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### ***Background***

The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) Program is a global initiative of BirdLife International in which 120 countries participate. It is a science-based program to identify, conserve, and monitor a network of sites that provide essential habitat for bird populations. In Canada and the U.S., eBird is helping to update population data for IBAs, either by design (IBA Caretakers in Canada are explicitly asked to enter their bird data on eBird) or incidentally (birders enter their data, not realizing that they are within an IBA). In either case, these data form a valuable resource for the IBA Program as they are incorporated into various tools and visualizations available via the eBird portal (e.g., bar charts, high counts, species lists) and ultimately help to ensure our knowledge and conservation planning for individual IBAs. By using the IBA Protocol we increase the value of eBird reports to derive better bird population estimates at individual IBAs.

### ***Why do we need a special protocol for IBA monitoring in eBird?***

Two main limitations currently preclude the use of eBird for IBA monitoring:

1. Most IBAs are large so single checklists typically cover a small portion of the total area, and therefore provide only a partial count of the total number of birds present at a given time within an IBA.
2. When multiple checklists do exist that cover a larger proportion of the IBA, there is no reliable way to combine them to arrive at a count total for the IBA (i.e., checklists may overlap one another or count the same birds multiple times).

This document describes how to overcome these limitations through

- i) Coordination of monitoring efforts (i.e., IBA-wide surveys with multiple locations near the same time).
- ii) Specific procedures for recording bird observations in eBird using the IBA Canada protocol.

### ***What is the IBA Canada protocol?***

The IBA Canada protocol is very similar to the way Christmas Bird Counts are conducted. Whether you are monitoring birds on your own, or as part of a coordinated group, the idea is to obtain an overall estimate of the number of birds within an IBA on a given day, while avoiding double-counting of individual birds. Like the Christmas Bird Count, large IBAs can be divided into manageable sectors and surveyed in a coordinated manner to accomplish this (see guidelines below). There are no specific rules about how often and at what time of year the IBA protocol should be used, as these will be largely driven by the situation at individual sites (e.g., peak shorebird migration season, peak waterfowl migration, breeding season), and practical considerations (when people are available to perform the counts).

The way you report your data on eBird for an IBA is the same as general eBirding, with only a few minor differences. The primary difference is in the way birds are counted in the field and tallied on your data forms (see ***Reporting your data to eBird*** below).

## ***IBA-wide Survey Guidelines***

Please follow these guidelines as closely as possible when using this protocol and reporting your data on eBird:

1. **All checklists for a single inventory should be submitted for the same date.** Later on, our automated database tools will extract all observations from the same date and IBA that use the IBA protocol and will calculate the total number of individuals for each species on a given day.

2. Please submit **distinct eBird checklists for different locations** within the IBA, and **avoid reporting the same individual birds**. Some double-counting will be unavoidable, but the idea is to come up with the best estimate possible. This is particularly important for congregatory species that are likely to move around in large flocks, such as seabirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds. It will require that:

a. You should exclude birds that you have reported on earlier checklists (e.g. distant birds that were seen and counted earlier, or that may have moved among sites). If you have some reason to believe that the large group you are seeing is the same as the one you counted earlier, you should only report them once. For instance, you visit site #1 and see a group of ~1,000 Semipalmated Sandpipers, which you see fly to the east towards your next site #2. As you arrive to site #2, you then see around ~3,000 individuals. If you have reason to believe that some of the birds from site #2 are those that you saw earlier at #1, you would report 1,000 birds at site #1, but only 2,000 at site #2 (only the additional birds). Note, if there are species that you have detected at a specific location, but for which all individuals have already been reported on another checklist because of double-counting rules, we encourage you to report them using an 'X' rather than leaving them out of your checklist entirely. The X is used in place of a count to indicate that you have detected a species, but no individuals will be computed in the overall total for the IBA.

b. You should coordinate your count efforts with other parties that are surveying the IBA on the same day, and monitor distinct areas (to minimize the chance of double-counting). This may require that if parties are monitoring sites where birds are likely to be shared, they could agree to visit those sites at a specific time of day in order to minimize the risks that bird flocks will move from one party's area to the next. We recommend that parties also compare notes at the end of the day to try to determine whether they are likely double-counting the same individuals. If so, the party that saw the birds first should report them on their checklist, while the other party should report only the additional birds (make a note in the species comments explaining that you excluded a certain number of individuals, and the rationale for doing so). Comparing of notes will be particularly useful for large birds that can be identified at a distance. For instance, if you saw a large group of Sandhill Cranes flying in the distance in the other party's territory, you will only be able to determine whether they have already been counted after discussing with the other party.

c. Coordinated surveys of IBAs that involve many participants should be handled by the local IBA Caretaker and/or the regional IBA Coordinator. If you require additional guidance, the national IBA program coordinator at may be able to help ([iba@birdscanada.org](mailto:iba@birdscanada.org)).

3. **Only birds located within the boundaries of an IBA should be recorded** on checklists using the IBA protocol. We also encourage you to report additional sightings using one of the pre-defined eBird hotspots, rather than create your own personal sites. To suggest new hotspots check the option 'Suggest as a Birding HotSpot' when you create your new site, or go to 'Manage my locations' under the My eBird section, check off the site, and then use the drop-down list at the top right of the screen. Contact the IBA program coordinator if you would like help or have questions about hotspots.

