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## DOCUMENTATION AND SUBMISSION OF BIRD RECORDS IN TENNESSEE

STEPHEN J. STEDMAN AND JOHN C. ROBINSON

The job of recording and submitting bird sightings for publication has fallen on many generations of TOS members. During the past 70 years fieldworkers in the state have evolved increasingly sophisticated methods of fulfilling this basic responsibility of membership in our organization. One important cause of this evolving sophistication was the establishment of "*The Season*" report in this journal, from a germinal report about Memphis begun by Ben B. Coffey, Jr. (1931) to the reports from various cities organized by James T. Tanner (1950) to the version we now use (Smith 1968). In part, "*The Season*" became necessary because of the large number of bird records which needed to be published but for which there was not enough space using the traditional "*Round Table Note*" method of documenting sightings. Through the years compilers and editors have sought ever more reliable means of verifying the records submitted to them for inclusion in this report. Their search has led to the promulgation of many "rules" about how to document and submit bird records, with each new set of rules being slightly more exhaustive and comprehensive than those which preceded it.

The need for ever more sophisticated documentation guidelines is self-evident to those who do their birding with any degree of seriousness whatsoever. Birding has rapidly evolved into a hobby which interfaces with science, economics, politics, and sociology in countless ways. Consequently, the demands placed on the members of the birding community to document their findings have also increased. This is especially true where sightings of very rare and/or endangered species are involved. The way that we treat our records of these birds may well determine their fate in the next decade and into the next century, for it is only from a carefully documented history of sightings that the decline of a species can be established, that management plans for its future can be made, that the dollars needed to fund those plans can be legislated, and that the implementation of those plans can occur. Without solid data on which to base decisions, the fate of many bird species in our state might well be a more gloomy one than it already is. Whether a gloomy fate awaits species such as Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) and Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) remains unclear.

What is clear is that TOS members can materially affect the future of many species of birds in the state by the way that they handle their records. The following discussion of record-keeping offers one means by which we can collectively contribute to maintaining healthy populations of all Tennessee bird species.

### MAINTENANCE OF PERSONAL RECORDS

The importance of maintaining an orderly system of personal observations cannot be overly stressed. While it is imperative that each ornithologist adopt a record-keeping system which meets his own needs, it must be realized that the data within such a system will meet scientific standards only if, at a minimum, the following five essential items of information are readily accessible:

1. Species of bird observed.
2. Number of individuals observed.
3. Location of observation (including state, county, and name of specific locality where observation was made).
4. Date(s) of observation.
5. Name(s) of observer(s).

The use of a small notebook in which daily observations and other notations are recorded adequately maintains a permanent record of the 5 items listed above; moreover, there is sufficient space in such a notebook to record detailed descriptions of selected sightings. However, since most compilers of bird records prefer to receive records in American Ornithologists' Union (A.O.U.) Check-List (1983 and subsequent supplements) order, this system becomes impractical to use when many observations are made each season.

An alternative method of record-keeping is to record the number of each species seen on a field check-list card and file these check-lists by date. While it is often wise to save these check-lists for future reference, this system also becomes cumbersome to use when it serves as the sole means of record-keeping for an active ornithologist.

Probably the best method of maintaining one's records involves the use of a notebook in which all notable observations for a given species are recorded on one page. Each page is then filed by species in proper A.O.U. Check-list order. The necessary information for each sighting can be listed on the appropriate page under the following basic column headings: "date," "number observed," "location," and "special remarks" (Figure 1). Details on observers, time of observation, plumage or age of the bird, etc., can be entered under "special remarks." The advantages of this record-keeping system are obvious:

1. Species are already listed in A.O.U. Check-list order, making it easier for the observer to prepare his seasonal report of observations.
2. There is space to record each of the five essential items of information identified above for each sighting.
3. At a glance, an observer can review all of the notable sightings he has made for each species throughout the year.

