

Full Instructions for *Pennsylvania Birds* Compilers

Feb 15, 2025

IMPORTANT: Please send Winter 2024/2025 (Vol 38 #1) county reports to pabirdsrus@zoominternet.net (Wendy Jo Shemansky). Please send Spring 2025 and all future reports to pabirdseditors@gmail.com

Welcome to Pennsylvania Birds! On behalf of the entire PSO organization, the PSO Editorial Staff thanks you for generously volunteering to compile your county's sightings. The county reports published in the Local Notes section of every issue are the backbone of this journal. County compilers help make Pennsylvania Birds a highly respected state journal of ornithological record.

GENERAL PROCESS: Each volume of *Pennsylvania Birds* covers a season. Four times a year, the county compiler gathers observations made by people who have birded in the county and writes and submits a report that includes significant sightings, events, and trends. The report submission deadlines are one month after the end of the coverage season:

REPORT NAME	Coverage Season	Due Date	Journal Issue Number	Publication Month
Winter Report	Dec 1 to Feb 28/29	Mar 31	VOL x, NO. 1	Jul
Spring Report	Mar 1 to May 31	Jun 30	VOL x, NO. 2	Oct
Summer Report	Jun 1 to Jul 31	Aug 31	VOL x, NO. 3	Dec
Fall Report	Aug 1 to Nov 30	Dec 31	VOL x, NO. 4	Apr

1. Submit reports by email as attachments. We accept Microsoft Word documents (doc, docx), Word-compatible files (like rtf), or as plain text in the body of the email.
2. A copy editor downloads and edits your report.
3. They may contact you with questions on format, style, content, or other issues.
4. You may hear from the seasonal editor, who draws from the reports to compile the *Birds of Note* and *Summary of the Season*, to follow up on or clarify rare or unusual records.
5. Please reach out to the chief editor (markabonta@yahoo.com) for concerns and questions.

OUT-OF-SEASON RECORDS: Only include observations made on a date outside of the coverage season if it helps your narrative explain the continuing presence of a rarity. **Example** *A Townsend's Solitaire appears in State College 11/13 and stays to 12/12.* This should be included in the Fall Report because the date of first appearance was during the Fall coverage season. The exact departure date of 12/12 can also be noted in the Fall Report, if known when the report is written. You should also mention the bird again in the Winter Report even though the end date is already known and reported, because someone researching Townsend's Solitaire occurrence in winter by scanning Winter Reports would miss this sighting if it was only mentioned in the Fall Report.

You may also include out-of-season reports if you receive them from observers after you have already turned in your report for the season in question. **Example** An observer approaches you in October with a photo of a Northern Wheatear she took in her backyard back in May. You should report this sighting in the next possible report, as the Spring Report is long since published. Include such out-of-period sighting(s) in an ADDENDUM at the end of the narrative.

OUT OF-COUNTY RECORDS: Please note that Christmas Bird Count circles may include areas in more than one county. Please take care to report CBC species based on the correct county.

REPORTING RARITIES: When you encounter records of species on the *Review List* of the Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee (PORC, at <https://pabirds.org/porc-review-list/>), you should urge the observer(s) to submit a formal report to PORC. If the observer sends such reports to you, forward it to the PORC Secretary and make a note in your county report that documentation has been forwarded to PORC. Observers might submit formal documentation to you but specifically request that it not be forwarded to PORC, in which case you can forward it to the seasonal editor with a note that the observer does not want the documentation to be sent to PORC. The seasonal editor may use it in the *Summary of the Season* and the *Birds of Note*.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COUNTY REPORT: A county report should be a concise and readable summary of notable birds and related events and trends. It is a distillation of the most important bird records. You can write about noteworthy numbers (like unusually low or high flock counts or numbers of occurrences), significant dates such as early arrivals or late departures, avian events such as fallouts, and rare or unusual species or breeding records, for example. You should provide dates, locations, and observers whenever available. If you have the time and resources, you can report on trends among common and uncommon migrants or residents in the context of months or years. You can even mention historical sightings in your county to add context for current sightings.

