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Please visit the newly redesigned Bird Observer website at
<<http://massbird.org/birdobserver/>>.

Thanks to all of you who responded to our December Reader Survey. To date we have received more than 100 responses from subscribers who have been birding on average for twenty-eight years. You have been wonderfully supportive and we appreciate your ideas and comments. Quite a few questions were received about the Bird Sightings section — the section that lists birds reported over a two-month period. There will undoubtedly always be a lively interest in these records and the names associated with them (at least this has been true since the journal's inception in 1973). In response to the current survey commentary, however, Marj Rines offers the following:


“The purpose of the Sightings section is twofold. First, we try to provide our readers with an ornithological snapshot of a two-month period. Rarities are always included, but the compilers also try to offer a broader seasonal picture: When did the first migrants show up? When were the big fallout days? When did the last of the migrants move off? How successful was the breeding season? Were any unique breeding species recorded, or was there a decline in any breeding species? Were there any irruptions of winter finches, or other special events among wintering birds?

“The second purpose of the Sightings is to provide an historical perspective. Over the years, various journals have published Massachusetts bird sightings, but when the *Records of New England Birds* (published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society until 1968) was discontinued, a vacuum was created in this ornithological record. While *Bird News of Western Massachusetts* was initiated in 1966, it did not publish eastern Massachusetts reports, and *Bird Observer* was created to fill the void. The publication of bird records is essential to understanding the avifauna of any region. A perusal of Veit and Petersen's *Birds of Massachusetts* provides clear evidence of the importance of maintaining a continuous published record.

“Another question from our survey respondents pertained to how the published records are collected and selected. Many observers e-mail their records directly to *Bird Observer* as text files that can be imported directly into our database. Others send reports by "snail mail." Reports to the Massachusetts Audubon Society, submitted for inclusion on the Voice of Audubon, are also noted. Finally, reports are collected from Massbird.

“We carefully review the compiled data and select those records that best reflect the snapshot discussed above. Regrettably we have to omit many records. The compilers receive thousands of reports every month, and these need to be pared down to a manageable length. With rarities and temporal anomalies, the documentation provided needs to be carefully evaluated before the sighting is published.

“*Bird Observer* is occasionally criticized for seemingly including a disproportionate number of records from a handful of observers. This is not by design, but neither is it a coincidence. Some birders simply spend more time in the field than others or else they cover certain birding areas more thoroughly than other birders do.”

If you have further questions about the reporting process at *Bird Observer*, feel free to contact Marj Rines for more information. We encourage birders to submit their reports directly to *Bird Observer*. Information on how to do this can be found at: <http://massbird.org/birdobserver/sightings/>. 

Brooke Stevens
Editor