SPECIES: Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

1986

Date	Number	Location		Special Remarks
		State	County	
1-11	2	Tennessee	Henry	Big Sandy Unit, Tenn. NWR; 2 imm.
1-14	13	Tennessee	Lake	Reelfoot NWR; 11 adults, 2 imm.
1-18	2	Tennessee	Stewart	Cross Creeks NWR; 2 adults
2-4	3	Illinois	Williamson	Crab Orchard Lake; 3 adults
3-23	5	Tennessee	Humphreys	Duck River Unit, Tenn. NWR; 5 imm.
3-31	5	Tennessee	Stewart	2 adults w/ 3 young at nest next to CCNWR

**Figure 1.** Sample species record sheet for use in personal record-keeping system (part of a page only shown).

Under this system, one notebook is kept for each calendar year. This system, which has been described only in its most basic sense, can be modified any number of ways; however, space precludes additional elaboration here. Anyone interested in receiving more detailed information on this record-keeping system should contact the junior author at the address listed at the end of this article or refer to Remsen (1977) or Herman (1980).

In addition to maintaining an orderly system of bird records, the serious observer should also consider carrying a field notebook into the field at all times. Such a notebook is often 5½" x 8½", with heavy bond lined paper; the use of a permanent ink pen is recommended. Although anything can be entered into a field notebook, it is ideal for taking notes on, or illustrating, a rare species which is encountered in the field. The proper maintenance of a field notebook is invaluable when a feature article or Round Table Note is being prepared for publication and an observer needs to recall data about an observation several weeks or months after the bird was seen.

#### DOCUMENTING RARE OR UNUSUAL BIRDS

Taking notes in the field of a rare or unusual bird is the first step in the process of documentation. In order to perpetuate a sight record properly, however, these field notes must be used to prepare a formal report of the sighting. In Tennessee, the TOS Certification Committee provides a Rare Bird Reporting Form (also known as a documentation form) on which a formal report of a rare sighting can be recorded. Because the status, distribution, and abundance of bird species are constantly changing, the information provided on the Rare Bird Reporting Form will enable future ornithologists to accurately trace changes in population numbers, distribution, and habitat association of rare or unusual bird species. Lists of species which require documentation are provided hereinafter. It is important to realize that there can never be too many documentation forms submitted for a rare bird sighting. For this reason, even if you were not the one to discover

the bird, you should nonetheless properly document it. On some occasions, rare bird sightings go completely undocumented because everyone thinks the other birders will document them!

### The Documentation Form

Documentation data about a sighting should be typed or neatly printed in black ink on the Rare Bird Reporting Form (available on request from regional compilers for *The Migrant*) or on 8½" x 11" white paper using the format described below. The original should be submitted to the appropriate regional compiler and a copy should be retained for your files. The following list, which was developed from standards identified by Robinson (1985), describes the information that should appear on a properly prepared Rare Bird Reporting Form (Figure 2):

*Species:* give the common name of the species identified (seen or heard).

*Date(s):* give the day(s), month, and year in which the bird was observed.

*Number:* give the number of individuals seen or heard.

*Age:* when known, state the age of the bird. For most species, "immature" or "adult" will suffice; however, for gulls in typical plumage, "first-winter" or "second-summer," etc., may be an appropriate description. Oftentimes, the age cannot be safely determined. Indicate this by writing in "unknown."

*Sex:* when known, indicate the sex of the bird. If this cannot be safely determined, as is the case with loons and grebes, for instance, write in "unknown."

*Exact location:* describe the location as accurately as possible, using site names, (e.g., Radnor Lake) and the distance and direction to the location of the nearest town. The county and state should *always* be included in case the form is reviewed by ornithologists in other states. It is always desirable to state the precise location, such as "Pool 4, Cross Creeks National Wildlife Refuge," so that another observer may return to the location at a later date.

*Habitat:* describe, to the best of your ability, the habitat in which the bird was found. It may be necessary to consult a botanical guide to expand upon the notes which were taken in the field. In the absence of any technical assessment of the habitat, such general descriptions as upland or lowland forest, pasture, old field, brushland, lake, slough, marsh, swamp, etc., are adequate.

*Time of sighting:* give the time of day, in hours and minutes, when observations began and ended, being sure to indicate when times are approximate. Because the bird may be hidden from view for a portion of the observation period, the length of time it was actually observed should also be indicated. When the bird was seen at different times on various dates and there is not enough space to indicate this, footnote this information on the reverse side of the documentation form.

