

Guidelines for Providing Records for the Annual Report

As the end of the year approaches, thoughts turn to organising the year's bird sightings and sending them to the county recorder for inclusion in the next Bird Report.

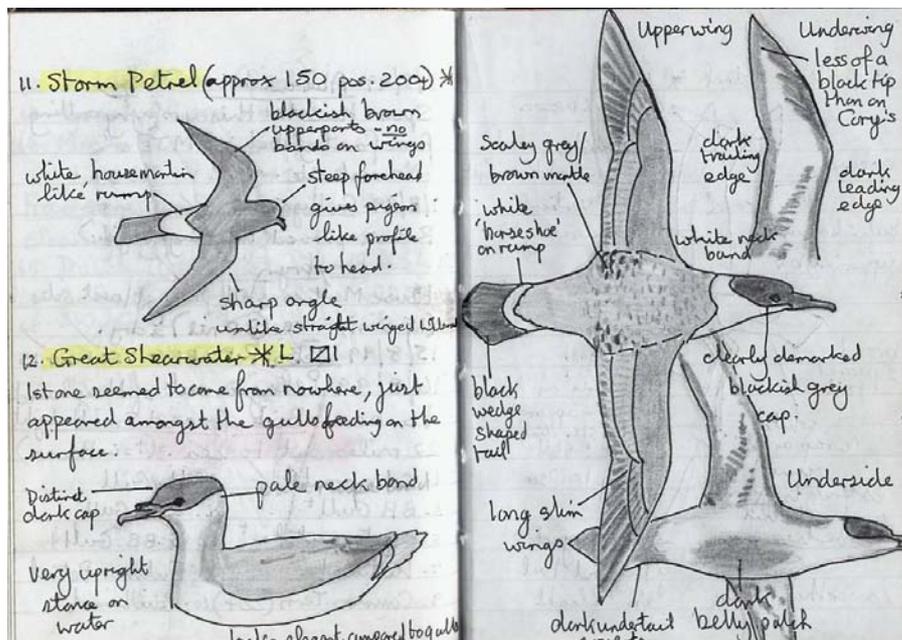
Since 2000 the numbers of birders sending in their observations has increased annually, many for the first time! However, the majority of members still do not send in records and one of the most common reasons given is being unsure what is required and the fear that 'the experts' would find their contribution silly or useless.

This article will attempt to explain the current guidelines, give examples of good practice from members who already send in records and hopefully allay any fears of being ridiculed for your efforts.

Ideally, every member should be submitting records. After all, we all see birds! Even if your record doesn't make it into the Annual report, it is NOT wasted. Each record contributes to a database, which provides us with the kind of detail needed to identify demographic trends in bird populations.

1. NOTEBOOKS

The prerequisite of submitting records is to keep a record of your observations. Most birders use a Notebook although the 'Technophiles' amongst us have taken to using Dictaphones to record what they have seen. Some Notebooks just contain rough notes, which are written up tidily on record cards, in neat journals or entered into computer data bases at home, while others are works of art in their own right. Notebooks/journals can be enhanced by the use of annotated drawings and photographs.



So what should you record?

Basically you need to record: Where, When, What and How Many.
WHERE?

Give the name of the place. Try to use the names given on the Ordinance Survey maps. A map reference is even more useful as there is sometimes more than one name for a place and often more than one place with the same name!

WHEN?

Note the date (and time if you intend to count passage/visible migration over a set period of time e.g. "159 swallows south in 1hr between 10 and 11a.m").

Some additional information of use would be weather conditions, wind strength/direction, state of tide for coastal watching and sea conditions when sea watching. It may also be relevant to note the degree of visibility, distance from bird and what optics you used, particularly if the bird is a rarity. The rarity form asks you for this information!

WHAT?

List each species present (don't worry if you use the BOU names, the BB names or still call Little Grebes 'Dab Chicks').

You may also want to record the age/plumage stage and sex.

It is important to watch for and record signs of breeding; e.g. singing males holding territory, pairs in suitable breeding territory during the breeding season, sexual chasing, territorial battles between males, nest building, copulation, eggs or hatched egg shells, chicks, adults carrying food to nest site, adults removing faecal sacs, family parties with newly fledged young, etc.

Behavioural notes also add interest and will also be of value to pass on for possible inclusion in the Bird Report e.g. "Tawny Owl roosting in Ivy. Mobbed by mixed flock of small birds."

