

# eBird Canada ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org))

## Featured eBirder: Mike Burrell

February 13, 2012



Did you know that roughly 22% of all checklists entered into eBird in the last month have had at least one species that needed to be reviewed? All of these records are reviewed by our worldwide team of over 500 volunteer regional reviewers. Our regional editor network is instrumental in following up with records, helping answer users' questions, and helping eBirders understand how to more effectively use eBird and why it's important. Mike Burrell of Bancroft, Ontario, isn't just one of our best regional editors, he has been instrumental in building Ontario's entire regional editor network. Our Ontario review team now includes dozens of Ontario's most active birders, many of whom were first convinced to look at eBird by Mike. Beyond that, Mike has given countless eBird presentations throughout much of Ontario and is always looking for new ways to engage users. In the last year, checklist submissions have more than doubled from Ontario, and Mike's role in this is indisputable. Please join us in congratulating this month's eBirder of the month, Mike Burrell.

**Residence:** Bancroft, Ontario

**Years eBirding:** 5

**eBird Life List:** 635 (391 in Canada)

**Ontario Life List:** 358

**Number of eBird Locations:** 918

**Number of eBird Checklists:** 5249 (3125 in Canada)

**Blog:** <http://mikeburrell.blogspot.com/>

From Mike:

I became a “serious” birder after getting a chance to learn from some great mentors during a month at Long Point Bird Observatory when I was fifteen. One of the big things I took from that experience was the importance of keeping detailed records--not just of the exciting rarities you can find once and a while, but also the common birds, for that is where most of the real interesting patterns can emerge. Since that experience I struggled with a way to record my personal records to the level of detail I wanted. That changed when I started using eBird. It was exactly what I had wanted.

What I really like about eBird is that it is constantly being improved in response to feedback from eBirders. When I first started using eBird the thing I wanted to see most was county-level tools in Canada, as I enviously saw the utility in the US where county-level features were already a reality. Now I can, and I love being able to explore the eBird data through the bar charts and maps at whatever scale I want. The eBird customizable alerts are also high on my list of features I like. My favourite thing about eBird though is how it opens up the data for everyone. In the world we now live in with instant communication there is no reason we shouldn't be able to find out about the birds of any region we want (including right where we live!). I think back to the amount my brother and I learned from keeping track of the rarities reported on birding listserves when we were starting out and can only be in awe of the amount of information now available through eBird. I have had the chance to use eBird as a planning tool for birding trips and I can say that it makes bird-finding on trips so much easier than ever before, since travelling birders are often interested in common species that might not be reported to rare bird hotlines (if they exist).

I primarily began using eBird as a means to keep track of my own bird records but now it is partly fuelled by a drive to help make our understanding of bird distribution and abundance as complete as possible. That, plus as most eBirders will know the competitive aspect of eBirding (with yourself and with others) is highly addictive. I am constantly setting new eBird goals for myself. A couple years ago I set the goal to enter at least one checklist per day, then it grew to two per day. Now I just try to enter as many checklists as possible, striving to refine my locations down as much as possible. I am now in a friendly competition with myself to try to raise my

total county ticks as high as possible in Ontario--it's a huge province and I still have three counties with no checklists.

My drive with eBird has been to see it adopted by as many birders as possible in Ontario. That's no easy feat in a province as big as Ontario, with a relatively large number of birders (our provincial birding listserv has about 2000 subscribers) that traditionally have segregated themselves into several core birding areas. To this end, countless birders have heard me get on eBird rants (my brother, another avid eBirder, usually warns birders now before I arrive!) and have (hopefully) read some of the articles I have written in our birding newsletters and elsewhere. I have recently concentrated my efforts on birding and naturalist clubs, hoping to get these organisations to start using eBird as a way to consolidate club records while making them available to the very same people that contribute to them. A couple clubs in Ontario have uploaded their entire databases of bird records to eBird, making those areas extra rich in eBird data. By getting clubs on board with eBird it also often brings many of their members into eBird as regular contributors. The other approach I have recently employed is to target the big birding figures in local areas to take on regional editing. This has been successful on two fronts, first it gets the most qualified candidate to do the eBird editing for an area, but second and most importantly--these are often the people that can convince many other local birders to start contributing to eBird.

I feel like I would be missing an opportunity if I didn't mention what is likely "the elephant in the room" when it comes to convincing established birders to start using eBird. I am sure it is similar in most places, where many of the established birders that have been around for a while are, by definition, "older". They might not be the most technologically savvy, but they are great birders, often with amazingly complete bird records usually buried in boxes of old field notebooks in their basements. If the younger generation of birders don't act quickly to encourage these birders to digitally archive this vast amount of data we are at a very real risk of losing generations worth of bird records. The reality is eBird isn't hard to use. Yes, it represents a change, and change can be difficult, but if bird records aren't recorded, they won't exist. Those eBirders who are working hard to convince others to join eBird would do well to point the non-eBirders towards the Top100 lists for their local areas. If there is one thing we know about birders it is the thought of seeing a young'un with the biggest list in an area is enough to drive them crazy! At the Top100 they will also inevitably see that some of their old friends have started using eBird, and if they can do it, it can't be that hard.