

# 2026



## **2026 World Series of Birding Rules of Competition**

All rules apply to Level I Bird Conservation and Level III Zeiss Youth Birding Challenge teams.

Level II NJ Audubon Ambassador teams need not adhere to every rule and may adopt those rules that foster a fun and rewarding WSB experience based on their birding skills.

New Jersey Audubon's World Series of Birding strives for inclusivity and welcomes all participants. Some rules have been modified or clarified toward this goal.

**ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST BE FAMILIAR WITH THE RULES IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE.**

### **I. Ethics**

First and foremost, no birds should be disturbed in any way to gain a verifiable identification (ID).

Each participant must maintain proper birding ethics at all times as defined in the [ABA Code of Birding Ethics](#).

Teams and individual team members visiting private properties, National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) or other identified places must abide by the landowners' rules and regulations including securing permits and adhering to up-to-date access instructions. See below for information specific to Great Swamp NWR and the New Jersey Meadowlands.

The primary interests of all teams should be the welfare of the birds and safety of all participants. No birds may be disturbed or harassed at any time before or during the event. While not a complete list, harassment/disturbance includes getting too close to sensitive species such as nesting raptors, flushing birds from nests or cavities or wet areas, and/or spotlighting birds during nighttime hours. See New Jersey's Listing of State and Federally Endangered and Threatened Species <https://www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/tandespp.htm>, or the comparable list in your state if participating as a Level II NJ Audubon Ambassador out of state.

If you witness a participant disturbing birds, you should lodge a “Call of Foul.” See information later in this document.

## **II. Team and Participant Fundraising Pages**

The World Series of Birding is New Jersey Audubon’s largest fundraiser of the year and the vast majority of participants are raising money for New Jersey Audubon. In the spirit of conservation, New Jersey Audubon allows other non-profit bird and wildlife conservation organizations to participate and use the World Series of Birding as a fundraising platform, and many do with great success.

In order to participate and raise money for another organization, teams from other organizations must register as non-NJA fundraising teams in the Level I Bird Conservation Challenge and pay entry fees of \$100 per team member. This selection is apparent at the very beginning of the registration process. Online fundraising is disabled for those teams as NJA will not collect and/or disburse funds to other organizations.

Everyone fundraising for New Jersey Audubon should populate their personal Participant Center page with photographs and information as soon as possible and no later than two weeks before the event. Team starters can populate the Team Pages with photographs and information. The new registration system makes online fundraising easy and fun!

## **III. Participants – What Makes a Team?**

An individual can be part of only one team.

All participants must be listed on a team via online registration by 12 midnight on Friday, May 9th. Unregistered team members contributing to identification on Level I or Level III teams during the WSB will disqualify the team.

Bird Conservation Challenge (Level I): All team members must be at least 18 years of age. Teams must consist of a minimum of 3, but not more than 6 members. Designated drivers are not included in the team total and cannot contribute to bird identification.

NJ Audubon (NJA) Ambassador Challenge (Level II): Team members can be any age. Teams can be as few as 1 person and there is no upper limit of the number of team members.

Youth Birding Challenge (Level III): Team members must be age 18 or younger. Teams must select a Division within the Youth Birding Challenge. Divisions are defined by grade, not age. Teams must consist of a minimum of 3, but not more than 6 members. Designated drivers and/or mentors are not included in the team total and cannot contribute to bird identification.

In addition:

- Youth teams in Divisions A, B and D must have an adult mentor present in the field tracking the accuracy of bird identification. Mentors must register for the WSB, although no fees are required. The mentor is assigned the task of keeping the checklist, checking accuracy and ensuring the list is submitted by the end of the time limit for the Division.
- See details of for each Youth Division here.

The deadline to have a team name listed on the back of the official 2026 WSB T-Shirt is Monday, April 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### **IV. Team Conduct**

Teams must have a minimum of three individuals in the field when actively identifying birds, excluding designated drivers or youth mentors.

Team members may leave for reasons of health, fatigue or safety, and can return as they are able. The 95% Rule (see below) applies to the remaining team members in their absence.

Team members must remain at distances that permit direct, unamplified voice contact at all times. Yelling and shouting disturbs birds and fellow participants and may lead to disqualification.

Any number of non-birding individuals may accompany a team, but these individuals cannot assist the team in any way in the location or identification of birds.

#### **V. Geographic Area of Competition (Including info on Great Swamp and Meadowlands)**

Level I and Level III teams must conduct their counts only within the boundaries of the State of New Jersey. Level II teams can count birds in any location and in more than one geographic area.

A team may cross into a neighboring state for convenience, or expedience, but no bird may be counted until the team member is back in New Jersey. In New Jersey, birds seen in the Delaware or Hudson Rivers may be counted providing the observer is standing in New Jersey or short of midpoint on any bridge. Birds seen in the Delaware Bay or in the Atlantic Ocean to a distance of 100 miles may be counted as long as the team is within New Jersey territorial waters.

