

2 December 2022

Dear Christmas Bird Count Compiler in Florida,

The 123rd Christmas Bird Count season will soon be upon us. The two of us have been editing (BP) and reviewing (BHA) Florida's CBC data for the past 22 and 15 years, respectively, for totals of 1,473 and 1,030 CBCs. This letter explains our editing procedures for Florida's 80+ CBCs; please share this letter with your participants, especially your party leaders. We must "warn" you that *this is a long letter* (11 pages) because there are many issues to address so that we all may improve the CBC database for Florida. We describe in detail the challenges that we encounter as we edit Florida's CBCs. **Text in red is new for the 123rd season.**

This letter is intended primarily for new compilers and those whose CBCs have had quality-control problems (e.g., species deleted from the database) over the past five years—but we hope that all compilers will find this letter useful. **For those of you whose CBC data are always impeccable, we thank you and we salute you.**

The most important aspect of CBC data review and editing concerns the identification of rare birds. Each season, Bruce and I delete 25–30 reports of very rare species because the documentation was either insufficient or not provided at all. As many as 50 other observations of less-rare species submitted with no details are retained but are appended with the undesirable "DD" (Details Desired) or "QN" (Questionable Number) editorial codes. Ornithologists who use the CBC database in their studies *never* include records appended with the "DD" or "QN" editorial codes, so please document such high numbers. Because of the amount of data that we review each season—about 9,000 records over 80+ CBCs—Bruce and I concentrate on the most significant reports that represent truly rare species in one or more regions in the state. **The species that we delete from the database, or that we question, represent less than 1% of all the birds reported on a season's Florida CBCs.**

To help reduce the number of reports we must delete, Bruce and I have created a Rare Bird Form (found at the end of this letter, and attached to this email as a PDF), which is much more detailed than the form that Audubon provides. **We ask that your participants use our form exclusively to document rare birds found on your CBC.** Also, **please tell your participants to send the completed forms to YOU, not to Bruce.** After you have examined the forms to ensure that they are complete and accurate, and then **please send all of your forms to Bruce via snail mail or email.** We stress that **it is vital that the observers of the bird fill out the form; compilers may not fill out rare bird forms if they did not see or hear the bird.** **All "Rare Bird Forms" should be filled out within 48 hours of the observation using the observer's own words;** descriptions taken verbatim out of a field guide will not be accepted.

There is no better way to document a rare bird than via photographs, and digital cameras have made documenting a rare bird much easier than in the past. **We love to receive photographs of rare birds!** We accept links to eBird checklists that include photographs of rare birds; **compilers, please provide a "clickable" link for each eBird checklist.**

Except for extreme rarities (e.g., see the list below), there is no standard for which species should be documented. **Generally, observers should provide documentation for any species seen on fewer than 30% of your past CBCs. We make exceptions to our “30% guideline”** for regularly-occurring species that are often missed on many CBCs because they are nocturnal (e.g., owls), are found in “challenging” habitats (e.g., American Bitterns in marshes or Sedge Wrens in grassy fields), or are difficult for many participants to identify (e.g., Orange-crowned Warbler). If you have any questions about whether a species seen on your CBC requires documentation, email BP for guidance *within a day or two of your CBC*. **Documentation is required for all species that you mark as unusual—even those observed during count-week.**

During the 121st CBC season, Bruce and I had intended to delete 30 extremely rare birds that were not accompanied by details. At the last minute, we searched the eBird database and were shocked to note that nearly all of these extremely rare species were found on eBird checklists during the count day, and that 23 were verifiable from photographs embedded in these checklists! We thus drastically reduced the number of extremely rare species that we needed to delete from Florida CBCs. **Compilers, please understand that providing details for rare birds found on your CBC is one of your most important responsibilities! Do not include extremely rare species in your CBC results unless you have sent to Bruce supporting documentation.**

