

NEW POLICIES CONCERNING THE SPRING AND CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

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Beginning with the 1974 Christmas Bird Count, a number of new rules and instructions will be in operation concerning the reporting of counts and their publication in *Chat*. The major reason for these changes is to improve the quality of the counts, both by insisting on full details for unusual species and by encouraging thorough coverage of the various habitats within each count circle. Also, a revised count form has been designed for use starting with the upcoming Christmas Count. It is imperative that all persons who participate on bird counts in the Carolinas read and understand these new instructions, particularly those concerning the reporting of details for unusual species. Compilers of counts should be especially aware of these instructions, as many statements pertain strictly to them. Harry LeGrand is now the editor of the Spring and Christmas Counts, but compilers still should send the completed count forms to Eloise Potter, who will continue to prepare the count table.

1. FULL DETAILS FOR UNUSUAL SPECIES: No longer will just the name of the observer(s) be acceptable to document a rare or unusual species. When anyone reports a species on a count that is rare for the area at that season, he must submit to his compiler full and convincing details for that species, so that the compiler can include these details with the count form and submit both to *Chat*. Full details are required by *American Birds* on unusual species reported on Christmas counts published in that journal, and the write-up of details now requested by *Chat* should follow exactly those required by *American Birds*. The details must convince the editor that the species was correctly identified. State briefly, in about three sentences or phrases, how the species was identified, including field marks observed, calls or songs if heard, habitat and general location of the sighting, observation conditions (light, distance, and observation time), and the observer's name and address. As an example, the following would be considered sufficient and convincing details for a rare species on the Raleigh Christmas Count:

Bewick's Wren—(Harry LeGrand, 331 Yadkin Drive, Raleigh, N. C. 27609)—one seen in a brushpile near Lake Raleigh; seen in good light for 30 seconds at 50 feet; white eye stripe and underparts, long tail with white spots in the corners.

The editors will be less lenient in judging the validity of unusual records (both rare species and extremely late or early individuals), particularly those with no details reported. For a very rare species without details (e.g., a Least Tern in the piedmont), the editors will completely remove the record from the count without mention. For a rare species without details (e.g., a Common Tern in the piedmont on a Spring Count), the editors will remove it from the table and list it in the Compiler's Comments section of the count, in brackets, as being reported but without details. This latter procedure has been established because the editors believe such a record may well be valid, but without details the record cannot be fully accepted and included in the count table. The purpose of this insistence on reporting details is to insure that every record of a rare species appearing on the count table is valid.

The compiler should include the details for unusual species in the Compiler's Comments section of the count form. If there is not enough space on the form to complete the listing of details, the compiler should finish the report on the back of the first page of the count form or attach additional sheets of paper. Because of space limitations, the details of unusual species *cannot* be published in full in *Chat*; but a brief summary will be published, including the names of observers for noteworthy species. The Compiler's Comments section is also to be used for information on unusual abundance of species, long-term population trends, influence of weather on bird activity, or anything else the compiler believes other birders would be interested in knowing about his count.

2. PUBLICATION OF COUNTS: *Chat* can print a maximum of 29 counts on a count table, due to the limited size of the pages in the journal. Anticipating the time when 30 or more count reports might be received, the editors have adopted some new policies concerning the establishment of new counts and the publication of all counts. We encourage new, well-organized counts; however, we discourage the continuance of counts with only a handful of observers who do not get out before dawn, spend half their time in cars, and tally only half as many species as neighboring counts. These latter counts do not contribute enough to our knowledge of bird life to justify the cost of publication. Beginning with the upcoming (1974) Christmas Count, *Chat* will print a maximum of 29 counts on the table. If more than 29 counts are received, 29 will be printed on the table, but the remaining will be published in paragraph form (as in *American Birds*) in the same issue of *Chat* as the count table. Those which will be omitted from the table are ones which the editors feel are weak and contribute the least information of scientific value. Counts reporting less than the following numbers of species are considered weak and are in jeopardy of being omitted from the table: Spring Count—100 for the immediate coast, 70 for the coastal plain, 80 for the piedmont, and 60 for the mountains; Christmas Count—100 for the immediate coast, 60 for the coastal plain and most of the piedmont, and 40 for the upper piedmont and mountains. Those counts that consistently record fewer species than the figures listed should be either discontinued or upgraded in the future by increasing the number and field ability of observers and the number of hours in the field. Compilers of new counts also should be aware of the minimum figures listed above. These new policies are designed to make the counts printed on the table more nearly comparable as to the number of species and individuals, and to make possible the acceptance of new and well-organized counts in areas of the Carolinas not presently being censused.