During scouting and on WSB day, teams wishing to access the Great Swamp NWR during evening hours and/or access otherwise restricted areas, as well as teams wishing to access otherwise restricted areas of the New Jersey Meadowlands, such as Harrier Meadow, must supply specific information to WSB organizers in advance and no later than

May 3<sup>rd</sup>. If you wish to access those areas, please email [wsb@njudubon.org](mailto:wsb@njudubon.org) and a link to a brief online form will be forwarded to you. In most cases, the team captain can supply the necessary information but please be advised that all license plates for vehicles on the properties must be supplied. WSB organizers are responsible for providing this information to the property managers at these sites in advance. Your cooperation is appreciated.

## **VI. Travel during WSB**

All vehicles except aircraft may be used during the competition. Those competing in the Carbon Footprint Cup or Carbon Free Kids categories may not use any motorized conveyances from the time they begin birding until they finish.

Participants are not required to travel in the same vehicle, so long as team members are within unamplified voice range when identifying birds.

All team members must comply with the traffic rules and laws that apply to their state. Failure to do so will result in team disqualification.

## **VII. End-of-Day Reporting**

eBird Trip Reports are the preferred method of submitting checklists and are required in Levels I and III. Teams should appoint an official designee who will set up the Trip Report in advance and submit the Trip Report link to WSB organizers in advance. All Trip Report links for Level I and Level III teams must be submitted by Thursday night, May 7<sup>th</sup> at midnight.

When a team has stopped birding and double checked their Trip Report, they must send an email to [wsb@njudubon.org](mailto:wsb@njudubon.org) listing their total. Organizers will then check the total against the Trip Report using the link provided previously. **For Level I and Level III teams, once the final tally has been reviewed and accepted by WSB organizers, the team's Trip Report link will be posted next to its Total Species Count on the WSB website.** Trip Report links for Level II NJ Audubon Ambassador teams will be posted within one week after the event.

Teams in the Level II NJ Audubon Ambassador Challenge are highly encouraged to use eBird Trip Reports even if team members are from more than one state. Otherwise, checklists for Level II teams can consist of the Pocket Checklist available on the WSB website or an eBird individual checklist. If a team is compiling a list from numerous locations, please submit a total number via email by midnight, and be prepared to provide back-up upon request. Do not submit multiple lists.

The bottom line is that WSB organizers should receive an email stating the final tally from a representative of each and every team by midnight (or earlier for Youth Division A, B and D). Competitive team results (Levels 1, 1a and 3) will be posted on the WSB website early Sunday morning prior to the Brunch. Ambassador team results will be posted as soon as

possible. Please note, species in checklists not submitted via eBird Trip Reports will not be included in the cumulative checklist for the event.

In the event of a tie between two teams in a competitive category (Levels I, Ia and III), the recognition will be shared.

### **VIII. Counting and the 95% Rule**

Birds counted must be alive, wild and unrestrained. Sick, injured or oiled birds may be counted if still at large in the countryside and not in captive confinement. Eggs do not count as birds.

Birds must be conclusively identified by sight or sound.

The object of the game is for all team members to identify every bird tallied. WSB allows for the occasional miss with the 95% Rule. See below.

Count only full species as defined and indicated by eBird. Non-native or re-established species may only be counted in accordance with the current Bird Records Committee list in your state. Flagged species must include a written description at minimum in eBird, and a photo or audio recording if possible. Flagged species do not appear as such in the final eBird Trip Report, so please list Flagged Species in your end-of-day email to [wsb@njudubon.org](mailto:wsb@njudubon.org). All rarities will be vetted by the WSB Judge; the judge's decisions are final as they relate to the WSB, even if they are later negated by an eBird reviewer.

If using the Pocket Checklist for NJ, please write in birds that don't appear on the list and be prepared to provide additional information upon request.

A bird identified as to one of a species or group (i.e. scaup either greater or lesser) may be counted as a species, if no other bird in that group appears on your list. FOR EXAMPLE: Scaup, sp. counts as one bird. Greater Scaup and Scaup, sp. still counts as one bird. Greater Scaup and Lesser Scaup count as two species. Sensitive species, such as Long-eared Owl, will not appear on an eBird checklist in order to protect the specific location. Your end of day email is your opportunity to note any such species, such as "WSB Total 151, 150 on eBird Trip Report plus 1 Long-eared Owl at undisclosed location."

The 95% Rule: Ninety-five percent of all birds identified by a team must be identified by all members of the team. However, it is not necessary for all team members to record the same individual bird of any species. In other words, for every twenty birds recorded, one bird may be counted that was identified by fewer than every member of the team, but by at least two members.

- Example: Three team members ID a Belted Kingfisher and the fourth does not, the 95% rule applies. If the fourth team member and at least one other team member later identify a different Belted Kingfisher, the 95% rule can be lifted.
- Example: Nocturnal Flight Calls (NFCs) present challenges to even the most experienced birders. A team may have one or two NFC experts, but unless all team members can confirm the ID based on sound alone, the species should be counted as a 95% bird if it is identified by at least two team members, or not counted if it is identified by only one team member.