*Distance to bird:* state the distance from you to the bird, giving minimum and maximum distances when appropriate.

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**Figure 2** (facing page). Sample of a properly completed documentation form.

**Species:** Black-necked Stilt

**Behavior:** observer vessel the bird fed in an aimless manner; walking and sometimes running in a jerky, random fashion; stabbing or pecking at any food it encountered.

**Vocalizations:** (song/call notes),  
in flight, emitted a series of "peep" or "kek" notes.

**How did you separate this species from similar species?**  
This species has a distinctive head pattern and reddish legs. This species also has an obviously recurved bill. Otherwise, no other North American species resembles this startlingly-plumaged bird.

**What references were consulted? How did they affect the preceding description?**  
National Geographic Society's Birds of North America supported this identification.

**Previous experience with this and similar species?**  
I have seen the species on several occasions in Texas (2 birds).

**Of what significance is this record in county/area/region/state?**  
This represents only the second state record outside of the Memphis area, also temporally unusual.

**Were sketches, photographs, recordings made? No. If so, are they attached?** When were field notes made? Immediately

**Signature of Form Preparer** *John C. Robinson* 2 November 1985  
(Date Form Prepared)

**Your address:** Telephone:  
P.O. Box 215 615-232-7412 (home)  
Doyle, Tennessee 37058 615-232-7427 (work)

**Tennessee Ornithological Society Certification Committee**  
**Form Bird Reporting Form**  
**Black-necked Stilt**  
**Species (Official Name)** *Black-necked Stilt* **Date(s) of sighting(s)** Nov. 2-3 Nov. 1985.

**Number 1** **Age:** Unknown **Sex:** Unknown

**Exact Location (include county and nearest city):**  
Camden County, Tennessee  
Street: Camden City Steam Plant, 1.5 miles west of Camden City.

**Habitat in which bird occurred:**  
Ash ponds with emergent vegetation (primarily cattail) at a steam plant.

**Time of Sighting:** 11:28 AM to 12:05 PM (2 Nov.) **Length of time observed:** 35 minutes

**Distance to bird (include maximum and minimum distances):**  
40 to 70 yards

**Viewing Conditions:** Overcast, with no sun flare; otherwise excellent conditions.

**Optical Equipment:** Bushnell 7x35 binoculars and Bushnell Spacemaster 11 scope with 20x lens.

**OBSERVERS:** Your name: John C. Robinson  
Others with you: None  
Others before or after you: Stephen J. Strahan and Donald Blunk on 4 November

**DESCRIPTION (details on size, shape, plumage, color pattern, coloration of soft parts, diagnostic features, etc.):**  
Bill was long, straight, thin, black and pointed. Legs were extremely long and pinkish. Forehead area immediately above culmen was white; also, the white triangle extended up the back to a single point as in dowitchers (legs changed behind in flight). The rest of the plumage was black: head (down to cheek area, which was white), wings and nape of neck. Front of neck and breast were white. The upper half was brownish-black suggesting a female or immature male. The lower half was washed over the lesser yellowlegs (Tringa flavipes) it was feeding with.

*Viewing conditions:* describe the position of the sun in relation to the bird and yourself, and give a brief overview of the weather (was it raining or drizzling; clear, overcast, or foggy; windy or calm?).

*Optical equipment:* describe any optical equipment you used to observe the bird by indicating the type of instrument and its magnifying power.

*Observer(s):* neatly print or type your name on the first line. If other observers accompanied you, list their names on the next line; and if you know of other observers who saw the bird before or after you, list their names on the third line.

*Description:* this is by far the most important part of the documentation and should ideally be written *before* consulting a field guide. The objective is not to describe how the bird looks in the field guide or how it should look in the field, but to describe what was actually seen in the field, even if this means that certain field marks noted in some of the field guides have to be omitted because they were not observed when the bird was seen. The task of describing a bird without consulting a field guide can be greatly simplified by becoming familiar with the various anatomical structures (crown, flanks, eyestripe, upper tail coverts, primary feathers, etc.) which are usually illustrated in the introductory sections of most field guides. Once learned, the different parts of the wing, for example, can be examined for details which may provide the only evidence which can be used to separate various species of shorebirds and gulls.