HOW MANY?

Count numbers present e.g. "numbers of singing male Chiffchaff present in a wood in spring", "flock size of Golden Plover in field", "numbers of wintering Goosander on reservoir" etc.

Hints: When counting flocks, A.) Use a mechanical counter available from many stationary shops. B.) Learn how to estimate flock size by working out how much space 10 or 100 birds take up then seeing how many "lots" of 10 or 100 are present in the flock.

2. RECORD CARDS

The club provides blank record cards to members in an attempt to standardise the presentation of records. The latest version produced is based on the BTO record cards which are sadly no longer available. Record Cards are available from the Recorder (Steve Moon for East Glam and Rob Taylor for West Glam; myself at gerithomas@merlin159.freeserve.co.uk, or telephone 01443.836949, or 07984.591983. Also, photocopyable templates are regularly attached to Newsletters and are also downloadable from the Club website: - (<http://www.glamorganbirds.org.uk>)

There are a number of strategies available for using these cards:

A.) Note every record of a Species seen throughout the year. Our most prolific Recorder, Neil Donaghy uses this technique to great effect.

Species TUFTED DUCK	Year 2001
Observer (full name and initials – place your address overleaf) NEIL DONAGHY (ND)	County E. GLAM

Date		Number, Age & Sex	Location	Notes & Comments (Grid Ref., direction, etc.)
Day	Month			
05	01	70	KNNR	
09	02	41	KNNR	
27	03	30+	KNNR	from low Gr Park
13	07	6	KNNR	
17	07	33	KNNR	
22	07	48	KNNR	
27	07	65	KNNR	
01	09	69	KNNR	
14	09	106	KNNR	
01	11	86	KNNR	

Please send your completed card to your local recorder and not to the BTO

B.) Keep a record of monthly maxima at a given site e.g. garden feeding stations. Christian Jenkins has used this technique well below.

Species HOUSE SPARROW (<i>Passer domesticus</i>)			Year 2001
Observer name and FULL INITIALS Christian Jenkins (CJ)			County East Glamorgan
Date	Number	Location	Notes & Comments
d m	Age/Sex		
01	6m 14f	Queen St. Pentre (SS 968 962)	Monthly maxima at this site.
02	7m 8f		The presence of juveniles indicated the occurrence of breeding at this site. ✓
03	7m 10f		
04	8m 6f 2j		
05	8m 9f 8j		
06	7m 8f 7j		
07	6m 8f 12j		
08	8m 9f 15j		
09	8m 10f 9j		
10	12m 15f		
11	10m 15f		
12	11m 14f		

C.) Only extract significant records from notebooks and entered on cards. Many Recorders use this technique. What is regarded as a significant record varies between species but most Birders record presence in suitable breeding habitat, males holding territory, suspected breeding, proved breeding, first and last dates for migrants, notable flock sizes and unusual behaviour. Here are some fine examples from Ian Morris and Phil Bristow.

BLACKCAP		2001	
Observer (full name and initials - place your address overleaf) IAN JAMES MORRIS ISM			County EASTERN GLAMORGAN
Date	Number, Age & Sex	Location	Notes & Comments (Grid Ref., direction, etc.)
Day Month			
27 04	7 ♂	Fforest Fawr, Castell Coch	singing males
30 04	6 ♂	Llanbradach	singing males
20 05	11 ♂	Fforest Fawr, castell Coch	singing males
05 06	7 ♂	Parc Cwm Darran (Deri)	singing males
16 06	7 ♂	St. Gwynno Forest	singing males

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Species MEDITERRANEAN GULL	Year 2001
Observer (full name and initials - place your address overleaf) P. BRISTOW	County Eastern GLAMORGAN

Date	Number, Age & Sex	Location	Notes & Comments (Grid Ref, direction, etc.)
Day Month			
6 Jan	1 adult	Cardiff Bay	
11 Feb	4	" "	2 adults, 2 second-winters
10 Mar	1, second-winter	" "	
24 Oct	1 adult	" "	
4 Nov	1 adult	" "	} Thought to relate to same ringed individual.
23 Dec	1 adult	" "	
12 Oct	1 adult	At sea between Flat Holm + Llanwnda	(Seen from Flat Holm boat)
25 Oct	3 first-winters	Kentig Pool	
11 Nov	3	" "	1 adult, 2 first-winters

Send this card with your records to your local recorder - not the BTO

D.) Summarise the success of a species at a regularly watched site and compare to previous years/indicate trends. Paul Marshman is a master of this Technique, having an unrivalled knowledge of the Ystrad/Llwynypia area based on many years of observation.

