

Birds Reports, Going with the Flow

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As rapid as the gray-green flash of a Merlin's underwing, changes can come. Or, we may absorb them slowly as the eclipse plumage of a drake Northern Shoveler giving way to autumn brilliance.

At any speed changes move us forward. And, the WSO's acting to update the Rare Bird Documentation Form, add a new Review Species List, and automate the reporting process is definitely moving Wisconsin birding forward. Driving these improvements is the continuing increase of bird reports that birders of all levels bring to the attention of the birding community through many avenues. The goal of this article is to show the flow of those records once they are "public" and report changes birders should be aware of in the WSO reporting process. I direct readers to the official Wisconsin Society for Ornithology website as it contains much of the information cited in this writing: <http://wsobirds.org/>.

Starting with one well-publicized big change is that there is no longer a Short Form bird list. For eBirders most former "Short Form" bird reports are flagged and generate a request for confirmation along with

supporting details. For non-eBirders awareness of a species' status as unusual, requiring additional details to support the report, is wise. Observers need to consult the "Report Sightings" tab on the WSO Website for Review Species list and early/late records.

There has also been an updating of the Single County Report Species List found on the WSO site both in electronic and printable form. Correction of a glitch which caused reports to be truncated in the Single County Report Form has also been resolved. Though still available on the WSO website, there will not be a comparable update of the old printable Multi-County Form. Its further use is left up to the reporter's discretion and eBird is encouraged as its replacement.

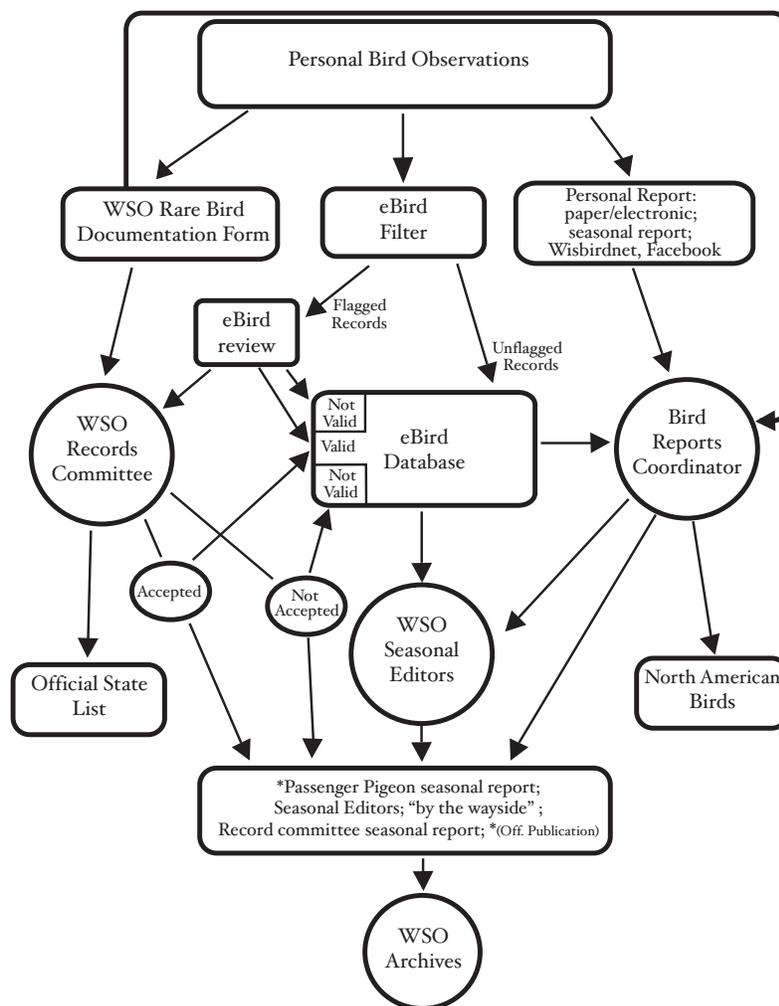
The Long Form too has been discontinued and its function has been primarily replaced by the Rare Bird Documentation Form for all species appearing on the Review Bird List. It is required that any report of a Review Species, or species record or near-record early/late date, be on a Rare Bird Documentation Form, accessible via the WSO website. Completion of a Rare Bird Documentation Form automatically generates email copies to

three parties: one to the reporter; one to the Records Committee Chair (RC)—Ryan Brady; and one to the Birds Report Coordinator (BRC)—me, Joe Schaufenbuel.

The WSO functions for many bird-related reasons, not the least of these is the evaluation, publication, and

archiving of bird reports. To illustrate record treatment and movement through the WSO reporting system, there is below a Flowchart graphing the components of this process. First presented in a brief talk at the Madison WSO convention, this Flowchart will be consulted frequently.

FLOWCHART



Arrows indicate actual movement of observation reports to and from the differing WSO bodies (boxes and circles). After evaluation by each WSO body of a record, along with all supporting documentation and images, it moves to the next appropriate WSO body. The shapes of the boxes are not significant and only there to add a little eye-appeal to the chart.

Personal Observations Box—what you observe

To start the Flowchart the top box is Personal Observations. These are your observations that may, or may not, move on to the attention of the WSO BCR, Seasonal Field Note Compilers, and Records Committee.

Bird observers using eBird have much of the reporting work done for them as many birders are aware. For ease, completeness, access, and organization eBird compiles your bird reports and flags records needing additional details or Rare Bird Documentation Form. Today, eBird submissions account for over 95% of all bird reports and are the recommended reporting system. But there are active birders not using eBird and there are less active birders whose records come to attention through other routes.