LAYOUT OF THE COUNTY REPORT: Every county report has the following **required** and **optional** sections:

- County Name
- Locations
- Narrative
 - Introductory Paragraph(s)
 - Species Accounts (in eBird taxonomical order)
 - Exotics (uncountable species worthy of reporting)
 - Addendum (additional reports received after deadlines for previous reporting seasons)
 - Corrigenda (corrections to previous reports)
- Observers

FORMATTING OF THE COUNTY REPORT:

County Name: Always the first line of the report. **Example** *Washington County*

Locations: If mentioning certain locations frequently, abbreviate them in the narrative. In the **Locations** section, spell out the full names of the abbreviated locations, with the abbreviations in parentheses after the name.

DO: List locations in alphabetical order in paragraph format, separated by commas and terminated by a period.

DO: Make all abbreviations two to six ALLCAPS characters.

DO: Use numerals in abbreviations, if necessary.

DON'T: Create a list format with one location per line.

DON'T: Separate location names with semicolons.

DON'T: Forget the parentheses around the abbreviations accompanying each location name.

DON'T: Use one-character abbreviations such as “B” or “D”.

DON'T: Repeat any abbreviations listed on the first page of *Local Notes* in each issue.

DON'T: Put abbreviations in parentheses in the narrative, as they could be confused with observer initials.

Example **Locations:** Bavington (BAV), Canonsburg Lake (CL), Dutch Fork Lakebed (DFL), Greencove Wetlands (GCW), Robinson Township (RBT), Washington Park School Pond (WPSP), Washington Reservoir #4 (WR4).

Narrative: Skip a space after the **Locations** section and begin the (untitled) narrative section. You may include an optional introductory paragraph or paragraphs describing weather conditions and other features of the season and highlight the most notable bird-related events and rare species. Follow this section with the species accounts, arranged in the same taxonomical order that eBird uses. You may also include charts, tables, and text boxes (refer to a recent issue for lay-out ideas).

DON'T write fragments: **Canvasback** (OB) – three at Bill's Farm on 11/21.
DO write full sentences: There were three **Canvasbacks** at Bill's Farm 11/21 (OB).
EVEN BETTER: Three **Canvasbacks** at Bill's Farm 11/21 (OB) were a surprising first fall record.

Try to aim for some level of detail, to avoid long, dry lists of sightings. Tell the reader *why* the sightings are interesting if you have that information. Details aren't available for all notable reports, so you will end up with a mixture of straight reporting and more compelling text:

Example A **Snow Goose**, unusual for *Washington*, was located near Ellsworth, Somerset Twp, 10/13 (AB). Twenty-five **Tundra Swans** passed over Bentleyville 11/24 (AB), ensuring that *Washington* had at least one record for this species in what was a good migration over SW PA this season. Up to 55 **Wood Ducks** were at the undisclosed private location mentioned in the intro through mid-October, which is an excellent count for this species. Other waterfowl seen at this location included four **American Wigeon** 10/4, eight **American Black Ducks** 11/18, seven to eight **Northern Pintail** 11/6-18, up to 13 **Green-winged Teal** 11/6-18, one **Ring-necked Duck** 11/18, three **Bufflehead** 11/6, and one **Red-breasted Merganser** 11/6 (all AB). Any spot as prolific as this for waterfowl in *Washington* is notable. Away from that location, waterfowl reports were very few; only a **Blue-winged Teal** at CL 9/28 (RT), five **Hooded Mergansers** at CL 11/19 (MV), and eight **Ruddy Ducks** in Somerset Twp 10/24 (AB) are worth mentioning.

A **Great Egret** was reported from GCW 9/5-20 (JB, GM, m.ob.), and another was at CL 9/9 (MV). A **Green Heron** lingered at CL until 9/30 (RT, MV). Most interesting among herons was a juv. **Black-crowned Night Heron** discovered at CL 9/25 (JaB) and last seen 10/22 (MV).

