

2024 Great Texas Birding Classic Rules (Modified March 22, 2024)

ALL PARTICIPANTS MUST BE FAMILIAR WITH AND WILLING TO COMPLY WITH ALL GREAT TEXAS BIRDING CLASSIC RULES IN ORDER TO COMPETE IN THE TOURNAMENT. *Note: All tournament rules are subject to revisions.*

The Spring 2024 Great Texas Birding Classic includes all pre-pandemic tournament categories as well as some categories introduced in 2020-2021. The rules for some tournaments still have modified versions available to those who would like that option. The health and safety of all involved remains our top priority.

The Birding Classic allows for both “intact” and “dispersed” flock teams in several categories. Intact teams must travel together and will communicate in person, while dispersed flock teams can take advantage of digital communication opportunities and social media to communicate their sightings to each other and to their one primary checklist manager who will submit the final team list to eBird. These modified rules are intended to encourage a fun and safe day of birding with friends and family this Spring.

There are two big changes for this year (please review [complete rules](#) for all tournament details):

- **The Sunrise to Noon Tournament is now a Regional Tournament!** Your team must select which [region](#) your team will bird during your Sunrise to Noon half-day event. This will no longer be a statewide event, instead having teams within the same region compete against each other (similar to the Regional Big Day, Big Sit!, and Roughwings Tournaments).
- **A new rule on AI-assisted binoculars and identification apps** has been added (**Rule I. J.**) to clear up any confusion on how apps and AI should be used during the tournament in terms of identification and what to count.

Please pay special attention to the following definitions and rules:

- **"Dispersed Flock" teams include team members who may be located anywhere in Texas or in their selected region** (depending on if they're entering a statewide or regional tournament). Several tournament categories will offer this option.
- **"Intact Flock" teams include team members willing and able to travel together during their tournament day.**
- **Big Sit! teams select a 50-foot diameter circle from which to bird.** Any number of birders may be in your Big Sit! circle at a time. Teams can plan shifts to allow for social distancing.
- **The 95% Rule will not apply in any "Dispersed Flock" tournament categories** nor to the Big Sit! In "Dispersed Flock" tournament categories, team members will be remote from one another, so it is up to fellow members to accept or question any dubious identifications before adding them to the team's official tournament day checklist. Big Sit! teams only need a single team member to see/identify a species for it to count.

- **The 95% rule applies only to the "Intact Flock" categories.** This means 95% of all birds recorded by an "Intact Flock" team must be tallied and identified by all members of the team. All birds must be identified by at least two members of a team. Identification made by only one team member can never be counted. Ninety-five percent of all birds recorded by a team must be identified by the entire team. The remaining 5 percent may be identified by two or more members.

Other tournament rule changes are **highlighted in yellow** below.

I. Counting

A. Count only full species as defined by the current American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) checklist (1998) and annual supplements.

B. Birds must be conclusively identified by sight or sound. A bird identified as one of a species or group (i.e., scarp, either greater or lesser) may be counted as a species if no other bird in that group appears on your list. For example: *Dowitcher* sp. counts as one bird. Short-billed Dowitcher and *Dowitcher* sp. still counts as just one bird species.

C. Birds of questionable origin, and introduced or reintroduced species, may be counted providing that they appear on the current Texas Ornithological Society (TOS) checklist, and each population has been established in Texas for a minimum of ten years. For example: **Egyptian Goose**, Black Swan and Yellow-headed Parrot are uncountable under this rule. Any disputes over applicable species will be settled by the Great Texas Birding Classic judge.

- **NOTE:** For the purposes of the Great Texas Birding Classic, teams may count the Greater (Attwater's) Prairie-Chicken and the Aplomado Falcon.

D. Birds counted must be alive, wild, and unrestrained. Sick or injured birds may be counted, but permanently injured wild birds incapable of normal migration or seasonal movements (i.e., found or relocated to parks, yards, zoos, gardens, boat ramps, fish cleaning stations, or other unnatural settings where they may receive intended or unintended critical human support or protection) may not be counted. Eggs or nests do not count as birds.

