

American Woodcock Singing-ground Survey: New Observer Guidance

Survey protocol requires that *whenever possible*, the same person should run the same route each year. When a new observer takes over a survey route, the observer should complete the route with the last person to run the route (the previous observer) to allow for one year of overlap in the data. Following this one-year of overlap the new observer should then run that same route on their own year after year, until it is necessary to transition the route to another observer, when this process should be repeated. If a year of overlap is not feasible, a route should still be assigned to a new observer as data for that route remains valuable, necessary, and of high importance and priority.

What is the procedure for transitioning from one observer to the next?

New observers should complete the survey with the previous observer on the same day at the same time; however, they should collect and submit data independently. Observers should ride together in the same car, observing the same stops at the same time, but they should collect data on separate survey forms, and not discuss what they hear or compare results while completing the survey. Observer data are used as covariables to adjust for differences in observers' ability to hear birds, thus data must be collected at the same time. Please be advised that date of survey, route name, official sunset, sky condition, temperature, wind, precipitation, odometer readings and times at each stop should match between observers' survey forms.

Both observers should submit separate survey forms reporting their individual observations—they should not collect data on the same form or assign two names to one form. Observers should then indicate on their survey forms (just write a note in the margins) and during online data submission that they are 1 of 2 observers for the route (old or new observer). Data should be entered separately for each route to create two distinct survey records.

What is the purpose of the year of observer overlap?

This year of overlap serves several purposes. For practical purposes, it allows new observers to learn survey procedures and local route conditions from the experienced observers, which helps to ensure that valid and consistent data is submitted year after year.

For the purposes of data analysis, because observer data are used as covariables to adjust for differences in observers' ability to hear birds, and the approach used to calculate the 2 year population trend requires at least 2 non-zero counts by at least one observer, overlapping new with previous observers will ensure that route data qualifies for the 2 year comparison.

What if no one completed the route last year (a route might simply not have been run, or a woodcock route might have been in constant-zero status)?

Whenever possible, attempt to contact and assign the route to the last person to run the route. The USFWS Woodcock SGS North American Coordinator can provide the state and province coordinator with the observer's contact information from the previous year as well as the last known observer for a reactivated CZ route. If this is not feasible, assign the route to a new observer who should complete the route on their own.

What if a year of overlap between observers is not feasible (the previous observer is not available, resource constraints, etc.)?

When a year of observer overlap is not possible, a route should absolutely still be assigned to a new observer to complete the route on their own. Data collected by a new observer without a year of observer overlap is valuable and will qualify for the long-term trend analysis. Data for that route remains necessary and is of high importance and priority.

How does this impact data management?

A year of overlap will result in two distinct records for the route in question for that year (two survey forms from separate people, two separate data submissions via the online data entry website). Each observer is submitting one new record for the year in question, correctly resulting in two records in our database for the route for that year.