

LETTER - REGIONAL REPORTS

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I applaud Angus Wilson's proposal to systematize Regional Reports by species. It would indeed be an easy and rapid reference as well as a comprehensive overview. Cumulatively, it could be computerized into a formidable data bank.

I foresee difficulties. Wilson provides for the retention of Regional commentaries. Reporters regularly "open up" the dense text clusters of their species accounts with notes about such things as observers being almost struck by marauding accipiters. Are all such observations to be expunged from the accounts or worked into the general essay? A huge problem will be formatting. Each Regional Report features three sets of abbreviations, statewide, Regional, and observer initials.

Putting together a sample account for Lesser Black-backed Gull is easy enough. Cobbling together the data for any common species will inevitably yield an unwieldy tapeworm of telegraphic tidbits. If the species also happens to be regular in four Regions but marginal in six, but also a bit intransigent about breeding (for example, White-eyed Vireo), you have the makings of a pretty formidable fusillade of abbreviations. It is hard to see how you could avoid such a farrago.

Withal, I believe Dr. Wilson's idea is cogent and pregnant with possibilities. I suggest that it might best be implemented by retooling it carefully so as to render it capable of being formatted in tabular form.