

A REVIEW OF WESTERN BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE WEBSITES

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Every state and most provinces in the western United States and Canada have a bird records committee (BRC). The committees receive thousands of reports of rare birds from the birding community each year. The goals of each committee are to assess the identification, origin, date, and location of the rare birds reported, as well as to maintain the checklist for each state. In addition, each committee communicates records of rare bird sightings to the public through publications in journals and through the committee's website. The wealth of information found on each website can be used by researchers and birders alike. This review focuses on the websites of the eleven bird records committees in the western states and provinces and discusses how each website allows observers to submit documentation of rare birds and how effectively it conveys these records.

The California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) maintains an excellent website that makes searching and submitting records quite easy. Perhaps the most useful part of the website is that the main page has a database query in which one can simply type in the species and access all accepted and rejected records rather than having to scroll through pages of records to find the desired species. One can also submit records, including photographs, directly to the committee through the main page of the website. Additional pages include an annotated state list, all publications by the committee, and photographs of rare birds. The photos, however, have not been updated since 2015. "Rare Birds of California," the publication of the CBRC, is located on the main page. The publication analyzes rare bird records, the history of California birding, the history of the CBRC, and California birding localities. The name "Rare Birds" is somewhat misleading given that a large portion of the book is about California birding history. Perhaps "California Records History" would be more appropriate. In order to access the wealth of information for each review species within "Rare Birds," one must click on the Main List, then click on each species to access its status and distribution in the state. This search is somewhat confusing, and it might have been better if a separate tab for the species accounts had been created. Overall, however, the CBRC's website is very informative and allows viewers to access records easily.

The Oregon Bird Records Committee's (OBRC) website is part of the Oregon Birding Association's (OBA) website. This website allows birders to access both OBRC records and to explore OBA field trips, birding locations in Oregon, and additional information about birding in Oregon. OBRC records are sorted by species in an Excel spreadsheet, and each species is sorted by whether the record was accepted or not. The records are also located in a PDF file, updated in 2019, which provides an easy mechanism for locating records. The official Oregon bird checklist, as well as the review list, are easily found in a PDF file. One can submit written documentation directly to the OBRC through the website, but to submit a photograph, audio recording, or video, one must e-mail the secretary directly. I recommend that the OBRC alter its website to allow submission of photographs through that medium as well. There are no links to publications by the committee on the OBRC website or elsewhere on the OBA website. Publications are a crucial part of any bird record committee's output. Finally, the website does not provide any photographs of review species. Adding such photographs would enhance the user's experience.

The Washington Bird Records Committee's (WBRC) website is part of the Washington Ornithological Society's (WOS) website. Like the OBRC's website, it is simple, with a list of committee members, the official Washington checklist and

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review list, and a list of records assessed by the committee. The records can be found in an Excel spreadsheet and in PDF format. The PDF is much easier to search, and the records are split into accepted and not accepted. The WBRC's periodic reports dating back to 2009 are also included. The shortcomings of the website are similar to those of the OBRC website: photos, audio, and videos must be e-mailed to the committee, and there are no photographs of review species on the WBRC website or elsewhere on the WOS page.

The British Columbia Bird Records Committee's (BCBRC) website is a part of the British Columbia Field Ornithologists' (BCFO) website. The BCBRC website is excellent; there are tabs showing the committee's decisions and photographs of the birds representing accepted records on a quarterly basis. The main page links to PDF files in which all records are sorted by date and species. Unfortunately, the sightings have not been updated since August 2018. Most records have comments, further describing the bird's location, age, and sex, and identifying first provincial records. For example, the BCBRC incorporates comments like "possibly present as early [as] 29 September 2016; first confirmed BC record" and "undergoing prebasic molt." I would like to see these kinds of comments on other bird record committees' websites. The review list and forms for submission of records are easily found in the labeled tabs. However, it is difficult to get to the publications of the committee; one must first go to the publication of the BCFO (*British Columbia Birds*), then search the journal for the BCBRC. Having links to publications directly on the committee's tab would make the search easier.

The Arizona Bird Committee has its own website, which unfortunately does not do justice to the state's incredible wealth of birds. The state and review lists are easily found in the tabs, and publications are easily located as well. However, searching the database of records effectively is challenging. The only way the database can be sorted is by date, which is not very helpful when one tries to determine how many Arizona records there may be of a species. The county in which the bird was sighted is missing, and many localities are identified with opaque abbreviations such as "ROLA" and "ALSP" which are not defined. There is a "search for" option, but to search for Black Scoter records, for example, one must type in "Species" "equals" "Black Scoter." The database creates a separate entry for each submission of observations of a long-staying bird, which is confusing. For example, from the database, one might assume that Arizona has nine records of the White-throated Thrush. In reality, it has only two; the reason for this apparent discrepancy is that multiple people submitted documentation for the same bird. For the fall of 2019, there are four entries of the Long-tailed Jaeger at Lake Pleasant, but there is no way of knowing whether these represent one or four individuals. The database could be improved by refining the spreadsheet and formatting it similarly to those of other bird records committees.

