

LOS

NEWS



www.losbird.org

NEWSLETTER OF THE

Louisiana Ornithological Society

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Submission Deadline
Fall LOS News
September 1, 2014

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2014 LOS SPRING MEETING

Friday and Saturday, April 25-26

Cameron, Louisiana

****PLEASE REGISTER FOR THE DINNER BY APRIL 18th****

FRIDAY EVENING: First Baptist Church in Cameron, 110 School St. off Marshall Street (the main street)

6:00 P.M.-7 P.M. Registration: Light snacks will be provided by the Cameron Parish Tourist Commission

7:00 P.M. Meeting and Evening Program: "Birding in England with an Englishman" by Ken Harris and Joelle Finley. Ken and Joelle will take you on a whirlwind tour of England, Wales, and Scotland, hopping from one RSPB Reserve to another, traveling from Weymouth on the southern English coast to Handa Island in the north-west of Scotland. We will visit Gigryn Farm in Wales to witness the frenzied feeding of Red Kites, Common Buzzards, Ravens, Jackdaws, and Crows (a Corvid's delight!), and the Welsh RSPB Reserve Ynys-Hir where they met the BBC Spring Watch TV crew and their nest cams. They came face to face with rabid bird photographers on the slopes of the Cairngorm Mountains searching for Ptarmigan and lived to tell the tale! Join them for an evening of beautiful English birds and scenery to match.

Announcement for LWF Wildlife Photo Contest

The Louisiana Wildlife Federation has announced a wildlife photo contest to celebrate its 75th anniversary. The Louisiana Ornithological Society is an affiliate member of the Louisiana Wildlife Federation. Deadline for submissions is July 1, 2014. Go to www.lawildlife.org for specific information about the contest.

SATURDAY MORNING:

7:00 A.M. Field Trip: Meet in the parking lot of the Cameron Motel. Marty Floyd will lead a field trip to the Cameron Parish hot spots. **Bring lunch, water, bug spray, and walkie talkies if you have them.**

SATURDAY EVENING: First Baptist Church in Cameron, 110 School St. off Marshall Street (the main street)

6:30 P.M.-7 P.M. Registration

7 P.M. Meal: Roast beef, rice, green beans, green salad, rolls, dessert, and tea prepared by GiGi's

7:30 P.M. Meeting: Presentation of the President's Award and the George H. Lowery, Jr. Award

EVENING PROGRAM: "A Place to Land? Stopover Biology of Intercontinental Songbird Migrants" by Dr. Frank Moore, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at The University of Southern Mississippi.

This talk touches on the "decisions" a migrating songbird must make in response to the challenges that arise en route and focuses on the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico, arguably the most important stopover area for intercontinental migrants in North America. Visualize a Red-eyed Vireo gleaning small caterpillars from the edge of hackberry leaves in the middle of the long, narrow chenier near Johnson's Bayou. Now consider the many "decisions"

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she must make in response to the problems encountered en route. Besides the energetic cost of transport, she must adjust to unfamiliar surroundings, balance conflicting demands between predator avoidance and food acquisition, compete with other migrants and resident birds for limited resources, cope with unfavorable weather, correct for orientation errors, and get some sleep to name a few. How well she solves those problems determines the success of her migration, while a successful migration is measured in terms of her survival and reproductive success.

CAMERON ACCOMMODATIONS:

The phone number for the Cameron Motel is 337-775-5442. The Cameron Motel also has sites available for RV campers. Several eating places are open in Cameron, Creole and Johnson's Bayou. Other accommodations can be found in Sulphur or Lake Charles.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Although we had to cancel our Friday meeting and delay our Saturday trips by 3 hours – all because of dangerous weather conditions – we still had a very successful meeting in Lafayette. I don't know about the rest of you but the Wallaces' trip to Lafayette was adventurous. Our trip was not as long as some of the folks coming down from the Northern part of the state but our trip up US 90 was certainly scary.

Our General Meeting Saturday was at the ULL Alumni House, an absolutely fabulous venue for a meeting. The food was also fantastic. Bottom line, it sets a high bar for next year's meeting in New Orleans. I want to thank Judith O'Neale for the meeting arrangements and Ray Bauer for the meeting set up.

I also want to recognize the yeoman's work done by Kay, Judith, Elouise, Joseph, Joelle, and Ken for working the registration and sales table. Every meeting these folks take time out of birding to make sure the meeting is a success.

