

## RETORTS, REFLECTIONS, AND THOUGHTFUL REFUTATIONS

Dear Pete:

I was pleased to see your article concerning the "Free Lunch Club," those birders who expect no-cost Rare Bird Alert services provided for their convenience. It is entirely appropriate to expect the principle users of a highly specialized service to bear the cost of providing the service.

The National Audubon Society should apply the same reasoning to the Christmas Bird Count fee and eliminate it. The principle users of CBC data are people who subscribe to *American Birds*, personally or through their research agencies. The cost of publishing the counts should be absorbed through an *AB* subscription rate increase either for all subscribers or as a surcharge for those who want the CBC data.

Christmas Bird Count participants are for the most part not users of CBC data and should not have to pay for

This is your page. To do with as you please. We hope that you will be provoked, excited, energized, and challenged by Pete Myers' column, and we dedicate this space to your insight, opinions, ideas, recommendations, questions, complaints, challenges, and daydreams. Write to Retorts, *American Birds*, 950 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022.

the "Free Lunch" of those of us who use the data. The current system results in distorted data owing to the increasing practice of compilers reporting fewer observers than actually participate.

I will pay for my own lunch. Raise my subscription rates and get rid of the CBC participant fee.

**Alan Contreras**  
Jefferson City, MO

Dear Dr. Myers:

We at the Houston Audubon Society, and particularly those involved with the North American Rare Bird Alert, want you to know how much we enjoyed and appreciated your editorial, "Phone Freebies" (*American Birds*, Fall 1989). You expressed our concerns far more eloquently and to a much wider readership than my feeble rebuttal (still unprinted) to the editor of "Birding" magazine could ever attempt to do.

Unfortunately, the American Birding Association board continues to pursue what they perceive as a mandate to supply such a "free" service to their membership on at least a regional basis. Perhaps a good dose of cost accounting regarding the cost of producing a quality continent-wide service would persuade them otherwise!

**Mike Austin**  
The Houston Audubon Society  
Houston, TX

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