Team members who are legally blind are reliant on birding by ear. Birds that are not vocalizing can be counted by the majority of team members and don't qualify toward the 95% rule when all remaining team members agree on the ID. Likewise, team members who communicate primarily using American Sign Language (ASL) or who use a Cochlear implant do not have to identify birds that are identified by sound by others. These birds can be counted by the team, and don't qualify toward the 95% rule when all remaining members agree on the ID.

## **IX. Use of Electronics and Advanced Devices**

The WSB does not allow the use of electronic or recorded calls to attract birds or entice them to vocalize. This includes iPhones, iPads, any hand-held phones, or similar devices. Using such devices may result in the elimination of the entire team. Only "pishing" is allowed.

Teams should be able to identify species by sight or sound unaided. Tools such as Merlin ID, birding by ear recordings and field guides can only be used to confirm or negate an identification; not as the primary source of the identification.

Electronic aids can be used for identification only while practicing and during scouting. Whenever playing a recording of a bird call, please do so away from birds in the wild; preferably indoors or inside a vehicle with windows closed.

Audio enhancement devices, other than personal hearing aids, may not be used. Digital Thermal Imaging scopes may not be used during the WSB. Both are acceptable during scouting.

The use of spotlights, Q-beams or other bright hand-held lights is strictly prohibited at any time during the scouting and during the WSB. Small, handheld flashlights may be used as needed for personal safety only (i.e. walking trails or local streets at night).

## **X. Sharing Information**

While the World Series of Birding is a competitive event, the event organizers encourage collaboration and sharing of information using open-source or globally-accessible platforms such as eBird, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other non-pay-for-service list serves and bird alerts, such as the WSB GroupMe chat. It is prohibited to privately share information between individuals other than team members or between members of one or two teams (i.e. texting a sighting to a participant on another team without sharing broadly).

Certain locations are likely to be occupied by more than one team at a time, such as the Cape May Springwatch platform, Heislerville WMA and/or Forsythe NWR. Whenever possible, birds being shared by participants in proximity to each other should also be shared with all on a globally-accessible platform, such as the GroupMe chat group set up by the WSB organizers.

## **XI. World Series of Birding Branding Requirements**

All teams are required to refer to this event as “New Jersey Audubon’s World Series of Birding.” Teams raising funds for organizations other than New Jersey Audubon must be officially registered for the event, follow all rules, and reference the event properly while using the official logo. Please see Branding Requirements on the Rules/Forms tab on the WSB website.

## **XII. Call of Foul and Protest**

*Note: A Call of Foul relates to a team or individual not following the rules, whereas a Protest refers to contesting a team’s species total. In either case, issues should be brought to the attention of WSB organizers ([wsb@njudubon.org](mailto:wsb@njudubon.org)) immediately and no later than 36 hours after the completion of the event.*

The WSB strives to maintain the highest ethical standards. All participants in this event are, by the nature of their participation, committed to this ideal. Likewise, accuracy and honesty are fundamental to birding and this event.

If a team or individual team member is perceived to be NOT following WSB rules (either during scouting or on the day of the event), a “Call of Foul” should be brought to WSB event organizers for review and action. If any team’s final count is suspect, any *registered* WSB participant may file a “Protest” with WSB event organizers. Allegations will be reviewed by a panel of New Jersey Audubon staff and other individuals deemed necessary to review the protest and make a determination.

During the scouting period one week prior to the event, any rules violation should be reported immediately in the form of a written Call of Foul sent to [wsb@njudubon.org](mailto:wsb@njudubon.org). Action in the form of a warning or penalty to the team or individual in

question will be determined by the WSB event organizers. Photographic and/or video documentation, as well as the corroboration of others, will be taken into consideration. The final decision is the sole responsibility of WSB event organizers.

If a violation occurs during the event, a written Call of Foul must be received by event organizers no later than 12 noon on the Monday following the event (May 12, 2025). The affected team's Captain will be given 5 business days to present a defense of the allegations and the WSB panel will make a ruling within 5 business days of receipt. Because of time considerations, a Call of Foul or Protest may not affect team standings in the days following the event. However, if the evidence warrants, the organizers are empowered to adjust a team's standing and/or disqualify a team at a later date.

In the event allegations related to a Call of Foul are found to have substance, the team and its members, or an individual team member, will be banned from WSB participation for a minimum of one year. If the infraction is assessed to have given the team unfair advantage, their record for the year in which the infraction occurred will be voided.

In the event that allegations related to a "protest" are found to have substance, then the following may happen depending on severity: 1) the team's total is adjusted to delete suspect birds from the team list, 2) the team is disqualified; its total, standing and any awards nullified, and/or 3) the team and/or its members may be banned from any number of future competitions.