

# North American Migration Count Newsletter - Spring 2008

## **UPDATE & NEWS FOR 2008**

Most of you have participated on the Christmas Bird Counts sponsored by the National Audubon Society. The rules are simple: spend a day in the field counting birds in a specified area, and keep track of the hours and miles on foot, car, boat, feeder watching. The North American Migration Count (NAMC) is like the Christmas Bird Count, but with a few twists. The AREA is not a 15 mile diameter circle but an ENTIRE COUNTY (Parish in Louisiana). The big twist is the timing: unlike Christmas Bird Counts, which are spread over several weeks, this count is done on just a SINGLE DAY.



The choice of the second Saturday in May has been made to try to find the peaks of movement of neotropical species while they are still where most of the birders are. It will not be peak everywhere: the Northern States will be getting their first glimmer of Spring and the Deep South will be in early breeding season, but the overall goal is of importance to everyone.

The goals of the NAMC are:

- ◆ Have fun.
- ◆ To obtain a “snapshot” of the process of Spring Migration.
- ◆ To obtain information on the abundance and distribution of each species.
- ◆ Initiate more participation among Birders within a state and between states.
- ◆ Create challenges and goals among Birders while collecting useful information.
- ◆ Aid in organization and centralization of data.
- ◆ Establish the Second Saturday in May (May 10 this year) as “National Birding Day”.

## **ABOUT THE NAMC**

The North American Migration Count is an event not affiliated with any particular organization. Partners in Flight, the American Birding Association, and numerous State and local bird clubs provide support by increasing awareness of this activity. The NAMC collects no dues. You cannot join, only participate.

All of the original data sheets submitted to NAMC have archived; and the data have been transferred to spreadsheets. It was the intent to share all of the archived information with the Biological Resources Division of the USGS with the understanding that it would be public information which can be readily accessed. This has not happened, for various reasons. Thus again this year we are asking you to submit the data to an electronic resource, eBird, which is an NSF-funded venture jointly operated by Cornell University and the National Audubon Society. Data submitted to eBird are accessible to everyone via the internet, and it is hoped that this change will be a positive step toward making all the NAMC data available to citizens and scientists alike.

To submit data to eBird, just prepare the checklist as you have done in the past, including all sightings, names of participants, mileage, times etc. Then log on to the eBird website (<http://www.ebird.org/>), take a couple of minutes to register and locate your county on the map, then type in the data in the appropriate boxes. After you have done

## North American Migration Count Newsletter - Spring 2008

this, and checked the accuracy of your numbers, just hit the “submit” button and it all goes into a vast and accessible database. It really is quite simple, and I urge you to use eBird not just for NAMC data, but for all your birdwatching trips. If you don’t think that this is something you can do, I will accept your paper copies as before and hopefully find the time to do the data entry myself, but I would obviously rather not do that... It might be best if you logged on to eBird and did the registration and location steps before you are faced with that big data set the day after the NAMC. If you have questions, the help available on that site is quite good, or you can email me ([drintoul@ksu.edu](mailto:drintoul@ksu.edu)) and I will try to help.

### **How To:**

The count has been designed so that it is outside everyone’s house, and not limited to a set of widely-spaced, discrete circles. After all, migratory birds are everywhere and should be of concern to everyone. But you should remember to **count all the birds (not just migrants)**; those data on sedentary or introduced species will be valuable to someone too. Participation by ALL birders, irrespective of skill or style, is encouraged. To collect the most scientifically valuable information under these conditions requires a bit of extra work in compiling the data. If you just think about it, one hour of “field birding” is quite different from one hour of “hawk watching” or one hour of “owling”. If you did your county with just feeder watchers one year, then just hawk watchers, then just field birders, the differences in the numbers of hummingbirds, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and Tennessee Warblers might be significant from year to year but would have no relationship to the true populations.

To compensate for the different styles of birding and obtain the most useful information for data analysis, some complications in reporting are necessary. Each observer must indicate the “kind” of list they are submitting: **Regular**, **Stationary**, **Feeder Watch**, **Owling** (designated **N**) and the compiler has to accumulate the sets of information separately. A “typical” County Tally form might look like:

<b>R</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>N</b>	
123	1	5	0	Tufted Titmouse
8	15	1	0	Sharp-shinned Hawk
57	0	120	0	House Finch
2	0	0	12	Great Horned Owl

To enter them on eBird, use the category “traveling count” for most of the data collected while walking or driving from place to place, and the “stationary” count category “stationary count” for the data collected at feeders, (or while conducting a stationary count!). Depending on how you do your owling (stationary or with a lot of driving), you will have to make your own judgments about how to enter these data. I have included the reporting forms for Kansas with this newsletter. As noted above, the best way to handle the data which your counters have collected is to submit it to eBird yourself. If you don’t want to do that, send me the data sheets AND a note indicating that these data have NOT been entered into eBird, and I will do it for you. But that won’t be nearly as much fun!

The following are guidelines, not rules. Just use common sense to convey the best measure of an individual style of birding.

## North American Migration Count Newsletter - Spring 2008

(1) **REGULAR:** These are your traditional types of birding, where the observer moves from one place to another during the period from dawn-to-dusk. In theory, the birds are more-or-less stationary, distributed over a geographic area, and the observer wanders through the area. A quick stop by a feeder is O.K., but a route that goes from one feeder to the next to the next etc. is not (see Feeder Watching).

