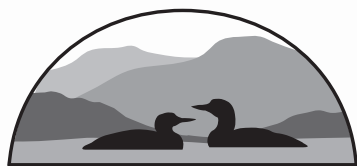


New Hampshire Bird Records





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MANAGING EDITOR

Rebecca Suomala
603-224-9909 X309,
rsuomala@nhaudubon.org

TEXT EDITOR

Dan Hubbard

SEASON EDITORS

Eric Masterson, **Spring**
Chad Witko, **Summer**
Lauren Kras/Ben Griffith, **Fall**
Jim Sparrell/Katherine Towler, **Winter**

LAYOUT

Kathy McBride

PUBLICATION ASSISTANT

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PHOTO QUIZ

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FIELD TRIP REPORTS

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WHERE TO BIRD

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IN MEMORY OF

Polly Perry

This issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* with its color cover is sponsored by NH Audubon in memory of Polly Perry, a volunteer and longtime supporter of the organization. Polly loved birds and was passionate about environmental education, providing annual camperships for children in need. Her bequest will help NH Audubon continue this work.



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Cover Photos: Bohemian Waxwings eating snow (top) by Steve Liffmann, 2-10-17, Conway, NH. Varied Thrush by Jason Lambert, 12-31-16, Swanzey, NH.

New Hampshire Bird Records is published quarterly by New Hampshire Audubon’s Conservation Department. Thank you to the many observers who submit their sightings to NH eBird (www.ebird.org/nh), the source of data for this publication. Records are selected for publication and not all species reported will appear in the issue. The published sightings typically represent the highlights of the season. All records are subject to review by the NH Rare Birds Committee and publication of reports here does not imply future acceptance by the Committee. Please contact the Managing Editor if you would like to report your sightings but are unable to use NH eBird.

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Technology Series

Why are Detailed eBird Locations Important?

by Rebecca Suomala

eBird is now the go-to place for bird data, not just for birders, but also for researchers, planners, and conservationists. For example, as a nighthawk researcher, I look for summer reports that may reflect possible breeding sites we don't know about. Pam Hunt has been checking for past Cliff Swallow nesting sites to revisit and determine if they are still active. In New Hampshire, data now goes to the NH Natural Heritage Bureau for species that they track for environmental review. *New Hampshire Bird Records* volunteers review the data and work to improve the accuracy and usability of the sightings. One of the frequent issues has to do with plotting the location of a sighting and naming it. This article will hopefully explain what you can do to help make your data as valuable as possible and why you may get an occasional email asking you to make a change in your location.

Choosing the Location

When you enter a bird sighting in eBird, you have several options for plotting the location. Plotting the specific location on a map by zooming in to the exact spot is the ideal, but sometimes that's not practical for each and every sighting. There's a balance between providing the exact information and making it reasonable to enter your data. eBird provides Hot Spots which we encourage people to use, but sometimes even they are not as specific as we might like (the NH coast Hot Spot being a classic example). When a bird is rare (i.e. Varied Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire) or sought after by birders (i.e. American Golden-Plover, Bicknell's Thrush), then birders want to know exactly where you saw the bird so they can look for it. When the species is threatened or endangered, researchers want to know the habitat it was found in. Making notes in your checklist is one way to help provide more location information.

Here's an example. In 2016, Zeke Cornell and I had a sighting of a Pied-billed Grebe in June at Scott Bog in Pittsburg. Zeke entered it in eBird for the Scott Bog Road Hot Spot (Figure 1). A short while later, I received a request from Pete Bowman of the NH Natural Heritage Bureau for more information on the bird's location. Pied-billed Grebe is a threatened species in New Hampshire and the sighting was during the breeding season, representing potential nesting. Pete was making sure the data was in the Natural Heritage Bureau so the information would be available in any environmental reviews of proposed actions for the area. In reviewing the coordinates for the eBird Hot Spot, he did not think it looked like appropriate grebe habitat, "from looking

at various aerial photos of the site, I can't see much in the way of open water." Of course, we actually saw the bird at Scott Bog itself and not along the road where the Hot Spot is located. I explained that to Pete so he could map it in the correct location.