Exotics (optional): Following the species accounts, create a separate paragraph for these.

Example **EXOTICS: Mandarin Ducks** have continued to be reported with alarming frequency in the county. Reports this season were five at Boone Res (GM), 16 at CL (RG), and a staggering 43 on the Monongahela R at California (AT). Competition for nesting sites with Blue-winged Teal may soon become a problem for the teal.

Addendum (as needed): It is sometimes necessary to include significant reports from past periods that were not received in time for publication in the proper issue. Don't bother with an Addendum unless the late report is very important or unusual.

Example **ADDENDUM:** A late report from the Summer Season was received of a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** frequenting a farm in Center Twp 7/12-21 (FN). This is the first record for *Beaver*. The report is currently under PORC review.

Corrigenda (as needed): When a significant mistake is printed, corrections are to be included in the next issue. These include: fixes to incorrectly reported dates; incorrect observer citations; incorrect species mentioned; incorrect locations.

Example **CORRIGENDA:** The report in the Spring 2023 season of 13 **Black Scoters** at Bill's Farm 4/1 was incorrectly attributed to GH. The actual observer was DK.

Observers: This list is the last section of the county report, beginning with *Observers*:

- The first person listed is the county compiler, even if they didn't contribute any sightings to the report.
- The compiler's contact information (physical address, email address, or both) is listed in this order and in bold: **Name, Address Line 1, Address Line 2, City, State ZIP, Phone Number, Email Address**.
- The contact information is followed by a comma, followed by an alphabetical listing by last name of all observers who contributed to the report.
- The observer list is a single paragraph with all names separated by commas and terminated by a period.
- **DO** include all observers whose initials appear in the narrative.
- **DO** list initials where any confusion over observer identities could arise (see below).
- **DON'T** list observers whose initials don't appear—ie., observers from former seasons.
- **DON'T** create a list of observers with one name per line.
- **DON'T** list the compiler's name again among the observers.

Where observers have the same initials:

- Alphabetize them by last name. **Example** Mike Sellers, Martin Smith, Mary Smith.
- The first will be (MS) in the narrative, and the others can be (MnS) and (MyS) in the narrative.
- The observer list will be written as: Mike Sellers, Martin Smith (MnS), Mary Smith (MyS).

Note: Some couples report their sightings as a single entity. Sam and Susan Thompson can be credited together for their sightings by referring to them as (S&ST) if they always submit all their sightings under both of their names. But if one or the other must be referred to singly for any sighting in the report, then split them into two observers for all sightings, using (ST) and (SuT), and credit sightings they made together as (ST, SuT).

Example **Observers: Geoff Malosh, 7762 Maumee Western Rd, Maumee, OH 43537, 412-735-3128, pomarine@earthlink.net, Andy Berchin, John Boback, James Bohn (JaB), Patti Briggs, Lauren Conkle, Michael Dietrich, Mike Fialkovich, Ross Gallardy, Scott Gregg, Cris Hamilton, Ray and Edyie Posel, Cathy Skidmore, Amy Taracido, Jarred Taracido (JaT), José Taracido (JoT), Jen Thompson, Ryan Tomazin.**

STYLE GUIDE – DEEP DIVE

Please refer to the most recent edition of *Pennsylvania Birds* for examples and reach out to the chief editor for any clarifications. The current abbreviations to use are at the beginning of every *Local Notes* section and are also found on page 6 below.

Bird Names. Always write out the entire species name upon first mention in the narrative. You can shorten the name only after first using the whole name:

Wrong: Am. Crow, N. Rough-winged Swallow.

Right: A congregation of at least 10,000 **American Robins** in Franklin Park 2/12 was impressive. Normally robins are not nearly so common during this season.

Wrong: A congregation of at least 10,000 **robins** in Franklin Park 2/12 was impressive.

When referring to a subspecies or hybrid name, capitalize the subspecies/hybrid name, and do not use quotes.

