

Neotropical Birding

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Birding's World Cup: Global Big Day (13 May 2017)

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There's just five minutes to go. Seconds tick by as you bounce along in a cramped car with a few friends, hurtling down an obscure road to be at some marsh, field, or forest by the stroke of midnight. Piling out of the car at your destination, the clock tolls twelve, signalling the start of a new day. The race is on.

1 In Peru, 1,243 species were observed in a single day during the 2016 Global Big Day! This Long-whiskered Owlet *Xenoglaux loweryi* was one of them, photographed in Amazonas, Peru (Macaulay Library reference ML31432241; Andrew Spencer).

Walking the thin line between madness and brilliance, 'big days' (also known as 'bird races') are the essence of birding's competitive spirit distilled into 24 intense, frantic and thrilling hours. Months of planning, poring over spreadsheets and pen-marked maps; days spent scouting out the perfect stops, driving practice routes while ingesting egregious amounts of caffeine; and years of birding experience used to find the right habitat for each target species, the game is to see or hear as many bird species as possible in a single, incredibly efficient, BIG day.

Why do this? Why care? These friendly competitions are an incredibly powerful way to engage people around the world, both within the birding community and beyond. Across fields of study and walks of life, there is always an innate human interest in setting records or being a part of something that has never happened before. In addition to the inherent fun, record-setting events provide an outlet to talk to non-birders about conservation issues, ecological concerns, and all the things that make birds so interesting.

In our winged world, the friendly competition generally revolves around questions such as 'How many birds can be seen in X?' This may cause folks to list birds in their home county, or keep a list for a region like Central America or the Western Palearctic. There is also the temporal component, usually taking the form of the 'Big Year', where you build your list over a single calendar year. For many, this competition eventually revolves around a single question that you may try to answer time and time again: 'how many birds can be seen in just one day?'

In the UK, the current single-day record is 178. In the US, it is 294. In July 2015, Sean Williams did a Peruvian big day on foot (Williams 2015), walking 18.15 km and finding an incredible 345 species! In October of the same year, Dušan Brinkhuizen, Rudy Gelis, Mitch Lysinger and Tuomas Seimola recorded 431 species in a jet-setting day across Ecuador—a new world record (and an achievement that we hope the participants will recount in a future *Neotropical Birding*). For big day achievements, the Neotropics reign supreme.

Big-day totals for these single parties of birders have always pushed the envelope, but how about if the global birding community participated simultaneously? Imagine if every birder in the world joined together for a single day to record their sightings! Could we document half the species in the world in a single day? Or, just perhaps, even more?

A global big day

We first tested the power of Global Big Day in 2015, when 14,000 people across 135 countries joined together for the inaugural event, contributing 39,000 checklists and recording 6,149 species in one day. An event like this had never previously been attempted. Indeed it had never previously been feasible: now, however, eBird provides a unifying free resource that is available worldwide in dozens of languages, allowing people to easily record and share their sightings (Sullivan *et al.* 2014). Last year, the second Global Big Day set a new benchmark—on 14 May 2016, 17,200 eBirders collectively recorded 6,334 species across 151 countries, and provided 47,000 checklists of birds. That's participation from about 60% of the world's birds, and 60% of the world's countries!

This year, thousands of people from around the world will work together to make 13 May 2017 the biggest day of birding the world has ever seen. Can we reach 6,500 species this year? 7,000? With your help, we can.

On 13 May, where will you be for the Global Big Day? And how will you run your event? For us as organisers, one of the most exciting aspects of the Global Big Day is seeing the varied ways that people join in the fun. There is everything from frantic 24-hour dashes along narrow mountain roads logging hundreds of species on dozens of checklists, to more sedate 5-minute window-watching sessions. *No matter how you take part, every sighting makes a difference.* Even if you're only able to spend three minutes along the road to or from work, your contribution truly counts! Of course, if you have a chance to plan a more dedicated day of birding, what better excuse do you need?

Organise a local event

A common theme during the first Global Big Days has been the many local and regional competitions that developed among friends and fellow birders—competing to see either how many checklists they could submit (i.e. from different sites) or how many species they could record overall. If you and a friend live in one county, with a couple other friends just across the border, how do you know whose county is better for birds? Obviously the answer is yours! And what better way to prove it than on the Global Big Day? How about a patch vs patch competition? Challenging a local bird club's members to see if they can collectively find and report more species than neighbouring clubs? It's all in good fun, and it all *is* good fun!