3. BIG DAY REPORT: In order to encourage field work in areas not presently having counts, the editors will accept Big Day Reports during the Spring Count and Christmas Count periods. The Big Day must be a count made by only one party during a single day and must total at least 8 hours for a Christmas report and 10 hours for a spring report. This count has *no territory limitations*, other than that it must not cover any territory within an already existing count circle (for the same season) and that it must be completely within the Carolinas. Thus, if there is no Spring Count in the chosen area, a carload of birders from Raleigh can have a Spring Big Day beginning at Bodie Island, N.C., and ending at Hatteras Inlet, providing all observers remain within speaking distance of each other, this being our definition of a Big Day party. The compiler of a Big Day Report will submit to *Chat* a list of all species and individuals recorded on the count and full details for all unusual species, as outlined above. Also to be reported are the date and duration of the count, the territory covered, weather data, names of the participants, and hours and miles by foot and car. *Chat* cannot publish the full lists for these Big Day Reports, but it will publish some of the noteworthy records, as well as the total number of species and individuals and the basic information listed in the previous sentence. We hope the Big Day Report will become a popular activity among Carolina birders, especially the younger and more competitive ones, and that these reports will provide a wealth of distributional data from counties where there are not enough bird watchers to man a full-scale Spring or Christmas Count. Perhaps *Chat* could publish Big Day Reports made during the summer and fall seasons, as well, in the near future.

4. COUNT DATES AND COUNT PERIODS: *Chat* has never set strict, permanent dates within which Spring and Christmas counts are to be conducted. The journal has usually accepted the same dates established by *American Birds* within which Christmas counts are to be made. Christmas Count dates for *Chat* will still be those listed by *American Birds* in its April issue, and these dates will be published in *Chat* in the June or September issue. "Count period" for the Christmas Count will continue to be the complete spread of dates within which a count may be taken. The editors are hereby establishing the dates of 16 April and 15 May as the inclusive dates within which a Spring Count can be taken and published. "Count period" for bird counts will now be the 3 days before and the 3 days after a given count. Thus, for a count on 17 April, the count period will be from 14 April through 20 April, and any species

reported within that count circle on or between those dates (but not reported on count day) is to be listed on the count form with an asterisk. Likewise, a count on 15 May will have a count period of 12 May through 18 May.

5. FIELD-HOURS AND FIELD-MILES: Throughout the years *Chat* has always required compilers to list the field parties, the party-hours, and the party-miles for their count; yet *Chat* has never strictly defined the terms "party," "party-hours," and "party-miles." Compilers usually have considered a party as a group of observers who cover a specified section of the count circle, without regard as to whether the observers split into subgroups or remain together throughout the day. *Chat* now defines a "count party" as an individual or a group responsible for covering a specified section of the count circle—the group may split up into subgroups or individuals—but which must turn in to the compiler a *single list of species and individuals*. Thus, the number of parties reported by a compiler on the count form should be the number of field lists he received.

Chat is abolishing the term "party-hour" and originating the more meaningful term "field-hour." Field-hours are the time (in hours) that an individual, a subparty, or a party is counting birds in the field separate from all other such groups. If all members of a subparty or party remain within speaking distance of each other while counting birds for 10 hours, then the group totaled 10 field-hours. However, if a two-man group spent 4 hours birding together (within speaking distance) and 6 hours birding separately, they totaled $4 + 6 + 6 = 16$ field-hours. One large party can have over 40 field-hours, perhaps by having four separate individuals working 11 hours each or by having three two-man subparties each totaling 15 field-hours. The concept of field-hours is designed to indicate the total time that observers spent counting birds within the count circle, which the usage of party-hours does not do. *Chat* will not require compilers and observers to break down field-hours into foot-hours or car-hours.

As an example of the field-hour calculations, the following hypothetical case should be beneficial. A five-man party is covering the Carolina Beach section of the Wilmington Christmas Count. One member birds by himself for 10 hours (10 field-hours), one two-man subparty birds for 10 hours but only 2 hours together (18 field-hours), and the other two-man subparty birds for 12 hours but only 6 hours together (18 field-hours). At the compilation of the count, they combine their three separate lists into one list (one count party), and they total 46 field-hours. The five observers instead may wish to report three separate lists of birds (thus becoming three parties), but their grand total of 46 field-hours does not change (10 by party I, 18 by party II, and 18 by party III).

"Party-miles" now become "field-miles," and both foot and car miles are to be calculated. Field-miles by foot should be calculated exactly as are the field-hours. If two observers spent the whole day on foot and birded together for 2 miles and each walked 5 miles when separated, they totaled 12 field-miles by foot. Car miles should be the total mileage of all cars used by observers on count day within the count circle during daylight hours. Car mileage at night is not to be counted, because birds seldom are seen while driving at night, whereas large numbers and many species of birds can be identified during daylight driving. Mileage from other vehicles should be included with the car miles, as long as birds can be counted from the vehicle.

The editors request that all Spring Count forms and Spring Big Day Reports be returned to Eloise Potter by 1 June, and that all Christmas Count forms and Big Day Reports for that season be returned by 15 January. Because the compiling and editing of the count tables and the writing of summary paragraphs about the counts are time-consuming procedures, we must insist that all compilers comply with the above deadlines. Late reports will be accepted only at the convenience of the editors.