

Tips for Fielding a Big Sit! Tournament Team

It's a Tailgate Party for Birders!!

There are always some basics that go along with putting together a fun, cohesive team for the Birding Classic, and many of those are the same regardless of the tournament category you choose –

- Gather the right team mates (similar goals for the event of fun or competition, fill in each other's gaps in knowledge, get along well, etc.),
- Plan for meals during the day (have someone lined up to bring food to you at the park, bring something with you in coolers, or make a plan to take an afternoon break from the competition to grab a bite) – more on this tip for Big Sit!s below,
- Optics,
- Field guide(s) and other reference materials.

Gathered here are some additional quick tips people who have fielded teams before on how to run a successful Big Sit! Tournament team and have fun doing it!

- 1.) Pick your site! Many teams try to make sure the site of their 50-foot diameter circle has a great view of various habitat types to increase the numbers and types of species possible during their Sit (previous circle size was 17-feet, but it was expanded during Covid and people liked it larger which has made it stick so far!). Sometimes a team's site is all about convenience – a team member's backyard, your local park, or the closest birding hotspot. There is no wrong place to do a Big Sit! as long as you have permission to be there by site owners. Which brings us to...
- 2.) ...If selecting a park, nature center, private property, or other site that might have restrictions, be sure to:
 - Check with the site manager to make sure there are no calendar conflicts (e.g., the park is having a large event the same day in an area you plan to bird, that a conflicting activity such as ATV-riding or hunting might be going on that would make birding difficult or impossible, etc.).
 - If you would like to bird before and after hours in day use areas or at nature centers or parks not normally open outside daylight hours, make sure you contact site managers/owners to clear those times your team would like to be in the park or area so that you don't have issues (Locked gates, patrolling officers, available restrooms).
 - If applicable, get necessary permission for restricted use areas
- 3.) If your team plans to use this event as a team-building exercise/event, be sure to get necessary permission from your supervisors if wishing to count Birding Classic time as work hours. They might be willing to at least give you partial credit for work hours during your team's day!
- 4.) Select a date that works for at least a few true "birders" in your group. You'll want to have at least one or two ringers for each shift throughout the day to help ID birds, teach a bit about birding to other team members who might be new to birding, and to help keep your list going.
- 5.) There are a couple of ways to organize your Big Sit! day:

- Teams planning to bird the entire 24 hours (or a majority of it): set up blocks of time that people can sign up for so that you make sure you have coverage throughout the day. Make sure there's at least one good birder to ID things for each shift.
 - Teams who can only bird a partial day: There's been great success with Big Sit! teams who set up two shifts for the day to catch dawn and dusk birding (think of it as having a breakfast bunch and a happy hour crew!). These shifts might include one 7-10am shift and one 4-7pm shift, or some variance of that on competition day. Just make sure your team returns to the exact same 50-foot diameter circle for the second shift!
- 6.) Once your date is selected, your times are set, and your teammates are confirmed, you'll need to register your team with a fun team name! There are two ways to register:
- Independent team: There is a \$30 per person registration fee for each team member and each paid participant receives this year's official Birding Classic t-shirt. Enter each person's name on the registration form and then one person pays the entire fee (example: 10 person team would need to pay a \$300 entry fee to the payment portal by credit card and then each team member will need to reimburse whoever paid their team's fee).
 - Sponsored team: There is a \$500 set team registration fee for sponsored teams, regardless of number of birders on the team. Sponsored teams will receive a maximum of 20 tournament t-shirts to distribute to their team members (additional shirts can be purchased for any team members over that initial 20 on sponsored teams). See the "Sponsorship Tips" area of the website for more info on how to find team sponsors. Multiple sponsors can share the cost as well.
- 7.) Make your designated area visual. Tape it or designate it on the ground somehow. It will keep you honest about your 50-foot circle's boundaries and helps out the group.



- 8.) Pick a fun team name! Independent teams cannot carry the park or city name, but the Sit's location will be listed under the location your team birded. Sponsors will receive name recognition as your team sponsor and it will allow your team to carry the name of your Sit's site, the sponsor name, or the name of your city if you wish (example: an independent

team might be called “The Kingfishers” but a sponsored team could be called the “City of _____ Kingfishers”).

- 9.) Email Nature Tourism Manager (shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov) with the following:
 - a. Any questions you have throughout this process. She’s here to help!
 - b. Your selected tournament day once you’ve selected it.
- 10.) On tournament day, make sure folks bring out food to fuel the birders. Some teams have elaborate potluck spreads, some simply chip in to bring coffee and donuts or breakfast tacos, but however you do it, food is a great part of the Big Sit! If you have the funds you could even have it catered. **There’s no wrong way to offer food to hungry birders!**



- 11.) Let the fun begin! Be sure to turn your checklist in through eBird following the instructions online by midnight of the day after your Big Sit! day.
- 12.) **BONUS INFO FOR TEAMS MADE UP OF STAFF AT A BIRDING SITE, NATURE CENTER, OR SPONSORED BY A LOCAL COMMUNITY:**
 - The Big Sit! can also be used as a promotional event for your site or community/business! You can invite the public to come out and join you on your Big Sit! day, learn a bit about the park/community and its birds, and help your team spot more species for your list!
 - If you are in a high traffic area and expect lots of visitors stopping by throughout the day, designate a person to be the spokesman of the group to the public. Sounds silly, but if you don't you will end up with all the birders distracted by visitors or visitors being ignored and missing a great opportunity to connect to someone.

- Start promoting your team's tournament day and location via social media and/or in press releases, local calendars, or media advisories leading up to the event to gain team members, get some local promotion, etc.