THE ROLE OF THE ARIZONA BIRD COMMITTEE IN THE AGE OF EBIRD

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In today's world, the purpose and relevance of the Arizona Bird Committee (ABC)–or any state or provincial records committee–has been debated, particularly by the younger generation of birders, and especially as it relates to the explosion in popularity of eBird in North America (see Scott and Benson 2025 for relevant discussion on this subject). Although the ABC was created to centralize and verify bird records at a time when documentation was scattered and inconsistent, eBird now fills this organizing role for most birders, particularly newer birders, for whom birding and eBirding are basically the same thing. A main purpose of the ABC has been the keeping of the official state list for the scientific community and improving our knowledge of Arizona birds, which includes establishing a standard of observation and reporting by which field observers can directly compare their own techniques and better their skills. The ABC provided a means by which written descriptions gained acceptance into the scientific record. Here I describe the history of the ABC and how it functions and will explain how records committees and eBirding serve different, yet complementary functions. Although the 2 entities overlap broadly in basic processes, both are, in my opinion, still necessary and both should be celebrated.

ABC – HISTORY, PURPOSES, AND PROCEDURES

The ABC was established in 1972 at a time when birding popularity was exploding in western North America and more birders were discovering increasing numbers of rarities and new state records, especially in Arizona. Although the first list of Arizona's birds was compiled in 1914 by Harry S. Swarth (Swarth 1914), the first modern "unofficial" Arizona state list was prepared for the publication of *Birds of Arizona* by Allan Phillips, Gale Monson, and Joe Marshall in 1964 (Phillips et al. 1964). This seminal body of work was almost entirely based on specimen evidence of occurrence, with some exceptions, mainly by observers who were also "collectors" and trusted by the authors. By 1972, birding in the West was already changing – transitioning from "shotgun ornithology" to careful observation and documentation by ordinary birders who wrote extensive field notes or started carrying cameras. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this "new" activity spread from the U.S. East Coast and Europe and was in full bloom in California. Birders, such as Guy McCaskie and others, had taken a "science" mainstream, demonstrating that migrating birds regularly get off track, which produced an increasing number of rarities and new state records. It was evident that some sort of review process was needed to keep up with the ever-changing knowledge in bird distribution–and thus the establishment of the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) in 1970. By the early 1970s, this aspect of birdwatching had spread to Arizona, and Arizona followed suit in creating a records committee in 1972.

The founding members of the ABC included a mix of university ornithologists, field biologists, and the Arizona birding community: Russell P. Balda (Northern Arizona University), Bill Harrison, Gale Monson, Stephen M. Russell (University of Arizona), Steven Spiech, and Robert Witzeman. Janet Witzeman took on the role as Secretary, and she remains Assistant Secretary to this day. At this time, a set of highly skilled field ornithologists, including Ted Parker, Mark Robbins, Kenn Kaufman, Scott Terrill, Doug Stotz, Robert Witzeman, and others, was based in both Phoenix and Tucson. These birders were making many new discoveries. Also, by then, the journal *Audubon Field Notes* (which later became *American Birds* published by the National Audubon Society, and then *North American Birds* published by the American Birding Association), was in existence. At the same time, efforts to document and report rare species in Arizona were increasing. The formation of a records committee was essential not only to establish an official "state checklist," but also to review and evaluate observations that would constitute new state records, other rarities that had occurred very few times in the state, as well as scarce species that were considered to be particularly vexing identification challenges. One of the ABC's first chores was to publish a *Checklist of Arizona Birds*, and several versions were revised and published over the years. The ABC accepted those species published in both *The Birds of*

Arizona (Phillips et al. 1964), and the *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Arizona* (Monson and Phillips 1981) that were documented by a specimen, photograph, or sound recording. It soon became clear that the main purposes of the ABC were to improve the quality of the bird records by requiring observers to submit documentation, and to further our knowledge of bird distribution in the state.

The ABC has evolved over the years. Up until the mid-1990s, the committee consisted of 6 members with no term limits. New members were brought onto the committee when there were retirements, providing at least some turnover and new blood. In the mid-1990s, the ABC went through a major change: the number of voting members increased from 6 to 8 and term limits were established. Each committee member now serves a 4-year term and then must be off the committee for at least 1 year before they can be nominated and elected again. Each committee member can nominate 1 new potential candidate, and the election typically takes place at an annual ABC meeting. In this way there is an annual turnover within the committee, 2 members rotating off, and 2 new members elected every year. At least in recent decades, the committee has strived to elect a diverse membership, while maintaining a high level of expertise.

Certain criteria to serve on the committee has always been important in order to be nominated: having a good understanding of the distribution of birds in Arizona and a general understanding of the identification and ranges of North American birds (including Mexico); being an active birder in the state, and showing a willingness to document rare sightings by submitting them to the ABC. No single person knows everything about bird identifications, so an important attribute of a committee member is a willingness and ability to research an identification issue to eventually reach an independent decision.

