

# Tips for Using Merlin Bird ID with Voiceover

Please Note: As of January 2026 when this document was written, The current version of Merlin Bird ID requires iOS 17.6 or later

## Introduction

Merlin Bird ID is a bird identification app from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. It can be downloaded free of charge from the App Store.

This guide is for iPad and iPhone users who rely on Voiceover. It is designed to help Voiceover users to get the most out of Merlin Bird ID.

Navigational headings are included.

Merlin is also available for Android.

When you install Merlin, you will be given the opportunity to establish a free Cornell account. While Merlin's basic functions can be used without an account, setting up an account is recommended.

To take full advantage of Merlin, you must permit it to access your location while using the app.

## The main Screen

(Please note: What Voiceover says may differ from what is shown visually on the screen. Also, settings you choose may change what Voiceover speaks on the main screen.)

## Overview of the main screen

Open the Merlin app and go to the top of the screen.

If you flick forward repeatedly with one finger, this is what you are likely to hear:

Your bird of the day, followed by a bird species

Share

A number showing how many people are currently listening with merlin

An unlabeled button

Microphone button

Camera button

Step-by- step, sound, photo

Speaker-my sound recordings button

Identify tab, explore tab, life list tab, and settings tab.

## Detailed description of the main screen

Your bird of the day: Lists a different species each day. Double-tapping on the species opens a direct-touch area that provides details, some of which are visual. You will find a button to play sounds of the bird, and other relevant information, followed by a Close button which may not be easy to find. There is also a found-it button, which opens a screen where you can enter information to confirm where you discovered this species. (Not completely voice-over friendly.)

After the species, there is a Share button which can be used to send the species information to another person.

I sometimes find it necessary to close the app and re-open it to get out of the direct touch mode.

Icon Step-by-step:

Opens a screen that asks for visual information such as size and location to identify a bird. (Mostly visual)

Microphone: This is where you go to identify a bird by sound.

When you activate this button, merlin begins to listen and record audio.

Please note that activating the Microphone button causes the Voiceover volume to drop considerably. To hear Voiceover while the microphone is open requires that you hold the phone up to your ear, or use a wired headset. Bluetooth headsets generally do not work well with merlin.

When finished, use the Close button to exit sound ID, and Voiceover volume will immediately return to normal.

#### My Sound Recordings:

This section gives you access to the recordings you have made.

It is mostly self-explanatory.

Above the list are two buttons worth mentioning.

Item button: Opens settings that control the order in which recordings are displayed.

Select Button: After activating this button, you can navigate through your list of recordings and tag the ones you want to delete by double-tapping them.

Once you are finished selecting them, go to the bottom to find the Delete button.

There does not seem to be a way to automatically select them all for deletion.

#### Primary Tabs:

At the bottom of the screen are four important tabs, called Identify, Explore, Life list, and Settings.

When Merlin is first opened, the Identify tab is automatically selected.

Explore tab: Includes an edit box for searching for a species from all of the birds that have been downloaded to your device. . Once a species is found, you will find buttons for playing its sounds and getting additional information.

#### Life List Tab:

Some birders maintain a life list, consisting of each new species they find, along with details such as where the bird was identified, habitat, season, and more. Merlin can also be used with an app called eBird, a much more visually oriented app that many sighted birders find extremely useful.

### Settings:

Any new user of Merlin should spend some time in Settings to select from among many helpful options.

For example, there is one called “Move repeated matches to top”. A lot of users find this helpful, because it moves birds that are heard repeatedly to the beginning of the list while Merlin is listening and reporting what it hears.

“My Offline Birds” can be found in Settings and is very Voiceover-friendly. It enables you to download many free “bird packs” for various regions of the world. If you plan to visit most any part of North America or Europe, you can download birds ahead of time and learn about them prior to your trip. Many areas outside of North America and Europe are also covered, and more are being added all the time.

As an alternative, as long as you allow Merlin to access your location (see above), no matter where you are in the world, it will listen for the birds expected in your location. But this latter capacity will only work if you have access to cell service in that area. Downloading the regional birds allows you to use the app without worrying about cell service in the area.