

EDITORIAL — REGIONAL REPORTS AND RECORDS DOCUMENTATION

Robert Spahn

716 High Tower Way, Webster NY 14580

Since the change in *The Kingbird* editorship early this year, we have been wrestling with many issues relative to the Regional reports. The intent is to continue to strike some balance between providing interesting, readable reports and producing a compilation of records likely to be of use to researchers trying to locate data. The experiences of many of the authors of species accounts for the new state bird book in progress have driven us to a few changes in format of the reports, such as virtually eliminating the use of the term "intro" in the body of the species records. Any data worth putting in the introduction of a report will be summarized again in the body of the species summaries for easy location.

In a recent meeting with many of the regional editors and through notes from the rest, there has been reinforcement of the recognition that they walk a tightrope in many ways. In order to encourage the submission of records, the editor wants to be as non-judgmental as possible and to include recognition of as many individual contributors as possible with initials on individual records. Yet, in the interest of science and credibility, rarer records, either due to where found or when, must be adequately documented and the editors are called upon to push for documentation from the observers and to eliminate as simply as interesting rumors those for which written documentation is not submitted. Since we are generally not collecting specimens, good written documentation is all that we have to support sight record validity and to add some degree of science to our efforts. In the interest of space (= cost), we must recognize that all records are not of detailed interest at the state level. The editors are called upon to select records which illustrate what happened in their Region in a given season, with emphasis on special events and records which relate to longer term trends of some kind. Periodically, this will mean noting that a given stable species or family is still just that, but every species can not be covered every season.

We have asked that initials be added only to "special" records, though every observer/contributor should be acknowledged in the **Contributors** section of the report. However, it is imperative that as many records be gathered as possible so that we can first obtain a feel for any given season, then later begin to see trends in data. It is hoped that all the submitted records will be retained

in some fashion and passed along when the local editorship changes. It is also very useful if more of the records can be published in some form in club newsletters within the local Region.

Issues remain around the gathering and reporting of data such as this. Early and late dates, while interesting to birders, are mainly weather, observer effort, and luck driven, so may tell us little about population trends. High counts again may be driven by special conditions forcing unusual concentrations, thus requiring much care in interpretation. Counts also require that we carefully spell out the "level of aggregation" or level of effort spent if we are to make meaningful comparisons. Totals from a BBS route or a bird count or a set of bird counts in a Region are not immediately comparable with each other or with reports from single field trips. We must all be as clear as possible in our reporting. Over time we must figure out how to best portray such varying data. We generally feel strongly that data are essential to driving rational decisions in the environmental arena, thus the more that we can gather, the better, even if we don't know exactly how to analyze it now. We may be able to figure out useful methods of analysis later, but we have no hope of finding data we didn't take or gather and save now.

Records with the greatest level of detail you are willing to provide and with your comments on the circumstances and the season in the areas you visited will be of the most interest and use. Counts and careful numerical estimates at specific sites are preferred. However, even the simple presence or absence of a species in an area on a date indicated by a check on a list may have some utility. Submission on checklists of some kind, or at least summarized in checklist order, will ease the task of the Regional editor in assembling and trying to make sense out of a season's input. In the end, any form of written submission will be appreciated. As always, any of us would like to hear your comments and suggestions.