E. Electronic or recorded bird calls may not be used to attract birds or entice them to vocalize during the Great Texas Birding Classic or while scouting prior to the event. Bird tapes and mobile phone apps may be used to help in the identification of birds and may be included among your gear, but they may not be audible in the field. Tapes and use of mobile apps are restricted to vehicles or earbuds/headphones and may only be used as a reference when teams are not in the field, the sound is not projected aloud (i.e., use of earbuds), or teams are traveling between destinations. Recorded bird calls may not be used while teams are actively birding. Pishing and other bird sounds made by mouth are acceptable.

F. Spot lighting is prohibited at all times during the Great Texas Birding Classic and while scouting prior to the event. Small, handheld flashlights can be used as a light source as needed for personal safety (i.e., while walking on trails). Q-beams and other bright hand-held lights are not allowed.

G. Only 5 percent of all passerine species recorded by a team may be identified by nocturnal flight calls.

H. All birds must be identified by at least two members of a team. Identification made by only one team member can never be counted. Ninety-five percent of all birds recorded by a team must be identified by the entire team. The remaining 5 percent may be identified by two or more members.

- **The 95% rule applies ONLY to the "Intact Flock" categories:** Adult Statewide Weeklong Tournament – Intact Flock, Adult Regional Big Day Tournament – Intact Flock, State Park Tournament – Intact Flock, Sunrise to Noon Tournament – Intact Flock, Texas Two-Stop Tournament – Intact Flock, and Outta-Sight Song Birder Tournament – Intact Flock. It is not necessary for all team members to record the same individual bird. For example: if three members of a team hear a Belted Kingfisher and a fourth member does not but manages to see another Belted Kingfisher later that competition day, then Belted Kingfisher has been recorded unanimously.
- **EXCEPTIONS: The 95% Rule will NOT apply in any "Dispersed Flock" tournament categories nor the Big Sit! tournament.** In "Dispersed Flock" tournament categories, team members will be remote from one another, so it is up to fellow members to accept or question any dubious identifications before adding them to the official checklist. **As in previous years, the Big Sit! Tournament requires only one member to see/identify a species for it to be counted.**
- **SPECIAL NOTE FOR ROUGHWINGS AND GLIDERS TEAMS:** Team members must locate and identify all species **UNAIDED** by adult team captain, mentors, chaperones, or drivers. Adult assistance is only allowed for verification, not identification or location.

I. Disturbance to nesting species increases exponentially in relation to the number of people who know about a site. Don't tell other people the location of any nesting species. Nest harassment will not be tolerated.

J. Team members should base their bird identifications on what they themselves see or hear. Bird sound identification apps (such as Merlin or BirdNET), photo identification apps (such as iNaturalist), or artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted equipment (such as AI-supported binoculars) should not be used as the only way you are identifying birds. Team members may use these tools to confirm their own identification with field guide pictures or bird song apps through ear buds, listening to songs of birds they think it might be to narrow it down or confirm the identification. Using Merlin, other apps, or AI-supported equipment to auto-identify anything you see or hear when you do not necessarily know the bird's song or can't see the bird yourself to verify an unfamiliar call is not identifying the bird yourself and the species should not be counted.

II. Time

A. All tournaments must occur from **April 15 – May 15, 2024**, on any date during that time period.

B. Final checklists must be submitted to [eBird](#) within 48 hours of your team's selected tournament day.

- **Examples:** If your team participates in a single day tournament, choosing to compete on May 1st, then your checklist must be submitted to eBird and shared with GTBC staff through eBird, per **Rule IX**, by 11:59pm on May 3rd.

C. Teams may select their tournament date ahead of time (based on weather, last minute scheduling, etc.) but **all registered teams must indicate their selected tournament date(s) in an email to the Nature Tourism Manager** (gtbc@tpwd.texas.gov) no later than within 24 hours of their official tournament day(s). Staff uses a team's official tournament date(s) to ensure eBird checklists are submitted on time (see **Rule IIB**).

