

A FORM OF RECORD FOR AMATEUR ORNITHOLOGISTS

WITH ONE ILLUSTRATION

By ROBERT S. WOODS

TO those of us who are of a statistical turn of mind, one of the greatest pleasures to be found in the field study of natural history consists in the keeping of some sort of systematic record of our observations, whether we be at home or on vacation trips. If some concise and readily understandable form is adopted, it is conceivable that such records may be not only a source of satisfaction to their makers, but of permanent value as an indication of conditions at the time they were made.

Complete periodical lists of observed species may become a burden by their repetition, while the resulting voluminosity discourages their use for reference purposes. What seems to be needed, in addition to running field notes, is a means by which one may have available in compact form all of the more important statistical data which he has gathered in his previous observation of any particular species. For this purpose

Lanius ludovicianus

2	<i>gambeli</i>	✓	06 05	09 08	11 09	08 06	06 05	06 05	06 05	08 07	10 07	09 04	05	Val.
5	"		07	06	07	07	05	19		05	04	05	04	Val.
3	<i>anthonyi</i>				06									Sta. Cat.
6	<i>excubitorides</i>		14	12	10	12	16	13			21	14		Des. - Cult.
8	"						25							Val.

Fig. 82. Example of author's record cards, used for tabulating statistical data obtained in field studies of individual species.

a card system has important advantages, in that it is capable of unlimited expansion, mistakes are easily rectified, additional cards may be inserted in their proper places, and it permits of rearrangement at any time in accordance with the latest styles in classification.

Never having had the benefit of suggestions from more experienced ornithologists, the writer has developed through various evolutionary steps a form of record which is here illustrated and described, not as the best possible form, but as one which seems to embody the features desired by the writer personally. Standard four by six inch ruled record cards are used, with the addition of the vertical lines on the face and, preferably, plain ruling on the back also. Five by eight inch cards can be obtained if

a larger size is required. At the top of the card is written the name of the species (binomial), leaving room at each side for the notation of possible changes in nomenclature.

If a list of species is to be informative, it must be limited to a definitely outlined region. The location and extent of such regions will depend on individual circumstances, but in a country of varied topography their limits should be determined by physical features rather than by arbitrary political boundaries, and their area should be so limited as to include but one set of geographical races. Those in which extensive observations are made should be designated by number or letter and described on an index card. In the example here shown (fig. 82) the regional numbers are set down in the column at the left-hand margin of the card. Region No. 2 includes that part of the mainland of Los Angeles County south of the Mojave Desert, southeastern Ventura County, the southwestern corner of San Bernardino County, including the San Bernardino Mountains, the western end of Riverside County, including the San Jacinto Mountains, and all of Orange County. If one wished to enlarge this region, it could logically be extended farther up and down the coast, but not to the north or east, beyond the mountain barriers. Region No. 5 is the San Francisco Bay district, No. 3 the Santa Barbara Islands, No. 6 the Antelope Valley and Mojave Desert, and No. 8 is southeastern Arizona.

The grouping of all geographical races together on one card not only makes for convenience and economy of space, but renders it possible to ignore the third term of the trinomial when the status is undecided or when two or more subspecies not readily distinguishable in the field occur together in migration or on winter range.

Following the name of the subspecies there are twelve divisions for the months of the year, within which are recorded the first two years in which the species was observed in each region for each month. It is assumed that when a species has been seen in the same month for two different years it must be of normal occurrence during that month, but, if desired, space for a larger number of years could be provided. If the month and year in which a species was first seen in a given region are known, it is convenient to enter it in red ink (or underlined, as in fig. 82), and to distinguish in the same way the last entry when the spaces are all filled. Some idea of relative abundance is usually afforded by the elapsed time between records. The division of the year into quarters by heavier lines facilitates the location of the proper spaces without the necessity of a heading.

At the right is a space for indicating the nature of the habitat. The Los Angeles region, for example, can be subdivided into coast, salt marsh, lagoons and lakes, lowlands, cities, valley (in general), oak regions, wash, canyons, foothills, Transition and Canadian zones, etc., using more specific designations for localized species. Region No. 6, the Mojave Desert, requires fewer divisions; towns, cultivated land, reservoirs, desert, uplands and hills will probably cover the greater part of it.

The back of the card can be used for recording early and late migration dates, nesting data, times of unusual abundance or any other items of permanent interest. If extensive field notes are kept, reference to book and page numbers might be entered on the card.

As the title of the article indicates, this form is designed primarily for those who pursue the study of ornithology as an avocation merely; hence the writer trusts that its limitations from a technical standpoint will not be too severely criticized.

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