Right: Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow

Wrong: "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow

County Names. When referring to any Pennsylvania county in your narrative, write the county name by itself in italics, and do not put the word "County" after the name. **Example** Three **Yellow Wagtails** present 4/14-16 were a great report for *Centre* following reports of this species in both *Lycoming* and *Juniata* last season.

Dates in the Text. The standard date format is mm/dd (omitting leading zeros). Do not use years even in the Winter report, which spans two calendar years. **Example** For a sighting on June 8, write 6/8, not 06/08 or any other format.

- Mention years only when referencing historical records. They should be in four-digit format: 6/21/1975.
- When mentioning a month without a day, spell out the name of the month.
- When reporting spans of dates, use a hyphen between the days if the entire span falls in the same month, or use a hyphen between complete dates if spanning over two or more months. **Example** An adult male **Surf Scoter** frequented the Youghiogheny R at Ohiopyle 2/21-3/4 and was joined by a first year male **White-winged Scoter** 2/22-27 (OB).
- When referring to a generalized period within a month (early, mid-, or late October, for example), use a hyphen for "mid-October" but no hyphen for "early October" or "late October."
- Omit "on" before dates, unless the date immediately follows a numeral. **Example** A **Northern Lapwing** was at the Conejohela Flats 3/24 (TJ). Three **Northern Hawk-Owls** were sighted at SGL 285 on 1/30 (GM).

Numbers in the Text.

- Never begin a sentence with a numeral, even if it is very long. It must be spelled out:
Wrong: 77 **Wood Ducks** were found 6/15.
Right: Seventy-seven **Wood Ducks** were found 6/15.
Wrong: 3,128 **Common Loons** put down on a pond at Bill's Farm 4/11, a staggering total.
Right: **Common Loons** numbering 3,128 put down on a pond at Bill's Farm 4/11, a staggering total.
- Always spell out numerals one through nine, including counts of individual birds.
- Use numerals for all numbers 10 and up, except at the beginning of a sentence.
- **Examples**
 - A total of eight **Snowy Egrets** at two sites...
 - At least six flocks totaling 15 **Black-bellied Plovers** and 79 **Semipalmated Plovers**...
 - Nine **Common Redpolls**, 21 **Evening Grosbeaks**, and two **Pine Grosbeaks** were counted at three different feeders in Punxsutawney by eight observers over the course of 37 days ...
- Use commas to separate thousands.
- Ordinals (first, second, 27th, etc.). Always spell out first through ninth. Use the numeral form for 10th and higher. When using the numeral form, do not put the suffix in superscript (13th, not 13th).
- The ordinal-based definitions of a bird's plumage (such as first basic or second summer) are not hyphenated.

Observer Citations. Cite the observer(s) involved in every record you report. Place the observer(s) initials in parentheses immediately adjacent to the sighting. When citing more than one observer, alphabetize the initials and separate them with commas and a space between each. **Example** (GM, MF, PH). Always cite observers in such a way that it is obvious who saw what:

Right: Unusual were **Gyrfalcons** at Hibernia 3/5 (KL, PH) and Green Lane 5/15 (BB, FG).

Wrong: Unusual were **Gyrfalcons** at Hibernia 3/5 and Green Lane 5/15 (KL, PH, BB, FG).

- When citing a string of observations by the same observer(s), it is OK to list the observer once at the end of the series. **Example** Unusual were **Gyrfalcons** at Hibernia 3/5 and Green Lane 5/15 (all BB).
- If most sightings in your report are by a single observer, you may make a note in the introduction. **Example** All sightings in this report were by OB unless noted otherwise.
- Don't cite more than five sets of initials for a record unless absolutely necessary. Instead, list the primary observers involved, followed by et al. **DON'T** write (AB, RG, MH, WS, DF, WJS, AT, JT) without good reason. **DO** write (AB, RG et al.) if AB and RG were the primary observers.
- Note: Sometimes citing many sets of initials is necessary for both the purpose of accuracy and for public relations (some observers don't like it when they aren't given credit).
- If a bird was seen by many observers, use the abbreviation m.ob.
- Use *fide* for second-hand reports you personally cannot confirm. **Example** If GT tells you that his friend TD saw a Sabine's Gull on the Susquehanna River on 8/21, and you know nothing about TD, but GT is sure of his friend, and you trust GT's judgment, then write: A **Sabine's Gull** on the Susquehanna R 8/21 was an extraordinary find (TD *fide* GT).

