



## RULES & GUIDELINES

2026

### COUNTING

- Birds must be conclusively identified by sight or sound. A bird identified as 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: *Dowitcher* counts as one bird. Short-billed Dowitcher and *Dowitcher* sp. still counts as just one bird species.
- 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, Mallard Duck (unless a wild individual), Black swan and Yellow-headed Parrot are uncountable under this rule. Disputes over species validity will be settled by the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council staff.
- 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.
- **Electronic or recorded bird calls may not be used** to attract birds or entice them to vocalize during the HtH Big Day 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 may not be audible in the field. Tapes and 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, 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.*
- **AI and other Apps** for identification may not be used for the sole basis for bird identification. These items may be used to confirm a bird sighting only.
- **Spotlighting is prohibited at all times** during HtH Big Day and while scouting prior to the event. Small hand-held 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.

- Only 5% of all passerine species recorded by a team may be identified by nocturnal flight calls.
- All birds must be identified by at least 2 members of a team. Identification made by only one team member can never be counted. 95% of all birds recorded by a team must be identified by the entire team. The remaining 5% may be identified by two or more team members.
- Competing teams are not allowed to ride in the same vehicle. Even different category teams (24 hour and 12 hour) are not allowed to ride in the same vehicle. The only exception will include the ferry boat ride.
- It is not necessary for all team members to identify the same individual bird. As long as all team members encounter and identify a species during the day, the bird can be counted.
- 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 is prohibited.
- A checklist of expected species will be provided to team captains to help with your efforts in both scouting and during the event. We have outlined the expected species and have designated several others as being rare at this time of year. For those species highlighted as rarities and any others that are not on the checklist we ask that teams document the encounters in both eBird checklists and on a physical write-up form that will be provided during the countdown event. Photographic documentation is highly recommended for rarities to ensure data integrity for the HtHBD effort. Detailed descriptions with emphasis on features and characteristics that eliminate more expected species for the identification are helpful to ensure correct records are being entered into the eBird dataset.

## TIME FRAME

- 24-Hour Category: For the purposes of the GINTC Hotter than Hell Big Day, the "day" ends at Noon 12pm on Monday, June 29, 2026. Teams can list birds encountered between Noon 12pm on Sunday, June 28 and Noon 12pm Monday, June 29.
- 12-Hour Category: Teams can list birds encountered between Noon 12pm on Sunday, June 28 through Midnight 12am on Monday, June 29 or Midnight 12am on Monday, June 29 and Noon 12pm Monday, June 29.
- Please specify on your registration form which category your team has chosen.

## GEOGRAPHICAL REGION

- Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council is interested in promoting the natural resources of Galveston County; therefore, the geographic limit for birds that can

be counted for the HtH Big Day is Galveston County. We are interested in showcasing all areas of Galveston County and encourage teams to survey the entire county for this event.

## TRAVEL

- All vehicles except aircraft (including drones), and airboats may be used.
- Team members must remain at distances which permit direct, unamplified voice communication 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 on the same team are not required to travel in the same vehicle. Physically pointing out birds between vehicles is allowed.
- Competing teams are not allowed to ride in the same vehicle. Even different category teams (24 hour and 12 hour) are not allowed to ride in the same vehicle. The only exception will include the ferry boat ride.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Teams consist of a minimum of two with a maximum of five members.
- Teams can use a non-birding driver as an unofficial team member.
- The registration fee for each team is \$100 regardless of the number of team members or if you are participating in a full or half-day.

## CONDUCT

- Each of the members of the team must count only birds personally identified beyond a doubt.
- Team members must be familiar with and willing to comply with these guidelines throughout the event.
- No team may intentionally flush or drive into hiding any bird to prevent another team from finding it.
- Team members must follow Federal and State laws; for example, speed limits and laws against trespassing 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).

## CAMARADERIE

- Teams are encouraged to share information with other teams prior to and during the event.
- Any information received prior to or during the HtH Big Day may be used by teams.
- **Hired guides are not permitted.**

## ETHICS

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

## SCORING

- Each team captain is encouraged to list sightings on eBird. In the spirit of expanding the citizen science value of eBird, the listings should comply with the typical standards of listing species accounts within a small habitat area with as much accuracy as possible. This will likely require the team captain to enter multiple lists through the Big Day. The purpose of entering these lists on eBird is not to verify the team lists for this event, but rather to build the valuable data that eBird compiles.
- Each team captain is encouraged to share their lists with their team participants and GINTC to help us build our knowledge of the Galveston area's year-round nature tourism potential. An email address will be provided to team captains as the event nears to help with this information sharing.
- Teams will submit a filled-out checklist at the countdown event held at Palisade Palms, beginning at 1:00pm on the 29th. Checklists will include team members contact information and will be used to identify the overall diversity that Galveston County has to offer at what's considered the hottest and least birded time of year.
- Teams should emphasize rare and unexpected species in their lists as well as interesting and unique experiences they had during the event. As an annual event having your adventures on record as recruiting tools is a huge benefit.
- Team checklists will be accepted as submitted and the top efforts will be recognized during the countdown event.
- For official purposes, the top performing teams will be determined after the event and showcased in multiple ways through Visit Galveston's website, GINTC's website and other avenues.
- The "GINTC HtH Big Day team of 2026" and "GINTC HtH Half-Day Big Day team of 2026" will be determined by the "GINTC staff in a closely guarded, but highly transparent process.