We certainly enjoyed the presentation by LOS Board Member Larry Raymond on his trip with Mac Hardy to Peru. 400 species of birds were seen with photos of many. It looked like a great adventure.

Even with the shortened birding some great birds were seen by many. Thank you Dave Patton for coordinating the field trips and especially for getting LOS members access to many great birding spots that are normally restricted access. Highlight birds included Crested Caracaras, White-tailed Hawk, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, American Bittern, Vermillion Flycatchers, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, Sandhill Cranes were all seen Saturday. On the way home, we stopped at the ULL farms and I found Fox Sparrows.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you all in Cameron on April 25 and 26.

Ed Wallace

How Does the 2013-14 Hummingbird Season Stack Up?

By Erik I. Johnson, Ph.D., Audubon Louisiana

(NOTE: Color art for the figures mentioned in this article can be seen at our website: www.losbird.org. The tables are at the end of this article.)

Over the last several decades, Louisiana has become established as a hotspot for wintering hummingbirds, with dedicated hummingbird hosts planting bird-friendly vegetation and maintaining feeders to support the hundreds of hummingbirds that visit Louisiana each winter. Remarkably, although only one species breeds in the eastern United States (the Ruby-throated Hummingbird), 13 species of hummingbirds have been documented in Louisiana, including temperate western species and tropical and subtropical species from Mexico and Central America. In order of decreasing abundance our regularly occurring species include Rufous, Black-chinned, Ruby-throated, Buff-bellied, Calliope, and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. Our neighbors in Mississippi now have 11 species, Alabama and Florida each have 12 species, and Arkansas has 10 species. Texas has a whopping 18 species, but with their variety of eastern and western, and temperate and subtropical habitats, it is impossible to compete. In Louisiana, winter hummingbird reports coincide with higher human populations, particularly across south Louisiana (Fig. 1), and wintering hummingbird numbers in metropolitan areas of neighboring states do not compare the densities found in Lafayette, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and surrounding communities.

Tom Sylvest started maintaining a database on winter hummingbird reports in the winter of 1999-2000, beginning a program unlike any other to maintain wintering records of these charismatic species. Kevin Morgan added to this database a sophisticated and stream-lined data entry system, so that when Tom decided to step down as record-keeper in 2008-09, Kevin kept the program running and continues to maintain the server that hosts the Louisiana Winter Hummingbird Database, even after I took over the reins of record-keeper in 2011-12. I continue to utilize a number of tools to encourage reporting that include LABird and HumNet list serves, social media (like Facebook), and through personal contacts across the Louisiana bird community. I am so grateful for the continued interest in citizen scientists to maintain their hummingbird-friendly yards, and for reporting their birds. The summaries that I show in this report are the result of hundreds of bird watchers providing over 7000 individual records of wintering hummingbirds in Louisiana spanning nearly 15 years.

Despite the enormity of this dataset, it only paints part of the picture of winter hummingbird numbers and distributions in Louisiana. Dedicated hummingbird banders, starting with Nancy Newfield's ground-breaking hummingbird banding

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project that began in 1979, continue to study these little jewels. In addition to Nancy, Dave Patton, Paul Dickson, Steve Locke, and Linda Beall also band hummingbirds in Louisiana, collectively discovering magnificent movements and other fascinating insights into the life history and ecology of these birds.

