

SPRING BIRD COUNT 2020 and COVID-19

The Spring Bird Count is still on and scheduled for May 9th. Obviously the COVID-19 pandemic will influence this year's count.

First and foremost, staying safe, and keeping others safe, should be a priority of all while counting birds. If you do not feel comfortable, please do not feel compelled to participate in the Spring Bird Count. Below we outline 1) small changes in how to record surveying effort in and around your house, and 2) safety considerations / recommendations.

Collecting data on birds in our yard / neighborhood

While we know many participants have their favorite birding areas, this year those sites may be closed, social distancing may preclude visiting the location, or it may be too far to safely visit. Because many people may be conducting the SBC from their yard or neighborhood, we have added a new "line" item to the data form to record miles walked and hours spent birding from "House/Nearby". These data will provide for an interesting comparison in future years.

2) Safety considerations / recommendations

While we do not know how restrictions might change once the governor's shelter in place order expires at the end of the April, we highly suggest adhering to these recommendations.

1. **Travel safely.** If you plan to use a vehicle to travel, please do so only with those you have been in close contact with (in most cases only those you have been living with). Also, *"The American Hiking Society recommends staying within 50 miles of home to avoid having to stop for gas, restroom breaks, etc. Many if not most public bathroom facilities are closed, so even driving a short distance — especially with kids — is rolling the dice. Wherever you go, bring hand sanitizer and plan on not being able to use a restroom — that might mean not driving anywhere and staying within walking distance of your own residence. Stay away from popular parks and trails; closure of state parks may overcrowd county parks, forcing their closure as well. If you can't get to a less popular park, stick to walking around your neighborhood..."*
2. **Maintain distance.** If you are birding near others (whether they are birders or not), maintain **at least 6 feet** of space between yourself and other people at all times. Again, only travel with those you have been living with, or in close contact with.
3. **Avoid touching communal surfaces.** Wash hands frequently and use hand sanitizers.
4. **Respect restrictions and closures.** Check ahead of time to determine if your intended destination is open. Given that recommendations are subject to change, plan your survey in accordance with the latest recommendations from your local authorities. **Please respect all closings, and do not attempt to enter an area that is closed to the public. All IDNR properties are currently closed as mandated by the governor (do not contact the site supervisors as they can't open the park, even if they**

wanted to). We understand that many sites in northeastern Illinois are closed, and this might provide the opportunity to collect data around your house.

5. **Be aware of your surroundings.** Some landowners are a bit more suspicious these days; please be careful if you are doing roadside stops, or neighborhood birding.

We realize this year's Spring Bird Count will be very different than those prior, but we hope that volunteers can make the most of the count and know that the data collected are still useful. For those that elect not to participate, it will be time for the 2021 SBC before you know it, and we look forward to your future participation.

Thank you and be safe!

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