

September 2002

Dear County Compiler;

Several months ago, you received a letter stating that there would be further changes to the format of *Pennsylvania Birds*. This letter details those changes.

New Reporting Periods

In place of the old calendar quarters, *Pennsylvania Birds* will use new seasonal reporting periods consisting of:

Winter	December through February	Due March 31
Spring	March through May	Due June 30
Summer	June through July	Due August 31
Fall	August through November	Due December 31

Deadlines for county compilers to send in their reports will be one month after the end of each season (see above). These are the seasonal reporting periods used by *North American Birds* magazine, and we think they more accurately reflect seasonal bird occurrence than the old calendar quarters.

Changes In Tables

The bird record table currently in use will be replaced by three simplified seasonal tables for spring migration, breeding season, and fall migration. There will be no winter table. Deadlines for turning in these tables will be the same as for the spring, summer, and fall reporting seasons noted above. The spring and fall migration tables will record only first and last occurrence dates. The breeding season table will record only breeding status (no dates) for listed species using the Possible/Probable/Confirmed codes from the breeding bird atlas. None of the tables will record numbers, locations or observers, some of which will be included in expanded county reports (see below). Any reports which you formerly wrote in the Comments section on the back of the old forms should now be included in your county report. Copies of the new seasonal table report forms, along with instructions for filling them out, are included in this mailing. Note that the new tables do not conform exactly to the new reporting seasons. This was done to catch early and late migrants and species that don't conform to our definitions of the seasons.

For those of you with internet access, the forms will be available on the PSO web site www.pabirds.org. There are also spreadsheet versions of the forms available there for submitting the data via email. See instructions that came with the forms. For those of you without internet access, make copies of the enclosed forms for your use or contact **Frank Haas** (fchaas@pabirds.org) to get new forms.

Expanded County Reports (Local Notes)

For most readers, the county reports (Local Notes - the Comments section on the old forms) have probably always been the heart of *Pennsylvania Birds*, one of the first things they read after receiving an issue. Their importance will increase under the new format. Since numbers, locations and observers will no longer be included in the tables, it becomes more important than ever that they be included in the county reports to give a detailed picture of bird activity each season. The content of the reports will reflect the discretion of the county compilers--you know your turf best. At a minimum, they should detail noteworthy numbers (such as unusually low or high counts), dates (eg., record early or late arrivals/departures), events (like fallouts), and rare or unusual species and breeding records. They should always cite locations and observers. County reports can also provide a forum for highlighting resident or other species that often fall through the cracks in the reporting system. (For instance, is Ruffed Grouse quietly disappearing from PA southeast of the Kittatinny Ridge?)

There is no longer a "Comments" section on any of the new forms. Your county report should now be written up separately. (Many of you have done this in the past, but those of you who just filled in the Comments section, you will now send a separate narrative report.) The County Report now becomes pre-eminent over the tables. It is much more important to write a County Report than to fill in tables (although we would like both if you have sufficient data).

When writing county reports, please observe the following stylistic guidelines to make them as easy to read as possible.

1) Please don't submit reports using email style shorthand. Write complete sentences that follow basic rules of English grammar. (For example, sentences should never start with a numeral. If a number begins a sentence, spell it out.) If you don't follow these basic rules, one of the editors (all volunteers like you) will have to take additional time to correct your text. When you have finished writing your report, please proofread it for typos, taking special care to spell the names of observers and locations correctly.

2) As the first paragraph of your report, write a list in alphabetical order of locations to which you have assigned abbreviations, with the abbreviation in parentheses after the full name. For the sake of clarity, it is best to abbreviate only the most frequently cited locations. If you cite a location only one to three times, spell it out in the text each time. Long lists of abbreviations make text confusing to read.

3) When composing your report, please write about the birds in proper taxonomic (AOU checklist) order, the order in which birds are presented in most field guides. If everyone follows the same order, readers will find it easier to skim the reports looking for species of particular interest to them. Sometimes a departure from taxonomic order can make an account more

readable, as when you want to describe a large waterfowl or songbird fallout consisting of many unrelated species. Use your discretion in such situations, but generally try to talk about the birds in AOU checklist order. An easy way to make sure you're following the proper order (and using officially accepted common names) is to keep a copy of the latest PA Birds checklist handy. A copy is enclosed for your convenience.

4) In the text of your report, include observers' initials in parentheses after the bird citation. If two observers have the same initials, order them by the second letter of the surname. (For example, if both Johan Schmidt and John Smith sent records, cite their initials as JS and JSm in the body of the text.) At the end of the report, include a paragraph beginning OBSERVERS in which you spell out the full names, first name first, of all your contributors in alphabetical order by surname. It is wise to include all who contributed records that season, even if you used someone's record only to fill out a table but did not cite it in the county report. All contributors deserve to be recognized, and they like seeing their names in print. Again, please make sure names are spelled correctly.

5) Please submit your reports to Wendy Jo Shemansky (pabirdsrus@zoominternet.net) either as straight email text or cut and pasted to an email message from a word processing program. Please do not send your reports as attachments to an email message, as Wendy Jo has received several computer viruses from attachments. If you prefer to send paper copies of your reports, send them as word processed or typewritten documents along with your seasonal tables to **Wendy Jo Shemansky, 41 Walkertown Hill Rd, Daisytown, PA 15427.**

Rare Birds

Also included in this mailing is a separate sheet of rare species requiring special documentation by the PA Ornithological Records Committee (PORC). Please follow instructions on the form for having observers document these species. It would help the Seasonal Editors if you would include a copy of the PORC list with any species circled or highlighted for which you have records this season. Then attach any documentation for those species to that list. This will make sure those species are given special attention. If any observer sends in documentation to you, but does not want it submitted to PORC, please put a note on it to that effect. All other documentation will be forwarded to PORC.

Transition to the New Seasons

The new format will be initiated in a transitional issue combining Vol 16 # 3 & 4, covering July through November 2002. Your deadline for submitting reports and tables to Wendy Jo Shemansky for this issue is December 31, 2002. Future reports will follow the new seasonal schedule, starting with Winter (December through February) 2002-2003. Please inform your contributor network of these changes as soon as possible.

Therefore, DO NOT send in a quarterly report for July-September 2002. Instead, combine that data with October and November and send in one report covering July-November 2002. Do not use the old forms. Please discard any old forms and instructions.

The *Pennsylvania Birds* transition team thanks you again for your loyal support during this very difficult period. Without the long hours of work and thought you give to *Pennsylvania Birds*, the magazine could not continue publication.

Respectfully,

Dan Brauning
(Chairperson, PA Birds transition team; Summer Seasonal Ed.)

Committee Members

Mike Fialkovich (Allegheny & Fayette Co. Compiler; Spring Seasonal Ed.)
Doug Gross (Pres., PA Soc. for Ornithology; Special Areas Project Coordinator, PSO)
Greg Grove (Huntingdon Co. Compiler; Winter Raptor Survey Compiler; VP, PSO)
Frank Haas (Grand High Poobah Emeritus & Eminence Gris, PA Birds)
Rudy Keller (Berks Co. Compiler; Site Guide Ed.)
Doug Kibbe (with Roberta Zweir, Winter Seasonal Ed.)
Deuane Hoffman (Cumberland & Perry Co. Compiler; Fall Seasonal Ed.)
Katrina Knight (Chief Ed.)
Peter Robinson (Adams Co. Compiler; PA Birdlists Ed.)
Wendy Jo Shemansky (Data Entry Tech.).