

Grass River Natural Area eBird data

by Richard Sanderson 10/20/2014

Purpose. BirdBlitz data on eBird adds to the scientific data base and provides a way for GRNA birders to find where and when species of birds are visiting GRNA. It also provides a very convenient way for birders to track and store their own bird sightings.

GRNA BirdBlitz. In the last 4 years Grass River Natural Area (GRNA) has conducted a count of birds present at GRNA during the breeding season on the 2nd Saturday in June beginning about 6:30am. The counts were conducted by dividing the 1443 acres into 17 BirdBlitz areas with teams 1 to 4 birders of all experience levels assigned to each area (at least on advanced birder in each group). In addition to these area counts, birds were counted in the week before or after the walking counts by boat on the Grass River. Detailed data for each individual count has been retained in "xlsx" computer files and is also available on eBird.

eBird is a real-time, online checklist program, and it has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird now contains millions of bird sightings and it provides a rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution. For more information open ebird.com and select "About" or "Help" at the top of the page.

eBird Basics. For those unfamiliar with eBird, data is entered on the eBird website using a "Checklist" of the actual record of the birds seen by an individual or small group on a birding expedition over a relatively small area and at one time. When entered, this data can then be searched and analyzed by any eBird user. Data from a number of parties, such as the BirdBlitz can be entered separately for each "group-area-date" (Personal Location Checklist) and then combined for an "eBird Hotspot" without duplication of the data.

Locations. There are two types of location used by eBird to record where birds where seen, "Ebird Hotspots" and "Personal Locations".

Ebird Hotspots are selected prime birding locations used by many birders to enter and retrieve "Checklist" data by any registered user of eBird. These can be seen by signing into eBird (any account) then select "Explore Data", "Explore Hotspots", then entering "Grass River Natural Area" in the box labeled "Hotspot". **"Grass River Natural Area, Antrim, US- MI"** is an "eBird Hotspot" currently containing 52 checklists from 31 registered eBirders with 131 species submitted since 2004.

Personal Locations. In addition to "eBird Hotspots" registered eBird "Users" can also create and name "Personal Locations" (private) using lat/log coordinates to locate the birding location. They can then enter "Checklists" for these areas when they go birding. Most of the "Checklists" data is available to eBird professional for research as well as a personal record for each birder. New "Personal Locations" for each BirdBlitz area such as "GRNA- 1 Algonquin", "GRNA- 2 Chippewa", etc. have been created. There are total of 41 "Checklists" for the 4 years of the BirdBlitz.

Using eBird for Grass River Natural Area There are many ways of entering, sharing and reviewing bird walk data using eBird. The chart "Using **Ebird Data for Grass River Natural Area.pdf** has step-by-step procedures for many of the eBird uses tailored for Grass River. For an overview on using eBird also see "Becoming an eBirder" (<http://www.detroitaudubon.org/014/01406Flyway.pdf> page 5), an excellent article by fellow GRNA birder, Curt Hofer.

eBird Procedures for Grass River Natural Area:

Creating an eBird Account. (Procedure 1) Follow the steps going across the page for on the chart. You can create your own account name, but the email address must be an active address. With your own account you can easily keep track of when and where you have seen birds and thus create a Life List that can be selected by species, place, month, year, etc.

Entering Bird Counts. (Procedures 2, 3 and 4) The basic method for entering data for a bird count is an eBird Checklist. These procedures describe the methods for entering data for a Grass River bird walk (2) or for a bird walk somewhere else (3). A new computer program (4) for entering bird sightings directly onto a smart phone or tablet while in the field is now available. This program called "BirdLog" is free and is available for Android, or Apple (phone or tablet) by Google searching "birdlog". There is also an excellent tutorial for using it.

View/Edit/ Delete Checklists. (Procedure 5) Once you have entered a Checklist or had one shared to you, you can View, Edit, or Delete that Checklist. Please note that only a person signed in to your account with your name and password can change your Checklists. When you delete a Checklist it is gone and cannot be recovered (unless it has been shared).

Sharing Checklists. (Procedures 6, 7 and 17) You can "Share" your Checklist with fellow travelers (6) on a walk so that only one person needs to enter the data. In addition Checklists for "GRNA Trails" can be shared to (17) or from (7) your account. When you change a Checklist shared to you only your copy is changed not the original Checklist.

My Locations. (Procedures 8-11 and 15) For a list of "My Locations" or to edit a Location Name, Lat/Lon or to Merge two Locations use (8). All "My Locations" must be added to your account. The main way to add a Location is to submit a Checklist for birding at that Location or by having a Checklist with a new Location shared to your account. You can add all the GRNA Trails to your account by signing in as GRNA Trails (17) and by sharing a checklist for each Trail to your account. If you don't want the count data added to your Lifelist, simply delete the Checklist after adding it (Note 3).

Where did you Bird? (Procedures 3, 8, 9-11) When you start to enter a Checklist you are asked "Where did you Bird?" It offers many choices to use an existing Location (3) or add a new one (9-11). "Find it on a map" is usually easiest for most new Locations.

Bar Charts. (Procedures 13,14) All Bar Charts are essentially counts of bird species submitted to eBird by Month for a Specific Region and Time Period. Options include: the Location (County(s), Hotpot(s), My Location(s)) and Date Range.

Species Maps. (Procedures 14,15) Species Maps for a specific species can be created using the <Species Maps> option in <Explore Data>. Options include: Species, Date Range and Region. Individual Checklists can be viewed for each Location on the map by selecting the <Point> icon on the Map. This map can also be created from a Bar Chart by selecting a species <Map> icon on the Bar Chart. If a common species is chosen, this becomes a **Location Map** for most Birders submitting Checklists for the Region. You can also use this method to find Observers and Locations (chose Checklists) for unusual birds or recent sightings (Red <Point> icons).

Species Checklist Lists. (Procedures 2,3,13,17) are list of **Checklists** for a Region (2, 13). Generally only one Checklist is shown for each species, but the species shown can be changed by changing the criteria, i.e.: Last seen, First Seen, High Count, and Recent Visits. Procedure (17) allows a County to be selected as a Region, but this can be changed by selecting a Hotspot when the List is showing.

Viewing Checklist. (Procedures 2,3,5,12,13,14,15,17) Checklists can be viewed in a wide variety of ways. All "your" personal Checklists (any signed in account including GRNA Trails) can be viewed, edited, shared or deleted using <My eBird>, <Manage my Observations> (5).

Many other Checklists can be viewed for a single Species (without comments) but cannot be altered. To view these Checklists use Species Maps (14,15) (select a <Point> icon) or Species Checklist Lists (2,3,13,17) (select a species-date).

Note that most Checklists for a Region can be found using <Species Map> (14,15) by selecting a common bird for most habitats such as a Blue Jay or American Crow. You can also use this method for finding Checklists showing Locations and Observers for unusual birds and recent sightings.