

2022-2023 Texas CBC Documentation Standards

Brent Ortego

TX CBC Editor

361/827-4691

brentortego@hotmail.com

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HOW TO TALLY

<https://www.texasbirdrecordscommittee.org/texas-state-list>

During Count Day tally each wild species that is native to North America and any of the introduced species that are recognized **by the Texas Bird Records Committee** as established for your species total.

Domesticated species like ducks and geese found in parks and other exotics should not be tallied for the species total. However, they can be reported as domesticated/exotics for tracking their status.

Only one species can be added to your species total for species with multiple subspecies/forms. Dark-eyed Junco is one of several species that could have multiple forms on a CBC but **all forms of a species combined only gives you credit for one species.**

Spp. When recording very similar species it is not unusual to record some birds as sp. A common example would be Meadowlark sp. If you only list Meadowlark sp. and not Eastern or Western Meadowlark this counts as one species. If you list Eastern, Western or both species, Meadowlark sp. does not credit you for an additional species.

COUNT WEEK: Count Week birds do not contribute to your species tally.

Correct Addition. I recommend calculating species total with a spreadsheet. Create an extra column next to the species name and place a 1 for each valid species. Automated summation should minimize errors. I still find about 30% of the compilers have errors in species totals.

PHOTOGRAPH NEEDS

CBCs are encouraged to submit digital photos for documentation of unusual and rare birds. It really makes it easier to judge the validity of the observation.

Photographs of more common species are also used by me to write my annual report for Texas. It helps tell the story; plus, the readers prefer to see pictures than read text. Would you send some of the nice digital photos your birders produce? I will try and use them in the annual article.

BIRDER EFFORT

The most important data participants produce is the one where many likely pay the least attention. This is party-effort. Whenever your data are analyzed they are adjusted for effort just like eBird reports. Number of individuals by party-hour/mile is the primary measure used to analyze status of a species. Not just the total number of birds. The

link http://birds.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidetocbcpartyhours_0.pdf

discusses many aspects of party hours and party miles, but I will go over key points people will potentially make errors.

Audubon developed (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone>) a new tool to track population trends based on birder effort. Check it out.

WHAT IS A PARTY ON A CBC?

It is one or more birders that are able to communicate with normal voices and are operating as a unit. What I see sometimes on the larger counts is that a section (property) will have 8 or more birders, but only one party is reported. The birders likely were not all walking/riding together and thus they were probably more than one party. The correct number of parties need to be identified as well as the amount of time and mileage spent walking or traveling in a vehicle for each party. See at end of message for more explanation.

START AND ENDING TIME “ENTER ME FIRST”

The count starts when birding starts for the day whether it is daylight or dark and it ends when the last birding stops. Thus, if a group is owling at 4 a.m. then the count starts at 4 a.m. rather than 6:30 when most of the other birders start. The hours in the dark are considered nocturnal and not normal birding hours. They need to be logged separately. Thus, if you are reporting a time span of 12 hours on a normal day of 10 day-light hours. Then at least 2 hours of that day was nocturnal.

If there are gaps in birding during the day/night, then the starting ending times of each segment need to be recorded. An example would be if your count takes a lunch break. Then the time for the CBC would be in two segments. Example: 6:30 am to 11:30 am; 12:30 pm to 5:30 pm.

Another example would be at the count down it was noticed that an owl species was not tallied and a team was sent out to locate that species. Start and ending times might look like the following with a gap when no birding was conducted: 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

For data entry, start and ending time needs to be entered before effort is logged because of the way the website is programmed. Otherwise, if you must make a correction to start and end times, you will need to delete your effort data before the website will allow you to change times.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DOCUMENTED?

There are about 110 Texas CBCs to edit and it is challenging to streamline documentation needs for each CBC. So, I set some generalized State standards which applies to each CBC. If a compiler decides to send documentation on more observations than required by these standards that is OK and I will gladly review them.

Any species which has not been reported on a CBC at least twice during the last 10 years (excluding this year, and as published on the CBC website) and has received no negative editorial codes. Those codes are typically ND (no details), DD (details desired), UD (unconvincing details). You can check past years results at <http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/> to look at results and editorial codes.

Any Texas Bird Records Committee review species.

Any species which is challenging to identify. Glossy Ibis, Rufous vs Allen's Hummingbird, Ruby-throated vs Black-chinned Hummingbird, etc. For Rufous Hummingbirds, I accept counts of males without descriptions with a note from the compiler for the number of males.