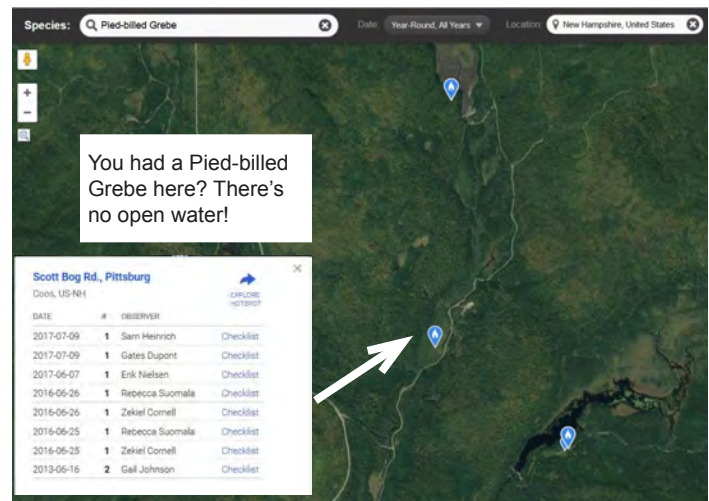


Figure 1. Map showing the Scott Bog Hot Spot and the Pied-billed Grebe report where there is no habitat for the species.

It was a lesson in how good notes can be helpful for sightings that are not plotted at the specific point of occurrence. I should have added a note to the Pied-billed Grebe entry with the exact location or made a separate entry for this sighting at the exact location. Using the Hot Spot was great for most of the species on our checklist and very helpful, but for the more unusual species, more specific notes were warranted, especially since the Hot Spot covers a wide area. The more specific a location is in eBird, the better for anyone who uses the data for habitat related purposes. For a more generic spot, it helps birders and researchers alike if you add a note with the location, especially for the more unusual species and any species on the Threatened and Endangered Species list (see the article on the updated list on page 33) or Species of Special Concern (see below).

Here's another example. I was reviewing recent reports of White-rumped Sandpipers in New Hampshire to see where I might be able to find one when I went birding on the weekend. In addition to reviewing the NHBirds email list, I also checked eBird, using the Explore Data tab and reviewing a species map. (Steve Mirick wrote an article about how to do this in the Fall 2010 issue of *New Hampshire Bird Records* and it's available on-line at: <http://nhbirdrecords.org/all-articles/NHBR-Fall2010.pdf>.) When I checked White-rumped, there were four reported for the NH coast Hot Spot, but there were no notes to explain where they were seen. That's a frustrating experience. Fortunately for me, another birder had reported the same four White-rumps and had added notes on where he saw them (see Figure 2), as well as a

Pectoral Sandpiper (thanks Steve Mirick)! I can't say I had the same luck, but at least I knew where to look.

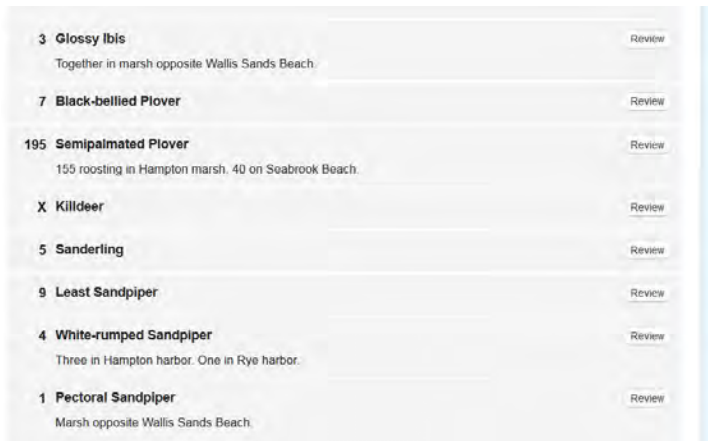


Figure 2. A checklist for the NH coast Hot Spot (S. Mirick, 7-29-17) showing the comments on where the White-rumped Sandpipers and other interesting and/or unusual birds were seen.

Here are a couple of examples of why using a Hot Spot is helpful. As a birder, I research good birding places when I travel by using eBird. With the Explore Data feature, I can Explore Hot Spots and see what Hot Spots are in the area I'll be going to and what's been seen at them recently. That only works if people select the Hot Spot when they enter their sightings. If someone plots a personal location in the same place as the Hot Spot, that data won't show up under the Hot Spot. Hot Spots can also be useful for environmental issues. At NH Audubon, Carol Foss was reviewing a hydrodam relicensing application and we checked eBird to see if there was a Hot Spot for the location so we could review the birds that might use the water body.

