

LETTER - SINGLE SPECIES ENTRIES COVERING ALL REGIONAL REPORTS

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I applaud your call to increase the quality and quantity of data reported in *The Kingbird* (March 1996), and I would like to platform two suggestions that might promote useful debate. The first concerns *The Kingbird* as a comprehensive and yet practical/viable archive of New York State birds and birding. Although radical, I would like to suggest that "the meat" of all ten Regional reports be combined as a systematic account, with the records cited in a standard order such as Region 1 followed by Region 2 and so on. Here is an example:

Lesser Black-backed Gull: (1) Three reports, probably four birds, NR Jan and Feb, more than usual for after Dec. (2) One ad IB 8,13,14, Jan (sev); One ad P11 Jan (MP) (5) One ad Baldwinsville 23 Dec-30 Jan (8) One ad, one first w Crescent ALBA 2 Dec (KA, WE, et al.); one TCBC; one HR Troy Dam 25 Dec (RG to BEN) (9) one PL thru, sporadic; one Hudson R, Haverstraw 23 Feb (10) half a dozen reports SI to MP.

There are several advantages to this arrangement, the most important being that it saves space, allowing more records to be cited. After all, the species name needs only to be mentioned once in the whole publication. In addition, the format is much easier for those interested in a particular species or group of birds, as ALL the records for the state are together - something that I am sure "Bull book revision" authors can appreciate.

This provides a better picture of the species across the state as a whole, without losing the fine detail. Of course, *The Kingbird's* Regional commentaries should remain as they are. Although more editorial effort is required, this systematic format has been adopted by the majority of Regional and national bird reports worldwide.

My second point concerns how readers are to judge the reliability of reports published in the Regional accounts. This is an important issue because these entries function as the most accessible, up-to-date account of New York birds. For one thing, the scale of the state presents difficulties; while the New York State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC) covers birds that are rare throughout the state, things seem less clear for species that are unusual on a Regional level, and I suspect many observers submit records without fully appreciating the significance of their observations. The use of a symbol (here an exclamation mark) to indicate that a written description was received, and presumably deemed acceptable, by the Regional Editor(s) is helpful in principle. Unfortunately, this convention is adhered to very inconsistently, at least in recent issues, and this weakens its value. Also, the choice of symbol seems a little bizarre, and perhaps something more confidence inspiring could be adopted!

References to species considered by NYSARC should always indicate whether descriptions have been submitted to (or better, approved by) NYSARC. If it is unclear when going to press whether a description has been filed, then the records should be withheld from the seasonal account or at least this fact indicated, again by a simple symbol. My concern is for future researchers who must cross-check past records to figure out whether they were actually accepted after review, an impractical task. An increased number of short notes describing the circumstances of lesser rarity discoveries would also be valuable and fun. These notes would provide a published context to interesting records. Maybe the editor could add a line or two mentioning key identification details that helped satisfy NYSARC members.

I hope these suggestions stimulate fruitful discussion leading to ever better documentation of the fascinating birdlife of this complex and diverse state.

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