Do not give the size of the bird in inches or centimeters unless you actually held it in your hand and measured it. Rather, describe the size in terms of its relative appearance with nearby species or your own experience of observing similarly sized birds at an equal distance. The shape of the bird can best be described by a hand-drawn illustration or by comparing it with a closely related species (e.g., when describing a Ross' Goose (*Chen rossii*), it can be stated that the bird is similar in appearance to a Snow Goose (*C. caerulescens*) with certain notable exceptions such as a smaller-sized body, shorter neck, stubbier bill, etc.). Shape can also be expressed by describing the silhouette of the bird: falcons have long, narrow tails and crooked or "swept-back" wings; *Accipiters* have long, narrow tails and rounded wings; and *Buteos* have fanned tails and rounded wings.

Describe the color patterns of the bird's plumage and soft body parts, including the beak, feet, legs, and, if present, bare areas around the eye and forehead. If these field marks allow you to determine the age/sex (see Age and Sex above) or plumage (i.e., winter versus summer plumage) of the bird, make a statement to this effect. Keep in mind that the way colors contrast is just as important as the colors themselves. For example, a small plover described as having white undersides, one black neck band and a gray back could be either a Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) or Semipalmated Plover (*C. semipalmatus*). If the bird is a Piping Plover, it might be described instead as having a light gray back which contrasted only slightly with the whitish breast, belly, and flanks.

In general, the size, shape, and/or color pattern should be given for all of the various anatomical structures of the bird. Although often ignored, the size, shape, and color of the beak and the tail are many times crucial to the identification of a species. Structures or plumage features which are



"obvious," "distinctive," or "conspicuous" to you will not be obvious, distinctive, or conspicuous to future ornithologists if you do not describe them in terms of size, shape, and color. Use quotation marks ("...") to indicate when you are quoting directly from your field notes.

**Behavior:** describe the bird's behavior as accurately as possible. Was it involved in courtship activities? If it was feeding, was it feeding actively like a phalarope or sluggishly like a plover? If it was walking, did it stop and start like a plover or did it bob up and down like a Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*)? Did it isolate itself from other birds; was it aggressive towards other birds; was it tame and allow close approach by birders?

**Vocalizations:** describe the bird's voice if it was heard. If the voice was not heard, be sure to indicate that fact.

**Similar species:** in this section, list all species or species groups which you feel could possibly be mistaken for the documented species. For each species listed, state why you feel this was not the species observed; all arguments used to substantiate this should be based only on what you observed in the field. In those rare instances where the species actually observed is not similar in appearance to any other North American bird species (e.g., Black Skimmer (*Rhynchops niger*)), be sure to state this is the reason why no species are listed in this section.

**References consulted:** list the titles of the books or the names of the persons with whom you consulted after finding the bird. Either collectively or for each reference, state how the information thus obtained influenced the written description. Ideally, as stated before, the bulk of the documentation should be written prior to consulting a field guide. There will be times, however, when the bird remains in sight long enough for comparison to be made between it and a picture in a field guide. In all instances, one should indicate which notes were made as a result of consulting with a field guide or with another person.

**Previous experience:** briefly summarize your experience with the documented species and all species listed in the Similar Species section. For most birds, this can be done by simply stating approximately how many individuals of a particular species you have seen: "I have seen hundreds of Sandhill Cranes (*Grus canadensis*)" or "I have seen 4 Groove-billed Anis (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*). For those species the plumages of which change notably with the age of the bird, it is desirable to be more specific: "I have seen 4 adult Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) and 2 second-winter Great Black-backed Gulls." Be sure to indicate which species you have never previously seen, even if it is the species being documented.

**Significance of record:** to the best of your knowledge, state the significance of the sighting. Significance may be indicated by the number of times the bird has previously been observed in a particular county or area of the state, by the time of year (e.g., a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) in March would be significant even in Lake County), or by the number of individuals constituting the sighting (e.g., 450 Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*) at Paris Landing State Park).