Although the ABC historically consisted of mainly older ornithologists, today it is made up of many younger active birders in the state. A full list of all who have served on the ABC is as follows: Charles Babbitt, Russell P. Balda, Chris Benesh, Gavin Bieber, Andrew Core, Troy Corman, Doug Danforth, Tommy DeBardeleben, Henry Detwiler, Pierre Deviche, Shawneen Finnegan, Sean Fitzgerald, Felipe Guerrero, Laurens Halsey, Bill Harrison, Lauren Harter, Eric Hough, Rich Hoyer, Roy Jones, Keith Kamper, Kenn Kaufman, Ken Kertell, Dave Krueper, Chuck LaRue, Paul Lehman, Janine McCabe, G. Scott Mills, Gale Monson, Michael Moore, Narca Moore, Ryan O'Donnell, Scott Olmstead, Molly Pollock, Kurt Radamaker, Gary H. Rosenberg, Stephen Russell, Will Russell, Steve Spiech, David Stejskal, Mark Stevenson, Caleb Strand, Scott Terrill, Jake Thompson, Carl Tomoff, David Vander Pluym, Nolan Walker, Magill Weber, Jason Wilder, Robert Witzeman, and John Yerger.

An examination of other state records committees in western states (see links to websites in Appendix) reveals similar, and almost identical purposes—first and foremost establishing and maintaining the state list (Sieburth 2020). The criteria for species that appear on the review list varies from state to state. In Arizona, we have established an arbitrary number of 30 accepted records (it formerly was higher). Once 30 records are received in the state, the committee then votes to either retain or remove the species from the review list. If the identification of the species is deemed straightforward, then it is usually removed after 30 records. The reasoning is that we have a relatively good understanding of the status of the species in the state, and reviewing more reports will not add more to our knowledge of its status in Arizona. Documentation of rarities and new species in the state, and maintaining a state checklist, allows us to understand the history of occurrence, and any change in status over time. As an example, there are many examples of "Mexican" species expanding their ranges into Arizona during the past 50 years. The ABC has helped document the expansion of species such as Rufous-capped Warbler (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) into Arizona; the first record was found in 1977 and there are now more than 50 records, and it likely breeds in small numbers. Examining the individual records over time (as reviewed by the ABC) allows insight into the history of occurrence in the state.

We used to have a category that required observers to continue to provide documentation in the form of sketch details for inclusion in *North American Birds*. This process is now similar in the form of flagged species in eBird, and at least minimal details are needed for rarities before they are accepted and appear in the public eBird database (more on this below). Some species have been retained on the review list after 30 records for a variety of reasons, one being

that there could be identification challenges with very similar species that also occur in the state. For example, American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*) was retained on the list well past 30 records due to the difficulty separating it from Pacific Golden-Plover (*P. fulva*). American has now been removed, yet the much rarer Pacific remains on the review list (Figure 1).

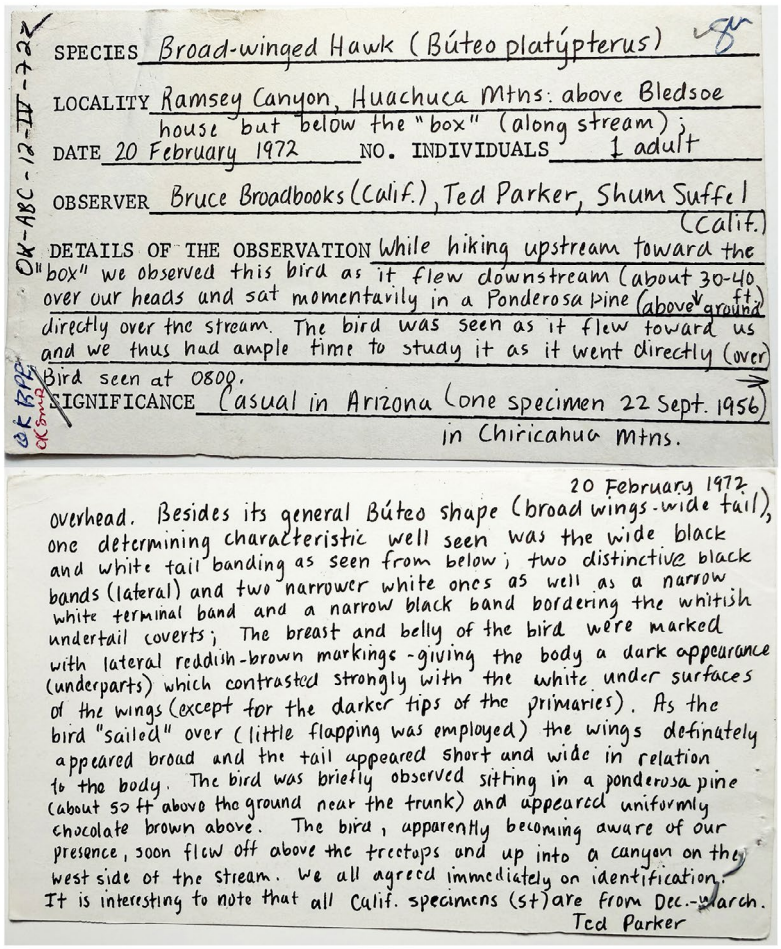
Figure 1. This Golden-Plover was photographed at Glendale Recharge Ponds 11 September 2011. It was initially thought to be an American, but was reidentified as a Pacific, providing a third Arizona record. Photo by Melanie Herring

Other species may be added to or retained on the list due to their overall status in North America and the desire to monitor their status. Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) is a good example of such a species, given its "threatened" status and declining populations. Some species on the review list were removed, and then subsequently placed back onto the list. Calculating the actual number of state records is difficult in this scenario. Red Knot falls into this category, as do Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), all of which were more regularly reported in the 1970s. When Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) and Pacific Wren (*T. pacificus*) were split in 2010 by the American Ornithologists' Union (Chesser et al. 2010), we added Winter Wren to the review list to determine the true status in the state, which was pretty much unknown at the time. Once the true status of Winter Wren was understood, it was removed as a review species, even though separation of the 2 species is still problematic (Figure 2). The same situation occurred with Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) and Cackling Goose (*B. hutchinsii*). The committee is hesitant to reinstate species to the review list, and the prevailing attitude is to let the eBird review process handle further review once a species is removed from the ABC list, although this could change in the future.