D. Tournament length by category:

- All Regional and Statewide Big Day (Dispersed and Intact Flock), Big Sit!, Gliders Big Day (Dispersed and Intact Flock), Human-Powered – Intact Flock, and State Park – Intact Flock teams participate for up to 24 hours on their tournament day, from midnight to midnight on the date of their team's choice.
- Adult Weeklong – Intact Flock teams participate for up to 6 complete days in a row, from midnight of the first day through 11:59pm of the sixth consecutive day (example: 12:00am on May 1st – 11:59pm on May 6th). Teams need not bird the entire time and are encouraged to rest, as needed, during this birding week.
- Texas Two-Stop – Intact Flock teams participate for up to 2 complete days in a row, from midnight of the first day through 11:59pm of the second consecutive day (example: 12:00am on April 16th – 11:59pm on April 17th). Teams select two distinct sites (see **Rule III E**) and may spend no more than 24 hours in a calendar day at either location of those two stops. Drive time between the two sites must fall within that consecutive 48-hour tournament timeframe.
- Roughwings teams (Dispersed and Intact Flock) participate for up to 8 hours on their tournament day (8 hours need not be consecutive; can be split up throughout the day).
- Outta-Sight Song Birder – Intact Flock teams participate for up to 12 hours on their tournament day (12 hours need not be consecutive; can be split up throughout the day).
- Sunrise to Noon – Intact Flock teams participate from dawn to 12:00 noon on their tournament day.

III. Geographic Area

A. Regional Tournaments (Big Sit!, Roughwings, Gliders, Sunrise to Noon, and Adult Regional Big Day Tournaments):

1. Teams choose one of the nine regions of the Great Texas Wildlife Trail based on the [map provided online](#). All regional tournament teams must indicate their region on the official registration form.
2. Both the bird and the birder must be in the same state, country, and chosen region of the Great Texas Wildlife Trail at the same time. There are nine regions to the state (refer to [regional maps](#) provided online to see county boundaries), and your team must indicate on your registration form the region in which you choose to compete.
3. Birds seen in the bays or in the Gulf of Mexico to a distance of 200 miles may be counted.

B. Statewide Tournaments (Adult Statewide Big Day, Adult Weeklong, Human-Powered, and Outta-Sight Song Birder Tournaments):

1. In the Statewide Tournaments, the bird and birder must be in the same state and country (i.e., within the boundaries of the state of Texas).

2. Birds seen in the bays or in the Gulf of Mexico to a distance of 200 miles may be counted.

C. Big Sit! Tournament:

1. Both the bird and the birder must be in the same state and country at the same time.

2. Observations can only be made from within a 50-foot (diameter) circle.

3. If a bird is seen or heard from within the circle, but is too distant to identify, the circle can be left to get a closer look for confirmation. However, any new bird seen or heard while confirming the original bird cannot be counted unless it is seen from an “anchor” team member who stayed behind in your circle, or by you once you return to your spot.

4. The same circle must be used for the entire Big Sit! Tournament. Teams must designate their circle’s location on their official registration form.

5. All teams must have a unique circle location and indicate that circle’s location on their team registration form. Two Big Sit! teams may not bird the same circle on the same day. If more than one team indicates the same circle location on their registration forms, the Birding Classic staff will contact those teams to make sure that they choose different tournament days.

D. State Park Tournament:

1. Both the bird and the birder must be in the same state and country at the same time.

2. Observations can only be made from a single Texas Parks and Wildlife State Park. Teams must designate the state park on their official registration form.

3. If a bird is seen or heard from within the park then it is countable, even if the bird itself is outside of park boundaries as long as team can be sure the bird is in the same state and country as the birders, per rule III.D.1.

4. All teams must select one specific state park location and indicate that selection on their team registration form. Multiple teams may choose the same state park for their tournament day.