And those routes, including eBird, are: eBird; Rare Bird Documentation; Wisconsin Birding Network; Facebook; Single County Form; Multi-County Form (Paper Only); May Day Reports; Big Day Reports; Christmas Bird Counts; Specimens; and, All Others.

Hereafter, I will follow each observation input type through to deposition in Archives.

eBird Box/eBird Database Boxes—

Personal observations arriving as ebird submissions follow the arrow to the eBird Box. Here observations pass directly into the eBird Database Box (i.e. “unflagged” common species, expected numbers, and such) or are flagged by preset filters prompting confirmation and details for birds historically rare, seasonally late/early, or found in exceptional numbers.

Flagged reports move along the arrow to the eBird Review Box. Questions about eBird here may be directed to the Wisconsin eBird Team: wiebird@gmail.com.

eBird ReviewBox—

Regional reviewers—the Wisconsin eBird Team—manage the flagged bird reports. If the observation is of a WSO Review List species, a record early/late date, or a species never officially recorded before in Wisconsin, the team will respond. The eBird team prompts the observer to report the observation to the WSO via the Rare Bird Documentation Form and defers acceptance, or not, to the WSO Records Committee.

Reports that do not reach the higher rarity level noted above may still be flagged, as being regionally rare (within a particular Wisconsin eBird zone), or somewhat late, or otherwise unusual, and are assessed by the eBird team. Details provided by the observer may be enough to confirm the identification. Otherwise, the team may request additional details from the observer to support a report. Flagged records accepted by the eBird team go into the eBird database in perpetuity. Records not approved are catalogued in the database for future access and are maintained in the observer’s personal eBird lists/records; but, these are not displayed in any eBird output or analysis. Data eBird stores are dynamically archived in the Avian Knowledge Network maintained at Cornell University.

Unaccepted records are important to track as they may offer valuable information later. Records from eBird are compiled and made available sea-

sonally to the BRC and The Passenger Pigeon Seasonal Editors (also known as Field Note Compilers).

Rare Bird Documentation Box—

The main function of the Records Committee (RC) is to assess seasonally the validity of rare bird records submitted via the rare Bird Documentation Form. It is incumbent upon the observer to submit Rare Bird documentation for Review List Species and record early/late departures. Comments submitted to eBird, to list serves, or other media DO NOT qualify as documentation for WSO in these instances.

Completion of a Rare Bird Documentation automatically generates email copies to three parties: one to the reporter; one to the RC Chair; and one to the BRC. Records Committee voting follows a protocol outlined in the WSO Official Bylaws.

Accepted records serve as the benchmark for the official Checklist of the Birds of Wisconsin. Both accepted and not accepted records are published in the Passenger Pigeon and these decisions are in turn used to validate (or not) those flagged records awaiting final determination in the eBird database. Questions about the Rare Bird Documentation Form or Records Committee may be directed to Ryan Brady at ryan-brady10@hotmail.com.

Personal Report Box—

Aside from the massive eBird data and the Review Bird List observations directed to the RC, there is a small portion of reports that come to the attention of the BRC via the Wisconsin Bird Network, Single and Multi-

County Forms, and all other electronic or paper routes as listed above.

Bird Reports Coordinator Circle—

The BRC's function is to glean and accumulate observations of interest from sources mentioned above. The BRC then filters that information and passes it to the Seasonal Editors, RC, and compiles the most interesting observations in a report to the Great Lakes Regional editor for the publication *North American Birds* (NAB).

As noted, the BRC may find it worthwhile to pursue interesting reports. I may request additional information, or even the completion of a Rare Bird Documentation, to support an unusual observation that may need follow-up to avoid being lost. Arrows indicating the flow of records coming from Personal Reports, Rare Bird Documentation Forms, and eBird Archives are used in compiling the *North American Birds* report then passed along to the Passenger Pigeon Seasonal Editors. Since the RC does not have time to rule on rare birds records prior to my writing the NAB report, I use my discretion to include, or not include, a reported occurrence. Unaccepted reports (that are too scant, unsupported, or that appear in error) are frequently culled and not forwarded to any other WSO body. Questions about bird reports, NAB, and function of the BRC may be directed to Joe Schaufenbuel at schaufenbuel@charter.net.

WSO Seasonal Report Circle and Passenger Pigeon Box—

Moving from the RC after its rulings, eBird compilations and reports collected by the BRC provide a mas-

sive amount of seasonal information, much of it collated and reported on by the Seasonal Editors. The four seasonal reports are major undertakings and appear in the *Passenger Pigeon*, the official publication of all records. The RC also publishes reports on its voting in the *Passenger Pigeon*. Observer notes (“By the Wayside”) and articles concerning the finding, identification, and related bird report information are also summarized in the *Passenger Pigeon*.

Archives Circle—

Every report, documentation, and image (though not specimens) is delivered to and archived in a room exclusively for use of the WSO at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. The only information that is not

archived at UW-GB is that submitted to eBird (which is electronically archived via AKN at Cornell) and not otherwise used in any published report.

It is hoped that this article provides enlightenment on what happens to bird reports after they move into the WSO record system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Joe Schaufenbuel serves as the WSO Bird Reports Coordinator. His duties are partially defined above in the paragraph on Bird Reports Coordinator Circle. He is a member of the WSO Board of Directors.