

North American Birds

Reporting Network

Every issue of *North American Birds* presents an overview of what the birds were doing all over North America for an entire season. These summaries are based on observations by thousands of birders. If you enjoy *North American Birds*, we urge you to consider becoming a contributor of information as well as a reader.

The columns are written by Regional Editors, all of whom are experts on the birdlife in their areas. These hardworking individuals are all **volunteers**. While they are generally glad to receive more reports (to make their accounts more thorough), we need to practice some courtesies to avoid overwhelming them.

As a first step, you should know the significance of the information that you are reporting. Never just send in a list of the birds you saw, expecting the regional editors to sift through it. If you are new to this publication, it would be a good idea to read a few issues' worth of reports from your region to get a better idea of the kinds of bird records that are included.

Basically, we cover news. If you see the expected species in normal numbers and at normal places and dates, this is reassuring and important, and well worth recording in your own field notes. But we can't publish all of that in *North American Birds*. (Can you imagine the heft of a *New York Times* that published the daily activities of every resident of the city?) We report the unusual. However, this doesn't mean you should ignore the "common" birds. The regional reports are far more than summaries of rarities. If there is a major invasion of American Robins, for example, or if the Barn Swallows come back exceptionally early, such things are part of the story of what happened during a season.

To find out the "normal" bird situation in your locale, you need to consult other types of publications. Most states and provinces, and many smaller areas, have books or annotated checklists on bird status and distribution. Such references are essential to help you understand the significance of your own observations. Checking such sources can make your birding not only more educational but more enjoyable

Another good way to learn about local bird distribution is to establish contact with your nearest Audubon chapter or other bird clubs.

Perhaps you are reporting to *North American Birds* for the first time because you have found a bird that is definitely unusual where or when you saw it. When reporting rarities, it is always important to include the details of the record. Points to cover include:

- Date, time, and exact location.
- Viewing conditions (lighting, weather, distance to bird).
- A detailed description of the bird: appearance, voice, behavior. Include only those things you actually observed. A description written on the spot, during the observation, is *always* more useful than one written later.
- Names and addresses of other observers who identified the same bird.
- Photographs, even of marginal quality, are very worthwhile for establishing records. And if video or audio tapes have been made, it's worth mentioning that they exist, although it's not necessary to send them along in most cases.

In asking for details, regional editors are not casting doubt on anyone's abilities. The top bird experts in North America routinely write up details to support their unusual sightings, and all birders would do well to follow their example. Reports of truly rare finds are usually kept on permanent file. Maybe everyone knows today that you're a sharp birder, but what about people fifty years from now who are researching past records? They probably won't know your reputation, and they'll want to see details.

In some regions, especially large ones with lots of birders, reports are funneled through subregional editors, and it is best to send your reports to these individuals. Some regions list the mailing addresses for these subregional compilers. Others do not, but you may be able to find their addresses in the *ABA Membership Directory*. If you are not sure of the address, it's better to send in notes to the main Regional Editor than to not send them anywhere

Don't be discouraged if your sightings are not specifically quoted in a particular report. Even minor observations help the regional editors to form a more complete picture of the season. By becoming part of our reporting network, you put your birding observations to good use, and you contribute to the permanent record of North America's birdlife.

For each season, your field reports (along with supporting details and photographs) should reach the Regional Editors as soon as possible after the season ends. The Regional Editors are working under strict deadlines, and it makes their task much easier if they have time to consider and analyze your reports before writing their columns.

Winter Season

(December through February)
Notes should reach Regional Editors as soon as possible after March 1.

Spring Season

(March through May)
Notes should reach Regional Editors as soon as possible after June 1.

Summer Season

(June and July)
Notes should reach Regional Editors as soon as possible after August 1.

Autumn Season

(August through November)
Notes should reach Regional Editors as soon as possible after December 1

Photographs

For instructions on how to submit photographs to *North American Birds*, see page 116.

