The Food Habits Database – An Example of how to Convert Spreadsheet Data into a Powerful Relational Database

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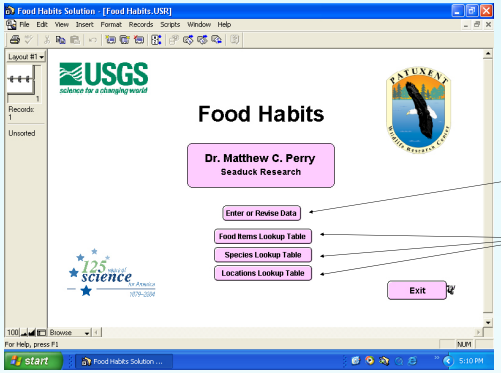
Spreadsheets are excellent for financial applications but are often spread too thin when they are used for managing and sharing non-numerical information. Also, spreadsheets represent a "snapshot in time" and often it is difficult or impossible to quickly gather related records or view the dataset in any other way.

On the other hand, using a relational database system such as FileMaker can make data entry much more efficient and the use of pop-up or pull down menus can greatly reduce or eliminate data entry errors. Also, finding and gathering records sharing specific values is quick and easy.

FileMaker facilitates the conversion of spreadsheet data into relational databases. This Food Habits application was converted from a large and unwieldy spreadsheet and broken out into two principal databases: (1) a sample database with one record per individual bird, and (2) a contents database with one record for each food item identified within the gizzard or gullet.

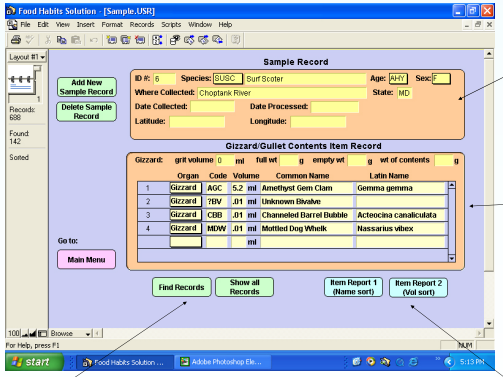
Three lookup tables contain (1) food items, (2) waterfowl species, and (3) sample collection locations. New items are loaded into the lookup tables which eliminates erroneous data entry into the main databases.



Data entry or Revision

Lookup Tables

Food Habits Main Screen



"Rolodex" allows movement between records

Record count for the entire database

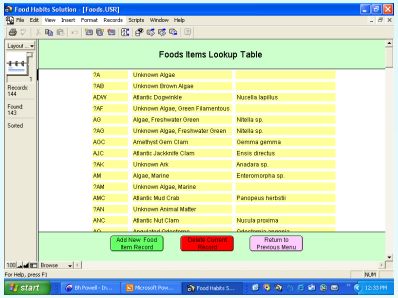
Record count for the "Found Set" of items

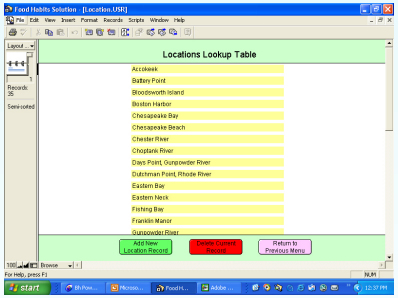
Sample record information is at the top of the screen. Click buttons control the adding and deletion of sample records. Deleting a sample record also deletes all contents records associated with that sample.

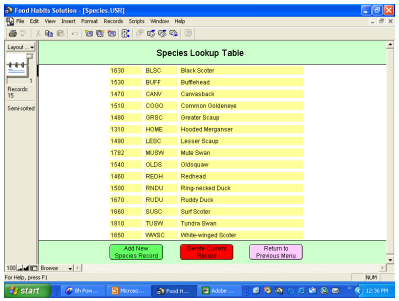
Contents records are entered through a "portal" or window into the second database. Items are added at the bottom of the list. Items may be deleted by highlighting the line and simply depressing the [delete] key.

Groups of records may be quickly found using the Find Records key and accepting user input. Ranges and Boolean values are possible.

Reports may be quickly generated using pre-programed report buttons. Reports are generated for the "Found Set" of records







Lookup tables contain specific data items. Through the use of pop-up lists or pull down menus, these items are made available for selection and input into the main databases. Each lookup table allows the user to add or delete items contained within that table.

No animals or trees were harmed in producing this poster
However, a considerable number of electrons may have been inconvenienced