

News from NYSOA: Records, Regional Reports, and You

By Robert Spahn, NYSOA Regional Reports Editor

One of the major functions of NYSOA (formerly The Federation of New York State Birds Clubs) has been the gathering and publication of bird records with some analysis and commentary. Early on, 10 reporting Regions were identified centered on major bird clubs and taking into account historical birding areas related to these. Regional Editors (REs) were identified with the aid of the interested clubs, and records and other inputs were solicited and initially sent to these editors, who would then identify interesting records and write quarterly reports summarizing the picture of birds and birding in their Region for the quarter/season. The reports were based on the records and other information sent by observers and were also related to historical information and the experience of the RE.

This approach has continued for over 70 years, with only minor changes to Regional boundaries along the way. From the beginning, the details of record submission have varied a bit by Region. Some Regions have clubs with active records committees, which first receive and screen local records, provide these to their local clubs, and send summaries to the RE. More recently, with the inception and growth of eBird, more and more of the observation data, records, have been submitted to eBird, with the eBird database accessed by the REs quarterly or now monthly. A common element has remained: the REs gathering the records and studying them to obtain a picture of what happened in their part of the birding world for the quarter/season, then writing a meaningful summary based on the data. Masses of data in a database are really of little personal interest to most birders and even less to others with a more casual interest in birds. The analysis and stories that are captured in a good Regional Report are more accessible and of more general interest. While eBird has brought a huge improvement in the gathering of data easily accessible to the REs in a common format, a major loss has been that few observers now submit their personal comments and stories to the REs, so preparation of interesting summaries is more difficult.

As an active birder, you can contribute to Regional Reports – and to citizen science – simply by submitting your observations and checklists, and at least occasionally your thoughts and comments on what you see or think is happening, to your local Regional Editor. For the name and contact information of your RE, visit <https://nybirds.org/RecordsEditors.htm>

A great positive for birding as a “hobby” is that anyone can take part in it in any way that appeals to them with whatever time they wish to spend; no approach is really “right” or “wrong.” Your choice. However, volumes of data are needed and useful for many studies in ornithology, and you can contribute to the science with any observations that provide a correctly identified species, location, and date, and, better too, some idea of numbers. The more details you are willing to provide, the more useful the observation. Observations over relatively short time periods and smaller geographic areas with counts or reasonable estimates of numbers are most useful, as these can later be added together to cover longer times and larger areas. But even observations with just very basic information are useful. This kind of information is needed in order for others to assemble the bird guides we all use for identification and the bird finding guides we use locally or on travels to decide where to go to find birds of interest.