Perhaps the most heated 'battle' of the first couple of Global Big Days has been between Brazil and Peru, each vying for first place in the global species total. In Peru, the Global Big Day is already so big that even the Ministry of the Environment advertises the event! Brazil has always come out of the gate unparalleled, leading by a margin of up to 200 species in the 48 hours during and after the event. However, once Monday comes around (the event takes place on a Saturday), Peruvian birders seem to get connected to the internet simultaneously, both times pushing their country past Brazil for final totals of 1186 vs 1098 (in 2015) and 1243 vs 1128 (2016). After the totals were finalised a Brazilian eBirder commented that observing the results come in "was like watching a World Cup match!" We can think of no higher praise than for the Global Big Day to be considered the World Cup of birding.

Elsewhere in the Neotropics, Colombia and Ecuador are poised to be in contention for the top species total. Will 2017 be their year? In 2016 they trailed with 943 and 938 species respectively, but either could easily surge forward for a crack at top spot. It only takes a few more teams covering a few additional areas... Meanwhile, Argentina had an amazing turnout in 2016, with 743 checklists submitted making it second only to Brazil in the Neotropics. Check out the rest of last year's results at ebird.org/globalbigday, and see if you or someone you know might be able to raise the bar in 2017.

Be part of Global Big Day

So, how do you join in the fun? The first step is going to ebird.org/globalbigday. Here you'll find information on how to make your sightings count for Global Big Day, how to follow along with the rest of the world, and how to have the most enjoyable and productive Global Big Day efforts. Don't forget—all you have to do to be a part of birding's biggest day is to spend a few minutes outside in the garden or at a local patch. Every sighting counts!

Global Big Day is powered by eBird (ebird.org), a free global online database of bird observations that is used for science, conservation, and to keep track of bird sightings across the world. So far more than 330,000 people have entered sightings in eBird from every country on earth, totaling 360 million bird observations and 98% of all bird species. These sightings, when combined with the 1.6 million bird photos contributed from folk like you, help build amazing birding resources to help

inform and engage the future of birding and bird conservation (Davies *et al.* 2016).

It may be helpful to familiarise yourself with eBird (Williams 2015) in the weeks leading up to Global Big Day—sightings only count towards the totals if they're eBirded. You can enter sightings using the free eBird Mobile app or online at ebird.org. We personally recommend using eBird Mobile, since it allows you to track sightings in the field anywhere you go, without the need for cell service. Gone is the need for pen-and-paper—eBird Mobile's quick entry options have you covered. You can download eBird Mobile for free from the App Store or Google Play.

As Global Big Day kicks off, sightings are updated in near real-time on eBird, allowing you to follow what your friends are seeing, as well as sightings from fellow eBirders from around the world. Watching the live results roll in is one of our favourite parts of this event—seeing the incredible reach of the global birding community manifested through their eBird checklists.

On 13 May this year, we have the opportunity to make birding history. With your help, we can set a new threshold for a single day of birding, both throughout the Neotropics and around the world. We're excited to see what we can build together as a part of #GBD2017!

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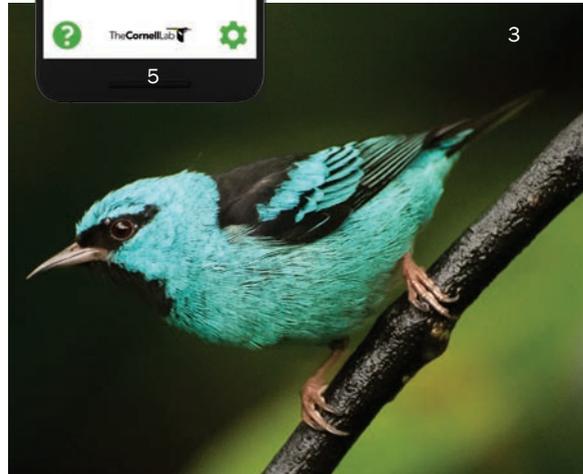


GLOBAL **BIG DAY**



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2 The emblematic Global Big Day artwork showcases the incredible diversity of birds worldwide—a perfect example of this amazing shared passion that brings people together across any barrier. (Artwork by Luke Seitz.)

3 Brazil came second in species observed this past year's Global Big Day, and also had 140 species photographed—one of which was this Blue Dacnis *Dacnis cayana*, São Paulo, Brazil (ML29356491; Luiz Carlos Ramassotti).

4 The exciting local efforts of birders and communities around the world are what really makes Global Big Day special. This team of birders from Argentina celebrates the fun that more than 17,000 people had last year (COA Vicente López en Isla Martín García).

5 Want to be a part of Global Big Day, but aren't a big fan of taking notes? The smartphone application eBird Mobile makes note-taking (and birding!) easier than ever before. Available in 25 languages anywhere in the world, check it out for free today!