Before diving into the data summaries, it is important to recognize a few caveats to what I will present here. First, hummingbird banders often do not, and are not expected to, report their captures to the Louisiana Winter Hummingbird Database. They have enough data to organize and keep track of, so we have always placed reporting on the shoulders of each hummingbird host. Therefore, the Louisiana Winter Hummingbird Database provides only a partial account, and a more complete and rigorous analysis might and should include banding data. Second, reports on Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and unidentified *Archilochus* spp. were not recorded in the database until 2011-12, so they are excluded from all analyses presented here. Third, some of the data from 2009-10 and all from 2010-11 have not yet made it into the database; these records exist and have been filed, but are not summarized here as it will take a pretty substantial undertaking to add these records to the database. Fourth, the data reported, though passing the scrutiny of the database compilers (Tom, Kevin, and myself), still likely contains errors as in any large database. Uncertainty in identification, which is an unfortunate reality in wintering hummingbirds, often requires placing hummingbirds into genus-level categories, like *Selasphorus* or *Archilochus*. Also note that "Rufous/Allen's" Hummingbirds are labeled as such given the identification challenge in non-adult males. Even so, banding data have shown that Rufous Hummingbirds outnumber Allen's Hummingbirds by at least 100:1 in Louisiana, so Rufous/Allen's overwhelmingly consist of Rufous Hummingbirds, and throughout the report I simply refer to them in the text as "Rufous" Hummingbirds for convenience, even though they likely include a few Allen's. Rarer records, like of Broad-tailed, Calliope, Allen's, and Anna's Hummingbirds are given more scrutiny. With the ever increasing availability and accessibility to high-quality digital cameras, scrutinizing records of common species is often much easier than it was even 5 or 10 years ago. Finally, because the data are reported by willing citizen scientists, the data are subject to typical biases associated with reporting voluntarily. Therefore, all analyses presented should be considered with these caveats in mind. Even so, some interesting patterns and trends emerge, and I will discuss thoughts about what these may mean, and whether these patterns would continue to emerge with the addition of other information, such as banding data.

How Does 2013-14 Compare?

Many of us recall the banner years of the last two winters, which were among the best years in terms of hummingbird numbers in recent history, and the highest number reported since 2003-04 (Fig. 2, Table 1). Of course, the overall count

is largely driven by our most common wintering species, the Rufous Hummingbird (Fig. 3, Table 1).

The winter of 2013-14 has been relatively lack-luster for all common hummingbird species, particularly compared to the previous two winters. For Rufous Hummingbirds, this is not the worst year in recent history (Fig. 3), perhaps buffered by individuals returning from previous winters (see also below), whereas for the other common species, 2013-14 is among the worst since the database was established in 1999-00 (Figs. 3-6, Table 1).

Interestingly, good numbers of early-season Rufous Hummingbirds reports were coming in in August and September, but after that, we have really only seen a light trickle of birds arriving especially compared to the large number of November-December arrivals in 2012-13, 2011-12, and 2006-07 (Fig. 3). Buff-bellied and Calliope Hummingbirds had a relatively late start in terms of the timing of arrival, with the first real pulse of birds not arriving until late October, compared to September and early- to mid-October arrivals in both species in most previous years (Figs. 4 and 6) The arrival of Black-chinned Hummingbirds in fall 2013 matched most previous falls, but by December 2013, very few new birds were being reported compared to in previous years where arrivals through January are common (Fig. 5).

Annual Variation in Hummingbird Numbers

It is interesting that annual variation in numbers of other species does not necessarily follow annual variation in Rufous Hummingbirds. For example, note how 2007-08 was a banner year for Buff-bellied Hummingbirds (Fig. 4), whereas it was one of the worst years since 2005-06 for Rufous Hummingbird (Fig. 3), and a moderate year for Black-chinned (Fig. 5) and Calliope Hummingbirds (Fig. 6). Similarly, 2011-12 was among the best years for Rufous, Calliope, and Black-chinned Hummingbirds, but a relatively poor year for Buff-bellied Hummingbirds. There are many other examples of these kinds of comparisons, and gazing through the graphs provides a way to visualize this (Figs. 3-6).

A better way to quantify the variation in the annual fluctuations among species is to calculate correlation coefficients. I calculated correlations (Pearson's r , which range from 0 = no correlation to 1 = perfect correlation) between Rufous, Buff-bellied, Black-chinned, and Calliope Hummingbirds for the total number of individuals reported each year (Table 2). What this shows is that annual variation in the numbers of Rufous Hummingbirds strongly correlated with variation in the numbers of Calliope and Black-chinned Hummingbirds reported, but not with Buff-bellied Hummingbird. In fact Buff-bellied Hummingbird numbers only moderately correlated with Black-chinned Hummingbird, but not with Rufous or Calliope Hummingbird numbers. The patterns of annual variation across species suggests that species with more overlapping breeding ranges (i.e., those in the western

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U.S.) show stronger similarities in the number of reports in Louisiana, suggesting that annual abundance in Louisiana may be driven by factors on the breeding grounds, such as breeding productivity.