Figure 2. This Winter Wren was photographed at Colossal Cave Mountain Park 14 February 2011. Winter Wren was added to the ABC review list for several years until its true status in the state was determined, and then it was removed. Photo by Andrew Core

Some state committees, such as the California committee, sometimes remove or add species from and to the review list based on the total number of records and the number of records per year over a 5- or 10-year period, but these guidelines (outlined in the bylaws) are not always followed strictly. The Arizona committee believes that once a status is determined, reviewing additional reports should not be the job of the committee; eBird can handle it. The ABC does review a few selected well-marked subspecies that are vagrants (or potential vagrants) within the state.

The process of submitting records, and the ABC voting on those records, has changed radically over the years. Many of the original submissions were mainly made on 3x5 index cards with short descriptions of sightings (Figure 3). These were housed at the Arizona State Museum at the University of Arizona, as then-member Stephen Russell was the curator of birds at the museum. Eventually a "report form" was created for observers to fill out and submit (Figures 4 and 5). The secretary would compile the forms into "packets" that were mailed from committee member to committee member. This was a long and arduous process. Votes were at first written onto the submitted material, and then later onto a dedicated voting form. Once voted on, the originals were housed in a file at the University of Arizona museum.



SPECIES Broad-winged Hawk (Búteo platýpterus)

LOCALITY Ramsey Canyon, Huachuca Mtns: above Bledsoe house but below the "box" (along stream);

DATE 20 February 1972 NO. INDIVIDUALS 1 adult

OBSERVER Bruce Broadbooks (Calif.), Ted Parker, Shum Suffel (Calif.)

DETAILS OF THE OBSERVATION While hiking upstream toward the "box" we observed this bird as it flew downstream (about 30-40 ft.) over our heads and sat momentarily in a Ponderosa pine (above ground) directly over the stream. The bird was seen as it flew toward us and we thus had ample time to study it as it went directly (over) overhead. Besides its general Búteo shape (broad wings-wide tail), one determining characteristic well seen was the wide black and white tail banding as seen from below; two distinctive black bands (lateral) and two narrower white ones as well as a narrow white terminal band and a narrow black band bordering the whitish undertail coverts; The breast and belly of the bird were marked with lateral reddish-brown markings -giving the body a dark appearance (underparts) which contrasted strongly with the white under surfaces of the wings (except for the darker tips of the primaries). As the bird "sailed" over (little flapping was employed) the wings definately appeared broad and the tail appeared short and wide in relation to the body. The bird was briefly observed sitting in a ponderosa pine (about 50 ft above the ground near the trunk) and appeared uniformly chocolate brown above. The bird, apparently becoming aware of our presence, soon flew off above the treetops and up into a canyon on the west side of the stream. We all agreed immediately on identification. It is interesting to note that all Calif. specimens (st) are from Dec.-March.

