Be a Better Birder (B3) Class 1
Summary

Part 1 of Class 1 was an introduction to being a better birder. Highlights include:

The class introduced themselves by responding to the following:

1. What was your "spark bird"? And why?
2. Who were/are your mentors?
3. What bird would you most like to see? And why?
4. What are your favorite birding locations?

3 Steps of Learning were presented.

1. Understanding
2. Processing & Storing
   Memorizing – Mnemonics
3. Application (field trips & on your own)

Birding IS observing – therefore to be a better birder, you must become a better observer. Four specific steps to being a better birder were suggested:

1. Learn distribution (Habits 1,2,3)
2. Learn GISS/Structure (Habit 4)
3. GO BIRD & make your own IDs (Habits 5, 6,7)
4. Use a process until it becomes 2nd nature

The **7 Habits of Highly Effective Birders** (the 7 Habits) were introduced as the suggested process for bird ID. The first 3 define **Distribution**, the last 4 concern **Identification**.

1) Where are we? – County, sub-county…
2) When are we? – Season, month, ½ month…
3) Where is he? – Habitat, micro-habitat…

4) GISS & Structure – posture, behavior, primary extension …
5) Bill & Head – length, shape, thickness, use…
6) Field Marks – plumage, pattern, behavior…
7) Diagnostic Field Marks – differentiate closely related species

Several aspects of **observing** were discussed and demonstrated through exercises, including:

Search Images
Inattentional blindness

Focusing vs Dis-focusing (in connection with searching for static or moving birds)
Blue Jay exercise

3 major activities of birds were discussed and described as energy expensive, having not much overlap, affecting "where" and "when" birds are present and can aid in ID.

1. Breeding
2. Migrating
3. Molting

The terms **range**, **status** and **distribution** were defined and discussed.

Several types of **data visualization** were discussed in relation to bird distributions. The strengths and weaknesses were pointed out for the following data visualization.

Range maps (field guides, online)
Ebird sightings maps (observational data)
Ebird frequency graphs
Abundance maps (eBird) (distribution)
Animated abundance maps (eBird)
Trend maps (eBird)

Several **data collection** methods were briefly mentioned:

Ebird checklist
Bird surveys
Breeding bird surveys (BBS)
Christmas bird counts (CBC)
Breeding bird survey (Breeding Bird Atlas)

Words describing bird distributions were listed in order of decreasing abundance. The last 3 were described as "agreed upon by the ABA and AOU".

Abundant
Common
Fairly common
Uncommon
Local
Irregular
Rare – occur annually in NA, but in very low numbers.
Casual – not annual, but 6 or more total records in NA, including 3 or more records in past 30 years.
Accidental – 5 or fewer times in NA, or 3 times or fewer in the last 30 years.

The necessity and ability of observers to **detect birds** was mentioned. Examples of Ebird frequency graphs were discussed.

Partitioning of **habitats** and **micro-habitats** by species and individuals was discussed.

A deductive reasoning exercise for wrens was presented.
The concepts of **GISS** (General Impression of Size and Shape) versus **structure** were demonstrated.

The **evolving impressions** of bird artists/experts over time was demonstrated.
Silhouettes and "**facial expressions**" of birds were emphasized as ID tools.
The importance of the **bill & head** in ID was emphasized.
Field marks and **diagnostic field marks** were discussed, including the idea that some field marks "work better" than others.

Examples of **types of field marks** were shown, including:

Color – plumage
Pattern – plumage (feather groups or individual feathers)
Structure
GISS
Facial "expression"
Behavior
Flight style
Vocalizations

Examples of **field mark categories** were provided, including:

Relative
Comparative
Proportional
Contrast
Demarcation
Behavior
Vocalization

Part 2 of Class 1 was **Identification of Swallows**.