One way to test this hypothesis could be to examine the demographic structure of wintering birds – one might expect that winters with lots of birds should be dominated by immature birds, a consequence of increased breeding productivity. One challenge for analyzing this given the data is that tremendous uncertainty exists in aging female birds unless they are captured, but adult males are relatively straightforward. Therefore, I calculated the proportion of adult males for each species in each year to use as an index of age structure – winters with lots of males suggest that fewer birds were immature, and vice versa. Unfortunately, adult males in Buff-bellied Hummingbirds are not distinct from other age and sex classes, so I had to exclude this species in the analysis.

Using this index of age structure, I examined the relationship between hummingbird age structure and winter abundance. What the analysis shows (Fig. 7), however, is that increased winter abundance is not necessarily associated with a higher proportion of immatures, particularly in Black-chinned and Calliope Hummingbirds. In Rufous Hummingbirds, the signal was stronger with boom years corresponding with a higher proportion of immatures, and perhaps the much larger sample size helps illuminate this pattern relative to Black-chinned and Calliope Hummingbirds.

Another way to explore the data would be to consider that factors that drive breeding productivity may be more similar

for species with overlapping ranges than for species breeding in different regions. The results show that three common species that breed in the western U.S. show reasonably strong correlations in the proportion of adult males reported each winter (Table 3) in the context of remarkable annual variation, ranging from 3.4% to 23.1% adult males in Rufous Hummingbirds and 7.4% to 32.8% in Black-chinned Hummingbirds, for example (Fig. 7). This correlation in annual age structure among species is consistent with the idea that breeding season productivity may influence variation in population structure on wintering grounds in Louisiana.

Collectively, these correlations and results suggest that there may be common factors that influence co-variation in winter abundance and age-ratios among Rufous, Black-chinned, and Calliope Hummingbirds in Louisiana, but that breeding productivity may not be the most important, or at least may be one of several important factors. Given that banding data reveals that many individuals return year after year, adult survivorship and annual site fidelity, as well as factors along migratory routes, all likely contribute to the variation in numbers we see from year to year in Louisiana.

Obviously, correlations do not explain mechanisms, but perhaps these initial summaries offer some ideas of where to begin. The Louisiana Winter Hummingbird Database makes it possible to begin evaluating such questions about what drives variation in winter abundance, which is a relatively unique opportunity in ornithology. I hope that people will continue to contribute their observations to this dataset, which can be done by emailing me (ejohnson@audubon.org), or posting to the LABird or HumNet list serves. As always, happy hummingbirding!

Table 1. Total number of reports of western wintering hummingbird species in Louisiana by year.

Year	Rufous/Allen's	Buff-bellied	Black-chinned	Calliope	Broad-tailed	Other	
2013-14 ^a	214	23	33	13	4	0	
2012-13	403	25	50	45	12	1 ^b	
2011-12	493	37	85	35	16	3 ^c	
2008-09	173	35	28	17	1	2 ^b	
2007-08	229	90	54	29	5	4 ^{b,c}	
2006-07	339	46	44	52	9	3 ^{b,c}	
2005-06	281	46	57	15	6	12 ^{b,c}	
2004-05	287	60	85	24	3	4 ^{b,d}	
^a as of 5 Feb 2014	2003-04	493	69	121	40	9	4 ^b
^b Broad-billed Hummingbird	2002-03	475	46	58	39	9	1 ^b
^c Anna's Hummingbird	2001-02	491	64	83	34	19	10 ^b
^d Magnificent Hummingbird	2000-01	405	44	108	28	4	1 ^b
	1999-00	208	56	64	17	17	8 ^{b,c}

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficients between the four most commonly reported hummingbirds, using total numbers reported each year between 1999-00 and 2012-13.

	Rufous/Allen's	Buff-bellied	Black-chinned	Calliope
Rufous/Allen's	1.00	0.18	0.71	0.74
Buff-bellied	0.18	1.00	0.46	0.18
Black-chinned	0.71	0.46	1.00	0.34
Calliope	0.74	0.18	0.34	1.00

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients between the three commonly reported hummingbirds, using the proportion of adult males reported each year between 1999-00 and 2012-13.

	Rufous/Allen's	Black-chinned	Calliope
Rufous/Allen's	1.00	0.59	0.68
Black-chinned	0.59	1.00	0.56
Calliope	0.68	0.56	1.00

What Constitutes “Good” Data for eBird?