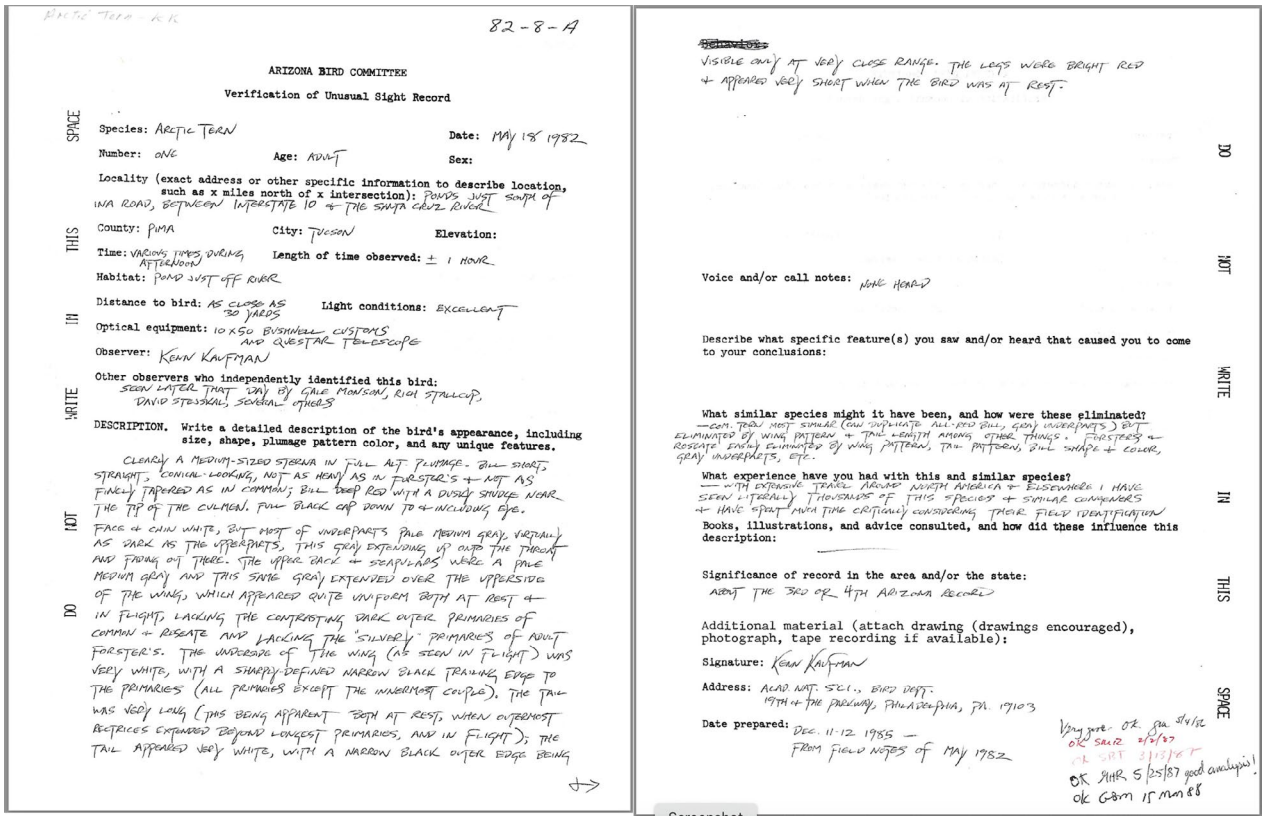
20 February 1972

Ted Parker

SIGNIFICANCE Casual in Arizona (one specimen 22 Sept. 1956 in Chiricahua Mtns.

OK-ABC-12-II-72

Figure 3. Example of a 3x5 index card that was provided for early documentation of rarities in Arizona. This documented a Broad-winged Hawk in the Huachuca Mountains written up by Ted Parker in 1972.



82-8-A

ARIZONA BIRD COMMITTEE

Verification of Unusual Sight Record

SPACE THIS IN WRITE NOT DO

Species: ARCTIC TERN Date: MAY 18 1982

Number: ONE Age: ADULT Sex:

Locality (exact address or other specific information to describe location, such as x miles north of x intersection): PONDS JUST SOUTH OF INA ROAD, BETWEEN INTERSTATE 10 & THE SANTA CRUZ RIVER

County: PIMA City: TUCSON Elevation:

Time: VARIOUS TIMES DURING AFTERNOON Length of time observed: ± 1 HOUR

Habitat: POND JUST OFF RIVER

Distance to bird: AS CLOSE AS 30 YARDS Light conditions: EXCELLENT

Optical equipment: 10X50 BUSHNELL CUSTOMS AND QUESTAR TELESCOPE

Observer: KENN KAUFMAN

Other observers who independently identified this bird: SEEN LATER THAT DAY BY GALE MONSON, RICH STALLCUP, DAVID STEADMAN, SEVERAL OTHERS

DESCRIPTION. Write a detailed description of the bird's appearance, including size, shape, plumage pattern color, and any unique features.

CLEARLY A MEDIUM-SIZED STERNA IN FULL ALT. PLUMAGE. BILL STOUT, STRAIGHT, CONICAL-LOOKING, NOT AS HEAVY AS IN FORSTER'S & NOT AS FINELY TAPERED AS IN COMMON; BILL DEEP RED WITH A DUSKY SMUDGE NEAR THE TIP OF THE CULMEN. FULL BLACK CAP DOWN TO & INCLUDING EYE. FACE & CHIN WHITE, BUT MOST OF UNDERPARTS PALE MEDIUM GRAY, VIRTUALLY AS DARK AS THE UPPERPARTS, THIS GRAY EXTENDING UP ONTO THE THROAT AND FRONT OF THEIR. THE UPPER BACK & SCAPULARS WERE A PALE MEDIUM GRAY AND THIS SAME GRAY EXTENDED OVER THE UPPERSIDE OF THE WING, WHICH APPEARED QUITE UNIFORM BOTH AT REST & IN FLIGHT, LACKING THE CONTRASTING DARK OUTER PRIMARIES OF COMMON & ROSEATE AND LACKING THE "SILVERY" PRIMARIES OF ADULT FORSTER'S. THE UNDERSIDE OF THE WING (AS SEEN IN FLIGHT) WAS VERY WHITE, WITH A SHARPLY-DEFINED NARROW BLACK TRAILING EDGE TO THE PRIMARIES (ALL PRIMARIES EXCEPT THE INNERMOST COUPLE). THE TAIL WAS VERY LONG (THIS BEING APPARENT BOTH AT REST, WHEN OUTERMOST RECTRICES EXTENDED BEYOND LONGEST PRIMARIES, AND IN FLIGHT); THE TAIL APPEARED VERY WHITE, WITH A NARROW BLACK OUTER EDGE BEING VISIBLE ONLY AT VERY CLOSE RANGE. THE LEGS WERE BRIGHT RED & APPEARED VERY SHORT WHEN THE BIRD WAS AT REST.

