

VIRGINIA BIG DAY: RULES AND GUIDELINES

Section I: What makes a team?

- a. The registration deadline is October 1st, 2026.
- b. Each team must be composed of between three and six people (with the exception of the “Club” category). The member total does not include drivers or mentors.
- c. **Carpooling is strongly encouraged by the Virginia Big Day Committee.**
- d. A team must fall under one of the following categories. Competing teams will compete in their own category.
 - i. Standard: All individual team members are aged 19 or older; or, the team consists of birders of mixed ages.
 - ii. Youth: All individual team members are aged 18 or younger, and each team consists of at least one adult mentor, who may not locate birds but who may aid in identification.
 - iii. Club: A club may register its members as a “club team.” There is no upper limit for the number of members in a club team.
- e. A team must also register for one competition area corresponding to where they compete. A team may only count birds in the competition area they register for.
 - i. Mountains and Valleys
 1. All areas including or west of the counties of Clarke, Warren, Page, Rockingham, Augusta, Rockbridge, Botetourt, Roanoke, Floyd, and Carroll
 - ii. Piedmont
 1. All areas east of the Mountains and Valleys border (see e.i.) and west of I-95
 - iii. Coastal Plain
 1. All areas east of I-95, including offshore waters
 - iv. Statewide
 1. All territories of Virginia, including offshore waters
- f. An individual may only be a member of one team.
- g. Team members may only count birds when all members are at distances that allow for unaided voice contact.
- h. One member of the team must be chosen by their team as a captain. The captain must complete registration, handle all communications with the Virginia Big Day Committee, and finalize their totals in an eBird Trip Report.
- i. Non-birding participants (such as a designated driver) may accompany a team; however, they may not assist the team in the location or identification of birds.

Section II: Where & when can we count?

- a. A team may only count birds in their competition area (see I.d.). Teams registered under “Statewide” may count birds anywhere in the state of Virginia, including Virginia offshore waters.
- b. A team doesn’t need to travel in the same vehicle, as long as all team members are within unaided voice range when identifying birds.
- c. A team may count birds between 12:00 AM and 11:59 PM on Saturday, October 3rd.

Section III: What can we count?

- a. A team may count species as defined by eBird. Established non-natives may be counted, but exotic and provisional birds may not be. Protests may be forwarded to the Committee.
- b. Flagged species must be confirmed by an eBird reviewer. If a species is on the VARCOM review list, a report must be sent to the Committee to be examined by VARCOM for confirmation.
- c. Birds that are deemed regionally restricted, generally rare, or otherwise difficult to identify, will require additional documentation such as time of sighting (hh:mm am/pm) and location (general location, nearest town, and county).
- d. All species must be identified conclusively. “Spuhs” (e.g. buteo sp.) must be reported as such.
 - i. A bird identified as to one of a species or group (i.e. scaup either greater or lesser) may be counted as a species, if no other bird in that group appears on your list. FOR EXAMPLE: Scaup sp. counts as one species. Greater Scaup and Scaup sp. still counts as one species. Greater Scaup and Lesser Scaup count as two species.
- e. Playback is not permitted to attract birds or aid in their identification.
- f. No captive birds may be counted.
- g. Personal hearing aids may be used to aid in identification, but otherwise no audio enhancement devices may be used.
- h. At least two members of a team must identify a bird for it to be counted. In the event that a definitive photograph or recording is obtained by only one member, the rule may be waived by a unanimous decision of the Virginia Big Day Committee on a case-by-case basis.
- i. Merlin Bird ID and other identification applications may not be used to locate or identify birds.

Section IV: How do we report our count?

- a. eBird Trip Reports must be compiled by each team leader. They must be completed and shared with the Virginia Big Day eBird account prior to 10:00 AM the following morning, Sunday October 4th. More details will be provided to teams via email.

- b. Sightings of sensitive species hidden by eBird must be emailed to the Virginia Big Day committee prior to 10:00 AM the following morning, Sunday October 4th.

Section V: Pledges and Fees

- a. There are no fees required for entry, though if your team chooses not to pursue pledges, we would appreciate a small donation from the team, which should be treated as a pledge (see below)
- b. It will be the responsibility of the team to secure pledges before the big day and collect them afterward. Secured pledges must be registered on the Virginia Big Day website. Pledge collection information will be sent to registrants via email.
- c. Pledges may come from any entity, whether an individual, organization, company, or otherwise.
- d. Pledges may be in one of two forms:
 - i. Per-species: A pledging entity will pledge a certain sum for each species counted by the team. These may be capped.
 - ii. Flat: Flat pledges are essentially donations; the pledging entity will pledge a certain sum to the project, irrespective of their team's species total.
- e. All pledges will go directly to the initiative announced by the Big Day Committee.

Section VI: Ethics

- a. The use of spotlights, Q-beams or other bright hand-held lights is strictly prohibited at any time during the competition. Small, handheld flashlights may be used as needed for personal safety only (i.e. walking trails or local streets at night).
- b. No birds — especially endangered, threatened, or sensitive species — may be disturbed or harassed in any way or at any time before or during the Big Day.
- c. The ABA Code of Birding Ethics must be followed (see: <https://www.aba.org/aba-code-of-birding-ethics/>), with the following exception to the use of recorded/digital sound.
- d. Electronic or recorded bird calls (such as iPhones, iPads, any hand-held phones, or similar tools) may not be used to attract birds or entice them to vocalize during the Virginia Big Day event. Only “pishing” is allowed.
- e. All proper permissions for land access must be properly obtained and all rules set out by landowners must be followed.

Section VII: Protests

- a. If a team member or team is perceived to be in violation of the Big Day rules, a protest may be filed to the Virginia Big Day Committee by any competitor.
- b. To file a protest, a competitor must send an email to the Virginia Big Day committee (see your inbox after registration for more details) with the subject

“Date_Protest.” All protests must include the accusation, the accused team or competitor, and any evidence.

- c. All protests must be filed **prior to 10 AM on Monday, October 5th.**
- d. Protests will be reviewed by the “Rules and Registration” subcommittee of the Virginia Big Day Committee.
- e. The Rules and Registration subcommittee may either disqualify the competitor or team if evidence is sufficient, drop the accusation, or forward the accusation to the Virginia Big Day Committee. Appeals may be forwarded to the Virginia Big Day committee after a decision by the Rules and Registration subcommittee is reached. A simple majority vote will be taken by the Virginia Big Day committee. The decision of the majority is final and unappealable.
- f. Competitors found to be in violation of local, state, or federal law may be disqualified for whatever period of time deemed necessary by the Virginia Big Day committee.