



Tucson Bird Count Instructions

Please read all instructions prior to surveying your route(s). Adherence to these instructions will lead to more accurate and useful results.

Preparation

Refamiliarize yourself with the birds of Tucson. A list of most of the birds expected (and songs, photos, etc.) can be found at the Tucson Bird ID Center (on the TBC web page, www.tucsonbirds.org)

Scouting

Most sites have been surveyed before, and thus have details on their location (if they don't, please provide/improve location information and send it in with your data sheets). For those few sites that have not been surveyed before, precautions have been taken to place sites along straightforward driving paths (where roads are available), and to avoid placing sites in inaccessible areas. Unless you are already familiar with each site on your route, scout your route to uncover any potential problems. Try to reach your site via public roads. If a site is in a large area with no public access, you may make arrangements in advance to access the site.

Site Access and Site Relocation

In the event that a site on your route is not accessible (in a yard, in a restricted area, etc.), choose an alternate site as close as possible to the original site on your route map. Do not attempt to conduct counts on any property without consent of the owner, and only count on private property if no publicly accessible location is nearby. If the original site is in a yard or alley, move it to the nearest publicly accessible spot (street, park, etc). If you move a site, mark the exact location of the new site on your route map with a red 'X' and the Site ID number, and submit details on new site location, providing GPS coordinates if possible. Your markings will be used to update sites in computerized TBC maps for data analysis and for locating the same site in future years.

Equipment Checklist

transportation (car or bike for roaded areas, boots for more 'remote' areas)	
GPS unit	(Recommended for all routes, <i>required</i> if your route includes any sites away from roads. The TBC has several available for check-out. Call a few days in advance to make arrangements.)
binoculars	pencil (dark) or pen (dark ink)
watch with second hand or timer	TBC instructions, route map, and data sheets
field guide	street or topo map of area around your route
clipboard	TBC business card and/or "Bird Count" sign for your car
Water, sunscreen, hat, etc. A few routes have remote sites, plan accordingly and do not do remote routes alone.	

When to Run Routes

Survey your route on a morning of your choosing during the survey period, April 15 - May 15. Many routes have one or more sites near roads that are noisy with weekday traffic; weekend mornings generally provide better counting conditions. To maximize detections, surveys should be conducted between 30 minutes prior to sunrise and 4 hours after.

Starting & Traversing Sites in a Route

Choose a path connecting all the sites along your route in a way that will minimize (roughly) your total travel time (Site ID numbers are for identification only; you don't need to survey them in numerical order). Begin counting at your first site as close to sunrise as possible (as early as 30 min before sunrise). No counting should take place more than 4 hours after sunrise. If all sites along a route are not surveyed within this time, survey unfinished sites another morning. Report that this was done in the "Notes" section of your data sheet, with a brief explanation (e.g., "sites x, y, and z involved hiking").

Acceptable Weather

Occasional light drizzle or a brief shower may be acceptable, but fog, steady drizzle, or prolonged rain should be avoided. Counts should not be done if the wind exceeds 12 mph (loose paper and dust are raised, small branches on trees move).

Tucson Bird Count Instructions, cont'd

Counting Birds

Point Counts: Only one observer should conduct the 5-minute point count at each site. Count from a stationary point outside of a car. Count every bird seen or heard by the primary observer during the 5-minute period. Birds any distance from the observer should be counted. However, do not count birds that are known or strongly suspected to have been counted at a previous site. For large groups of birds, estimate the number. Do not exceed 5 minutes because you are sure a certain "good bird" is there and not calling — valid negative data are as important as positive in this survey. If you observe, but do not identify, a bird during a point count, it's OK to spend time after the point count working on the ID. Record such birds as being in the point count. Don't use any method of coaxing birds ("spishing", tape playback). It's important that all point counts be done consistently to produce reliable results.

Supplemental Observations: Birds detected by other observers in the group, detected outside the 5-minute window, or detected during your transit between sites, should be recorded in the Supplemental Observations ("Supp.") column (see Recording Data, below). In general, it is only necessary to record in the Supp. column those species that were not observed already during the Point Count for that site.

Rare or Unusual Birds: Any species rare in SE Arizona or unusual in the area being surveyed should be supported by including some details of the observation in the "Notes" section. Include all features you used to determine ID.

Temporary Noise, Interruptions

If a temporary noise (e.g., passing car) or interruption (e.g., inquisitive resident) interferes with your ability to count birds at a site, pause the count (and the clock) for the duration of the interruption, and resume counting when the interruption has passed. Total time counting birds (that is, *not* including interruptions) for the point count should be 5 minutes. Birds observed during an interruption, but not otherwise during the 5-minute count, should be reported in the Supplemental Observations column.

