

25 November 2023



Dear Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Compiler,

The 124th CBC season is upon us. If you're new to compiling, then a bit of introduction is in order. I'm the editor of Kentucky's CBCs and this letter explains my editing procedures. **Please pay particular attention to the subject of documenting rare birds.** I am available via [email](#) to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. Please share this letter with your participants, especially your section leaders. This letter will be posted to the Kentucky Ornithological Society's (KOS) [CBC webpage](#) along with the attached documents (see details below).

If you no longer are compiling your CBC, please forward this to the new compiler, and please email the compiler's contact information to me so that I can update my records. Please note that *this is a long letter*, but one that I hope you will read and find useful. **The primary audience of this letter is new compilers.** If you are a new compiler, please read the information on the National Audubon Society (NAS) [CBC Compiler page](#), especially the section covering online data entry. While you are there, **please validate your login to the data entry portal, and enter your CBC date as soon as possible.** I also ask that you consider adding "Kentucky Ornithological Society" as the sponsoring organization on your CBC's "Count Date, Status, and Information" page.

Both KOS and NAS require that conclusive details be provided for all species that are rare in your CBC circle during winter. Please use the KOS CBC Rare Bird form that I have attached to the KOS [CBC webpage](#) for documenting rare birds on Kentucky CBCs. The form is *quite detailed*; fill out as much of the form as is possible. Please send all documentation forms directly to me (email is preferred; but you can mail to the address below).

Note: If you have photographed the bird and added the picture to your eBird checklist, and added sufficient notes there, please email me the URL to the checklist, or at least send me the checklist number (in lieu of the Rare Bird form). *I still may need the Rare Bird form for extraordinary birds.*

James A. Wheat
600 Bluffview Drive
Taylorsville KY 40071

Numbers of parties – If your CBC had parties that spent less time in the field than did other parties (which is almost always the case), then please list a *range* that represents the minimum and maximum numbers of parties in the field. For instance, if 2 parties begin at 6:30 AM and are followed by 7 other parties that begin at 8:00 AM, then you should list 2–9 parties in the field.

Party-Hours – These are determined to allow for standardized comparison among all CBCs and years. **Party-hours cannot exceed 11 hours per party;** "owling" hours are tabulated separately. **Please do not tabulate "observer hours" as party-hours;** if you have 10 people in 3 parties out for 10 hours each, then you have 30 party-hours.

Species groups – I do not accept the use of extremely vague listings such "duck species," "hawk species," "warbler species," or "sparrow species." However, less-vague listings such as "Greater/Lesser Scaup," "Cooper's/Sharp-shinned Hawk," "*Archilochus* species," "crow species" are acceptable.



“Countable” species – As you enter your data online, you are asked to fill in a box for the Number of Species seen on your count. This number should represent **only whole species, and only those species currently on the official [Kentucky Bird Species](#) list** maintained by the KOS Bird Records Committee. Feel free to leave the Total Species box blank; I will fill it in after my editing is complete.

Unusual numbers – Please limit your use of “unusual numbers” to those totals that represent **new high counts for a species on your CBC**. The data-entry pages in the online CBC portal list the previous high count of each species. If your CBC has been run fewer than 10 times, please try to limit “unusual numbers” to those high counts that seem truly significant. The online database does not display the historic “low” number for species on your CBC, so please use this listing sparingly or not at all.

PARTICULAR SPECIES WORTHY OF COMMENT

Each CBC season, observations are deleted because documentation was either not provided or was insufficient for conclusive identification. The deletion of undocumented or insufficiently documented rarities can be eliminated if participants follow these guidelines:

- Provide clear and concise written details for all rarities (even where photographs are captured)
- Provide photographic, video, or audio recordings of the bird
- Write up the rarity as quickly as possible after the sighting
- Capture field notes and impressions, ideally before field guides and other references are consulted
- Please respond promptly if I request such documentation during or shortly after the conclusion of the count (*it is a request for documentation, not a challenge of your birding skills*)

There is no substitute for photographs or videos; I appreciate especially receiving digital or scanned JPEGs via email—but *please crop the photos and reduce their file size* before sending them to me. If participants do not provide sufficient details for rarities, **compilers must request additional details or delete the report. If you did not receive clear and thorough details for any rarity reported on your CBC, please do not submit that species with your results.**

If you have any questions about whether a species seen on your CBC requires documentation, send me an email ***within a day or two of your CBC*** and I’ll be happy to provide an answer. **Documentation is required for all species that are marked as unusual on your CBC—even for species marked as “cw” (i.e., seen during count-week).**

Observation of any species on the [Kentucky Bird Species Review List](#) requires a CBC Rare Bird Report on Kentucky CBCs. There are a couple specific exceptions on that document.

KY CBC DOCUMENTS

I have updated several documents on the (KOS) [CBC webpage](#).

1. CBC Rare Bird Report
2. CBC Field Checklist
3. CBC Workbook (Excel)
4. CBC Count Data Form

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A few comments about these documents:

1. The **CBC Rare Bird Report** is discussed above.
2. Species list and sequence for the **CBC Field Checklist** and the **KY CBC Workbook** are based on the current sequence in the *NAS online database* – the plan is to update the list and sequence soon. I know this is not what you may be used to, but it will be convenient when you enter your data online.
 - a. I researched the eBird filters and came up with a comprehensive list of not-uncommon birds for these two documents.
 - b. I highlighted the species that do not occur on all of the counts, and *added footnotes to the Field Checklist for write-up requirements*. Please pay attention to these footnotes!
 - c. I also referred to the *Annotated List of the Birds of Kentucky* (Palmer-Ball, KOS, 3rd Ed., 2019) for *accidental* and *extremely rare* species.
3. I built the **KY CBC Workbook** and I hope you find it useful. Please note that when you open it, there are no macros – so please click “Disable Macros” when you open the file.
 - a. The table on the *Summary* tab will auto-populate as you complete your tally.
 - b. Yellow cells contain formulas; *please do not type anything into these cells*.
 - c. The *Tally Sheet* tab is designed to be used at your compilation; total species counts and number of individuals, by observer group and species, are automated.
 - d. There are blank rows for additional species below House Sparrow.
 - e. There is a separate section for “sp.” or generic listing, below the main table. It’s separate so species counts are not skewed by these general categories. As editor, I am aware that if, for example, the only *Accipiter* seen on your CBC is listed as “*Accipiter* sp.” It counts as a species in your totals – I will catch this in the editing process. Feel free to add “slash” species (e.g., Greater/Lesser Scaup is more specific than “scaup sp.”).
 - f. If you need help adding columns/rows for additional groups, please ask for my help to ensure the formulas are preserved.
4. The Count Data Form is for your convenience to gather the data needed for input into the data entry portal.
 - a. I want to point to the **Additional Comments** section and request that each compiler write a short summary of the highlights of your count, including noteworthy species, remarkable numbers, weather conditions that impacted your results, and any other important notes.
 - b. List the observers who participated in your count, and include their email address and city/state.

IMPORTANT: Allow me to thank you for commitment to citizen science, and adding to the body of knowledge of our Kentucky birds. Your hard work is appreciated, and your suggestions for improvements to my work as Regional Editor are important to me. While the process of adding your data to the NAS data entry portal requires a bit more effort, the availability of this data online for researchers, students, and other citizen scientists adds great value to their work.

James A. Wheat
Regional Editor, Kentucky CBCs
Taylorsville KY
james.a.wheat@gmail.com