And, speaking of eBird: As written above, for the previous two CBC seasons, Bruce and I used eBird to search for rare birds that were found in a CBC circle during “count-week” but that were not documented by CBC participants. We ask that CBC compilers assist us with ensuring that rare birds reported on a CBC are properly documented. **However, eBird data cannot be used to “pad” CBC data! Unless an eBirder is a formal participant in a Christmas Bird Count, then his/her data cannot be added to data gathered by CBC participants.** This is not a new policy that Bruce and I have created for Florida; rather, it is the continentwide policy of the National Audubon Society. The following information is copied from National Audubon’s CBC website (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count/christmas-bird-count-compiler-resources#29>):

Checklists in eBird that are from areas within a count circle on the count day but not submitted by official CBC participants **cannot** be added to Christmas Bird Count results. Because official CBC observers and parties on Christmas Bird Counts are coordinated in advance by compilers, and because the effort of the parties on CBCs is as critically important as the bird data for the analyses of CBC results, independent eBird checklists are not compatible with official Christmas Bird Count results.

Please ensure that birders in your CBC circle understand that they cannot contribute data to your CBC through eBird unless they are a formal participant on your Count.

Numbers of parties – Virtually every Christmas Bird Count has one or more parties that start earlier or end later than other parties. Please ensure to list the *range* that represents the minimum and maximum numbers of parties in the field *during daylight hours* (e.g., 3–9 parties).

Party-Hours are used to standardize CBC data continentwide. **Party-hours cannot exceed 11 hours per party**; nocturnal hours are tabulated separately. **Do not tabulate “observer hours” as party-hours**: 10 people in 3 parties out for 8 hours each = 24 hours, not 80 hours.

“Countable” species – As you enter your data online, **you may choose** to fill in the box for the Number of Species seen on your count. **Every non-captive bird seen on your CBC should be included in your count totals, but please do not “count” any species unless it is in the Official Florida State Bird List maintained by the Florida Ornithological Society** <<http://fosbirds.org/florida-bird-list.html>>. In other words, if your CBC participants saw Graylag Geese or Red-masked Parakeets in a park, or an escapee such as a Diamond Dove or Zebra Finch is visiting a bird feeder, please include these species in your count results, but please exclude them from the Species Total that you may submit to Audubon. (Audubon now allows you to leave the Species Total box empty; in which case, BP will fill in the number).

High counts – Limit your use of “high counts” to those totals that **represent new high counts for your CBC**. If your CBC has been run fewer than 10 times, limit these counts to those counts that seem truly significant. **We prefer that you do not list “low” numbers**, since the CBC database bizarrely does not consider zero to be a number, thereby giving incorrect information.

Rounding off numbers – Because the totals for most species seen on a CBC are based partly or entirely on estimates, the totals that you submit should be rounded off. For instance, if parties on your CBC report Tree Swallow totals of 1000, 500, 250, 100, 20, 6, 2, and 1, then please round off this total to 1850 or 1900, rather than listing “1879.” For huge numbers such as for Lesser Scaup, American Robins, or Red-winged Blackbirds give a very rounded number such as 10,000, 50,000, or 100,000; do not use “9,600,” “52,500,” or “109,000.”

The following section comprises the rare birds that are most problematic on Florida CBCs. **Species underlined represent or have represented those most frequently misidentified on Florida CBCs.**

SPECIES WORTHY OF PARTICULAR DISCUSSION

NEOTROPICAL MIGRANTS – These species breed in or north of Florida and then migrate through the state to winter farther south. None of these species regularly winters here, and **many have never been documented by photograph even once during December–February anywhere in Florida. Bruce and I delete every report of any of these species if claimed on a Florida CBC with insufficient or no documentation being submitted. Ideally, every one of these species should be photographed if found on a CBC:** Red-footed Booby, Mississippi Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite, American Golden-Plover, Upland Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird’s Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Wilson’s Phalarope, Bridled Tern, Least Tern, Black Tern, Roseate Tern, Arctic Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black-billed Cuckoo, Common Nighthawk, Antillean Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-

whiskered Vireo, Purple Martin, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Veery, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Bicknell's Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Wood Thrush, Golden-winged Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Canada Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Bobolink.

CANADA GOOSE – List all as “Canada Goose (large forms).” “Small forms” of Canada Geese require documentation to distinguish them from Cackling Geese.

EGYPTIAN GOOSE – This species is “countable” statewide, even though birds north of the central peninsula may more likely represent local escapees.

