

## REPLY — EDITING THE REGIONAL REPORTS

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I thank Tony Lauro for his comments. This reply will address these topics with some expansion on points which may be of general interest.

Birdwatching is an interesting hobby which can be carried out over a wide spectrum of participation levels, none of which is intrinsically "better" than another. Some of the activities can enter the realm of science and/or at least allow the gathering of data/information which can have scientific value. But, it is not always clear where one draws the line. The gathering of records about bird populations is of potential scientific value AND "records" are written, not oral. Birders are free to play the birding/birdwatching game at any level they wish, BUT if they choose to participate at the level of contributing records, then there will be rules and requirements. If the records are of rare events, (for number, time, location, etc.), then detailed, written documentation is an essential part of calling the input a record.

Dismissing oral input or input without written details as interesting rumors is not a flip or patronizing statement. I have come to this strong conclusion after many years of gathering local records and trying to cajole people into documenting sightings. I am completely convinced that such details in writing are an essential part of a record having any future value. I enjoy as much as anyone the oral tales of people's birding exploits. But, if these are to be records, they must be written. Otherwise, they are just tales or "rumors", fun to hear, but of no value to state or local ornithology. I am interested in hearing oral reports, but do not consider it a victory from a records standpoint until I

see it in writing. Locally, I use the rare bird alert line to help decide where to bird or for finding out about possible rarities, but it is not even considered in local records compilation. Likewise, items appearing in the local newspaper bird column are written, but generally are only second-hand, or more distant, and unverified for the rarer material.

On the topic of attaching initials onto records in *The Kingbird*, my main point is that all records are not of high value on the state level. If an urban feeder watcher faithfully records the peak count of 22 starlings and 19 House Sparrows at a feeder each month, he/she is not likely to ever see his/her initials. It might be worth it for somebody in the Region to keep that pile of data in some form because a drop to 5 or a leap to 500 sometime in the future might be a signal of interest. Obviously this is an extreme, but it illustrates the issues relative to recognition. I am firmly of the opinion that *ALL CONTRIBUTORS* in all regions should have their names listed every season they contribute. The initials serve only peripherally for additional recognition, but more importantly to identify the source of special or unusual records to help others assess their validity or to give them a contact, should they wish to pursue more information. As with past editors, I have sent out notes on what I think "special" means, but have added that this is really the province of the Regional editor guided by knowledge of what we are trying to do. I have not edited out any initials to date and, in fact, have asked for more in some cases.

With my local records committee hat on, I would periodically send very faithful contributors a personal note and bend over backwards to find something in their data to publish in our local newsletter's Noteworthy Records section. Here in Region 2 (and in Region 1), we do have the plus that local clubs are assessing records and publishing lots of local data which may not be of great significance at the statewide level. That way, more people are recognized individually more often. Still, some never see or do anything notable. Not every kid gets to play in the major (or even minor) leagues of any sport. Why would I expect birdwatching to be greatly different?

On the future of records, I see no near-term mechanism for gathering all data at the state level. Much of it is in boxes or on computer disks at the Regional or club level. I think that serious researchers will need to go to these sources if they need specific data. I would love to see proposals for how to assemble all the data we need or want in more accessible form at any level. I don't have time and haven't found others locally to enter into a computer all of our monthly checklists. Steve Kelling (Region 3) is trying to do this for his Region and is also trying to have direct e-mail or internet input. The latter adds the problem of assessing veracity. Does anyone else have ideas?

Relative to everything important enough to be saved for posterity being published in *The Kingbird*, I am not convinced that we know enough about what will be important to posterity to select and publish "all". I will probably

continue to differ from some others on the oral versus written. But, written records can be revisited over time. In contrast, oral material tends to rapidly vary with distance from the event in time or space; the original no longer exists. Over time, individuals' credibilities will become established and their records handled appropriately. All regional or local records compilers probably have birders who report great things, none of which they ever can produce for others. Their "records" are generally handled appropriately.

Early and late dates and rarities are fun to gather. The dates involve more people in record gathering than the rarities. Nevertheless, all of the dates are not of such interest as to warrant noting location and observer's initials. A first or last sighting of a species occurring in the middle of its historical date range adds a data point to the overall season's assessment, but certainly is not something to be checked out later. I mentioned the dates specifically out of a very current frustration level over the time it takes to enter and to try to assess the date table data, with little evidence of any visible changes, even for species for which other data suggest major population decreases. But again, it seems to be of interest to many and provides tangible output which may be useful at some point. So we will keep doing it.

In a rare occurrence report I look for some evidence that the observer recognized at the time that the observation was notable, made a serious effort to observe all the details immediately, and then wrote these down without a lot of prior corruption from reviewing field guides and/or talking with others. Obviously, notes written in the field are best. In the verification report I just need all of the details which led the observer to his/her conclusion, hopefully in enough detail to convince me now and others in the future. As a records committee person, I am biased TOWARD acceptance of anything close to convincing, with level of convincing depending on rarity and to some extent on observer. (I'm human and not totally uninfluenced by reputation.) Generally, I leave "special" (= things I'd put initials on) to the Regional editors, but I do tell them that these ought to be things Regionally out of date or place or otherwise of great interest to them, records which somebody might want to check out with the observer later. As far as "records" go, I want anything the observer is willing to send in whatever form they send it. The more detail, the more useful. Material on checklists or in checklist order is easier to work with than random notes on scraps of paper. Numbers and dates are of more use than just check marks. Details from specific, identifiable locales are of more use to people trying to use data later. Added comments and observations on the season are of use to the Regional editor. Anything submitted will be saved.

Finally, there is absolutely no question that *The Kingbird* belongs to the Federation, which is the membership. However, somebody representing the membership must choose (or arm twist) somebody into being editor in order for anything to be published. The editor is going to need to establish guidelines

and make decisions, which at times will be unilateral, in order to put anything in print during our lifetimes. We are trying to keep *The Kingbird* open to include as much membership input as possible in the decisions relative to our guidelines. Over the years, I have included a multitude of questions in my Highlights and Region 2 reports and have received virtually no feedback. Relative to the Regional report editing, I have solicited input from anyone willing to provide it. At the Annual Federation meeting last September, we set up a special meeting with the Regional editors, and anyone else interested, to discuss guidelines and directions. Only the dedicated few showed, most of whom had already provided input in writing. In the end, guidelines have been sent out based on the best we can do to accommodate all. We plan to meet again this year; please join us.

Serious input is welcomed at any time. Prompt reply is not guaranteed, but will come eventually, when the birds aren't flying.

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