By John Dillon

It is crucially important for any eBird user to understand that the best data are those that represent bird life as accurately as possible. This cannot be overstated. In fact, this is the reason veteran birders and biologists use playback, count as many birds as possible, identify through song and call (not just visually), and so forth. For example, consider Brown Creeper. It is a small, cryptic species that lives in dense woods. Your chances of seeing a Brown Creeper as you walk (i.e., not *bird*) a trail are extremely small. But we *know* the species is common in Louisiana in winter. Consider two points then: first, if you make a bird list only of species seen as you walk a trail without pishing or any other method to draw in birds, or without knowing many bird songs or calls, you are NOT making a list that accurately represents the bird life in the area; you are simply making a list of the birds you see. So, species like Brown Creeper would be absent from your list, misrepresenting the bird life there. Second, imagine a veteran birder walking through the same trail who is pishing or (responsibly) using playback and knows all the songs and calls but STILL doesn't get Brown Creeper. That is potentially very useful information because the veteran's birding strategies were such that they result in more representative data, and his list represents the fact that, for some reason, Brown Creeper was (likely) absent. Further birding in the same area could then yield Brown Creeper, of course, but what if they did not? Twenty lists from that same area with no Brown Creeper would be scientifically interesting but ONLY if the lists themselves were understood to be representational of the bird life there. So, again, the best data are those that accurately represent the bird life of a given area. If your lists don't do that, they probably shouldn't be submitted to eBird. However, eBird leaves a few options open to you if your lists don't represent bird life accurately.

Submitting an incomplete list. Upon submitting any list to eBird, you must answer the question, “Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify?” Taken literally, this question can be misleading. For example, if you are only able to identify Northern Cardinal and Blue Jay, and your list consists of 6 Northern Cardinals and 3 Blue Jays, then, yes, you are submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify. But that isn't actually what the question means. It means, “Were there other birds present that you could not identify?” Now, if Northern Cardinal and Blue Jay are all you know, you must answer “no” to their question if there were indeed other species present. This implies that if you are unable to make a checklist that accurately represents the bird life there for whatever reason, you can still submit a checklist to eBird *as long as you answer “no”* to the question, “Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify?” When you answer “no,” eBird excludes your data from those data from people who answered “yes.” Only the data from

people who answer “yes” are used in creating bar charts, maps, and other representations of aggregate data.

Submitting a “casual” list. The other option for you to submit data without having to create a list that accurately represents all bird life in an area is if you need to submit a casual list. For example, let's say you see a Greater Roadrunner on your drive home. Neat! If you don't have time to stop and make a representative bird list, you can still submit what's called a “casual observation” of only your Greater Roadrunner. It's one of the observation options at the beginning of the data entry process. It, too, would be excluded from data that may be used by scientists, but it would still be noted that the species was seen in a specific location on a specific day. And it would be noted in the bar chart by a very thin green line.

Given the crucially important point of view that “good” data are those that represent reality, there are some other points to consider. So, please consider all these in order to understand the full ramifications of representative data.

Some areas may be oversampled. Everybody loves birding at Lacassine NWR. And eBird has many checklists submitted from it containing lots of great species and numbers. Now, those checklists may certainly be representative of the bird life at Lacassine, but if the checklists submitted for Lacassine vastly outnumber lists submitted from surrounding areas of similar habitat, do those Lacassine checklists accurately represent the surrounding habitat? They might not. It could very well be that Lacassine isn't truly representative of marshland prairie bird life because it's a managed NWR. Now, this isn't to persuade you not to bird at Lacassine; it's to persuade you to *bird areas that may be under sampled*.

Many areas are under sampled. If you exclusively birded Cameron Parish Hot Spots a few times a month all year, you'd have an awesome year list. But you wouldn't have a list that accurately represents bird life in Louisiana. We expect rarities to show up there. But finding Spotted Towhee in a random cutover or 3 Black-throated Blue Warblers in your yard is a feat indeed. As is finding 40 Sedge Wren around a pond perimeter or 8 Hairy Woodpecker in the woods along a highway. These numbers and species may not be the equivalent of finding Trumpeter Swan or Snowy Owl, but they can teach us much more about the bird life in our state. Biologists don't only want to study the coolest records, remember. They want to study data that are most representative. If you only bird migrant traps and such, you aren't producing observations that are as representative as someone who's birding random woods, the countryside, or the nearest lake.