**Sketches, photographs, or recordings:** indicate whether any sketches, photographs, or sound recordings of the bird were made and, if so, indicate if they have been attached to the documentation upon submission.

*Elapsed time before documentation:* indicate how much time elapsed after you found the bird before you completed your field notes of the observation. Similarly, indicate how much time elapsed before the actual documentation form was completed.

*Address:* give the address and the phone numbers where you can be reached.

The completed form should be mailed along with your seasonal field records to the appropriate regional compiler for *The Migrant*.

#### ROUND TABLE NOTES

In addition to properly documenting the occurrence of species in the "Very Rare" category identified below, observers are also encouraged to prepare a Round Table Note for each sighting of a very rare species for publication in *The Migrant*. Used in this sense, a Round Table Note not only serves to report the species more fully, but it results in providing details on the circumstances (habitat, method of identification, etc.) surrounding the sighting to other ornithologists, many of whom will never have the opportunity to see your documentation form.

Observers should consult any recent issue of *The Migrant* for information about the manuscript, style, and documentation requirements of this journal. Once a documentation form has been completed for a rare sighting, it is relatively easy to compose a Round Table Note from the information contained in the documentation. Moreover, regional compilers or the current editor of *The Migrant* can provide information on previous occurrences of the species. Completed manuscripts should be submitted to the current editor of *The Migrant*.

#### LIST OF HARD-TO-IDENTIFY SPECIES

Because some species are hard to identify, bird records of them require (even from veteran observers) a **brief** mention of the salient field marks which led to their identification. A list of such hard-to-identify species follows (common names of all species listed hereinafter follow the 6th edition of the A.O.U. Check-List (1983) and later supplements):

Snowy Egret	Short-billed Dowitcher
Yellow-crowned Night-	Long-billed Dowitcher
Heron (immature)	Common Tern
Greater Scaup	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Common Merganser	Alder Flycatcher
Golden Eagle	Bewick's Wren
Merlin	Connecticut Warbler
Peregrine Falcon	Mourning Warbler
Western Sandpiper	Brewer's Blackbird
Baird's Sandpiper	

#### RARE AND VERY RARE SPECIES (REQUIRING DOCUMENTATION)

All rare species should be submitted with documentation included. The list of such species in Tennessee is very long, so observers need to become familiar with what is and what is not rare in the state (and in particular regions of the state). As an aid to field workers, a list of species which require



documentation on green "Unusual Sighting" cards, available from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), and a list of species requiring documentation on the Rare Bird Reporting Form are offered below. Currently request green cards from Mr. Robert M. Hatcher, Coordinator, Nongame and Endangered Species, TWRA, Ellington Agricultural Center, P.O. Box 40747, Nashville, TN 37204. Observers should note that common species observed on unusual dates or at unusual locations should also be documented on a green card. Any species for which no previous record exists for the state should be properly documented on a Rare Bird Reporting Form. In the following lists, Western Coastal Plain region is abbreviated as WCPR, and Eastern Mountain Region is abbreviated as EMR.

### Green Card Species

American White Pelican	Ruddy Turnstone
Anhinga (in WCPR)	Red Knot
White Ibis	Laughing Gull
Tundra Swan	Franklin's Gull
Mute Swan	Least Tern (except in WCPR)
Brant	Common Barn-Owl
Oldsquaw	Long-eared Owl
Surf Scoter	Short-eared Owl
White-winged Scoter	Northern Saw-whet Owl
Mississippi Kite	Red-cockaded Woodpecker
(except along Miss. R.)	Fish Crow (except along
Purple Gallinule	Miss. R.)
Common Moorhen	Common Raven (except in EMR)
Piping Plover	Black-capped Chickadee (except
Black-necked Stilt	in Great Smoky Mtns. Nat. Park)
(Shelby Co. only)	Le Conte's Sparrow
American Avocet	Snow Bunting
Willet	Western Meadowlark (in WCPR)
Upland Sandpiper	Red Crossbill (except in EMR)

