

# ABA RECORDING RULES AND INTERPRETATIONS

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## ABA Recording Rules (as amended 1999)

Members who submit lifelist and annual list totals to the American Birding Association for publication in the annual ABA List Report must observe the ABA Recording Rules. Many non-members who enjoy maintaining lists find these rules useful.

A bird included in totals submitted for ABA lists must have been encountered in accordance with the following ABA Recording Rules.

- (1) The bird must have been within the prescribed area and time-period when encountered.
- (2) The bird must have been a species currently accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee for lists within its area, or by the A.O.U. Checklist for lists outside the ABA area and within the A.O.U. area, or by Clements for all other areas.
- (3) The bird must have been alive, wild, and unrestrained when encountered.
- (4) Diagnostic field-marks for the bird, sufficient to identify to species, must have been seen and/or heard and/or documented by the recorder at the time of the encounter.
- (5) The bird must have been encountered under conditions that conform to the ABA Code of Birding Ethics.

## Interpretations of the Recording Rules

originally published in the 1996, and modified in 1999, 2003, and 2004 by the ABA Recording Standards & Ethics Committee

The five ABA Recording Rules should define what is countable in the vast majority of circumstances. The ABA Recording Standards & Ethics Committee has developed the following definitions and interpretations to guide recorders in those few special situations where the Rules may not be sufficiently comprehensive.

### **RULE 1: The bird must have been within the prescribed area and time-period when encountered.**

A. *Within* means that the bird must be within the prescribed area when observed, although the observer need not be. For example, if an observer on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande identifies a bird across the river on the Mexican side, the bird may be counted on his Mexican list but not on his ABA Area list.

B. Prescribed area and time period are defined for the particular list:

(i) ABA Checklist Area is defined in the current ABA Checklist as the 49 continental United States, Canada, the French islands of St. Pierre et Miquelon, and adjacent waters to a distance of 200 miles from land or half the distance to a neighboring country, whichever is less. Excluded by these boundaries are the Bahamas, Hawaii, and Greenland.

(ii) A subarea of the ABA Checklist Area, or other prescribed area, is as defined by its legal boundaries. If not legally defined otherwise, it includes adjacent waters (rivers, lakes, bays, sounds, etc.) out to half the distance to a neighboring area, but not beyond 200 miles.

(iii) Birds observed on or over an ocean are counted for the area having jurisdiction over the nearest land, if within 200 miles.

### **RULE 2: The bird must have been a species currently accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee for lists within its area, or by the**

### **A.O.U. Checklist for lists outside the ABA area and within the A.O.U. area, or by Clements for all other areas.**

A. *Species* means that each full species is counted only once on most ABA lists. Additional subspecies or color morphs are not counted as additional entries except on lists specifically defined to include such identifiable forms.

B. *currently accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee* means:

(i) the species must be (a) included in the current published ABA Checklist, as modified by subsequent Supplements, or (b) formally accepted by the ABA Checklist Committee for inclusion in the next published ABA Checklist or Supplement. Species listed as "species of hypothetical origin" and species that have been deleted from the main ABA Checklist are NOT considered to be accepted;

(ii) an indigenous species currently accepted by the Checklist Committee but observed in the past when it was not considered a valid full species may be counted;

(iii) an introduced species may be counted only where and when it meets the ABA Checklist's definition for being an established population. An introduced species observed well away from the accepted geographic area is not counted if it is more likely to be a local escape or release rather than an individual straying from the distant population;

(iv) an indigenous species which is reintroduced into an historic range of the species may be counted when the population meets the ABA Checklist's definition of being established or when it is not possible to reasonably separate the reintroduced individuals from naturally occurring individuals;

(v) hybrids are not countable. Any bird with physical characteristics outside the natural range of variation for the species and clearly suggesting that it is a hybrid should be treated as a hybrid under ABA Rules. Songs in passerines are learned behavior and should not be used as evidence of hybridization;

C. **A.O.U. Check-list** means the latest edition of the A.O.U. Checklist and its Supplements.

D. **Clements** means the latest edition of "Birds of the World: A Check List", by James F. Clements, and its Supplements.

E. The taxonomic status of a bird as a full species, and thus its countability, is determined by the standard for the list on which the bird is to be counted. The ABA Checklist is the standard for all list areas contained completely within its area. The A.O.U. Check-list is the standard for all list areas contained completely within its area, and with at least some portion outside the ABA Checklist area. Clements is the standard for all list areas with at least some portion outside the A.O.U. Check-list area. (Updated supplements will be issued annually for the ABA Checklist, the A.O.U. Check-list and Clements.) Thus, it is possible that two birds seen in the continental USA would be counted as one species on state and ABA Area lists, and as two species on a World List, or vice versa (from *Winging It*, October 1992, p. 20).