MUSCOVY DUCK – These are “countable” statewide. We do not need details for any CBC.

“MALLARD × DOMESTIC DUCK” – This listing is redundant, since all domesticated ducks—including all-white “Pekin Ducks” —are Mallards. We always change this listing to Mallard.

MALLARD /MOTTLED DUCK – We previously encouraged CBC participants to use the MALLARD × MOTTLED DUCK listing for “Muddled Ducks” that showed plumage characteristics of both Mallards and Mottled Ducks. However, the hybrid/backcross listing is being used excessively. Therefore, we now ask CBC participants to use the MALLARD/MOTTLED DUCK listing for “Muddled Ducks” that are not obvious Mallards, obvious Mottled Ducks, or obvious hybrids/backcrosses. (This listing can be added to your CBC data by clicking on the “Add Species” link, then typing “Mallard/” into the box and selecting Mallard/Mottled Duck). Most feral Mallards in Florida—especially males—are so inbred that their plumage **may not resemble** typical “field guide” Mallards.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK – Provide details south of Gainesville.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL – Please list all as “(American) Green-winged Teal” unless photographs have been obtained for the Eurasian subspecies.

COMMON MERGANSER – Provide details (ideally with photographs) statewide.

“GREAT WHITE HERON” – Provide details away from the Keys or Everglades.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK – Provide details statewide, except on the St. Petersburg and South Brevard CBCs and in Broward, Collier, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

SHORT-TAILED HAWK – Provide details statewide, except in Broward, Collier, Miami-Dade, and Monroe counties.

GRAY-HEADED SWAMPHEN (AKA PURPLE SWAMPHEN) – Provide details when “new” to your CBC circle or otherwise rare. **Identifications of other species of swamphens, such as Western Swamphen, are erroneous.**

COASTAL SHOREBIRDS INLAND (e.g., Black-bellied Plover, Sanderling, Red Knot, Dunlin, Willet). Provide details for all inland CBCs, except for Dunlin on the Econlockhatchee and STA5–Clewiston CBCs.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER – Provide details for reports of more than two on any CBC.

DOWITCHERS – Provide details for all inland Short-billed Dowitchers, and do not submit reports of Long-billed Dowitchers from along beaches. There may not be any verifiable record in Florida of Short-billed Dowitchers inland during winter, and there is no record in Florida of Long-billed Dowitchers along beaches during winter.

ROYAL TERN INLAND – Provide details when “new” on your non-coastal CBC.

COMMON TERN – Provide details (ideally accompanied by photographs) statewide. (Contrary to their English name, Common Terns are rare to non-existent *during winter*). Over the past five CBC seasons, this species has become the most troublesome in Florida, **eclipsing Least Tern and Eastern Kingbird, previously the most troublesome species reported on Florida CBCs.** Again, details are required statewide. **Bruce and I delete every undocumented Common Tern reported on Florida CBCs.**

LEAST TERN – Provide details (accompanied by photographs) statewide. *There is no verifiable record of Least Tern in Florida during winter—ever.* **We thank compilers for addressing this issue with their participants, as Least Tern now is seldom claimed on Florida CBCs.**

MONK PARAKEET – “Countable” populations are found along the Gulf coast from Pasco to Lee counties, and along the Atlantic coast from Martin County southward. This species has declined dramatically in numbers over the past 10 years.

NANDAY PARAKEET – “Countable” populations are restricted to the central Gulf coast from Pasco to Charlotte counties. For now, we will continue to consider populations of Nanday Parakeets found southern Atlantic coast to be “non-countable.”

MITRED PARAKEET – This species is now “countable” in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties.

AFRICAN COLLARED-DOVE (“RINGED TURTLE-DOVE”) – Provide details statewide. The only known population, at St. Petersburg, died out **more than 20** years ago.

COMMON NIGHTHAWK OR “NIGHTHAWK SPECIES” – Provide details statewide.

LESSER NIGHTHAWK – Provide details statewide, except in and around Everglades National Park.

CHUCK-WILL’S-WIDOW – Provide details north of Lake Okeechobee.

