

Tips for Fielding a State Park Tournament Team

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),
- vehicle (one that will accommodate all of your team so you can bird together),
- 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 State Park Tournament team. Good luck, and have a fun day!

- 1.) Make sure you know where the park boundaries are, so you can make sure each species will count!
- 2.) This is obvious, but scouting is really important. Remember that not everyone on the team has to be present for the scouting but that at least one or two of you should scout a few weeks in advance. If you have someone on the team who works at the state park, he/she can give insider tips, but it's still important to get out a week or so in advance with a scouting purpose. If no team members are park staff members, try to set up a time to chat with the park naturalist or interpreter to see if they have any inside secrets on good areas of the park to bird.
- 3.) When choosing your date, check with the state park to make sure there are no conflicts (e.g., the park is having a large event the same day and/or in an area you plan to bird)
- 4.) If you plan to bird before and after hours in day use areas or parks, get that early and late time cleared with the park or area so that you don't have issues (locked gates, patrolling officers, available restrooms).
- 5.) Get necessary permission for restricted use areas as well.
- 6.) Depending on the size of the park, the "plan of attack" for the tournament day can be more elaborate or flexible. (For example, a Lake Casa Blanca State Park team, on their 500-acre park, had a very rough plan: start on the north shore of the park at sunrise, then bird the southeast "brush" area, and then go wherever necessary to pick up any species that they still needed. This worked great for them! They planned to only go until 3 pm or so, but got so into it that they ended up birding until 5pm on their tournament day.)

- 7.) Once your teammates are confirmed, you'll need to register your team. 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: 4 person team would need to pay a \$120 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 tournament t-shirt for each team members. See the "Sponsorship Tips" document for more info on how to find team sponsors. Multiple sponsors can share the cost as well.
- 8.) Pick a fun team name! Independent teams cannot carry the park or city name, but the park 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 park, 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:
 - Any questions you have throughout this process. She's here to help!
 - Your tournament day once you've selected it (within 24 hours of the day).
- 10.) 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.