The New Mexico Bird Records Committee's website is part of the New Mexico Ornithological Society's website. The website is simple, with four major features: the state checklist, review list, how to submit sightings, and publications. This committee's website includes a "sketch details" list—species that are unusual enough in the state to warrant documentation, but not rare enough to be considered a review species. I liked this unique feature, as it encourages birders to document all rarities—not just those on the review list. Unfortunately, there is no database on the website, though by selecting the option "publications" then "Field Notes database," reports in the *NMOS Field Notes* can be searched. New Mexico has the fourth-highest state list in the United States, and allowing birders to access records more easily may help the public become more aware of this underappreciated state. Also, sightings can not be submitted through the website; one must e-mail the committee's secretary with documentation.

The Colorado Bird Records Committee (CBRC) has its own website. The home page is dedicated to the mission of the committee, as well as submitting sightings.

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To submit a report to the committee directly, one must create a CBRC account. Although at first this seemed unnecessary to me, it allows birders to see in one place all records that they have submitted to the committee. The website also links to the committee's published annual reports, as well as a few interesting articles written by committee members, such as *Determining Status of the Cackling Goose in Colorado*. The database can be sorted by species, and then further sorted by date, observer, and county by means of the "Create Your Own Query" tab or the "Reports from the Data" tab. These two tabs serve essentially the same purpose. I prefer the "Reports from the Data" tab, since this option yields a photograph of the species. The "Create Your Own Query" tab does not show records when nonreview species are selected. Thus I feel the CBRC's options are confusingly redundant; I recommend the committee consider removing one of the tabs. Finally, the species are listed in taxonomic order, which changes, so searching for a species can take quite a while. Perhaps adding an alphabetical option, or simply allowing users to type in the species, would solve this problem.

The Nevada Bird Records Committee's (NBRC) website is a portion of the Great Basin Bird Observatory's website. The introductory page presents an overview, which includes a few photos, as well as the committee's purpose and contact point. The following page links to the state and review lists, which unfortunately can not be downloaded as a PDF file. Written documentation of rare birds can be submitted via the website, but photos must be e-mailed. The database is excellent, as it can be sorted alphabetically, taxonomically, and by record number. The database also includes photographs supporting each submission, which is an excellent feature. Finally, annual reports can be accessed.

The Utah Bird Records Committee (UBRC) website consists of a home page with many links. The first set of links details how to submit sightings to the committee, and the next set includes the state and review lists. A very helpful link is to the Review Species Table. By clicking the link, one can see maps of where review species have occurred in the past, as well as links to the bar charts at www.eBird.org to let the user know exactly when a review species is expected to occur in Utah. I would like to see other committees include a feature like this. The next set of links, labeled "sight records," is somewhat misleading; it is simply the database of Utah's rare birds rather than birds supported by sight records only (no photographs or specimens). I recommend the UBRC change "sight records" to simply "records." The database is viewable only taxonomically. Finally, the last set of links goes to "special features," highlighting articles about difficult field identification problems, and once more detailing maps and bar charts of review species. Overall, the website offers a wealth of information, though it can be difficult to navigate because of everything being presented on one page.

The Idaho Bird Records Committee (IBRC) maintains its own website with multiple tabs. One links to a downloadable checklist, another to the review list. The next tab links to the excellent database, which is easily sorted by species and by county. My only complaint is that the website does not specify whether a record is accepted or rejected. Presumably, this means all records in the database were accepted, but it would be nice to know for sure. Finally, another excellent part of the website is the "history" tab. It leads to a history of the IBRC, important figures, and a history of how the database of Idaho rare bird records was created.

The Montana Bird Records Committee's (MBRC) website is a tab within the Montana Bird Advocacy's website. The website is rather basic, consisting of state and review lists, as well as annual reports. There is also a photo gallery of rare birds. The website lacks the option of querying a database, which prevents birders from gaining a clear understanding of Montana's rare bird records.

The website of the Hawaii Bird Records Committee, founded in 2014, is linked from the Western Field Ornithologists website. The first two tabs are dedicated to the

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history of the committee. The official Hawaii checklist is also found on the website, and review species are marked with an “X.” The committee’s only published report is linked at the “published reports” tab. I would like to see this website expanded to include a link to a database that can be queried, to allow observers to submit documentation through the website, and to show photos of Hawaiian birds. Adding these features may increase awareness of the island’s birdlife and attract more birders to Hawaii.

Bird record committees’ databases allow birders and researchers to access data of rare bird sightings, but these databases also rely on the birding community to submit sightings with proper documentation. To encourage the birding community to submit their sightings and contribute to citizen science, these websites should be easy to use and should offer information about records of rare birds, as do the websites of the British Columbia, California, Colorado, and Utah committees. Some states and provinces, namely, Wyoming, Alaska, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Yukon Territory, and Northwest Territory, do not have a website, perhaps because of a relatively low number of birders.

Websites:

California: <https://californiabirds.org>

Oregon: <https://oregonbirding.org/oregon-bird-records-committee>

Washington: <http://wos.org/records>

British Columbia: <https://bcfo.ca/bc-bird-records-committee-sightings-database>

Arizona: <http://abc.azfo.org>

New Mexico: <http://www.nmbirds.org/nmbrc>

Colorado: <https://cobrc.org>

Nevada: <https://gbbo.org/nbrc>

Utah: <http://utahbirds.org/RecCom>

Idaho: <https://ibrc.idahobirds.net>

Montana: <https://montanabirdadvocacy.org/about-mbrc>

Hawaii: <https://westernfieldornithologists.org/HBRC/news.php>