Targeting species correctly. We're lucky in Louisiana to hear
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of rarities reported fairly often. And we also have several uncommon species throughout the state. But when going after a stakeout Iceland Gull or something like a recently reported Clay-colored Sparrow, you should make a list of all birds seen so that your list isn't weighted with rarities. The same thing goes for, say, large numbers of ducks at a lake or marsh. Don't just list the high numbers of ducks; list the sparrows, the crows, and everything else to make a representative list. If it's too overwhelming, and in Louisiana it can be, remember strategies like using "x" or answering "no" to the "are you submitting a complete checklist" question.

All the strategies explained above are for the purposes of collecting reliable data that give a realistic representation of bird life in a given area, and they are absolutely essential for anyone who wants to contribute to the eBird database. But there are some other related strategies that will also help you in keeping lists more easily, as well as some that relate specifically to how eBird processes the data you put in. Finally, after understanding all these, you'll be ready to input data.

Making general and/or specific observation details. When you submit a list, you should consistently report basic weather conditions or changes in weather, location details (unless obviously implied by a strict location, like "my yard," or a small park) including roads or fields birded, etc., accompanying birders, and any other information that may be relevant. For any species that is borderline unusual or for a bird that may be involved in a behavior you've never seen, make notes in the "comment" box.

Understanding eBird flags. eBird observations are filtered by a state reviewer. Any submissions that contain "flagged" observations are sent to him to either accept, reject, or to ask the observer for more details. Flags are based on rarity or number or both. Flags are NOT based on easily confused species that are common to an area. This means that if you misidentified a Downy Woodpecker as a Hairy Woodpecker, it most likely will never be caught by the reviewer because both species are common in Louisiana. So, it is very important to be sure of identification, even of common species.

Before we get into rare species, it's very, very important for all birders to understand what the term "rare" actually means in birding, as well as other terms that denote frequency of occurrence. "Abundant" is for a species that is easily found and with great regularity. "Common" is for a species that is usually easily found but with somewhat less regularity. "Uncommon" means a species is found with some regularity but likely only in proper habitat and isn't always dependable. "Rare" means a species is seldom found but occurs maybe a few times a year. "Vagrant" is for a species that is unexpected in the state.

These terms *strongly* imply something that all veteran birders understand very well. Rare species really are rare. In the vast majority of cases, when a new or inexperienced birder claims to see a rare species, he's probably just seeing an unfamiliar species. New birders can certainly happen upon rare species, but they're rare for a reason. Here, Ockham's Razor (the philosophical principle that the simplest explanation is probably the correct one) applies almost all the time. For example, Purple Finch and House Finch are common in Louisiana. It may be tempting for a new bird to claim he has a Cassin's Finch at his feeder, but the chances are unimaginably greater that it is either a House Finch or Purple Finch. Sending checklists with claims such as this must be strongly substantiated, or they will be dismissed. So, before you get hung up on one field mark, look at the range map and consider just how much more likely it is that you're seeing a common species; it just may not be that common to you.

Now, if you list a species that is considered "rare," it would be best to make some notes about what you saw. For one reason, notes about rare species can be helpful to you or to other birders. Also, you could have misidentified the species, and there may be something in your notes that can prove that and might be able to lead a more reliable identification of what you actually did see. For some species that are rare in the state, eBird will flag them and ask for comments. It is unwise to make minimal comments. Remember, you're reporting to veteran biologists; they'll want details of what you saw.

If you list a species that is considered a "vagrant," eBird will flag your entry and require you to make comments. Again, be thorough in your description. You'd be surprised just how many birders make almost no comments at all for very rare or vagrant species. But consider the role of the reviewer, whose viewpoint is probably always, "If this bird only shows up once or twice every few years in the state, I'm going to need convincing evidence that this observation is reliable." State reviewers are seasoned, respected biologists. Why would they accept a record of a rare species with no details whatsoever? Also keep in mind that veteran birders almost always offer details of any rare species they find. If you want to be a better birder (or eBirder), you certainly need to make detailed notes of any rare species you see.

As a general rule, the best way to document rarities is through photo or video or through audio recordings of any vocalizations. In addition to eBird, you should also be familiar with the state Review List of species that require written documentation sent to the Louisiana Bird Records Committee. For more on the LBRC, go to the Louisiana Ornithological Society webpage about them at <http://losbird.org/lbrc/lbrc.htm>.

