

Rules of Competition: Sky Islands Birding Cup

Introduction

These rules largely follow the American Birding Association (ABA) “Big Day Count Rules” (accessible online at <http://www.aba.org/bigday/bigdayrules.pdf>). Some changes and additions have been made to create Rules practical for use in team competition. *All teams participating in the Sky Islands Birding Cup must follow the Rules outlined in this document.* Failure to follow these Rules may result in disqualification of the team.

I. Counting

- a) **What “counts?”** Count only full species as dictated by the current ABA checklist. Birds must be alive, wild and unrestrained when first identified. Species at bird feeders count. Eggs do not count as birds.
- b) **How does it “count?”** Birds must be conclusively identified by sight or sound. Birds identified as one of a species group (*for example*: Myiarchus flycatcher, raven species) may be tallied if no other member of that group is counted. Chihuahuan Raven and raven sp. still counts as just one bird.
- c) **What about non-native species?** Introduced or reintroduced species may be counted if the bird is included in the ABA checklist and/or has been established in Arizona for 10 years. (*For example*: Eurasian Collared-Dove was first officially documented in 2000 and rapidly spread throughout the state. It “counts.” Peach-faced Lovebird, though well-established in Arizona and likely to persist, is not on the official ABA checklist and therefore does not “count.”)
- d) **Hybrids** may be counted as one or the other parent species (not both), provided that neither parent species is seen during the competition. *For example*: a Costa’s x Lucifer Hummingbird may be counted as either a Costa’s or a Lucifer, but if a purebred Costa’s OR a purebred Lucifer Hummingbird is also seen at any point during the Cup, the hybrid must not be counted at all.
- e) **Audio playback:** No recordings of bird sounds may be used to attract birds or persuade them to vocalize. Recordings of bird sounds may be played in the team’s vehicle only while in transit between destinations, only for reference, and not while actively birding. Pishing and other vocal imitations *are* permitted.
- f) **Verify all IDs:** All bird identifications must be confirmed independently by at least two members of the team to count. If one team member identifies a bird, but no other team member can independently confirm the identification, that bird may not be counted.
- g) **95% Rule:** 95% of all species recorded by the team must have been identified by every single team member – this is your Official Total. This means that 5% of species recorded on the team’s official checklist may be identified by less than the entire team (but still at least two members). Note: to meet the 95% quota, the entire team does not need to see/hear the same individual bird. *For example*: if three team members see the same Western Kingbird while the fourth member misses it, but that fourth team member sees a different Western Kingbird later in the day, that species is counted unanimously – provided that another team member corroborates the sighting!
- h) **“Write-in” species:** Any species found that does not appear on the official Sky Islands Birding Cup checklist is a “write-in” species (and a MAJOR rarity!) A

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“write-in” species will only be counted in the team’s Official Total if a written description is submitted at the Goal Line which thoroughly documents the bird. Identifiable photographs with a time stamp are acceptable in place of a written description; if the photograph is only clear enough to provide supporting evidence, a written description must still be submitted as well. Birding Cup Referees will evaluate the description or photograph to decide if the species will be accepted. As in other sporting events, for good or for ill, the decision of the Referees is final!

- i) **Nesting raptors:** *Birds of prey are especially sensitive to disturbance. This rule is in place to facilitate avoidance of nesting raptors.* If a raptor nest was known to be active in the 7 days preceding the Birding Cup, do not approach within flushing distance! A team may simply park their vehicle at the point where they would walk out to the raptor nest, and wait for as long as it would have taken for every member of the team to view the nesting bird(s).
- j) **Other nesting birds:** Do not flush any nesting birds of any species! If an active nest is known, but the bird cannot be seen, the team must wait until the bird is visible. If the team does not have enough time to wait and is therefore forced to leave, the bird simply does not count.

II. Time and Checklist Submission

- a) **The Big Day:** starts at 12:00AM on the day of the competition (August 15, 2012) and ends at midnight. You may synchronize your clock with the official Goal Line clock during scout week (the 7 days prior to the Birding Cup) by visiting <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/city.html?n=393>.
- b) **Checklist submission:** Official checklists must be turned in to the Goal Line Referees no later than midnight. In lieu of submitting your checklist in person, a copy may be emailed to birdingcup@tucsonaudubon.org. All emails will be time stamped. If duplicate emails are received, only the earliest submitted checklist will be counted. No changes may be made after submitting the checklist, so be careful! If you would like to test the email method prior to the Birding Cup, feel free to do so but please clearly mark the email with TEST in the subject heading and the title of any attachments.

III. Geographic Area Covered

- a) **Southeast Arizona:** Birds may be counted anywhere in southeast Arizona, defined here as Pima County or any bordering county, excepting Yuma County. Only birds counted from within this area count on the official checklist.
- b) **Out-of-bounds:** A team may cross outside the boundaries of the Geographic Area for travel or other purposes, but may not count any birds detected while “out-of-bounds” on the official checklist.

IV. Travel

- a) **Transportation:** any mode of transport may be used except motorized aircraft.
- b) **Team travel:** teams may travel in separate vehicles if need; however, teams may not count birds seen during such travel, pursuant to rule VI(a).

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- c) **Traffic laws:** teams must obey all traffic laws. Failure to do so may result in disqualification.

V. Participants

- a) **Minimum team size:** Teams must consist of three or more participants. Designated drivers, whose only job is to drive (not detect birds), do not count towards this minimum.
- b) **Non-participating assistants:** Teams may designate an assistant or assistants to serve as “designated driver” or “recorder.” Neither type of assistant may aid the team by identifying birds, alternating the route or strategy, or any other aspect of the competition. A designated driver may ONLY drive, and a recorder may ONLY record team sightings. Assistants may be added, released, or change assisting roles throughout the day.
- c) **Joining or leaving the team:** Team members may join or leave the team at any time during the day, but may only do so once; i.e. once a team member leaves, they may not rejoin the team later during the competition. The team must still consist of three team members at any one given time.
- d) **Non-birding participants:** any number of observers may join the team at any time, but must not assist the team by locating or identifying birds while observing.

VI. Conduct

- a) Team members must remain within direct, unamplified voice-contact distance of all other participants at all times (shouting distance).
- b) Team members must make every reasonable effort to identify personally and to help other team members identify every species counted by the team.
- c) Team members must count only birds personally and unquestionably identified.
- d) All team members must be familiar with the Sky Islands Birding Cup rules prior to the start of competition, and comply with them at all times.

VII. Outside Information

- a) **Prior to the competition:** in the spirit of raising funds for conservation, sharing of information is strongly encouraged (excepting information which may prove detrimental the birds themselves, such as sharing info about nesting raptors). Any information received prior to the Birding Cup may be used.
- b) **During the competition:** teams must make every conceivable effort to avoid receiving bird finding information from any source – other teams, blogs, listservs, rare bird alerts, etc. When other bird watchers are encountered, information may not be solicited from them. If, despite a team’s best efforts, outside information is accidentally received, it may be used (again, in the spirit of raising funds for conservation!) *One exception to this rule:* bird sightings sheets, such as those found at Sweetwater Wetlands or Willcox Twin Lakes, may be used - provided the information has not been prearranged.

VIII. Ethics

- a) Each participant should maintain the highest birding ethics at all times. If in doubt, don’t do it. The ABA Code of Ethics provides a reasonable guideline.