# 3 Steps to Using eBird

New to eBird? This document will help you more easily and accurately report your bird sightings. If you'd like some additional information, or to see a video walkthrough on using eBird, visit eBird's online support page.

① Selecting your Birding Location

CHOOSING THE BEST LOCATION

For every list, make sure to choose a location on the map that correctly represents where you were birding. In most public lands in Virginia, there will be pre-existing eBird Hotspots to choose from: places that have been marked as birding destinations by fellow eBirders. If your birding fits with a hotspot region, we recommend using the hotspot.

Some locations may have many hotspots. If you birded throughout Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge, you don't want to select the hotspot that refers just to the Back Bay NWR Seaside Trail—choose the hotspot Back Bay NWR.
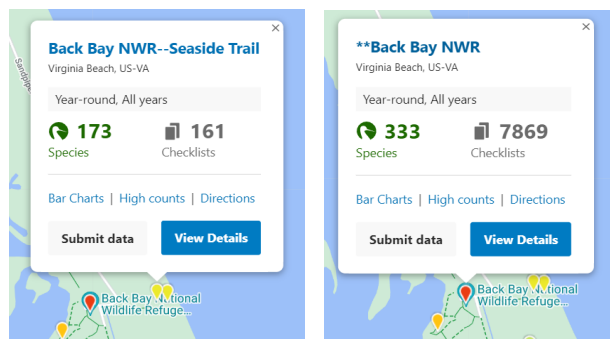
On the other hand, if you only recorded the species right around the Seaside Trail, select that specific hotspot.

If there is no existing hotspot referring to the public land you are birding, you can create a new location, called a 'Personal Location'. Please ensure that the name you choose is accurate and appropriate for the property you are birding.

TRAVELING DISTANCES

If you are traveling long distances on foot or by car and making many stops along a road, you'll need to decide when to stop tallying your checklist and start a new one. eBird Mobile will automatically keep track of your distance traveled for you. Two guidelines will help: **start a new list when you enter a new habitat, and keep checklist distance to 8km (5mi) or less.** If you travel through fields for two miles and then enter a patch of forest, it is the perfect time to stop the current list and start a new one for the new habitat.

If you're using eBird Mobile tracking, the app will automatically figure out the correct distance for you. You can still edit your track before submitting if you forget to end your checklist. If you are entering your checklist on the website, you should always report the unique distance traveled. For example, walking out and back along a 5km (3mi) trail should be reported as a 5km (3mi) checklist, not 10km (6mi).

eBird Mobile uses automated tracking to make it easy to know your location. This option uses your phone's GPS to track your travels during the time you're compiling a checklist. It gives you a running tally of distance covered that helps you know when you've traveled far enough that you should start a new list. For your next eBird Mobile list, make sure that the "tracking" toggle is on. The GPS track stops when you end a checklist, but if you forget to stop and leave the track running, you can edit the start and end points of the track before submitting your checklist.

❷ Creating and Sharing a Checklist

TYPES OF CHECKLISTS

TRAVELING – This type of checklist will be used for a majority of the competition. Choose the traveling checklist type when you traveled a specific distance—walking a trail, driving a refuge loop, taking a boat tour, or leading a group down the road. eBird Mobile's built-in distance calculation is the best way to get an accurate distance. If you don't use eBird Mobile, you'll need to calculate the distance traveled and enter this into your checklist. Note: If you go out and back on the same trail, the distance reported should be your **unique distance**: 5km (3mi) for a 5k trail, not 10km (6mi).

STATIONARY - Stationary checklist means you stayed at a **fixed location**—perhaps counting from an overlook or listening for owls in a public land parking lot. Total travel was less than 30m (100ft) in any one direction. When eBird Mobile "tracking" is on, it will automatically set your observation type to "stationary" if you stay in the same place for the duration of your list.

ARE YOU REPORTING ALL SPECIES?

For every eBird checklist you'll answer the simple question, "Are you reporting all species?" If you answer "Yes," it does **not** mean that you're detecting every bird that was present at the place you were birding—that's pretty much impossible! All it means is that you are reporting all species you and your team were able to identify, by sight and sound, to the best of **your** ability. What the question really asks is: are you reporting everything you identified, or just reporting a "highlight reel" of some birds and intentionally omitting House Sparrows, Rock Pigeons, or other common species? As long as you aren't intentionally leaving anything off the checklist, you're submitting a complete checklist. For the purposes of the Virginia Birding Classic, you should always report every sighting and answer "Yes".

SHARING CHECKLISTS

When you're out with your Virginia Birding Classic team, your group should only submit one checklist per location. Then eBird checklist sharing will copy a version of the original list into other accounts, after which anyone can edit their personal version of the checklist without affecting other versions. This reduces reporting duplicate data to eBird.

❸ Entering Sightings into your Checklist

EBIRD MOBILE PRO TIP: QUICK ENTRY

"Quick Entry" speeds up data entry on the go. It uses the search bar at the top of the eBird Mobile list to let you type something like "5 goose." This pulls up all of the birds that have "goose" in their name, and then adds 5 to the tally of whichever species you tap on. You can also do "5 canada" or even "5 cago," and a simple tap adds it to your list. Learn more about Quick Entry.