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In addition to rarities, eBird may flag species based on the number reported. This can vary greatly season to season and even region to region because of bird movements and species abundance. If you're birding and begin getting good numbers of a species that is usually difficult to find, start making notes about the numbers as you record them. For instance, merely listing 90 Le Conte's Sparrows would be suspect. But if I noted that I had 23 in one field, 37 in another, 9 singles along one path, and 21 in the farthest field, it shows the reviewer that I wasn't merely making a random guess at a number of a species that is usually pretty uncommon in the state. Or if you're counting Ruddy Ducks on a lake one by one and come up with a high number, note "1x1" in the "comment" box.

How do length of time and distance relate to eBird lists? With a "traveling count," distance increases as time increases. Both play an important part in making reliable, usable data, but distance is usually more significant than time. The only occasion time really comes into play is when you've birded so short a time that you wouldn't have been able to make a list that represents the bird life. So, I can submit a list for, say, 5 minutes to eBird, but that list may not be used with other data in analysis. Furthermore, if you look at an eBird bar chart and see very, very thin green lines as opposed to actual green bars, that probably represents an observation from a casual list or a list that only last a few minutes. Only observations that last at least 20 minutes get a full bar on the bar charts.

Distance is somewhat more nuanced. eBird works under the assumption (that isn't always correct) that if you bird over 5 miles, you may have entered different habitat. They do

LOS NEW MEMBERS

Lessley Boyd, Springfield
Ken Carstons, Woodworth
William Lewis, Hattiesburg, MS
Beverly Price, Pineville
James Robinson, Ville Platte

LOS New Life Members

Linda Adrion, Shreveport
Paul Conover, Lafayette
Jay Huner, Boyce

In Memoriam

Eleanor Talley, Vidalia – February 2014

NOT require lists to be less than 5 miles, but they currently do not use lists of over 5 miles to create their animated maps. Hopefully, this will change soon. If your observation took place over 10 miles or even 30 miles, it will still be accepted by the state reviewer *as long as the habitat is fairly consistent*. As an example, the 25 miles from Grand Chenier to Cameron is consistent habitat; any one area on that route looks like any other area. But going from downtown New Orleans to Bayou Sauvage NWR is 25 miles that goes from a strictly urban environment through an industrial zone through some suburban areas and finally into a marsh. A list comprised of habitat change like that isn't really useful because it may not be clear where you saw which species. If Virginia Rail is on your list labeled "New Orleans Area," it's going to be misrepresentative because Virginia Rail is a marsh bird.

Using Hot Spots correctly. Knowing the eBird Hot Spots of your area can be helpful in keeping lists. Let's say you're at a medium sized local lake that has a state park. Chances are that the lake and the state park are both listed as eBird Hot Spots. Ideally, if you bird both locations, you should submit one list for one Hot Spot and a separate list for the other. Remember, Hot Spots have well defined boundaries. Submitting lists for them that contain birds outside the boundaries would be like submitting a list for South Texas that contains birds seen in Mexico. If another eBird user pulls up birds reported at one Hot Spot, he expects to see just that. So, keep two lists and submit two lists because you birded two Hot Spots. It's also strongly preferred that if you're birding a larger area that contains a Hot Spot within it that you keep two lists for the same reasons. More information on Hot Spots will be included later.

This is an excerpt of the eBird tutorial that is almost complete. If anyone who has not already asked for the tutorial would like a copy, please email John Dillon at kisforkryptonite@gmail.com.

**LOS Awards
Two Research Grants**

William Lewis and Molly Folkerts receive \$500 grants from LOS for their master's research projects. Will is a student in Dr. Frank Moore's lab at the University of Southern Mississippi. Will's graduate research is focused on the role of intestinal microorganisms in the biology of migrating birds. Will's research combines field work with free-ranging spring migrants at Dr. Moore's long term coastal Louisiana study site at Johnson's Bayou and laboratory work on campus using molecular/genomic techniques to identify and quantify microorganisms from the gut of migrating birds. Molly is a member of Jim Ingold's laboratory at LSU Shreveport. Molly will study Green Heron nesting at Audubon's Paul J. Rainey Wildlife Sanctuary in Vermilion Parish. She will study nesting strategy and factors that affect nest success.



Judith O'Neale
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