VERY RARE HUMMINGBIRDS SUCH AS BLACK-CHINNED, ALLEN’S, ANNA’S, BROAD-TAILED, BROAD-BILLED, AND CALLIOPE – Provide details statewide. **Mentioning simply that the bird was banded is *not* sufficient**; we need details (ideally in-hand photographs) to confirm the identification.

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD – Provide details outside of the Panhandle (i.e., east of Leon and Wakulla counties).

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD – Except for wholly-brown-backed males, the identification of this species from Allen’s Hummingbird requires in-hand views and measurements of the outer tail feathers or detailed photographs of the tail. Lacking such views of the tail feathers, most “Rufous Hummingbirds” in Florida should be listed on CBCs as *Selasphorus* species.

HAIRY WOODPECKER – We prefer details for this species away from areas with expanses of fire-maintained pine flatwoods.

NORTHERN FLICKER – Please list all as “Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker.”

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE – We will not accept any report of a silent wood-pewee identified to species. All reports of wood-pewees in Florida should ideally be accompanied by video-recording that includes call-notes, or a banded bird accompanied by measurements. *Contrary to numerous reports on **previous CBCs and misidentifications on eBird checklists**, there is no verifiable winter record of an Eastern Wood-Pewee in Florida.*

LEAST FLYCATCHER – Provide details statewide, except on the Zellwood–Mount Dora CBC and in Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

ANY OTHER *EMPIDONAX* (e.g., ACADIAN FLYCATCHER): Provide details (ideally with photographs) statewide.

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER – Provide details northward from Pinellas, Hillsborough, Sumter, Lake, Osceola, and Brevard counties. This species has increased remarkably as a winter resident in the southern half of the peninsula over the past 30 years, but it remains rare and irregular farther north—where Ash-throated Flycatcher **is the more** expected wintering *Myiarchus*.

ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER – **Despite being more frequent than Great Crested Flycatcher in the northern half of Florida during winter**, please provide details statewide, except on the Zellwood–Mount Dora CBC (**to ensure that other *Myiarchus* species have been ruled out**).

BROWN-CRESTED FLYCATCHER – Provide details statewide, except in and around Everglades National Park.

EASTERN KINGBIRD – Provide details (ideally with photographs) statewide; ***there are only three winter records of Eastern Kingbirds in Florida***. This species is frequently confused with Eastern Phoebes and/or Loggerhead Shrikes, although far less frequently **on Florida CBCs** than in the past. **We thank compilers for addressing this issue with their participants.**

PURPLE MARTIN – Provide details statewide. We acknowledge that some martins return in early January—or even the last few days in December!—but details are nonetheless required.

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW – Provide details north of Lake Okeechobee.

BARN SWALLOW – Provide details statewide except in and around Everglades National Park.

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO – Provide details statewide, except in Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties. This species is often confused with Pine Warblers, which may be found miles from pine habitats during winter.

NASHVILLE WARBLER – Provide details statewide.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT – Provide details north of Lake Okeechobee.

NEW WORLD WARBLERS (formerly called WOOD-WARBLERS) – Concurrent with global warming, many species of New World Warblers have been found on Florida CBCs with increased regularity; many species previously unknown during winter are now expected, especially in the in areas south of Lake Okeechobee (peruse the results of the Kendall Area CBC the past few years for several eye-popping examples!). However, several of these species still must be documented, especially outside their current wintering ranges (in Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade, and Monroe counties). If you are unsure whether a species needs to be documented on your CBC, refer to our “30% guideline” mentioned on pages 1–2 of this letter. Selected species follow:

TOWNSEND’S WARBLER, SWAINSON’S WARBLER, BLUE-WINGED WARBLER, GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER, TENNESSEE WARBLER, WORM-EATING WARBLER, PROTHONOTARY WARBLER, NASHVILLE WARBLER, KENTUCKY WARBLER, and HOODED WARBLER – Provide details statewide. We promise to revisit some of these species found in the extreme southern peninsula and the Keys over the next few years.

YELLOW WARBLER – Provide details statewide, except in coastal Miami-Dade and Monroe counties.

