

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ):

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I. General Information

1. What is Phenology?

Phenology is the study of recurring plant and animal life cycle stages, or phenophases, such as leafing and flowering of plants, maturation of agricultural crops, emergence of insects, and migration of birds. Many of these events are sensitive to climatic variation and change, and are simple to observe and record.

2. What is the Bird Phenology Program (BPP)?

The North American Bird Phenology Program, part of the USA-National Phenology Network, was a network of volunteer observers who recorded information on first arrival dates, maximum abundance, and departure dates of migratory birds across North America. Active between 1880 and 1970, the program was coordinated by the Federal government and sponsored by the American Ornithologists' Union. It exists now as a historic collection of six million migration card observations, illuminating almost a century of migration patterns and population status of birds. Today, in an innovative project to curate the data and make them publically available, the records are being scanned and placed on the internet, where volunteers worldwide transcribe these records and add them into a database for analysis.

3. How does the BPP work?

BPP relies heavily on the participation of citizen scientists. We currently house millions of cards which have been prioritized and scanned. We then rely solely on volunteers to transcribe that data into our database using our online transcription system. Once cards are transcribed and sent into the database, the information can be analyzed, revealing changes in migratory bird patterns.

4. What is an AOU number?

AOU stands for the American Ornithologist Union. The AOU created an official source on the taxonomy of birds; assigning a 3-digit notation for each species. AOU numbers are still accurate but no longer commonly used. Today scientists commonly use a four-letter ALPHA code to denote a species. Infrequently, you will see an AOU number with a decimal point to denote a subspecies.

5. What is the USA- National Phenology Network?

The USA National Phenology Network (USA-NPN) monitors the influence of climate on the phenology of plants, animals, and landscapes. The organization does this by encouraging people to observe phenological events like leaf out, flowering, migrations, and egg laying, and by providing a place for people to enter, store, and share their observations. The USA-NPN also work with researchers to develop tools and techniques to use these observations to support a wide range of decisions made routinely by citizens, managers, scientists and others, including decisions related to allergies, wildfires, water, and conservation.

6. How is the BPP integrated with the USA- National Phenology Network?

The USA- NPN collects phenological observations of plants and animals in cooperation with existing phenology monitoring programs, with the aim to increase our understanding of how the phenologies of organisms and landscapes respond to environmental variation and climate change. The goals of the USA-NPN and the BPP align naturally. In particular, the USA-NPN database will provide an ideal location to store the BPP data, making it publicly accessible and integrating it with other phenological data. Also, the BPP methods for digitizing historical data will be adapted to digitize other historical datasets of phenology data. The USA-NPN's relationships with numerous government agencies, academic institutions, nongovernmental programs, and other organizations, and its knowledge of many key historical datasets, will facilitate the use of the BPP's digitization techniques to rescue important data.

7. How can I get Bird Phenology Program Data?

BPP data is available and openly accessible to the public and scientific community!
If you are interested in downloading data, go to: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bpp/BPPData.cfm>.
Additional records will be added to the website as they become available.

8. How do I get involved?

There are several ways to take part with the BPP. Historical migration cards are currently being scanned and are available on the BPP website (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bpp/). You can become one of the many volunteers from around the world to sign onto our site and transcribe these records for our database. This will allow the migration records to become accessible for analysis. Also, if you live in the Baltimore-Washington area and would like to volunteer in the BPP office we welcome you to come and take part in this program. Please contact the BPP office at bpp@usgs.gov for more information.

9. How do I sign up for the newsletter?

Please visit registration page, scroll down under the form. Please enter your email address in the text box under "Sign up for the BPP E-Newsletter" and click go.

10. How do I unsubscribe from the newsletter?

When you receive a newsletter and wish to unsubscribe, scroll to the bottom of the newsletter and click "Rapid removal with SafeUnsubscribe."

11. How do I recover a lost username or password?

Re-register on the registration page. When completed email the BPP office to have your card transcription tally moved to your new registration.