Species CHIFFCHAFF	Year 2001		
Observer name and FULL INITIALS PAUL MARSHMAN	County E. GLAMORGAN		
Date	Number Age/Sex	Location	Notes & Comments
d m			
		YSTRAD/LLWYNYPJA	
		First recorded on	24 th March
		when one singing ♂ present increasing	
		to 3 singing ♂♂ on	30 th March.
		A minimum of 9 singing	
		♂♂ present during the breeding season	
		compared with 6, 7 and 9 singing ♂♂	
		in previous three years. Song last	
		heard at breeding sites on	21 st July. A
		singing ♂ on	26 th August and 21 st September
		were the only other records.	

3. RARITIES DESCRIPTIONS

A number of species require that a description of the sighting be forwarded to the County Recorders (East & West). The species that require descriptions varies for each area (see web site for lists). Rarities Description Forms are available from the Recorders a template is often attached to newsletters and a version is downloadable from the website (<http://www.glamorganbirds.org.uk>). The form, in addition to the information needed for the normal record card, also requires that you record the distance from the bird (often tricky to estimate), the optics used, whether photographs were obtained, previous experience of the species and possible confusion species.

Description species (depending on the degree of rarity) are perused by:

1. The East/West Glam Rarities Committee.
2. The Welsh Rarities Panel.
3. The British Birds Rarities Committee.

N.B. An article about good practice in writing Rarities descriptions will follow soon.

4. COMPUTER GENERATED RECORDS

Eventually the majority of records may be submitted in this format, e.g. if all records were entered into Map Mate it would be possible to use all the data to write the species accounts, include tables, distribution maps etc. However, currently very few are actually entering data into Map Mate and an equivalent number are providing printouts from a variety of other recording programs (e.g. Recorder 2000) or constructing their own spread sheets. Unfortunately until a majority adopt electronic recording, the resulting printouts have to be integrated into the manual system.

The data is currently usually provided as A4 sheets (Portrait or Landscape) listing all sightings of all species, hopefully but not always in date order. The print size is usually too small and no gaps are left between species. These sheets are then cut up into species and distributed to section writers. Often a single line of text on a tiny shred of paper is all the section writer gets (and this is very easy to overlook in a pile of hundreds of record cards!) To facilitate ease of reading **all** should **provide** the **same information** presented in broadly the **same way**.

SUGGESTED MODIFICATION OF DATABASE PRINTOUTS:

To allow integration into the current system a few general rules for presenting the data should be followed:

1. The data is best presented in Landscape to allow all necessary information to be included in one line.
2. Only include the following columns on the spread sheet;
English Name, Observer, Date, Number Seen, Where Seen,
Comments e.g. age/sex, behavior, map ref. etc.
3. The font size should be increased to make the data more readable without moving to more than one line per record.
4. Arrange data for each species in chronological order.
5. Leave a gap between species.
6. Make sure the observers name is **included with each species** (not just on the top of the page which will be cut off!).

An alternative system adopted by recorders with sufficient computer skills is to present their data entered into tables of similar size and format to our current Record Cards (see earlier example by Christian Jenkins).

It is hoped that eventually enough people will be using electronic storage and retrieval of data to enable the report to be produced in the same way. Currently the most

popular system in use within the county and our neighboring counties is MAPMATE. This program relatively user friendly and cheap to buy. It is available from www.mapmate.co.uk .

Both East and West Glam recorders are using the system and there is a designated coordinator for each area and each taxon. These coordinators are called HUBS and each recorder using the system links to their designated hub to form a network. They share all the accumulated data. David Carrington is the HUB for East Glam Bird Records and Barry Stewart is the HUB for West Glam Bird Records. The two hubs then combine the information to produce a county-wide data base. All this information also contributes to national recording schemes.

The accumulated data can be interrogated to identify species distribution, population demographics and trends etc. It can also map distribution and present data in tables and a variety of graphs. It can even write reports from the data entered (it could put me out of a job!), but to make it work ALL available data needs to be entered annually.

It is intended to provide training for Glamorgan birders in the use of this system.