AMERICAN REDSTART – Provide details north of Gainesville.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, MAGNOLIA WARBLER and CAPE MAY WARBLER – Provide details statewide, except in Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH – Provide details statewide, except in and near Everglades National Park.

WILSON’S WARBLER – Provide details statewide, except at Gainesville and in Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach counties.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER – Please list all as “Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers,” unless photographs have been obtained for one of the western (Audubon’s) races.

SUMMER TANAGER – Provide details only for reports of three or more on any CBC.

BLUE GROSBEAK – Provide details statewide except on the Zellwood–Mount Dora CBC.

INDIGO BUNTING – Provide details only if “new” to your CBC. (Note that Indigo Buntings in winter are never all blue; they’re mostly brown with some blue in the wings and tail).

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW, FIELD SPARROW, LARK SPARROW, DARK-EYED JUNCO, LECONTE’S SPARROW, HENSLOW’S SPARROW, and LINCOLN’S SPARROW – Provide details peninsulawide.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW and FOX SPARROW – Provide details peninsulawide except at Gainesville.

HARRIS’S SPARROW – Provide details statewide.

SEASIDE SPARROW – Provide details along the Atlantic coast south of St. Augustine and along the Gulf coast south of Port Richey. Surprisingly, “Cape Sable” Seaside Sparrow has not been reported on a CBC in more than 10 years.

SALTMARSH SPARROW – Provide details from along the Gulf coast including Everglades National Park. The identification between Nelson’s and Saltmarsh sparrows is more difficult than many birders realize. Along the Gulf coast, the majority of sharp-tailed sparrows are Nelson’s, but the number of Saltmarsh Sparrows seems to increase farther south in the peninsula. **We change undocumented reports of Saltmarsh Sparrow to “Sharp-tailed Sparrow”** given the uncertainty of the status of each species in southern Florida.

SONG SPARROW – Note that reports of more than two individuals from the central peninsula southward are likely erroneous.

RUSTY BLACKBIRD – Provide details south of Gainesville.

BREWER’S BLACKBIRD – Provide details from Gainesville southward.

HOUSE FINCH – Provide details only if “new” to your CBC.

SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA – This species is now “countable” in the three westernmost counties in Florida: Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa. For now, populations found elsewhere in the state (e.g., the Miami metro area) remain “non-countable.”

Thank you!

Happy Holidays and CBCs,

Bill Pranty
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and

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Winter Park, Florida 32792
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FLORIDA CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DOCUMENTATION FORM, 2022–2023

Participants, give this form to your compiler. Compilers, mail or email all forms to:

Bruce Anderson
2917 Scarlet Road
Winter Park, Florida 32792
scizortail@aol.com

It is important that this form be filled out thoroughly and as quickly after the observation as possible (ideally the same day). Reports of extreme rarities—including birds not verified to occur during winter—should be photographed and/or video-recorded.

OFFICIAL CBC NAME (Compilers, please correct the name if necessary).

Species _____

Number of individuals _____ **Age and sex (of the bird)** _____

Date and time _____ **Duration of observation** _____

Weather conditions (include relationship of sun and bird to observer)

Exact location _____

Habitat _____

Distance from bird _____ **Optical equipment** _____

Others observers _____

Did anybody disagree with the identification? If so, who?

Others who identified the bird before or after the CBC

Vocalizations _____

Behavior _____

Describe in detail the features that YOU noted IN THE FIELD. You should include the SHAPE, SIZE, and COLOR of ALL PARTS OF THE BODY including the head, bill, eyes, lores, eye rings, other facial markings, back, wings, wing bars, tail, tail bars or spots, throat, breast, belly, tail coverts, legs, feet, etc.

What similar species were considered and why were they eliminated?

Explain previous experience with this and similar species

Did you identify the bird before consulting a field guide? _____

What guides influenced your decision? _____

Was the bird photographed or videotaped? If so, please submit copies (emailed JPEGs are fine) _____

Attach any drawings made during or after observation. Drawings made BEFORE _____ or AFTER _____ consulting a field guide. (USE AND ATTACH ANY ADDITIONAL PAGES AS NEEDED)

Signature _____ Date prepared _____

Your name, address (including email) _____

_____ **Thank you!**