

## VORTEX BANTAM HD 6.5X32 £89

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**T**wo things may have struck you already. One, the magnification – is that enough for birdwatching? And two, the price – I don't often review binoculars with a sub-£100 price tag. This one has fully multi-coated lenses and an HD optical system. If you're strapped for cash, buying a binocular as a gift or looking for an inexpensive second binocular, could this be it?

### 'Only' 6.5x

Most birdwatchers use 8x (or 8.5x) or 10x binoculars. So, why go for a lower magnification? The detail you can, or can't, see is not just about magnification. If it was, we'd all use 20x binoculars. It's also about the quality and stability of the view. A 20x binocular magnifies your handheld wobbles 20x. A 6.5x magnifies them 6.5x. And, for the same size objective, a 6.5x has a bigger exit pupil than a higher magnification binocular. Which means more light can get to the eye (all other things being equal) and it's easier to line your pupils up with the binocular's exit pupils.

### Form

For a mid-sized binocular, the Bantam is very light (410g). It's compact – significantly shorter than the length of my hand, and comfortable to handle. There are thumb indents on the underside but they are not 'over-stated'. Vortex say the Bantam is designed for smaller hands and faces. My hands and face aren't small and the Bantam's form worked well enough for me. Build quality seems very good – better than you might expect at this price point. It's rubber-armoured, nitrogen-filled,



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waterproof, and, remarkably, the Vortex also comes with a lifetime warranty.

### Function

The central hinge holds its position, and the dioptre ring moves stiffly enough to stay in position once set. The twist-up eyecups have a good action, one intermediate position, and are comfortable enough in use. The focusing wheel is one-finger wide and moves quite lightly and very smoothly, anti-clockwise towards infinity through about 1 3/8 turns. Real-world birding requires less

than half a turn.

The 'view' is good. I got the best view when I held the Bantam against my brow ridge and away from my eyes a little – which did make it a bit more vulnerable to flare/reflections. Brightness, sharpness and colours are good. Initially, the image felt narrow, but with a bit of time you notice that less. The apparent field of view is just less than 50° – this is not a wide-angle binocular. Sharpness seemed best at long-range and up close, and there may be a little edge softness, but nothing too distracting. Focus precision is

reasonable, though sometimes I 'hunted' a bit to find best focus. Colour-fringing is pretty well corrected – I saw a bit, but nothing shocking. Close focus, at 3.7m, is not good. But for birdwatching you won't need to focus closer than that very often. You may be using the Bantam in low light, though, and I don't think you'll be disappointed. At sunset, under a mostly clear sky, it coped very well in close shade and with distant, unshaded foliage, showing colours in both, and still did a good job 20 minutes later. And don't forget, the Bantam costs less than £90.

### SPECS

Eye relief: 18.7mm  
Field of view: 7.6°/132.6m@1,000m  
Close focus: 3.7m  
Weight: 410g  
Height x width: 125 x 122mm  
RRP: £89  
Warranty: Lifetime  
Supplied with: Rainguard, tethered objective covers (loose), strap, lens cloth, case (with strap).  
Web: [newprouk.co.uk](http://newprouk.co.uk)

### VERDICT

If you can't, or don't want to, spend too much money, the Bantam is a lightweight, compact, well-made option. The view is good, if narrow, focus precision is reasonable, and low light performance is good. Close focus isn't the best, but unless you're an insect-watcher, it's not really a problem.

Is 6.5x enough? I didn't find myself asking for a distant gull. Having said that, I wouldn't recommend it if most of your birding is far-away estuary stuff or seawatching.

### RATINGS

Optics ★★★★★  
Handling ★★★★★  
Price ★★★★★  
Overall ★★★★★