



Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of survey is the Neighborhood Bird Project?

The main NBP survey protocol is a Point Count protocol which is to say that we survey certain sites (points) within the parks for a certain amount of time. In our parks, a point count consists of surveyors standing at the center of a circle of 50m radius, counting birds from that spot for 5 minutes. It is important to note that the point count protocol does not allow us to record every bird or species that may be in the park on a given day, which goes against many of our “birder instincts.” However, the Point Count protocol allows us to collect comparable data at parks of different sizes, to compare data from different places within a park, and to look for trends in our data over time.

Why do we only count birds within a 50m radius circle?

We want to know over what area the data have been collected; this allows us to appropriately compare data from different sites or different times. A circle with a 50m radius is the standard fixed radius count area for songbird studies. In addition, some of the sites are close to one another and so counting within 50m attempts to minimize the likelihood of double counting individuals.

Does the 50m guideline apply to fly-overs?

Yes, the 50m radius is a column that stretches infinitely upward.

Can we move about the 50m circle to count birds? Why?

No. Everyone must stay in the center of the 50m circle. This is a standard part of the point count survey method. If you wander within the circle, it becomes an area search.

After 5 min is up it is okay to investigate a previously heard or seen bird(s). This means moving away from the circle center is acceptable. DO NOT add any new birds, this is just for confirming previously heard/seen birds. Put any new birds in the Additional Species List.

Can you explain the differences between ‘seen,’ ‘heard,’ and ‘fly-over’ in more detail?

Seen - a bird that is seen *interacting with the habitat* within the 50m circle:

Birds flying below canopy level, flying from one perch to another, or actively foraging on or above the survey area are considered ‘seen’. This includes birds that are perching, nesting, foraging, or hunting; it also includes swallows feeding while in flight and hummingbirds collecting nectar at flowers, cases where a bird may not land within the survey area but is using the habitat in it.

Fly-over - a bird that is seen *flying over/through the 50m circle that does not interact with the habitat* within the circle;

Think of this as a bird in transit that happens to fly over your survey area.

Heard - a bird that is *believed to be vocalizing within the 50m circle* (that you don't see during the survey time);

Knowing that none of us can be 100% certain whether a Heard bird is within our survey area or not, the key here is to be consistent, use your common sense and birding knowledge as applicable (i.e. we know that crows are generally louder than bushtits), and above all else, do your best.

How are seen, heard, and fly-over weighted?

Data analyses require accurate data in order for conclusions to be reliable. A data analyst will have the option to weight the data with the most reliable being 'seen' data, followed by 'heard' data, with 'fly-over' data being weighted least. 'Seen' is weighted highest because the observer is both able to identify the bird visually as well as confirming that it was located within the 50m survey circle. If a bird is 'heard', the surveyor is often still able to positively identify the bird, however it may be difficult to confirm whether the bird is within the 50m survey area. A 'fly-over' indicates a bird was within the 50m cylinder but did not interact with the habitat at that location, therefore it is considered less important than the birds 'seen' or 'heard' at that specific location.

Why does the protocol require team members to stand quietly for one minute before beginning to survey at the point?

The purpose of standing quietly is to allow you to get oriented, and allow the birds to acclimate to your presence. Birds that are flushed out upon entering the site or within the one minute of waiting can be recorded in the Additional Species list on the back of the data sheet.

A note about timing:

The one minute waiting period should be *at least* one minute, but can be longer as needed.

The five minute survey period should be *exactly* 5 minutes. We encourage setting some sort of timer with an alarm (eg. with a cell phone), so that surveyors can focus on looking for birds, rather than checking watches.

What are some ways to avoid double counting of individual birds?

During a survey we try to count using a method called conservative counting. For example, if at one minute you see three Black-capped Chickadees and they disappear into nearby vegetation, then a minute later you see five Chickadees in the same general area as the first three, you should record five Chickadees on the data sheet, not eight. If there are multiple loops in your park, avoid double-counting some of the larger birds, e.g., raptors, by having the team leaders within the park discuss after the survey which large species were seen and when, in order to

eliminate individual birds recorded multiple times. It is therefore preferable for all survey loops within one park to be surveyed simultaneously so that these comparisons can be made.

What is the rule on playing bird song/call recordings during the survey?

Use of playback devices is strictly prohibited during surveys. Surveyors are encouraged to brush-up on songs before setting out for their surveys.

When is it permitted to pish?

It is permitted to pish during the survey after 4.5 minutes in order to call up birds within the circle which may not yet have shown themselves. Pishing is not allowed at any other point during the survey time. If you do pish at a station, please indicate so by circling "yes" next to pishing on the data sheet. After the 5 minute survey time is up, it is permitted to investigate a previously heard bird if necessary to verify its identity.

What do we do if there is an exceptional amount of noise disturbance (i.e. train or road race) during one of the stops?

If noise significantly impacts your survey, and everyone on your survey team agrees, we recommend you restart the survey once the noise has stopped. If the sound does not pass, do the best you can and indicate noise level for that particular stop on the data sheet.

What should be done when survey locations are forced to move due to construction or other permanent disturbance?

Provided it is safe to do so, conduct the surveys as close as possible to the original circle center. In addition, please notify the Seattle Audubon Science Manager so that a record can be made of the shifted survey location. If the data show a sudden shift we can determine whether the shift is due to the change in survey location or some other cause. If the survey location needs to be moved significantly please contact the Science Manager who will devise the best course of action.

How should juvenile birds be counted?

Juvenile birds or birds that you think fledged during the current breeding season should be recorded in the same way as for adult birds. Put the total number of individuals, but please add detail in the notes section on the number of juveniles. For example, if you see an adult Mallard with six ducklings please record: Mallard – 7 on one row, and then write Stop x = 1 adult Mallard plus 6 ducklings in the notes section.

How should flocks of birds be counted?

When a flock of birds passes through your survey area during a survey, e.g. Bushtits, do your best to accurately record the number of birds in the flock. We recommend having three surveyors in the team attempt to count the individuals in the flock and then record the mean of

the three numbers. Alternatively, have one person count the flock three times and use the mean of those counts.

Is it okay to list ____ sp.?

Yes, if you're unable to confidently identify a species, please do not guess at an ID. Instead, please record the individual as _____ species. For example, an unidentified hawk can be recorded as *Accipiter* sp.

Where can I record the interesting species I observe between stops?

With the updated data sheet that we rolled out last summer, we removed the 'between stops' sections beneath each of the tables. We totally understand that occasionally you'll see a really interesting bird, and that it typically won't show up in your usual 5 minute survey. We do want you to record these birds and so have provided a new table entitled "Additional Species List" where you should record birds that you observe between stops or after time. It is not necessary to record the same species more than once and not necessary to record between which stops they were seen.