

# 2026



## **2026 Level I Bird Conservation Challenge Categories**

The Level I Bird Conservation Challenge is designed for teams who want to compete for trophies in each of the categories listed below. In addition, any team raising money for a conservation organization other than New Jersey Audubon must register in Level I.

A team participating in the Bird Conservation Challenge (Level I) must designate the category in which they are competing, and each team can compete in only one category.

### **I. Category One: Boundless Birding**

Boundless Birding teams must begin and end their routes anywhere within the state of New Jersey. They may bird the entire state, or choose a region, watershed, etc. to achieve the highest total number of species.

### **II. Category Two: Limited Geographic Area (LGA)**

The “Limited Geographic Area” (LGA) category is open to any team that restricts its birding to a single New Jersey county, except Cape May County, which has its own category.

The LGA competition recognizes the team that achieves the highest percentage of “par” for a single county. A par value, ie. the number of species likely to occur in a given New Jersey county in early May, has been established for each county and they are listed below. To be clear, team totals in this category will not be compared as absolute values, but as a percentage of the established county par.

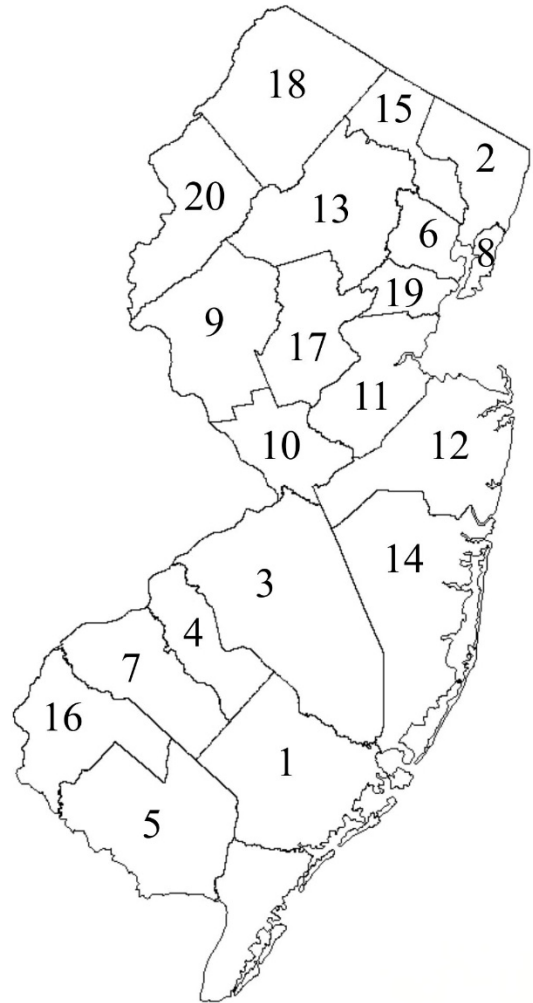
$$(\# \text{ OF SPECIES} / \text{PAR}) \times 100 = \% \text{ OF PAR}$$

Example: Team A birds Atlantic County and records 175 species. Par for that county is 193, giving them a value of 90.7% of par. Team B birds Passaic County and records 140 species. Par for Passaic County is 151. Team B wins, as they recorded 92.7% of par.

EXAMPLE: The fictional Splendiferous County par is 100, and Team Birddog wins the LGA with 104 species in 2018. Therefore, the par is raised to 102 for the following year.

All par values are revisited every five years. A county par value will be raised in the interim years only if the par is exceeded. If exceeded, the par will be increased to the midpoint between the current par and the team’s new record.

	<b>World Series of Birding County Pars</b>		
	<b>Updated 2026</b>		
	<b>County</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2026</b>
1	Atlantic	184	188
2	Bergen	163	157
3	Burlington	158	158
4	Camden	141	141
5	Cumberland	174	174
6	Essex	129	142
7	Gloucester	154	154
8	Hudson	146	140
9	Hunterdon	139	144
10	Mercer	142	134
11	Middlesex	155	152
12	Monmouth	181	185
13	Morris	144	145
14	Ocean	185	185
15	Passaic	142	142
16	Salem	169	165
17	Somerset	146	144
18	Sussex	172	165
19	Union	155	155
20	Warren	160	158



County pars are updated every five years. They were updated for 2026 using both data from eBird checklists for each county, and the judgement of birding experts in each county.

### III. Category Three: Cape May County Only

Best known for its vast concentrations of migrants, over 400 species of birds have been recorded in Cape May County. More than 200 species have been seen in a single day – evidence of its everyday avian wealth. An array of habitat types and a wealth of protected

natural areas make Cape May County and the Delaware Bayshore a birding region for all seasons, and especially during the World Series of Birding at the peak of spring migration. Teams may roam or be stationed anywhere in Cape May County.

Because of its manageable size and abundant birding opportunities, this is a popular category!

#### **IV. Category Four: Cape Island**

The very tip of Cape May is separated by the rest of the Cape May Peninsula by the Intracoastal Waterway, also known as the Cape May Canal. Known locally as “Cape Island,” most of the 400+ species that have been seen over time in Cape May County have been seen here. A triangular wedge, Cape Island is about 6 square miles and contains birding hotspots like Higbee Beach WMA, Hidden Valley, The Beanery, The Nature Conservancy’s South Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge (aka. “The Meadows”), and Cape May Point State Park, to name a few. Teams may roam the island as they choose.

#### **V. Category Five: Big Stay**

A World Series of Birding “Big Stay” requires that you remain in just one place and tally as many bird species as your team can see or hear in a single day from that single outdoor location.

Rules Specific to Big Stay (All other competition rules and ethics apply)

1. Observations may only be made from within the boundary of an outdoor count circle whose diameter does not exceed 17 feet. The same count circle must be used for the team for the entire Big Stay.
2. Only birds seen or heard and positively identified while team members are in the count circle may be counted (no leaving the circle for “ground- truthing”).
3. Team members must remain in the count circle for as long as they choose to compete, within the framework of the 24-hour count period. If any team member leaves the circle for a brief absence, any birds counted in their absence are subject to the 95% Rule. If a team member needs to leave for a longer period of time for reasons of health and safety, as outlined in the WSB Rules of Competition, the 95% rule applies to the remaining team members.
4. For any given Big Stay location, the team that registers first is entitled to the site. Other teams must select a different spot.

## **VI. Category Six: Carbon Footprint Cup**

When participating in the Carbon Footprint Cup (CFC) teams may walk, run, bike, skate, row a boat, kayak, etc., but may not use any mode of motorized transportation while finding species.

Rules Specific to the Carbon Footprint Cup (All other competition rules and ethics apply)

1. Once team members are in place and have begun birding, no mode of motorized transportation may be used. Team members may walk, run, bike, skate, use any type of non-motorized boat (canoe, kayak, etc.) or any combination throughout the event. Motorized transportation, if any, may be used only up to the point when the team begins birding and after they have stopped birding for the event.
2. Any species seen or heard while using motorized transportation may not be counted.
3. Any CFC team member counting species while operating or riding in any motorized transportation during the competition will disqualify the entire team.