4. **Ensure that you are covering the entire IBA** or at least most of the area where the target species are found. Again, the idea is to obtain a best estimate of the total number of birds present, and this won't be possible if you only visit a small portion of the IBA. If you are not conducting a thorough inventory of the IBA please enter your data using one of the regular eBird protocols.

Again, for those who participate in the Christmas Bird Count, the above procedure should sound familiar in principle. Important to note, however, is that individuals are also welcome to use the protocol (one need not be part of a complex blitz effort) provided the guidelines are followed. In these cases, it is important to communicate with the local IBA Caretaker or the provincial IBA coordinator to ensure that someone else didn't do a similar survey on the same date as you.

### **Reporting your data to eBird**

When you are ready to submit your data to eBird, go to the main **eBird Canada** portal at <http://eBird.ca/>. If you do not already have an eBird account, you will need to sign up for one. **Only one observer per party should report the observations using the IBA protocol!** If other observers of the party would also like to have their observations entered in eBird under their name, the person reporting the data under the IBA protocol can [share](#) the checklist(s) with the other observers (the reporter will need the other observers' eBird usernames or email addresses for sharing).

To submit observations, click on 'Submit Observations'.

1. At step 1, select one of the methods to identify your site (from a list of your existing locations, or from a map). **Each location surveyed is entered as a separate checklist.** For instance, if your party visited 5 different locations during the day, you would report at least 5 checklists, in addition to observations made while traveling between these locations. The 'summing up' of the total number of individuals for the IBA is handled later by the data management system.

2. At step 2, enter the observation date. Under Observation Type use the drop-down menu to view the list of *Other protocols*. This is where you can choose the **IBA Canada protocol**.

**TIP:** If 'IBA Canada (protocol)' does not show up as an option, type in <http://eBird.ca/>, and restart your checklist in the eBird Canada Portal. If you still don't see IBA Canada Protocol as an option under the list of 'Other' protocols then contact [jba@birdscanada.org](mailto:jba@birdscanada.org) for assistance.

The screenshot shows the eBird Canada portal's data entry interface. At the top right, it says '\* = Required'. The 'Observation Date' field is set to April 29, 2014. Below it, the 'Observation Type' section has four radio button options: 'Traveling', 'Stationary', 'Incidental', and 'Other'. The 'Other' option is selected, and a dropdown menu is open showing a list of protocols: 'Choose...', 'Area', 'eBird Pelagic Protocol', 'Random', 'Nocturnal Flight Call Count', 'Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz', and 'IBA Canada (protocol)'. The 'IBA Canada (protocol)' option is highlighted in blue. To the right of each option is a 'More Info...' link. At the bottom right, there is a grey back arrow and a green 'Continue' button with a right arrow.

After you select 'IBA Canada (protocol)', you are required to enter Start Time, Duration, Distance, and Party Size (reporting the Area is optional). If you do not know exact values, please use your best estimate.

3. At step 3, you can report the individual count of each species as from each unique location surveyed within the IBA, **but remembering that your count must exclude any birds that are already reported on another checklist (by your party or another)**. For high counts, it is a good idea to document how the count was made (e.g., counted estimated groups of 100 or exact count). Before submitting the checklist you must answer yes or no to the question 'Are you submitting a complete checklist of all the birds you were able to identify?' You should always answer 'Yes' to this question unless you are purposefully excluding some species (e.g., European Starlings) from your checklist. Click submit to finish!

### ***Submitting data directly from the field***

1. **This can be done by using the eBird Mobile app.** If you have a smart phone running Android or iOS you can download the eBird app for free and enter data as you see it in the field.

a. Before submitting any IBA data, open the app, click the gear in the bottom right of the screen, and change the portal to eBird Canada (this saves a step later when using the IBA Protocol to enter data).

b. Click 'Start New Checklist', and select a method to identify your location. You can 'Choose a Recent Location' (your last 50 locations used on the **eBird app**), 'Choose a Location From Map' (if choosing a new location, update the preset name to something more descriptive), 'Choose a Nearby Hotspot', or 'Choose a Nearby Personal Location' (includes all existing locations on your eBird account). For the last two options, it works best if your location/GPS is on, if not you can zoom in to see the locations, or use 'Search Hotspots By Place'. At this point if you cannot use data, you can create an 'Offline List' that uses either a full taxonomic list (over 10,000 species), or one of your previous checklists to generate a list of species you may see. Whichever method you choose, remember, **each location surveyed is entered as a separate checklist so be specific with location.**

c. Next enter date and time in as usual, and press start at the top right of the screen.

d. Enter your counts in the field by clicking on the species and adding your number observed. Here you can also enter breeding codes and comments. Once you are done recording species, click 'Review & Submit' at the bottom right.

e. The IBA Canada Protocol is now an option on the eBird app! To make sure your observations are included in an IBA survey count, click on 'Observation Type', and choose 'IBA Canada (protocol)'. Enter all parameters requested, and press 'Submit'. If you are offline, you must wait until you have internet access to submit the checklist, but can start a new offline checklist by pressing 'Home'.

f. **For further tips with the eBird mobile app visit [this helpful page](#) (Getting Started with eBird Mobile).**

**TIP:** To use the IBA Canada Protocol on an existing checklist, open the checklist and select 'Change Portal' on the right hand side and select eBird Canada (if that isn't an option, then it is already in the eBird Canada portal). Then 'edit data and effort' on the checklist chose the IBA Canada Protocol under 'Other' Observation Type.



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