Any extremely large numbers of birds for a species. It would be good to provide documentation to reduce the likelihood I would challenge the number. As an example, one season I challenged a report of 150,000 Greater White-fronted Geese on a California CBC. The closest other CBC tally to this in the Nation was 20,000, and this tally was several times larger than the record tally for the decade for the CBC. I queried the compiler and he only came up with a description of 500 groups of 100. Another example was an inland Louisiana CBC had over 70,000 Ring-billed Gulls. That is an amazing # for the site, but when questioned the compiler came up with a description how a team of birders counted flight lines of gulls using a landfill near Lacassine. This was a very good record.

I don't have any fixed standard for high counts. If the observations are several times larger than what you would normally expect as a tally, then it would be good to document the report describing how these birds were counted.

WHEN DOES THE DOCUMENTATION NEED TO BE PREPARED?

I no longer accept documentation that was prepared longer than one week after the date of observation.

So, what happens if an unusual record is not documented? If it is a species I don't believe likely was observed, I will delete the record. If it is a species that I expect, but documentation is not received or poorly described I will let the record stand and insert appropriate editorial codes questioning the record. *At some time in the future, Audubon will likely delete those records which are questioned.* I will also subtract the questionable species from your total species count.

How should it be documented? Most rare bird reporting forms work. They guide an observer as to what to record. I am not picky as to which form or any form that is used. What I do need to know is:

What was seen

Who saw it

When it was seen

How long was the observation

How far from the bird

Which optics were used in the identification

The documentation should provide a description that a knowledgeable person could read and identify the bird.

PHOTOGRAPHS ARE GREAT IF YOU CAN OBTAIN THEM

Texas birders should be proud as to the large numbers of photographs which they take of rarities.

MORE THAN A SIGNATURE IS NEEDED

The typical CBC documentation form requests specific information about the sighting on the front of the form, and requests a description of the bird on the back.

It is amazing how many birders and compilers (about 10 per season) believe that all that is needed for documentation is a signed affidavit that says a birder saw a species. A description of the bird is needed to convince people that don't know the observer that an observation was made for it to last through time.

What helps the birders determine which species to document is being issued a check-list prior to the count which shows which species that requires documentation. For the 3 CBCs I compile, I provide a list of all expected birds which includes a few that need documentation. Those species requiring documentation are usually coded by all caps or bold. I note on tally sheets that any species not listed, also requires documentation. I don't list any rare species to minimize the likelihood of novices reporting rare birds. Also, compilers should require birders give documentations at count down. I know lots of birders are too much in a hurry to write it down during the day, and some want to go home to review references before they provide nice typed details. Just make sure the documentation is legible, and it is prepared within 1 week of observation.

Also, it is preferred that compilers submit all documentation at the same time data are entered on the website. When your CBC goes final on the CBC website, I have to make a guess as to whether or not you will be sending documentation for one or more species. I usually wait a few days to receive material in the mail and then I will proceed with the review during the first break in my schedule. It is time consuming to go back through the review process again when weeks later documentation is received. I would appreciate your help with this.

Some compilers expressed concern about offending their birders about challenging their identifications. When a compiler submits documentation to me, I am going to assume the compiler approved this observation. If the compiler is not willing to make the decision before it gets to me, let me know your thoughts. Otherwise, I am going to believe the compiler is convinced this identification is correct. I don't mind saying no to a record, but I need and respect the opinion of the compiler before I make a decision.

Most of you are business people. How many times do you like to visit a project to complete it? Think of over 110 CBCs where the typical compiler submits their record on the web either in one day or strung out over several weeks. They might submit some documentation within one week of data entry, but more frequently it kind of trickles in by multiple mailings/e-mails in 2 or 3 batches. Each time I access a CBC it takes time and I have to keep a record of all decisions. This really adds up by the end of a season.

I appreciate your help to streamline the data entry and make it more creditable.

TITMICE

CBCs in the zone of hybridization of the Tufted and Black-crested are challenged by how to correctly identify if the titmice observed are hybrids or pure. There has been some discussion as to the finer details on how to distinguish hybrid/non-hybrid in the field, but in reality nobody really knows without a DNA sample from the bird. So, how much DNA must be shared between 2 species to be considered a hybrid. There is no standard.

With the Tufted and the Black-crested demonstrating a high degree of hybridization in their overlapping range, I don't believe pure birds of both species could co-exist within a 15 mile belt without having some form of hybridization. I have been lumping all titmice that occur in CBCs that have a history of reporting 2 species of titmice - as hybrids.