II. Transcribing Basics

1. How do I become a participant?

To begin transcribing cards, click here to complete our simple registration form. You will receive an email to the email address provided in the registration form. Click on the link in the confirmation link to confirm your registration and bring you to the transcription page. This link can be clicked only once. Once you have registered, you will be asked to watch a 15 minute training video which will teach you the process of transcribing the migration cards. You can access the training video here.

2. How does the transcribing process work?

After login into our online transcription system your first migration card will appear in the top left portion of your screen. Follow the instructions that you have received in the training video to enter the data appropriately in the available fields. If you have any problems, please review the training video again, look at our FAQ page or contact the BPP Office at bpp@usgs.gov. Please enter the information on the card exactly as you see it. Do not correct spelling mistakes or any other errors you may see.

3. How does the BPP ensure the accuracy of each card?

Each migration card is entered twice by different people to insure quality control. The two records are compared, if they match, the data is sent into the database, if the data does not match, it stays in the system for a third transcription.

4. Why are there different types of cards?

Records were collected during a ninety year span and was coordinated by several different scientists. As each coordinator took leadership of the program, the format of the observation changed slightly. Wells Cooke, who began the program, transcribed each card by hand. Fred Lincoln later created the migration card chart. Chandler Robbins added fields to the chart to include the number of trips the observer took and the largest number of wintering and breeding pairs. Lastly is the "field report file" in which scientists transcribed their sometimes lengthy observations in the field from their field notebooks to a migration card.

5. How can I find out how many cards I have transcribed, how many cards are available for transcription and how many cards have been scanned?

On the top of the transcription page there are stat bars which you can mouse over to get updated card counts. Simply press the My Stats button. The number of cards transcribed in your session is always displayed on the screen without pressing the button.

6. What happens to the information I transcribe?

All of the useable data is submitted to the final database and will be released to the public on the Download Data webpage (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bpp/BPPData.cfm>). At the request of some researchers, some sample datasets have been copied from the database are being used in upcoming publications. Take a look at our Research webpage to learn about how the data is being used, <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bpp/Research2.cfm>.

III. Troubleshooting Migration Cards

Please remember to transcribe exactly what you see! Do not correct observer names, bird species, spelling and punctuation or modernize words.

PROBLEM:	SOLUTION:
1. Breeding	
Migration card says "some years"	Under Breeds? Select "Yes" In Observer Notes write "Breeds: some years"
Migration card says "common"	Under Breeds? Select "Yes" Under Commonness? select "Common" In Observer Notes write "Breeds: common"
Migration card says "rare"	In Breeds? select "Yes" Under Commonness? select "Rare" In Observer Notes write "Breeds: rare"
Migration card says "plen"	In Breeds? select "Yes" Under Commonness? select "abundant" In Observer Notes write "Breeds: plen"
Migration card contains a check mark in the breeding column	Under Breeds? select "Yes"
Migration card does not mention breeding	Skip Breeds? field when transcribing card If you accidentally select "Yes" under Breeds? go back to that field and select "Unknown"
2. Commonness	
Migration card says something different than choices offered in the menu. Ex: Migration card says "Common in migration"	In Observer Notes write the information provided such as "Common in migration"
3. Event Observation Data	
Migration card says "Nest [Date] 3/27"	*If this is the only date given, in Problem with Card? Select "Not an Arrival Card" *If there are other non-nest dates given, transcribe as usual and then in Observer Notes write "Nest[Date] 3/27"
Migration card says "Seen from May 15-23"	Under First Seen enter "May 15" Under Last Seen enter "May 23" In Observer Notes write "May 15-23"
Migration card says "Seen from May 15-	Under First Seen enter "May 15"