Voice and/or call notes: NONE HEARD

Describe what specific feature(s) you saw and/or heard that caused you to come to your conclusions:

What similar species might it have been, and how were these eliminated? —COM. TERN MOST SIMILAR (CAN DUPLICATE ALL-RED BILL, GRAY UNDERPARTS) BUT ELIMINATED BY WING PATTERN & TAIL LENGTH AMONG OTHER THINGS. FORSTER'S & ROSEATE EASILY ELIMINATED BY WING PATTERN, TAIL PATTERN, BILL SHAPE & COLOR, GRAY UNDERPARTS, ETC.

What experience have you had with this and similar species? —WITH EXTENSIVE TRAVEL ACROSS NORTH AMERICA & ELSEWHERE I HAVE SEEN LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF THIS SPECIES & SIMILAR CONGENERS & HAVE SPENT MUCH TIME CRITICALLY CONSIDERING THEIR FIELD IDENTIFICATION

Books, illustrations, and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:

Significance of record in the area and/or the state: ABOUT THE 3RD OR 4TH ARIZONA RECORD

Additional material (attach drawing (drawings encouraged), photograph, tape recording if available):

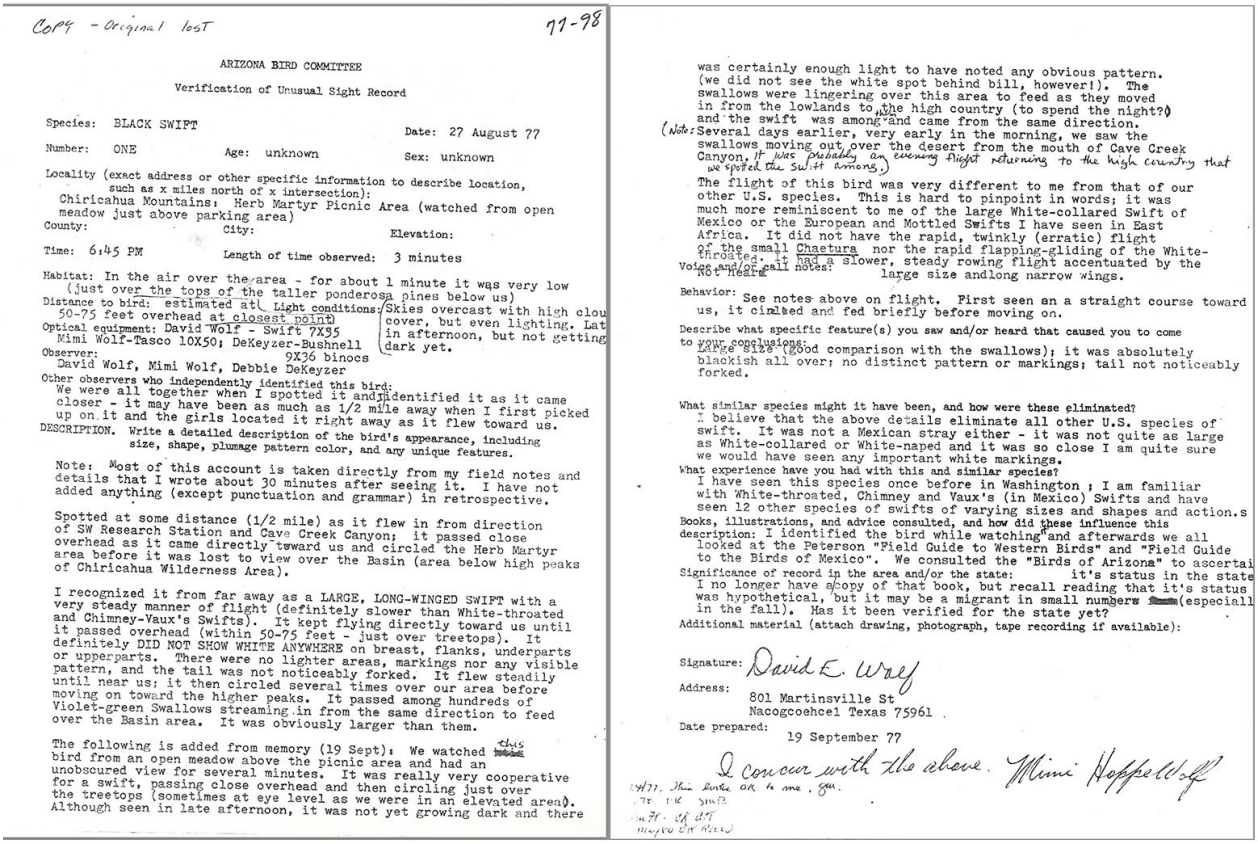
Signature: KENN KAUFMAN

Address: ACAD. NAT. SCI., BIRD DEPT. 19TH & THE PARKWAY, PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19103

Date prepared: DEC. 11-12, 1985 — FROM FIELD NOTES OF MAY 1982

Very rare - OK. fm 4/1/92 OK SALT. 2/5/87 OK SBT 3/13/87 T OK SHR 5/25/87 good eyeing! ok GBM 15 mm 88

Figure 4. An example of the ABC reporting form before the online submission form was developed in 2007. This was also an example of a bird report based on a written description, in this case an Arctic Tern seen in Tucson by Kenn Kaufman.



