

LETTER — REGIONAL REPORTS

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Robert Spahn's Editorial (1996) makes good points in encouraging written documentation of "special" bird sightings and systematic surveys of breeding and migratory bird movements.

I question, however, Mr. Spahn's contention that bird watching is science. Bird watching is a social pastime with disparate levels of interest and activity. To dismiss a birder's efforts as "interesting rumors" unless accompanied by written documentation is flip and patronizing and a disservice to the membership.

As a past Regional Editor and a local correspondent for the New York rare bird alert, I find that the most difficult aspect of these activities is to obtain any type of report from birders in our area. It takes years of coaxing and encouragement to secure records from birders. I consider it a victory when I get an oral report of interesting bird sightings.

Many birders enjoy seeing their efforts acknowledged by the insertion of their names and/or initials in the Regional Reports. To dismiss their efforts by the deletion of their initials unless the record is "special" is retrograde, especially if the reason is cost driven as suggested by Mr. Spahn.

Mr. Spahn hopes "That all the submitted records will be retained in some fashion". This, of course, includes records not published. To hope that future researchers will ferret out records stored in various locations throughout the state is to hope in vain. If a record is important enough to be saved for posterity, it should be published contemporaneously in *The Kingbird*, in the best manner that the Editor sees fit. A pristine written report by a single observer does not guarantee validity. I would much rather have an oral report by a creditable, experienced birder than a written report by a person with questionable credentials.

Mr. Spahn states that "Early and late dates, while interesting to birders, are mainly weather, observer effort, and luck driven, so may tell us little about population trends". This statement could be disputed but more to the point is that these data provide enjoyment to birders and are not necessarily meant to be indicative of population trends. Nor are rare birds indicative of population trends. In a pure scientific sense, rare birds are just curiosities and do little more than add to a sense of birding fun and as additions to the state list.

I suggest that the Editors of *The Kingbird* publish instructions on how to write a cogent bird report and also advise the members as to what constitutes a "special record". I also suggest that we respect the judgment of the Regional

Editors as to what information they wish to pass on for publication. They are better aware at the local level to determine what constitutes an interesting record.

The Kingbird belongs to the membership of the Federation and the printed content should not be subject to unilateral decisions.

LITERATURE CITED

Spahn R. 1996 Dec. Editorial - Regional Reports and records documentation.
Kingbird 46(4): 294-295.