SPECIES DOTS IDENTIFY UNCOMMON BIRDS

In the eBird Mobile app, when you select a species to add to your checklist, you might notice an orange semi-circle or red circle icon next to the species name. An orange semi-circle indicates that a species is infrequently observed at a particular location and time of year. A red dot means that a species has never been reported to eBird at that location at that time of year. The eBird Help Center has more information on these colored dots.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NOT SURE OF AN ID

Need to take a quick look at a field guide to check an ID? If you have the Merlin Bird ID app installed, you can quickly access photos, sounds, and information about a species directly from the eBird app. Just tap a species, then the Merlin icon, and eBird will open right to the information page for the species you are adding.

If you're still not sure of an ID, that's not a problem. Sometimes you just have to let go and not count a bird if you aren't certain. It's always better to err on the side of caution. eBird lets you report "spuhs" (birds only identified to the group or family level, such as hawk sp.) and "slashes" (birds only identified to one of a 2-3 species group). So if you see a distant flock of ducks that you aren't sure of, you should use "duck sp." Or if you see a hawk and you know it was a Sharp-shinned or Cooper's, but not which one, you should use the "slash" option: Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk. Recording birds like this ensure you're reporting a complete checklist. Per the rules, a bird identified as 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. Lesser scaup and scaup sp. still counts as just one bird species.

MAKE IT COUNT!

When you're entering an eBird checklist, we recommend counting the number of individuals you find instead of just marking that the bird was present with an "X." While this won't be reflected in your VA Birding Classic results, it magnifies the value of the Citizen Science data you are collecting. When possible, count birds individually. You don't have to count large flocks one by one—estimates are okay. The important thing is providing the closest estimate you can, even if it's a ballpark figure. Please remember to err on the side of caution. Also, it's far better to have an estimate than an X, which could mean 1 or 1,000,000. Remember that a count of "1" in eBird always means one and exactly one. Please don't use a "1" to indicate an "X." Some high counts may be noteworthy and require comments: please add information on how you identified the birds and how you arrived at the count, such as "counted by 10s" or "counted individually as they flew overhead." Check out eBird counting tips for more information.

EBIRD RARITIES AND HIGH COUNTS

Sometimes, when entering your checklist into eBird, an entry may be "flagged," indicating that one or more of the species you've entered is either rare for that location and/or date, or you may have entered a number for a species that is considered unusually high. This means more information is needed to ensure that the sighting is correctly documented so researchers, conservationists, and other birders can refer to it with confidence.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE A FLAG

When you see a flag appear on your checklist, describe what you're observing with as much detail as possible, including the bird's appearance, behavior, habitat, and vocalizations. It's also useful to note how you eliminated similar species that might be more common. If you're not fully confident in the ID, report the species as a "spuh" or "slash" instead.

You might also see a flag for an unusually high count of a common species. In this situation, describe how you reached your count and whether your number is precise or an estimate. Include notes such as whether all birds were in the same flock, as well how you determined the species. You can enter these notes directly in the species comments of your checklist.

Taking a photo or sound recording is a very helpful way to back up your observation. Merlin Bird ID is a great tool for quickly making a recording of a bird and even distant, blurry photos and noisy recordings can help others understand your experience, so upload them to your checklist.

FOLLOW-UP ON YOUR UNUSUAL OBSERVATION

Once you submit a checklist with a flagged species, a volunteer regional reviewer will look at it. The reviewer is there to verify your observation, so don't be surprised if they follow up with you to learn more about your unusual report. The more unusual the observation, the more documentation is necessary to verify it. It's possible that a reviewer will conclude an observation doesn't have enough supporting details to appear publicly in eBird. This happens to all of us, even the most experienced birders. Every species you report will appear as part of your personal birding activity, regardless of its public visibility.

SUMMARIZE YOUR OBSERVATIONS WITH EBIRD TRIP REPORTS

eBird Trip Reports combine your eBird checklists into a comprehensive summary of where you went and the birds you found, along with your photos and audio recordings. It provides data on when and where species were seen along a route. See the VA Birding Classic Trip Report .pdf for more information and detailed instructions on how to generate and share your team's Trip Report.

eBird Trip Report Tutorial

Trip Reports are a great way to aggregate a group of checklists. For the Virginia Birding Classic, we will use your team's shared Trip Report to evaluate your team's results.
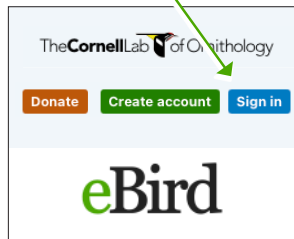
1 Go Birding!