E. Texas Two-Stop Tournament:

1. Both the bird and the birder must be in the same state and country at the same time.

2. All teams must select two specific locations with clear site boundaries and indicate those selections ahead of time on their team registration form. Multiple teams may choose the same site(s) for their tournament day. (Approved sites include state parks, national parks, national wildlife refuges, city parks, county parks, The Nature Conservancy properties, nature centers, national parks, bird sanctuaries, Audubon properties, national recreation areas, or national sea shore. Other locations subject to prior approval by TPWD Nature Tourism Manager.)

3. Observations can only be made from the two sites selected by the team. Birds seen during the drive between sites do not count on the team’s final list unless they are also seen at one of the two sites. Teams must designate their selected sites on the official registration form.

3. If a bird is seen or heard from within one of the sites then it is countable, even if the bird itself is outside of the site’s boundaries as long as team can be sure the bird is in the same state and country as the birders, per Rule III.E.1.

IV. Travel

A. All vehicles except aircraft and airboats may be used.

- **EXCEPTION:** For the Human Powered Tournament, only non-motorized transportation may be used. This includes walking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, etc.

B. For all “Intact Flock” tournament categories, team members must remain at distances which permit direct, unamplified voice contact at all times. Voice contact is defined as shouting distance. Electronic voice transmission in any form is prohibited. This includes CB radios, hand-held radios, cell phones, texting, etc. for teams using multiple vehicles. Participants are not required to travel in the same vehicle.

C. For all “Dispersed Flock” tournament categories, team members may be located anywhere in Texas or in the team’s selected region (depending on if they’re entering a statewide or regional tournament).

V. Participants

A. Teams must consist of a minimum of three with a maximum of five members.

- **EXCEPTION:** Big Sit! teams must consist of one or more team members. All independent team members receive event t-shirts with their registration fee, but only the first 20 team members for a sponsored team will receive event t-shirts. Any additional team member names should be emailed to the Nature Tourism Manager (gtbc@tpwd.state.tx.us) for Birding Classic records and for accurate team listings. Additional event t-shirts may be purchased through the registration payment portal.

B. Mentors, chaperones, and non-birding support people may accompany the team, but these participants may not assist the team in any way with the identification of birds. A designated driver who is not a team member may not assist with the identification of birds. Hired scouts cannot assist any team. Additional event t-shirts may be purchased through the registration payment portal for these non-birding team members.

VI. Conduct

A. All team members on “Intact Flock” teams must remain within voice contact of each other at all times (see Rule IVB).

B. Each of the members of the team must count only birds personally identified beyond a doubt.

C. Team members must be familiar and willing to comply with the rules of the Tournament before the event.

D. No team may intentionally flush or drive into hiding any bird to prevent another team from finding it.

E. Team members must follow federal and state laws, for example: speed limits and laws against trespass on private property. PLEASE NOTE THAT TEXAS IS A PRIVATE LANDS STATE, AND TRESPASSING IS CONSIDERED A SERIOUS OFFENSE. BEFORE THE EVENT, YOU MUST OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM THE LANDOWNER OF ANY PRIVATE LAND YOU PLAN TO ENTER. Do not enter the closed areas of public sites (i.e., closed portions of National Wildlife Refuges).

VII. Outside Information

- A. Teams are encouraged to share information with other teams during the event.
- B. Any information received prior to or during the Birding Classic may be used. **Hired scouts are not permitted.**

VIII. Ethics

- A. Each participant is required to maintain proper birding ethics at all times as defined in the [ABA Code of Ethics](#).