COPY - Original lost 77-98

ARIZONA BIRD COMMITTEE

Verification of Unusual Sight Record

Species: BLACK SWIFT Date: 27 August 77

Number: ONE Age: unknown Sex: unknown

Locality (exact address or other specific information to describe location, such as x miles north of x intersection):
Chiricahua Mountains: Herb Martyr Picnic Area (watched from open meadow just above parking area)
County: City: Elevation:

Time: 6:45 PM Length of time observed: 3 minutes

Habitat: In the air over the area - for about 1 minute it was very low (just over the tops of the taller ponderosa pines below us)
Distance to bird: estimated at 50-75 feet overhead at closest point) Light conditions: Skies overcast with high clou cover, but even lighting. Lat in afternoon, but not getting dark yet.
Optical equipment: David Wolf - Swift 7X35
Mimi Wolf-Tasco 10X50; DeKeyzer-Bushnell 9X36 binocs
Observer:
David Wolf, Mimi Wolf, Debbie DeKeyzer
Other observers who independently identified this bird:
We were all together when I spotted it and identified it as it came closer - it may have been as much as 1/2 mile away when I first picked up on it and the girls located it right away as it flew toward us.

DESCRIPTION. Write a detailed description of the bird's appearance, including size, shape, plumage pattern color, and any unique features.

Note: Most of this account is taken directly from my field notes and details that I wrote about 30 minutes after seeing it. I have not added anything (except punctuation and grammar) in retrospective.

Spotted at some distance (1/2 mile) as it flew in from direction of SW Research Station and Cave Creek Canyon; it passed close overhead as it came directly toward us and circled the Herb Martyr area before it was lost to view over the Basin (area below high peaks of Chiricahua Wilderness Area).

I recognized it from far away as a LARGE, LONG-WINGED SWIFT with a very steady manner of flight (definitely slower than White-throated and Chimney-Vaux's Swifts). It kept flying directly toward us until it passed overhead (within 50-75 feet - just over treetops). It definitely DID NOT SHOW WHITE ANYWHERE on breast, flanks, underparts or upperparts. There were no lighter areas, markings nor any visible pattern, and the tail was not noticeably forked. It flew steadily until near us; it then circled several times over our area before moving on toward the higher peaks. It passed among hundreds of Violet-green Swallows streaming in from the same direction to feed over the Basin area. It was obviously larger than them.

The following is added from memory (19 Sept): We watched this bird from an open meadow above the picnic area and had an unobscured view for several minutes. It was really very cooperative for a swift, passing close overhead and then circling just over the treetops (sometimes at eye level as we were in an elevated area). Although seen in late afternoon, it was not yet growing dark and there was certainly enough light to have noted any obvious pattern. (we did not see the white spot behind bill, however!). The swallows were lingering over this area to feed as they moved in from the lowlands to the high country (to spend the night?) and the swift was among and came from the same direction.
(Note: Several days earlier, very early in the morning, we saw the swallows moving out over the desert from the mouth of Cave Creek Canyon. It was probably an evening flight returning to the high country that we spotted the swift among.)

The flight of this bird was very different to me from that of our other U.S. species. This is hard to pinpoint in words; it was much more reminiscent to me of the large White-collared Swift of Mexico or the European and Mottled Swifts I have seen in East Africa. It did not have the rapid, twinkly (erratic) flight of the small Chaetura nor the rapid flapping-gliding of the White-throated; it had a slower, steady rowing flight accentuated by the large size and long narrow wings.
Voice and/or call notes: Not Heard

Behavior: See notes above on flight. First seen on a straight course toward us, it circled and fed briefly before moving on.

Describe what specific feature(s) you saw and/or heard that caused you to come to your conclusions:
Large size (good comparison with the swallows); it was absolutely blackish all over; no distinct pattern or markings; tail not noticeably forked.

What similar species might it have been, and how were these eliminated?
I believe that the above details eliminate all other U.S. species of swift. It was not a Mexican stray either - it was not quite as large as White-collared or White-naped and it was so close I am quite sure we would have seen any important white markings.
What experience have you had with this and similar species?
I have seen this species once before in Washington ; I am familiar with White-throated, Chimney and Vaux's (in Mexico) Swifts and have seen 12 other species of swifts of varying sizes and shapes and action.s
Books, illustrations, and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description: I identified the bird while watching and afterwards we all looked at the Peterson "Field Guide to Western Birds" and "Field Guide to the Birds of Mexico". We consulted the "Birds of Arizona" to ascertai
Significance of record in the area and/or the state: it's status in the state I no longer have a copy of that book, but recall reading that it's status was hypothetical, but it may be a migrant in small numbers (especiall in the fall). Has it been verified for the state yet?
Additional material (attach drawing, photograph, tape recording if available):

Signature: David E. Wolf
Address: 801 Martinsville St
Nacogdoehes Texas 75961
Date prepared: 19 September 77

I concur with the above. Mimi Hoppe Wolf

1977. This looks OK to me, Jon.
77 - 1 OK Swift
Jon 77 - OK 11.7
Hayden Dot Rees

Figure 5. Written description of a Black Swift sighting in 1977 accepted by the ABC.

In 2009, Kurt Radamaker designed software for an online database and voting system that we use today. Observations can be submitted through an online submission form on the ABC website that accepts up to 4 photos (**https://arizonabirdcommittee.org/PhotoSubmit/ABCSubmitMain.aspx**). Sound recordings can be sent to the secretary, or they can be added as a link to media submitted through eBird. Once filled out and submitted, they are automatically entered into a database. The secretary then processes the submission for voting. A record is accepted when it receives 7 or more positive votes. A record is not accepted if it receives 7 or more negative votes. Any record that receives 2 or more dissenting votes will go through a second round of voting.