Constant Excessive Noise

If constant noise interferes with your observations at a site, try to return to survey the site on a morning when it's quieter. The goal is to accurately survey birds at *all* sites — documenting the birds in a parking lot is as useful as recording the birds in a wash. Thus, surveying the original site at another time is preferable to moving the site. If returning is impractical, move up to 50 walking paces (but no more) to a spot where the noise is reduced. Report noisy conditions (see Recording Data, below).

Submitting Data

Please submit your data within one week of your count date. If possible, enter your data on the TBC web site (address below). This will (1) reduce errors in putting data into the computer, and (2) distribute the burden on TBC "staff", improving the ability of the TBC to continue/expand in future years. **Whether you submit online or not, please mail (1) your Route Map, (2) updated site locations, and (3) all completed Route Data Forms to the address below.** You may wish also to keep a copy for your records.

Mail completed forms to:

TBC, c/o Rachel McCaffrey
School of Natural Resources
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ 85721

Contact Information

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact the TBC Project Coordinator, Rachel McCaffrey.

(520) 730-3218

rachmcc@email.arizona.edu

Tucson Bird Count web page:

<http://www.tucsonbirds.org>

Tucson Bird Count Instructions, cont'd

Recording Data

This section details the fields on the *TBC Route Data Form* sheets. Record all data on these sheets, up to 4 sites per sheet. Use as many sheets as are required for your route, but don't include sites from more than one route on the same sheet.

ROUTE section:

Record the **Route Number** and **Primary Observer** name on each sheet, and names of **Others Present** on the route's first sheet.

SITE section:

Site ID #.

Each site gets a column. Write the full Site ID number here.

Date & Site start time.

For each site, record the date, and the time at which the point count was started.

Site Status.

Check one box. Check "new or moved" if the site is in a physically different location from previous years.

Site Location.

Site at which point count is conducted. **This description must accurately describe the count location to within 30 feet.** This information will be used to ensure that future TBC's count birds at the same locations. If the site has been surveyed before, please correct or improve the location description, or write "same" if the description cannot be improved. For new sites or locations which need clarification, descriptions differ for sites near and far from streets:

Sites on or near streets. Report the adjacent street address (e.g., "in front of 4549 E Cooper St") or nearest street or wash intersection. Report side of street or corner of intersection (e.g., "20 ft SE of SE corner of Broadway and Randolph"). If no marked address is near, record distance and direction along street from nearest street or street/wash intersection (e.g., "30 m W of Via Esperanza in Arroyo Chico Wash"). Include any nearby landmarks, especially those likely to appear on maps (e.g., "Ft. Lowell Park, 100 ft NE of parking lot"). Including GPS coordinates (in addition to the above) is preferred, though not essential if detailed street/wash locations are provided.

Sites far from streets. Determine the site location with a GPS unit. Report the coordinates in UTM projection (e.g., "507692 3564318") using the WGS84 datum. If you are unable to use UTM coordinates or the WGS84 datum, you *must* report the datum your GPS unit used. See "Equipment Checklist" above for info on checking out a GPS unit. Please call if you have questions regarding coordinate systems on any GPS unit.

Noise level.

Moderate = your ability to detect birds by sound is hindered somewhat; extreme = hindered almost completely.

NOTES section:

Use this section for details of site relocations, sightings of unusual species, recording accessibility issues (e.g., "in the middle of golf course, receive permission from clubhouse or call 555-5555 in advance"), or any other important information about a site. Begin any notes with the relevant Site ID number.

BIRDS section:

Write the **Site ID #** at the top of each column. Some common/widespread Tucson species are already listed. In the **Point Count** column, record the number of individuals of each species seen/heard during the 5-minute point count. In the **Supp.** column, record supplemental bird observations (species seen outside of Point Counts that weren't also observed in the Point Count; see Counting Birds, above). If you use tick marks to tally birds as you observe them, be sure to also write a distinct arabic number of individuals for each species observed, and circle it to avoid confusion.

Species	Point Count	Supp.
House Sparrow	7	
Hooded Oriole	1	
Blue Grosbeak		1

In this example, the 7 sparrows and oriole were observed during the point count. The grosbeak, seen after the point count, is recorded in the Supplemental Observations ("Supp.") column.

WRITE-INS section:

Write in the name of any species observed that's not already listed. Record counts as in BIRDS section. Record details supporting observations of unusual birds in the Notes section.