

## COMMENTARY

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Following up on the essay by Patten et al. (*W. Birds* 26:54–64), I would like to illuminate some of their comments from a local perspective. There are a number of things that local groups (e. g., the Sacramento Audubon Society) can do on a small scale (e. g., Sacramento County and the greater Sacramento area) to improve our knowledge of the distribution of California's birds. Sacramento Audubon maintains a file of observations, volunteered by members, that dates back to the early 1950s. We welcome written reports (submission encouraged on a monthly basis) of any observations members feel are noteworthy, as well as reports of the more unusual birds on a bird-report phone line. Since 1986, reported observations have been entered in a computer data base, and, over time, we hope to enter all pre-1986 records into this data base as well. Data for two local Christmas Bird Counts (Sacramento and Folsom) are also maintained in computer files. Sacramento Audubon has a records committee modeled on the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) that compiles and reviews local reports of species of rare or unseasonal species not reviewed by the CBRC. Finally, Sacramento Audubon volunteers recently completed collecting data for a Sacramento County breeding-bird atlas, the results of which are in preparation. The level of effort is not up to that of some California counties, but it is probably better than most, if only because there is a relatively high density of observers in the Sacramento area.

Now, at the risk of sounding as if I am crying in my birdseed, I'd like to discuss some of the problems faced in implementing this system. First, very few people report observations on a regular basis, and because the majority of these report only rarities and find the phone line more convenient, only two or three submit written reports on a monthly basis. The use of bird "hot lines" in recent years has also exacerbated another problem—the tendency of people to bird in mobs, visit the same old birder-worn locales, and call up the tape when planning a day afield, rather than to go out exploring new places on their own. Finally, there is a tendency for those who become adept at identifying birds to grow restless with the local scene and start traveling further and further in search of new birds. Thus many of the local birders best qualified to assist on the Sacramento County breeding-bird atlas were too busy chasing rarities and visiting other countries to be of much use, and few have shown any interest in doing library research or data analysis in order to speed publication of the results.

But even if the system for data collection and analysis for Sacramento County, rudimentary as it is, were to flourish beyond our wildest expectations, it would still be operating to a great extent in isolation, rather than in an integrated statewide network of such local systems. At present, the data collected in computer files, summarized and edited four times a year and submitted, as a printout, to the regional editors for *National Audubon Society Field Notes*, is copied by hand into the regional "books." The overworked and unpaid regional editors are months behind in this task, and faced with tight restrictions on the lengths of their published summaries are often limited to discussing only the rarities in print.

Is the situation hopeless? I don't think so, but agree with Patten et al. that progress won't come easily. WFO sponsors the CBRC and occasionally other efforts to integrate field ornithology statewide (e. g., a series of county bird-atlas workshops at recent WFO meetings). Whether under the WFO banner or another banner yet to be unfurled, the challenge to us all is to expand this effort greatly and develop a useful system to compile, analyze, and integrate fine-scale data on the distribution and status of California birds.