Paragraph Breaks. Try to come up with logical paragraph breaks and use them frequently. It is best to break into a new paragraph when you start discussing a new family or group of closely related families.

Past Tense. Text should be in the past tense.

Right: This was *Lancaster's* first record of Northern Lapwing.

Wrong: This is *Lancaster's* first record of Northern Lapwing.

S.A. (Special Attention text boxes). Special Attention passages will be highlighted in the final layout with a text box around the S.A. and a light gray text background. The purpose is to draw the reader's attention to an item they might otherwise miss if they don't read the entire county report. These are good for discussions of major new population trends, unusual invasions of rare species, an account of a mega-rarity, and so forth. To create an S.A., no special formatting is needed. Simply type "BEGIN S.A." immediately before the first paragraph of the special text section, and type "END S.A." immediately following the last sentence of this essay. Place the S.A. at the most logical point, considering taxonomic order and where the bird(s) discussed in the S.A. belong in the overall flow. The editors will handle the layout.

Tables for Data. These are effective for portraying raw data. You can provide the table at the end of the document or as a separate document. The editors will handle the final placement and layout, but remember the space limitations in *Pennsylvania Birds*. The maximum width of a table is 3.5 inches in the two-column format of *Local Notes*. A table that is excessively wide, with many columns, may be unusable. Consult with the chief editor if you aren't sure whether your table will fit properly.

Taxonomic Order. Discuss species in the taxonomic sequence currently outlined in eBird. Within reason, you may break the standard taxonomic order if doing so makes the text flow better. The readability of the narrative is generally the highest priority. Examples of situations when you might want to break the taxonomic order are when discussing fallouts of a large group of passerines or waterbirds from different parts of the sequence, or when highlighting a rarity at the beginning of a paragraph devoted to a particular family.

ABBREVIATIONS

BBS - Breeding Bird Survey	m.ob. - multiple observers	Res - Reservoir
CA - Conservation Area	Mt (Mts) - Mount/Mountain/Mountains	Rte - Route
CBC - Christmas Bird Count	NA - Nature Area or Natural Area	SF - State Forest
CP - County Park	NF - National Forest	SGL - State Game Land
Cr - Creek	NFC - nocturnal flight call	sp.; spp. - species; species (plural)
et al. - and others	NM - National Monument	SP - State Park
E, N, S, W - East, North, South, West	NP - National Park	STP - Sewage Treatment Plant
Ft - Fort	NWR - National Wildlife Refuge	subad(s).- subadult(s)
GC - Golf Course	PAMC - Pennsylvania Migration Count	Twp - Township
GP - Game Preserve	ph. - Photographed	vr. - voice recording
Hwy - Highway	Pt - Point	vt. - videotape
imm(s). - immature(s)	PORC - Pennsylvania Ornithological	WA - Wildlife Area
Jct - Junction	Records Committee	WMA - Wildlife Management Area
juv(s). - juvenal [plumage]; juvenile(s)	R - River	WRS - Winter Raptor Survey
L - Lake	RA - Recreational Area	
max - maximum	RBA - Rare Bird Alert	
min - minimum	Rd - Road	

CONTACT INFORMATION

Mark Bonta, Chief Editor
 970 Pennsylvania Ave Apt. 1
 Tyrone, PA 16686
markabonta@yahoo.com

Seasonal Editor, Winter
 (vacant)

Mike Fialkovich, Seasonal Editor, Spring
mpfial@verizon.net

Geoff Malosh, Seasonal Editor, Fall
pomarine@earthlink.net

Dan Brauning, Seasonal Editor, Summer
dan@thebraunings.com