Once your team's 24 hours of birding on public lands is complete, its time to generate a Trip Report.
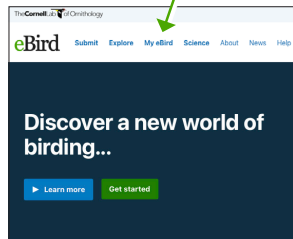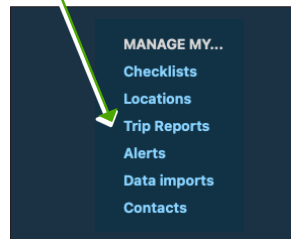
2 Create a New Trip Report

Here's how:

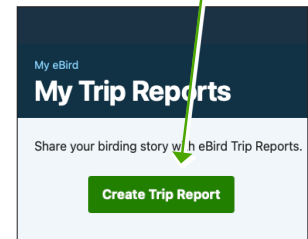**A** Go to **ebird.org** and **sign in** to your eBird account.

B Click on the **My eBird** tab on the eBird home page.

C On the left side column under **MANAGE MY...** click on **Trip Reports.**

D Click on the **Create Trip Report** button.

3 Naming the Trip Report

A For the **Name** field, use the following format: "[Your Team Name Here], Virginia Birding Classic, [year]."

B **Start date and time** are the 24 consecutive hours in which your team completed their competition run.

C **List Visibility** should be set to "Public."

Create Trip Report

Name
Name of Trip Report

[Your Team Name Here], Virginia Birding Classic, [year]

Maximum length of 256 characters

Dates

Start date	Start time	End date	End time
	12:00 AM		11:59 PM

Maximum duration of 31 days

Visibility

○ Limited
The Trip Report is visible only to you and the people you invite to join. To view the Trip Report, you must be logged in to your eBird account.

○ Link-only
The Trip Report will not appear on any future outputs on public eBird pages or in search results, and the Trip Report is visible to anyone who visits the link.

● Public
The Trip Report may appear on public eBird pages (regions, hotspots, your profile) and in search results.

④ Adding People to the Trip Report

A On the left side of the screen, under eBird username, click the arrow on the **Edit** button, and then click on **Add people**. This can be used to add members of your team.

B Under the **People to invite** box, enter email addresses or eBird usernames of all team members. If you have entered them in the past for any checklist, their name should come up under **Contacts**. **(IMPORTANT: Be sure to click the blue INVITE button to finish sending the invitations.)**

C You can then scroll down to the bottom of the **Add people / Manage people** page to see everyone you invited, who has accepted your invitation, and who is still pending.

D Once someone accepts your invitation to join the Trip Report, any checklists they submitted during the Trip Report time period will also be added to the report. Lists that do not count towards your team's final tally should be excluded (see below).
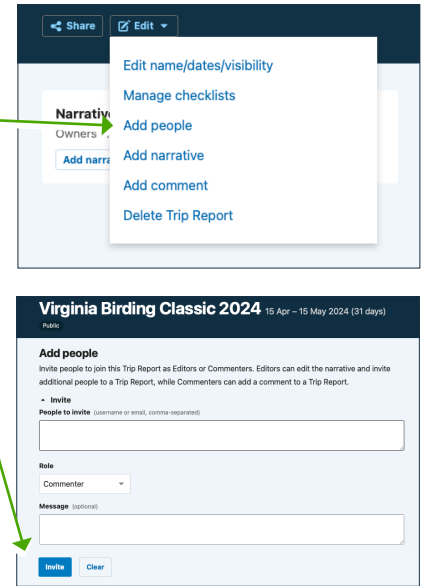
> *NOTE: Adding someone to a Trip Report does not automatically add your checklists to their account. To easily share checklists with other members of the team, use the Bulk Checklist Sharing tool (under **Edit > Manage people**) after they accept your invitation to join the Trip Report.*

⑤ Remove Disallowed or Uncountable Checklists

All checklists submitted by or shared with the user generating the Trip Report within the Trip Report time period will be automatically included in the Trip Report. Lists that will not count toward your team's final tally—such as lists generated while not on public lands (i.e. while driving between properties)—should be excluded from the Trip Report.
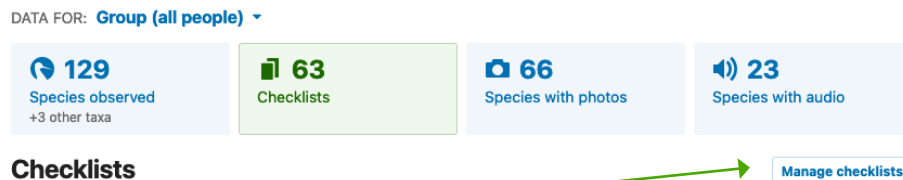
A To remove checklists from a Trip Report, click on the blue **Checklists** box. Then select **Manage checklists**. You can also tap **Edit > Manage Checklists** to the left of the **Trip Report** map.

B You can now choose which checklists to include in your final team submission for VA Birding Classic. Uncheck boxes to exclude those lists from your Trip Report totals. Remember to choose **Save and view Trip Report** when you've made your changes.

⑥ Share Your Final Trip Report

On the main page for your Trip Report, click the **Share** button below the Trip Report name, date, and participant information. Email the resultant link to: max.goldman@dwr.virginia.gov.

For more information on eBird Trip Reports, please visit this help page:
support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001201565-ebird-trip-reports