### Rare Bird Reporting Form Species

Red-throated Loon	Long-tailed Jaeger
Red-necked Grebe	Common Black-headed Gull
Eared Grebe	Iceland Gull
Western/Clark's Grebe	Glaucous Gull
Band-rumped Storm-Petrel	Great Black-backed Gull
Brown Pelican	Black-legged Kittiwake
Anhinga (except WCPR)	Sooty Tern
Tricolored Heron	Black Skimmer
Glossy Ibis	Band-tailed Pigeon
White-faced Ibis	Common Ground-Dove
Roseate Spoonbill	Groove-billed Ani
Wood Stork	Snowy Owl
Fulvous Whistling-Duck	Rufous Hummingbird
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck	Say's Phoebe
Ross' Goose	Vermilion Flycatcher
Barnacle Goose	Variegated Flycatcher

Garganey	Western Kingbird
Cinnamon Teal	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Eurasian Wigeon	Brown-headed Nuthatch (except Chattanooga area)
King Eider	Rock Wren
Harlequin Duck	Sprague's Pipit
Black Scoter	Northern Shrike
Barrow's Goldeneye	Bell's Vireo
Masked Duck	Black-throated Gray Warbler
American Swallow-tailed Kite	Kirtland's Warbler
Northern Goshawk	Western Tanager
Swainson's Hawk	Black-headed Grosbeak
Prairie Falcon	Painted Bunting (except Shelby Co.)
Yellow Rail	Green-tailed Towhee
Black Rail	Bachman's Sparrow
Limpkin	Clay-colored Sparrow
Snowy Plover	Lark Bunting
Black-necked Stilt (except Shelby Co.)	Henslow's Sparrow
Whimbrel	Sharp-tailed Sparrow
Long-billed Curlew	Harris' Sparrow
Hudsonian Godwit	Smith's Longspur
Marbled Godwit	Western Meadowlark (except WCPR)
Purple Sandpiper	Yellow-headed Blackbird
Ruff	White-winged Crossbill
Red-necked Phalarope	Common Redpoll
Red Phalarope	
Pomarine Jaeger	
Parasitic Jaeger	

#### FORMAT FOR SUBMISSION OF BIRD RECORDS FOR SEASON REPORTS

Observers who submit bird data for publication in *The Migrant* and *American Birds* will want to follow the guidelines noted below in order to assure themselves that the data have been properly presented. What is commonly called a "bird record" contains the five essential items of information listed earlier in this paper. Because the compilers for "The Season" receive a voluminous set of data each reporting season, it is important that they are able to synthesize all of the submitted records as efficiently as possible into a concise and accurate season report. Efficiency in this process can only be achieved if the compilers receive the raw data in a format which they are accustomed to use.

Currently there are two recognized reporting formats which may be used to submit bird data. Preferred reporting format differs among the regional compilers; therefore, be sure to check the Reporting Regions and Deadlines section of this article to know which format to use in submitting records to a particular compiler.

#### Tabular Format

When using this format (Figure 3), observers should type or neatly print records on 8½" x 11" white, plain paper as follows:

Observer: John C. Robinson, P.O. Box 215, Dover, TN 37058  
 STATE AND REGION: Tennessee, Western Coastal Plain Region  
 OBSERVATION PERIOD: Spring 1986  
 OTHER OBSERVERS: Stephen J. Stedman (SJS)

SPECIES	No.	DATE	LOCATION, COMMENT, OTHER OBSERVERS
Common Loon	21	23 March	Face Point, Henry Co.; peak #
Common Loon	3	4 May	Paris Landing State Park (PLSP), Henry Co.; departure
Horned Grebe	24	8 March	PLSP, Henry Co.; peak #
Horned Grebe	1	10 April	PLSP, Henry Co.; departure
Double-crested Cormorant	4	29 March	PLSP, Henry Co.; arrival
Double-crested Cormorant	1	4 May	PLSP, Henry Co.; departure
Snowy Egret	12	17 May	Lake County, 2-3 mi. sw of Ridgely; peak #; all birds with golden-yellow feet, thin black bills and black legs
Little Blue Heron	1	30 March	Dyer Co., Mississippi River levee; arrival; SJS additional observer
Laughing Gull	1	9 May	Island 13, Lake Co.; SEE DOCUMENTATION