*Miles by Foot:* estimate how many miles to the nearest ¼ mile

*Hours by Foot:* includes not only time spent walking but a modification of the Breeding Bird Survey Method: Drive a mile or so (it might be ½ mile or even 10 miles to the next stop), then bird a small area, hop in the car, and repeat: all time not spent driving, even if you just sit in the car or on the hood, is tallied in “Hours by foot”. As a rule, the average party travels no more than ½ mph. but less than 1 mph. on foot.

*Miles by Car:* Include time spent driving while at least some counting of birds on fence posts, telephone lines, etc. DO NOT INCLUDE a mad dash (carefully, not to exceed the speed of light) from Hot Spot #1 to Hot Spot #2, etc. DO INCLUDE miles driven on a modified “Breeding Bird Survey” (see hours by Car).

In general the average speed should be 25 mph, when party miles is divided by party hours (some may poke along at 10 mph, but if someone is near 50 mph, they are in the Indy 500, not birding).

*Hours by Car:* How much time was actually spent driving? A BBS Routine may have 2 minutes driving, then 3 minutes per stop: in one hour this totals 24 minutes by car, 36 minutes by foot, 12 miles by car and ZERO miles by foot. A modified route may have more time driving between stops and longer times at individual stops and may include some time spent on foot (which is tallied as Hours by foot, Miles by foot).

I want to make sure that there are enough distinctions that might make a difference to the statisticians (if you think you have more than one kind of “other”, list them separately. Note that canoe/kayak (include rowboat, raft, innertube) is distinct from boat (i.e. motorized boat, sailboat).

(2) **STATIONARY:** In Stationary Counts, the observer spends a significant amount of time, between dawn and dusk, in one spot, and many birds are moving past the observation point (i.e. a hawk watch). Note: there is no category for “Miles Stationary”. The difference between this and a feeder watch is the lack of feeders to attract birds. Stationary does not include time spent scanning a lake full of waterfowl, or gulls at a landfill, or shorebirds on a mudflat.... in all cases the birds are staying in one place, and not flying past the observer’s Station. In general, a Stationary Count should be at least 2 hours in one location.

(3) **FEEDER WATCHING:** In this type of counting, the observer stays more-or-less in one spot and the birds are attracted to it. The birds and observer are both more-or-less stationary. How to count birds at a feeder is a problem. Most avid watchers know that they have exactly 3 pairs of chickadees, or a morning group of goldfinches which is different from the afternoon goldfinches, but some first-timers might put down two chickadees each time they see two on the feeder. This category is meant for dedicated Feeder Watchers and not for the observation of a few birds at a feeder when most of the time the observer is traveling on foot or by car. In general, the minimum reportable Feeder Watching time (at a single Feeding station) should be 1 hour.

## North American Migration Count Newsletter - Spring 2008

(4) **“OWLING”** (actually **Night-time**) All of the birds tallied from midnight to dawn, and from dusk to midnight. This includes owls, rails, thrushes, chats, mockingbirds or anything that goes boo in the night. This can be in the backyard or for the insomniacs, a night-time modified BBS route.

(5) **Miscellaneous:** Do not wait until the end of the day to try to guess mileage or hours; do it whenever you change from one mode to another. If you are with someone, then split up for a while, get the hours and miles down as soon as you rejoin. It is O.K. for two or more parties to submit a single list.

When the total number of party-hours is small the “individual observer on an individual route” effect is important, but grows smaller as more parties are added. Rule of thumb: if a county gets 50+ Regular party-hours of coverage, the numbers from year-to-year in that particular county can have statistical significance. It may take a few years for an observer to figure out a good route; but once they get it worked out it is best to use the same route every year.

There is no conflict between the NAMC count and a Birdathon. If a Birdathon Team birds more than one county, all they have to remember are two things: keep track of birds/miles/hours in each individual county and **COUNT** of birds in each county (simple checklists are of no value to NAMC).

Note that the 2007 checklist incorporates some of the recent changes in the AOU checklist. Species which have been split into two species are included. Specifically, rufous-sided towhees are split into two species, the Red-eyed (Eastern) Towhee and the Spotted (Western) Towhee; Northern Orioles are re-split into Baltimore and Bullock’s orioles; solitary vireos are split into three species (Cassin’s, Plumbeous, and Eastern/blue-headed). Please take care to separate these species, since all may occur in Kansas during May. Additionally, if an asterisked bird is common in your part of the state in May (e.g. Pine Siskins in western Kansas), you need not submit details. But if a non-asterisked bird is uncommon in your part of the state in May (e.g. Cinnamon Teal in eastern Kansas), please document it fully!

If you have questions or comments, please contact the state coordinator, Dave Rintoul by:

**snail mail** - Biology Division, Ackert Hall, KSU, Manhattan KS 66506-4901

**voice phone** - 785-532-6615 (days)

**FAX** - 785-537-6653

**e-mail** - drintoul@ksu.edu

Thank you for your participation in this long-term data collecting effort. For more information, including a summary of data from all the previous KS NAMC efforts, check out the KOS web page (use the link to KOS Projects) at the URL:

***<http://ksbirds.org>***

That site also has a map indicating all the counties that have participated in the KS NAMC since 1993. Not all have been counted every year, but we are getting there! If you want to add a county this year, find some volunteers, copy the forms and use them for that effort. Thanks again for all your help.

— ***Dave Rintoul***