Helpful Location Names

A good name for the location is also helpful. It may not seem like the site name should be important when you are also mapping the location, but it is. People use eBird for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Researchers who download the data find a good location description helpful. Here at *New Hampshire Bird Records*, we also download the data for the Season Editors, who review it to select which records to publish, determine what to write about, and to spot errors. Figure 3 shows just a part of what the data looks like in Excel. When reviewing these Boreal Chickadee records, the location name is very helpful since this species is only found in certain habitat. The county helps, but there are many places in Coos County that are not suitable habitat for Boreal Chickadees. The location name consisting of only the latitude/longitude requires more detailed review to determine exactly where it was. That's where a descriptive location name really helps. The others in this example include the town and other information that makes it clear where the birds were. It also allows confirmation that the point was mapped correctly. If we have any questions, we can compare the name with the

COMMON NAME	SUBSP	DATE	COUNT	COUNTY	LOCALITY
Boreal Chickadee		08/31	4	Grafton	Cannon Mt., Franconia
Boreal Chickadee		08/31	4	Grafton	Cannon Mt., Franconia
Boreal Chickadee		08/31	4	Grafton	Cannon Mt., Franconia
Boreal Chickadee		09/03	1	Coos	45.1744x-71.1800 - Sep 3, 2016, 9:57 AM
Boreal Chickadee		09/05	3	Coos	Pondicherry NWR--Little Cherry Pond, Jefferson/Whitefield
Boreal Chickadee		09/14	1	Grafton	Trudeau Rd., Bethlehem
Boreal Chickadee		09/15	3	Coos	White Mt. NF--Jefferson Notch Rd.
Boreal Chickadee		09/24	15	Coos	Rt. 16 boreal bog (4 mi. from Rt. 26), Errol
Boreal Chickadee		09/24	15	Coos	Rt. 16 boreal bog (4 mi. from Rt. 26), Errol
Boreal Chickadee		09/30	1	Grafton	Dartmouth Skiway, Lyme

Figure 3. A portion of the eBird data when it is downloaded into Excel showing just a few of the data columns to show how locations names can be helpful. The Boreal Chickadee entry with just the coordinates as a location name makes it very difficult to tell at a glance where the birds were and if it was appropriate habitat.

point on the map and see if they match.

Also, when you use eBird's View and Explore to research where a particular species has been seen, it initially shows just the location name. In that case, it's really helpful if the person entering the sighting has named the location in such a way that it is recognizable. You can zoom in on the map, but a good name allows it to be found with a web search. Location names are also helpful for researchers like myself who are monitoring certain species. When I was reviewing 2016 Common Nighthawk sightings, there were two at a location named "Chocorua" which was too vague for me to tell if the pin was located where the birds were actually seen or if it was a more generic spot for multiple sightings from the area (Figure 4). I couldn't tell if this was a potential nesting site. A sighting by Bob Quinn had a good name that allowed me to look at the satellite view for that spot and see if there was potential nesting habitat (Figure 5). Names such as "Home" or "my backyard" are not especially helpful, but simply adding the street and town can turn it into a much more informative location name, i.e "home, Silk Farm Rd., Concord." If you use a name that has no meaning to anyone but yourself, then an eBird user will not be able to make sense of it. Yes, an accurate point location is the most important from a strict data standpoint, but eBird is most effective the easier it is for everyone to use. Also, keep in mind that we use eBird sightings in the *New Hampshire Bird Records* publication and that also relies on a text description of the location that makes sense to others.

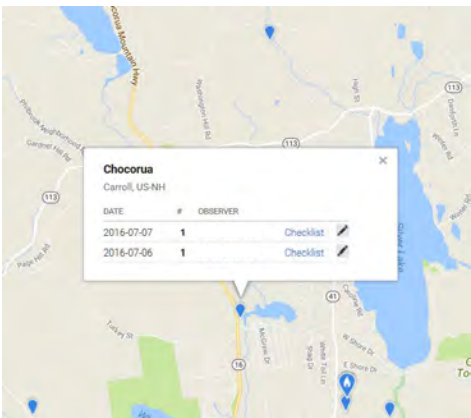


Figure 4. A Common Nighthawk sighting location in eBird for which the name was too vague to determine the actual sighting location and therefore, potential nesting.

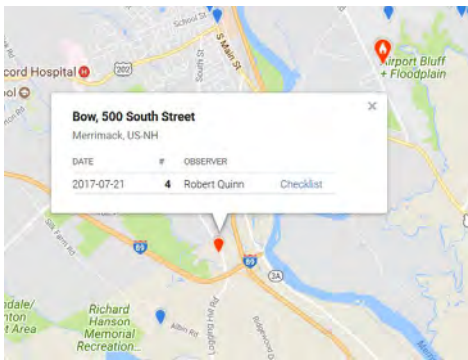


Figure 5. A Common Nighthawk sighting location in eBird with a name that was very helpful for determining if there was nesting habitat in the area.

Sightings from Your Town

If you want to enter multiple sightings from various locations in your town, please don't plot a point for your entire town using "Find it on a Map." It won't reflect the habitat where the sightings actually were. Instead choose "Select an entire city, county, or state" under Submit Observations (Figure 6). When you plot the town yourself, we can't tell from the data that your point doesn't necessarily reflect the exact location (and habitat) of the bird, but if you use eBird's official town selection, then the data reflects that, and we know the sighting could be anywhere in the town. This feature of the eBird mapping system is meant to be used as a last resort, mostly for older records where specific location information is lacking. Of course, it's best to plot sightings more specifically, but if you do use the town or county level, please include notes on where the sightings were, especially for more unusual species. Note that when you enter data at the state or county level, it can only be used for a limited number of analyses. It will be invalidated and the sightings won't appear on the eBird maps. Invalid doesn't mean it will disappear from your personal records, it just means it won't be used for analysis or mapping.