The database is managed by Kurt Radamaker. Within the past year, all the historical files have been scanned and have been entered into the database. Furthermore, GPS coordinates have been entered for every record in the database. Radamaker is working on a program that will map each accepted record on the state map, with links to all the documentation in the database. This is an ongoing project. Providing the birding community with online public access to the database is an important priority of the ABC.

About every 3 years, we compile the ABC decisions and publish the results in an ABC report in *Western Birds*. Since 1972, 11 reports have been published and are referenced in the Literature Cited. The reports can be found on the ABC website (see Appendix). These reports include new species accepted to the Arizona list, and the more recent reports also include photographs of all the new species, as well as many of the rarities. Date span and location are provided for each accepted record. The species accounts include the number of accepted records for the state. We have also tried to provide a context for most records by discussing their overall status in the state, or adjoining states, and any seasonal patterns that exist. In this way, the reader can learn more about the status of a species, other than just its date and location. Furthermore, the ABC reports include those reports that were not accepted, providing an avenue for a researcher in the future to re-review such records.

EBIRD: ARRIVAL AND FUNCTIONS

Launched in the United States in 2002, eBird went global by 2011, and is now one of the world's largest citizen-science projects, with an observation data base now numbered in the billions. There is no doubt that eBird is now very popular, particularly with the younger generation. Its explosion with birders mirrors the transition from specimen collecting to field observation during the 1960s and 1970s. Since it provides an almost real time reporting of birds, it has provided an amazing opportunity for observers to learn about and go see interesting birds both locally, and far afield. The main purpose of eBird is to create a large database of bird observations through "citizen science" that can then be applied to scientific studies, as well as for conservation purposes (Table 1). With its global scope, eBird collects data on all species worldwide whether common or rare, and it has been instrumental in increasing the number of birders. Rare birds are flagged and require additional documentation, and the review process is done by volunteer reviewers.

Table 1. Main purposes and differences between the Arizona Bird Committee and eBird.

Purposes of the ABC	**Purposes of eBird**
• Maintain the official Arizona State List for the scientific community.	• Create a worldwide database of bird sightings through citizen science.
• Verify rarities and archive documentation for the scientific record.	• Provide data for monitoring of bird populations for conservation.
• Provide a means for which written descriptions gain acceptance.	• Provide rapid verification of rarities through the review process.
• Improve our knowledge of the status of Arizona birds.	• Provide an invaluable resource of photos and recordings in the Macaulay Library.
• Establish a standard of observation and reporting.	• Map historical and real time records of birds.
• Publish peer-reviewed reports on decisions in Western Birds.	• Bring accessibility, speed, and participation to birding.
• Provide synthesis and interpretation on records of rarities in Arizona.	• Provide a means for list keeping at local and world levels.
	• Provide birders with real time distribution data.

Historically, the main purpose of a state records committee was to verify rarities and archive documentation of those records on a local level. eBird now performs many of the same functions that were once unique to records committees. The process of verification of rarities is now fast, almost instantaneous. The review process for rarities submitted to eBird is generally strong, and it involves the review of documentation, mainly photographs and recordings, brought to the attention of dedicated reviewers by filters established by knowledgeable local birders. For rarities, at least, the error rate of the reviewers is probably low.

For many rarities, one can go to eBird and search for specific species in a particular state and get a map that displays the reports accepted by eBird reviewers. These may include most (or sometimes all) of the records in a particular state for a rarity, but no synthesis provided. For some rarities, a single "hotspot" (a public, shared locality) may be created in eBird to at least consolidate all reports of that rarity (along with photos and documentation) into one point on the map. However, many individual rarities are seen by many observers (sometimes hundreds), and they can be (and usually are) displayed as several individual points, particularly if found at a location that was not already a hotspot, or

if the rarity had moved locations. This makes it tedious, difficult, and cumbersome to calculate the number of records, to find the first and last dates of each occurrence and its exact location, and to know who discovered the bird. In addition, not all historical records (from around the country) are entered into eBird (a point also mentioned by Scott and Benson (2025). In Arizona, Andrew Core has entered most, if not all, accepted records from past ABC reports into the eBird database, if they had not already been entered.

Although eBird provides a verification system for the birding community, the ABC, and records committees in general, and their published reports in a peer-reviewed journal (*Western Birds*), provides an easier means for adding bird records and their exact data to the official scientific record. The ABC reports usually provide an interpretation of trends, or seasonality, and ensure that every record of species on the review list is represented. The data in eBird has potential errors, sometimes bird identification, but also in exact locations, which can potentially decrease its scientific value. These errors are less likely when it comes to documented rarities (especially with submission of photos and recordings), but probably not absent.

Judging the accuracy of the identification often falls on a single, volunteer reviewer rather than a committee of 8, which potentially increases the chance of a mistake. There are conscientious eBird reviewers who do seek additional opinions on controversial records, and I hope that this occurs more often. Mistakes or disagreement of acceptance of a rarity can also be discovered by any eBirder, as the eBird lists are public, although mistakes of nonacceptance are more difficult to detect, and become the responsibility of the observer to question. Furthermore, decisions on provenance of rarities, issues regarding the naturalization of exotic species, and evaluation of written descriptions, while rare, are more subjective, and most likely better accomplished by a committee of experts. Although eBird may excel in determining the status of a given rarity (i.e. if it is still being seen), it does not compare to a records committee for providing historical context and overall accuracy for the scientific community.

