. Given that factor, we have pretty much reached the limit in overall miniaturization. However, designs like dual hinges can provide slim, pocketable, field-convenient products. What we may see is possible continued reduction in weight by using new optical and body materials. New optical designs may also allow us to develop shorter, more compact instruments.

Birding: How do you choose which programs to support, like the American Birding Association?

TM: Being a passionate birder, I always find more projects worthy of support than what budgets will allow. Personally, I have always tried to focus energies on those programs that support participation in birding by young people. It is here that relatively modest investments can have very positive effects. Although not all those we touch will become birders, I believe it is important to convey an understanding of the environmental challenges we face. Birds are a great means of doing that. They are animate, colorful, interesting, and readily accessible.

Birding: You're a birder and a hunter yourself. How do the optical needs of hunters and birders differ?

TM: This is a question that is often asked and one that I find very interesting. Both user groups feel they have special needs. However, with the exception of certain specialized activities, they generally choose the same optics. What they both have in common is a high level of field activity requiring well-featured, highly durable products and uncompromising optical performance.