Which Species Warrant Location Information

Throughout this article I've been talking about adding more information to records of unusual species or those that

are sought after by other birders. How do you know when a species fits those criteria and when it's a good idea to add comments? That may take some experience and it can be influenced by time of year and number of birds. Threatened and Endangered Species, Species of Special Concern, and species tracked by the NH Natural Heritage Bureau are all good candidates for more information.

Threatened and Endangered Species list and the Species of Special Concern can be found on-line at: <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/nongame/endangered-list.html>

For a list of species that are tracked by the NH Natural Heritage Bureau, go to:

<http://www.nhdfi.org/library/pdf/Natural%20Heritage/TrackingList-AnimalGeneral.pdf>

To complicate things, species of interest can change with time. Cliff Swallow nests were widespread in the state during the Breeding Bird Atlas in the early 1980s, but now they are scarce and we're more interested in exactly those buildings that once housed the nests. If it's a bird species you are interested in seeing, then it's a pretty good bet that other birders are also. You can get an idea of how common a species is at various times of the year from the bar charts of abundance in *A Checklist of the Birds of New Hampshire* (available from NH Audubon) and also in eBird under the bar charts feature of Explore Data. If the species "trips the filter" in eBird, meaning you are asked to confirm the record, then comments on both the identification and the location are a good idea. If in doubt, add more information. Someone 50 years from now may be very glad you did!

Researchers, conservationists, and states are turning more and more to eBird for data on bird locations. We want your data to make a difference and accuracy in locations is one important component of that. So, if you're wondering why you keep getting requests to adjust your eBird entries, please understand it's part of an overall effort to make your data the most useful it can be.

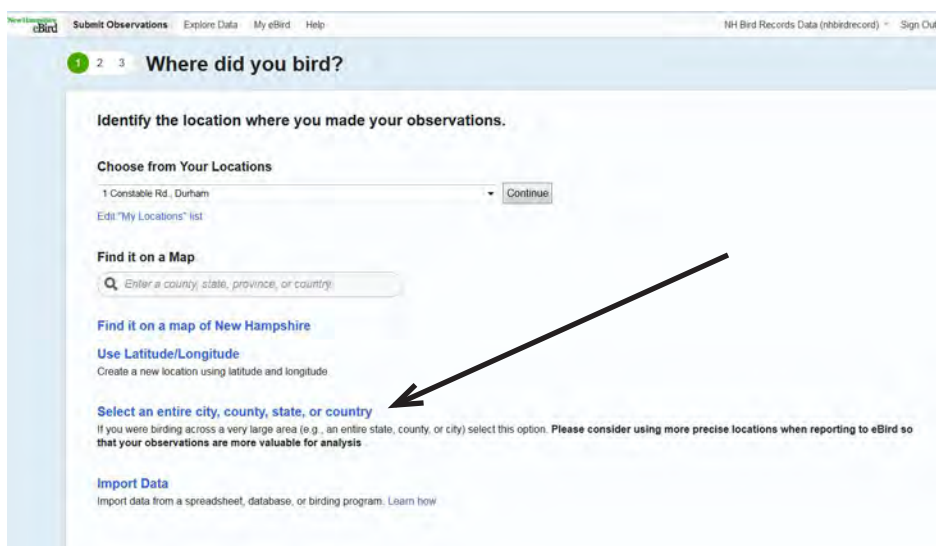


Figure 6. eBird's Submit Observations screen with the arrow pointing to the appropriate selection for a general point in a town.

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Abbreviations Used

AMC	Appalachian Mountain Club
BBC	Brookline Bird Club
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey
CA	Conservation Area
CC	Country Club
CFT	NH Audubon Chapter Field Trip
FT	Field Trip
IBA	Important Bird Area
L.	Lake
LPC	Loon Preservation Committee
NA	Natural Area
NHA	New Hampshire Audubon
NHBR	New Hampshire Bird Records
NHRBC	NH Rare Birds Committee
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
PO	Post Office
R.	River
Rd.	Road
RO	Raptor Observatory
Rt.	Route
SF	State Forest
SP	State Park
SPNHF	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, Concord
T&M	Thompson & Meserves (Purchase)
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WMNF	White Mountain National Forest
WS	NHA Wildlife Sanctuary
~	approximately
WTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant

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