An increasing trend, not only in eBird, but also with the ABC, is the tendency to include only the briefest of written documentation, especially when a photo is included, or the bird has been seen and reported by others. One of the stated purposes of most records committees is to provide a basis for which an observer's details and documentation can be compared to others, and to provide for acceptance of reports not documented by tangible evidence (photo, video, recording, or specimen). Historically, those reports written up and submitted to the ABC varied in detail, but good, honest, detailed descriptions were usually accepted and published—today, it is more typical to see just a sentence or 2 describing a rarity. Writing full detailed descriptions is a lost art in these days of instant information and photography. Rarely are detailed descriptions submitted, and the art of providing a detailed sketch is essentially gone. Careful written descriptions emphasizing plumage, structure, behavior, and vocalizations can still be very important to both eBird reviewers and record committee members to aid in evaluation (even if a photo is submitted), and writing these descriptions in the field has the added function of improving the observation skills of an observer.

To summarize, eBird has many great attributes, but has different purposes and functions compared to a records committee. Science and the hobby of birdwatching don't always mesh–which is okay–and the 2 can coexist in today's dynamic world. Birdwatchers can provide invaluable data when it comes to the changing status of bird populations, and if used properly, eBird can help monitor birds. Records committees, like the ABC, also provide an official means for maintaining a state checklist, and for endorsing rarities for the scientific record.

FUTURE AND DIRECTIONS

The ABC continues to function well. Today, the committee strives for diversity in its membership, drawing from both long-established ornithologists and active younger birders. The current committee (2025) consists of Tommy DeBardeleben, Chris Benesh, Janine McCabe, Caleb Strand, David Stejskal, Jake Thompson, Nolan Walker, and Jason Wilder. Kurt Radamaker is the webmaster specialist, Gary Rosenberg still serves as Secretary, and Janet Witzeman serves as Assistant Secretary. Our website is **https://arizonabirdcommittee.org/ABC/default.html**. The review list, which can be viewed on the website, is revised annually. We have been working on entering all historical records into

the ABC database and creating a mapping function for all accepted records. Both soon will become accessible to the public on the website. Our goal is to have all ABC material stored permanently in an online database. While the printed material amassed prior to the formation of the online database in 2007 was historically stored at the University of Arizona, this became less secure, and it is currently in files at the house of the secretary. A permanent home for these files continues to be discussed among the committee. There is still a desire by some on the committee to create a permanent archive of all ABC material, but in what form and where it would be stored is still under discussion.

Observers are encouraged to continue to submit documentation of species on the review list to the ABC in addition to creating an eBird list. The ABC has, in the past, extracted rarity documentation from eBird lists to independently review, but still prefers an independent submission of a rarity by the observer. This has become one of the greatest struggles of records committees; how to encourage observers to submit their documentation to a records committee as well as to eBird. It is not unusual to receive only 1 or 2 submissions for even the first state records, even though hundreds of observers may have seen (and photographed) the bird. Hopefully understanding the history and purposes of a state records committee, and how these relate to the functions and purpose of eBird, will encourage more birders to be more enthusiastic in participating in the records committee process.

There is an opportunity for the ABC to better collaborate with the eBird reviewers and the birding public in general. We would like to work more closely with the reviewers and administrators to share data, streamline communication, and increase the visibility of the organization. In our view, eBird is not the scientific record, but provides an excellent foundation for it. The ABC can take eBird's army of observers, and its living data stream, and provide the scientific community with a permanent, peer-reviewed contribution. eBird has not made records committees obsolete; it has made them better at what they are responsible for–maintaining a state list for the scientific community (Scott and Benson 2025). Together they ensure that what birders record today will still matter for science tomorrow.

I thank Andrew Core, Kimball Garrett, Felipe Guerrero, Doug Jenness, Roy May, Scott Olmstead, David Stejskal, Mark Stevenson, James V. Remsen, and Sandy Williams, who provided thought-provoking discussions and comments that improved this manuscript. I would also like to thank Kurt Radamaker for his expertise and continuing dedication to managing the online presence of the ABC.

APPENDIX

Western Bird Records Committees

- Alaska: **https://www.universityofalaskamuseumbirds.org/**
- Alberta: **https://library.ulethbridge.ca/birdrecords**
- Arizona: **https://arizonabirdcommittee.org/ABC/default.html**
- British Columbia: **https://bcfo.ca/bc-bird-records-committee-sightings-database**
- California: **https://californiabirds.org**
- Colorado: **https://cobrc.org**
- Idaho: **https://ibrc.idahobirds.net**
- Montana: **https://montanabirdadvocacy.org/about-mbrc**
- Nevada: **https://gbbo.org/nbrc**
- New Mexico: **http://www.nmbirds.org/nmbrc**
- Oregon: **https://oregonbirding.org/oregon-bird-records-committee**

- Utah: **http://utahbirds.org/RecCom**
- Washington: **http://wos.org/records**
- Wyoming: **https://wybirdrecordscommittee.wordpress.com/**

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Accepted 6 November 2025