**Figure 3.** Sample field report in tabular format (part of a page only shown).

1. At the top of the first page, write in full name and address, reporting season, year, and region in Tennessee covered by said report.
2. On successive pages, place at the top the following information: observer's last name/season and year/page number of report.
3. List, from left to right, the following four column headings on each page: *Species*, *Number*, *Date*, and *Location*, *Comment*, *Other Observers*.
4. Enter one record per line, giving information for each of the indicated column headings.
5. Species in the "Rare" and "Very Rare" categories should be reported on this list with supplementary information being recorded on properly completed green "Unusual Sighting" cards or Rare Bird Reporting Forms, respectively.

### Green Card Format

When using this format, observers should place *all* bird sightings on green cards (Figure 4). Observers should ensure that these cards are completely filled out for species in the "Rare" category; for very rare species a green card *and* a Rare Bird Reporting Form should be properly completed for each sighting.

### Style

The order and names of the species reported as records should follow the 6th edition of the A.O.U. Check-List, as represented in the most recent field check-lists distributed free by TWRA. All dates should appear in continental form (i.e., 25 June 1986). If the number of individuals which were seen is an approximation, it is best to round off to the nearest 10 or 100 or to use a +/- notation; otherwise, report the number you actually counted. The exact location, including name of site and county, should be given for each



**TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY**  
**Nongame and Endangered Species**



**UNUSUAL SIGHTING: BY SPECIES, CONCENTRATION OR BEHAVIOR**

Species Le Conte's Sparrow Date 8 February 1987  
 County Stewart Exact location Adjacent to Elk Creek Reservoir, Cross Creeks National Wildlife Refuge, 3 1/2 miles east of Carlisle, Tennessee  
 No. Individuals Observed 1 Sex Unknown Age Unknown  
 Field marks or behavior observed Flight was weak and short; golden-yellow eyestripe, malar stripe and upper breast were visible on perched bird; white central crown streak noted. White belly. Back and nape of neck streaked. Flushed from waist-high fescue grass.  
 Observer(s) John C. Robinson  
 Other Documentation None  
 Submitted by John C. Robinson Organization U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
 Address P.O. Box 215  
Dover, Tennessee 37058 Date 8 February 1987

WR-0515 (Rev. 10-85)

**Figure 4.** Sample "Unusual Sighting" (green) card properly filled out.

sighting. Be sure to state the county in which the bird was seen for each record. If observers other than yourself were present when the bird was observed, indicate their names. Abbreviations for names and places may be used in one set of records after the first, fully spelled out, usage.

Observers can make the regional compiler's job of interpreting the data considerably easier by stating whether the observation represents an early arrival, a late departure, a peak number, an unusually high or low concentration, a vagrant, a male, a female, adult, immature, etc., a range expansion or contraction, a bird someone else found or a species which was photographed or formally documented on a green card or Rare Bird Reporting Form. Tables, field check-lists, and other non-standard or extraneous materials should only be submitted in addition to, rather than in replacement for, the standard reporting materials.

### What Needs to be Reported

Not every species observed during a reporting season needs to be reported, as the primary emphases of the reports published in *The Migrant* and *American Birds* are on changes in the distribution and numbers of bird populations. Records which should be submitted include the following for each season of the year:

1. Spring
  - a. First and last sighting of transients.
  - b. First sighting of summer residents.
  - c. Last sighting of winter residents.
  - d. Maximum number for 1 day in 1 county.
  - e. Unusual or rare species.
  - f. Unusual behavior or habitat use.