23, 1 observed on May 17"	Under Next Seen as "May 17" Under Last Seen as "May 23" In Observer Notes write "May 15-23, 1 observed on May 17"
Migration card includes additional information, such as "Taken" and "Species Examined."	Transcribe as you normally would with filling in First Seen with event date observed. In Observer Notes write "Taken" or "Species Examined"
Migration card says "F 3/27= all" or "F 3/27= prob" or "F 3/27= sure"	Under First Seen enter "March 27" In Observer Notes write "=all" or what it says on your card
Migration card says F 4/29=com 88"	Enter "April 29, 1888" as your First Seen date and under Commonness select "Common" In Observer Notes write "=com" or what it says on your card
Migration card says "2=40A"	Under Problem with Cards? select "Other" and write "insufficient information for migration date" in Transcriber Comments
Migration card says "Only a Last Seen Date?" Ex.: L 9/13	Under Last Seen enter "September 13"
Migration card contains more than four (4) dates on a card	Please skip these cards
Migration card contains multiple years	Please skip these cards
Migration card contains two or more dates but does not specify which fields they should go in	Enter the information in the order of the fields. Ex.: If there are two dates, place them in First Seen and Next Seen
Migration card has only the last two digits of a year	The BPP only accepted records from 1880 to 1970. If the card says '80 to '99, you know it is 1880 to 1899. If the card is '00 to '70, it is 1900 to 1970. Please transcribe the proper four digit year under Reference Year
Migration card has number of birds written as subscripts after dates	The number of birds is usually is a superscript. If it appears as a subscript, look closely to make sure this not a comma.
4. Location	
Two locations given Ex. "Cavan and Millbrook, Ontario"	Under City/Town write "Cavan and Millbrook" Under State/Province select "Ontario" in the drop down menu
Location on card is unreadable	Search for websites to look up locations: USGS Geographic Name Information System Google Maps TerraServer PlaceNames Wikipedia: List of cities, towns, and villiages in the U.S. Global Gazzetter
Migration card describe a lake or other location information other than county or city	If you have any location information that you feel does not fit into either category, please transcribe it into the City/Town field
I am not sure if a location is a county, city	Type the location information into the City/Town field

or town	
Migration card describe multiple locations or a sentence describing the location?	Transcribe the information exactly as you see it on the card into the City/Town field
5. Observer	
Two observer given Ex. "May Thacher Cooke and Wells Cooke"	Under Observer write "May Thacher Cooke and Wells Cooke"
6. Other	
How do I transcribe a "Field Report File?"	Read the card and pull out the appropriate information to transcribe into the various fields then transcribe the card in its entirety (and just as you see it on the card) into the Observer Notes field
What if there is additional information on a card besides what is asked for in the fields?	Transcribe the information into the Observer Notes field
Where do I put elevation information?	Transcribe elevation information into the Observer Notes field
Can a previously submitted card be retrieved?	You can select the Back button to view a previous card and submit a new transcription for that card. However, you can not modify a previous transcription.
7. Overwintering	
Observer wrote "Rare"	In Overwinterers? select "Yes" In Commonness? select "Rare" In Observer Notes write "Winters: Rare"
Migration card does not mention overwintering	Skip this field if breeding is not mentioned on the card * If you accidentally select "Yes" under Overwinterers , go back and select "Unknown"
8. Problem Cards	
Migration card looks to be from a publication and not an original observation	Under Problem with Card? select "Other" Explain the problem in Transcriber Comments
Migration card describe only a nest, egg or young information and no arrival or departure information	Under Problem with Card? select "Not an arrival card"
Migration card is partially or completely unreadable	Transcribe as much information as possible under Problem with Card? select "Card all/partially unreadable" Explain the problem in Transcriber Comments
9. Species/Name of Bird	
Two species given Ex. "American Robin and Song Sparrow"	Mark under Problem with Card? select "Card all/partially unreadable" Explain the problem in Transcriber Comments
Migration card shows both an AOU number and a common or scientific name	Write the AOU number and scientific names in the appropriate fields

Migration card describes out of date bird names	Transcribe exactly what you see on the migration card. Transcribe the information give to you whether it be the scientific name, common name, or AOU number
AOU number is not listed on migration card	Leave the AOU field blank