IX. Scoring

- A. All teams must create or use an existing eBird account to submit the final team checklist. Teams **must include their team name and tournament category** in the “Comments” section of the “Step 2: Date and Effort” page of their eBird checklist submission.
- B. Each team must submit ONE official team checklist for their tournament day(s) to Texas eBird using the appropriate protocol option. See Checklist area of website for further instructions.
 - **NOTE:** Although we encourage team members to submit personal eBird checklists from each site visited to help support eBird’s data collection, for the purposes of the Birding Classic’s final records and judging, all teams must share **only one final cumulative team checklist to GTBC Staff via eBird**. Do not share a checklist for each site visited to the GTBC Staff account. **Do not submit a checklist for each team member.** Your score is based on your cumulative total number of species for your entire tournament day(s), so only **a single final checklist** is required for each team.
- C. Share the official team checklist through eBird to the official Birding Classic eBird account, “GTBCStaff”.
- B. Checklists are due within 48 hours of your team’s selected tournament day (see **Rule IIB**).
- C. Winning is accomplished by identifying the most species of birds in each tournament category.
- D. If a species is listed as uncommon, scarce, rare, or accidental during spring migration for the region you are birding based on the [TPWD regional checklists](#), additional documentation must be included within your eBird checklist. Documentation should include information required for the [TBRC Bird Report Form](#). Teams can add these details on the checklist itself by using the “Add Details” button next to each bird needing additional documentation.
 - **ADDITIONAL LISTS OF BIRDS NEEDING DOCUMENTATION:** Lists of birds always requiring documentation include: Birds listed on the [Texas Bird Records Committee Review Species](#) list, [Species not yet documented for Texas](#) list, or the [Specimens Not Located](#) list.

X. Prize Categories

A. Winners certificates will be awarded to the members of the winning team in every individual [tournament category](#).

B. Individual prizes will be awarded to winning regional Roughwings and Gliders teams.

C. The winning Adult Statewide Weeklong Tournament team will have their team (and sponsor, if applicable) name engraved on the memorial Roger Tory Peterson trophy which will reside for the following year in the offices of the team sponsor. If the sponsor does not have space for trophy display or an independent team wins the tournament, TPWD will display the trophy at their offices for the year.

D. Winning teams in certain tournament categories will be eligible to win the Conservation Grants. These winning teams will work with Birding Classic staff to determine which birding enhancement, avian habitat restoration, or acquisition project will receive the grants. Number of grants awarded each year and grant amounts are dependent on funds raised through registration fees and sponsorship dollars.

XI. Call of Foul

A. A team which, in the course of the event, observes what it perceives to be an infraction of the Great Texas Birding Classic Rules by another team may file a written protest to the TPWD Nature Tourism Manager. The Great Texas Birding Classic judge and staff will consider the charges. Because of time considerations, a call of foul may not affect initial team standings posted online; however, the panel is empowered to disqualify a team within ten days of the Tournament if evidence warrants.

B. The decision of the judge and staff is final.

XII. Eligibility, Fees and Deadlines

A. The Great Texas Birding Classic is open to all birders of good character.

B. All teams must pay registration fees in order to compete. See fee structure below for all tournament categories. Teams are either independent or sponsored and entry fees vary based on tournament category.

- Independent teams in any tournament category must pay their own registration fees and travel expenses for all team members to enter the Tournament. Designated drivers and chaperones do not pay entry fees and must cover their own travel expenses.
- Sponsored teams may secure sponsors or co-sponsors to offset the costs of the team by paying their sponsored team registration fee. Teams can work with their sponsor on additional travel expenses.

C. All registration forms and registration fee payments must be received by **April 1, 2024**. Teams will receive a website link with the team's registration form submission confirmation and must use this link to pay registration fees.

D. Late Fees: Independent teams will be charged an additional \$25 per person for late registration. Sponsored teams will be charged an additional \$200 per team.

Tournament Category	Independent Teams	Sponsored Teams
Adult Regional Big Day (Dispersed and Intact Flock), Adult Statewide Big Day (19 years old and older), Adult Statewide Weeklong (19 years and older); or Texas Two-Stop (all ages) Tournaments	\$50 per team member *	\$1000 per team
Big Sit! **, Gliders (14-18 years old)*, Human-Powered, State Park, Sunrise to Noon, or Outta-Sight Song Birder Tournaments	\$30 per team member *	\$500 per team **
Roughwings (13&under) Regional Tournaments*	\$20 per team member *	\$250 per team

* Drivers, mentors and chaperones are free but may purchase event t-shirts through registration payment portal.

** Sponsored Big Sit! team fee includes t-shirts for the first 20 members only, and additional event t-shirts may be purchased through registration payment portal. All independent Big Sit! Team members who register and pay receive a t-shirt (number of team members allowed is unlimited).