2. Summer
  - a. For all species, the maximum number seen in 1 county in 1 day (or at 1 site in 1 county).
  - b. Positive breeding evidence for uncommon or rare species.
  - c. Unusual or rare species/behavior/habitat.
  - d. Breeding earlier or later than normal.
3. Fall
  - a. First and last sightings of transients.
  - b. First sighting of winter residents.
  - c. Last sighting of summer residents.
  - d. Maximum number for 1 day in 1 county.
  - e. Unusual or rare species.
  - f. Unusual behavior or habitat use.
4. Winter
  - a. Maximum number for 1 day in 1 county.
  - b. Unusual or rare species/behavior/habitat use.
5. All seasons
  - a. All records of endangered species.
  - b. Any records which an observer feels should be noted.

### REPORTING REGIONS AND DEADLINES

Tennessee has been divided into four physiographic regions for the purposes of reporting bird records (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Regions of state for reporting bird records.

Reports from each region are written by the following compilers, whose format requirements for submission of records are also noted:

Region	Compiler/Address	Preferred Reporting Format
Western Coastal Plain	Martha G. Waldron 1626 Yorkshire Dr. Memphis, TN 38119	Tabular
Highland Rim and Basin	Stephen J. Stedman Dept. of English Tennessee Tech. Univ. P.O. Box 5053 Cookeville, TN 38505	Green Cards
Eastern Ridge and Valley	Richard L. Knight 804 North Hills Dr. Johnson City, TN 37601	Tabular

## Eastern Mountain

Glen D. Eller  
Rt. 9, Box 1340  
Elizabethton, TN 37643

Tabular

In addition, bird records are reported to *American Birds* by the following subregional editors, to whom important bird records should also be submitted:

## Western Coastal Plain

Ben B. Coffey, Jr.  
672 North Belvedere  
Memphis, TN 38107

## Highland Rim and Basin

Stephen J. Stedman  
Dept. of English  
Tennessee Tech. Univ.  
P.O. Box 5053  
Cookeville, TN 38505

## Eastern Ridge and Valley

Several local  
subregional editors

## Eastern Mountain

Glen D. Eller  
Rt.9, Box 1340  
Elizabethton, TN 37643

Those who wish to submit records for publication are asked to meet the reporting deadlines listed below:

Season	Inclusive Dates	Deadline
Spring	1 March-31 May	12 June
Summer	1 June-31 July	12 August
Fall	1 August-30 November	12 December
Winter	1 December-29 February	12 March

All reports, including any documentation forms, green cards, or photographs, should be received by the regional compilers by these due dates. All documents should indicate the observer's name, address, reporting season, and year.

## SUMMARY

Methods for documenting and submitting bird records in Tennessee are described. These methods stress the importance of maintaining an orderly system of personal records and properly documenting all rare or unusual species encountered in the field. Documentation of an unusual species ranges from a brief description of the bird for 18 hard-to-identify species to a description of the sighting on a green "Unusual Sighting" card for 34 rare species to a complete account of the observation on a TOS Rare Bird Reporting Form for 83 very rare species. The elements of the Rare Bird Reporting Form are discussed item by item to highlight the manner in which the documentation data should be presented.

The 2 formats currently recognized for submitting bird records are described. The tabular format uses white, plain paper of said dimensions to report observations, in list form, under four headings. Rare and very rare species are reported in this list with supplementary information being recorded on properly completed green "Unusual Sighting" cards or Rare



Bird Reporting Forms, respectively. The green card format utilizes the green "Unusual Sighting" cards available from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to report all species, with very rare species being additionally reported on a Rare Bird Reporting Form.

The style for recording names, dates, numbers, locations, and supplementary information for all bird records submitted is discussed. While not every species observed during a reporting season needs to be reported, a general overview of the bird records which ideally should be submitted is presented. The compilers of "The Season" report, which appears in each issue of this journal, are identified along with the reporting format in which they prefer to receive submitted bird records. In addition, those individuals responsible for forwarding notable records from each of the 4 regions of the state to *American Birds* are identified. Reporting deadlines for submission of records to compilers of "The Season" are noted. All observers are encouraged to prepare a Round Table Note for very rare species they have identified; Round Table Notes should be submitted to the current editor for *The Migrant*.

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Dept. of English, Tenn. Tech. Univ., P.O. Box 5053, Cookeville, TN 38505 (Stedman) and P.O. Box 215, Dover, TN 37058 (Robinson). Accepted 25 July 1987.