F. Updated supplements will be issued annually for the ABA Checklist, the A.O.U. Checklist, and Clements. Should updating supplements be overdue by one year for any of these three standards, recorders may petition the ABA Recording Rules Committee for exceptions to the standards, based on recent publication of a significant taxonomic change.

**RULE 3: The bird must have been alive, wild, and unrestrained when encountered.**

A. **"Alive"** means after hatching. Eggs are not counted as live birds.

B. **"Wild"** means that the bird's occurrence at the time and place of observation is not because it, or its recent ancestors, has ever been transported or otherwise assisted by man.

(i) An otherwise wild bird that voluntarily uses or is attracted to a feeder, nest box, tape recorder, ship at sea, or other nonnatural device without being captured is still considered to be wild. Physical contact between an observer and a bird does not automatically preclude a bird from being counted, as there are situations where wild birds have learned to eat from outstretched hands, or have used people as temporary perches.

(ii) A species observed far from its normal range may be counted if in the observer's best judgment and knowledge it arrived there unassisted by man. A wild bird following or riding a ship at sea, without being captured, is considered to be traveling unassisted by man.

(iii) Birds descendant from escapes or released birds are considered "wild" when they are part of a population which meets the ABA definition of an established introduced population.

(iv) A bird that is not wild and which later moves unassisted to a new location or undergoes a natural migration is still not wild.

C. **"Unrestrained"** means not held captive in a cage, trap, mistnet, hand, or by any other means and not under the influence of such captivity. A bird is considered under the influence of captivity after its release until it regains the activities and movements of a bird which has not been captured.

(i) A bird is under the influence of captivity during its initial flight away from its release point and during subsequent activity reasonably influenced by the captivity, such as initial perching and preening or early sleeping or roosting near the release point.

(ii) A nocturnal species released during daylight which goes to roost near the point of release is considered under the influence of captivity until the next nightfall, when it has left its roost and begun normal nocturnal activities.

(iii) A wild bird that is injured, sick, oiled, or otherwise incapacitated, but which retains a reasonable freedom of movement, may be counted.

(iv) Banders working on licenced projects under proper permits may count, for their personal lists, the birds that they band, without the restrictions described in (i) and (ii).

D. **"When observed"** means that a bird alive and unrestrained when observed, but which later dies or is collected or captured, may be counted.

**RULE 4: Diagnostic field-marks for the bird, sufficient to identify to species, must have been seen and/or heard and/or documented by the recorder at the time of the encounter.**

A. **"Diagnostic field-marks"** means the natural characteristics needed to uniquely determine the species of the bird while it is wild and unrestrained. It is not necessary to experience every possible field mark, but simply sufficient field marks to eliminate the possibility of the bird being any other species.

(i) Identification is not valid if it is based on nonnatural characteristics, such as an injury, anomalous plumage modification, a leg band, or other artificial marking.

(ii) Identification of the bird may be made subsequent to the initial encounter. It is not always possible to secure a positive identification initially, but, using physical and/or written documentation made at the time of the encounter, identification is sometimes possible after the fact, upon consultation with references and/or other authorities. In rare, tricky identifications, for example, photographs sometimes reveal minute, yet critical, details, that were not visible during the initial encounter. Furthermore, our knowledge of how to separate similar species in the field is continually advancing. On rare occasions a species may not be identifiable until after it has been captured and studied in the hand, or feather and blood samples analysed. In such instances of "after-the-fact" ID, the bird may be counted on one's life-list.

(iii) Since all recorders, from time to time, have birds pointed out and identified to them by others, it is not necessary that the recorder be the one who identifies the bird species, merely that he/she sees and/or hears sufficient diagnostic field marks at the time of the encounter.

B. For a first encounter with a species, no matter which list is involved, identification may be by sight or sound. The sighting or sounding may be brief, but in combination, field marks seen or heard must be sufficiently distinctive to distinguish the bird from all other species. Recorders must also assure themselves that tape recordings are not being mistaken for birds. In any situation for any list, a species may not be counted if the attempts to see or hear the bird are in violation of the ethical provisions of Rule 5.

C. **"By the recorder"** means that the recorder himself/herself must discern the distinguishing characteristics either visually or audibly. The recorder's identification is not valid if it is based on characteristics seen, heard, or recognized by another person but not by the recorder, or if the recorder does not recognize the characteristics seen or heard as being uniquely distinctive to the particular species.

**RULE 5: The bird must have been encountered under conditions that conform to the ABA Code of Birding Ethics.**

A. **"ABA Code of Birding Ethics"** means the Code of Ethics adopted officially by the ABA at the time of the observation.