

eBird 202: Advanced tips and tricks

In eBird 101 (*Bluebill* 61(2): 63-73) we showed you the basics behind submitting checklists and exploring the data. In the second instalment, eBird 202 (*Bluebill* 61(3): 125-129), we built on what we learned in eBird 101 to learn some advanced options and tips when entering data. In eBird 202, we'll continue to build on what we have learned previously, with an emphasis on some of the less known options and tips for getting more out of your eBird experience.

Location management

In eBird 101 we showed you how to select a location for your checklists. Over time, you can build up quite a list of locations and it is a good idea to do some house keeping once and a while. For this, you'll want to go to your locations list, which is accessible by clicking "My eBird" and then selecting "Manage my locations" from the right-hand margin or by going directly:

<http://ebird.org/ebird/MyEBird?cmd=manageLocations>

Hotspots

The most common form of house-keeping involves keeping your location list up-to-date with hotspots. The term Hotspot is a bit of misnomer that causes a fair bit of confusion. Hotspots aren't necessarily "hot", but rather they represent birding locations that are likely to be visited by more than one or two birders. They could be a popular stretch of road (generally less than 10 kilometres in length), a park, a lookout onto a lake, or a field that has a good shorebird or waterfowl spot in it. The main point of hotspots is to consolidate eBird data from multiple accounts into a single map location. That being said, new hotspots are constantly being created in the system and you likely have some locations in your account that should be turned into, or merged with, hotspots.

When you're looking at your list of locations (Figure 1) you can look at the "Type" column (note that you can sort your list by any of the columns by clicking the header) – "P" are personal locations and "S" are shared locations.

Suggesting a personal location for hotspot status

If you see any personal locations that should be hotspots you can click the checkbox to the left of the location name and then select "suggest as hotspots" from the options dropdown menu (circled in Figure 1). Once you have selected the option to suggest these sites as hotspots, click the "submit button". This is a good way to submit several locations at once as a hotspot. Once a location has been submitted as a hotspot it goes through a review process by a volunteer to make sure it is appropriate to be turned into a hotspot that will be available to everyone.

Another way to suggest a personal location as a hotspot is to click the blue "edit" button that corresponds to that location in your location list. This will open up the location page for that location (Figure 2). From there, you can click the "Suggest as Hotspot" link and you are done. This approach works well, but is slower if you have multiple locations to suggest.

Manage My Locations

Total # of Locations: 3284

Total # of Checklists: 14137

Type Key: P=personal location, S=shared location

Search:

<input type="checkbox"/> Location	Country	State/Province	County	In My Locs?	Type*	# Checklists	
<input type="checkbox"/> *South Frontenac--Washburn Road yard	CA	Ontario	Frontenac	Yes	P	441	Edit
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 104 Hardwood Lane, south of Bedford Mills	CA	Ontario	Frontenac	Yes	S	1	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Adolphustown-Glenora Ferry crossing (Adolphustown side)	CA	Ontario	Lennox and Addington	Yes	S	7	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Aikens Road	CA	Ontario	Haldimand	Yes	P	1	Edit
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ailsa Craig	CA	Ontario	Middlesex	Yes	P	1	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Ajax--Carruthers Creek Golf Centre	CA	Ontario	Durham	Yes	S	1	Edit
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ajax--Rotary Park	CA	Ontario	Durham	Yes	S	1	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Alfred area	CA	Ontario	Prescott and Russell	Yes	P	2	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Alfred Sewage Lagoons	CA	Ontario	Prescott and Russell	Yes	S	5	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Algonquin PP--WRS to Provoking Lake loop	CA	Ontario	Nipissing	Yes	P	1	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Algonquin Provincial Park	CA	Ontario	Nipissing	Yes	S	27	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Algonquin Provincial Park--Achray	CA	Ontario	Nipissing	Yes	S	1	Edit
<input type="checkbox"/> Algonquin Provincial Park--Blackfox portage	CA	Ontario	Nipissing	Yes	S	2	Edit

Figure 1: "My locations" list. Note the black circle over the options drop-down menu.

Edit Location

[← back](#)

 **Algonquin Provincial Park--Hwy 60 at VC driveway**
45.5876022, -78.3672407 [Suggest as Hotspot](#)

Rename Move Merge

Enter new name

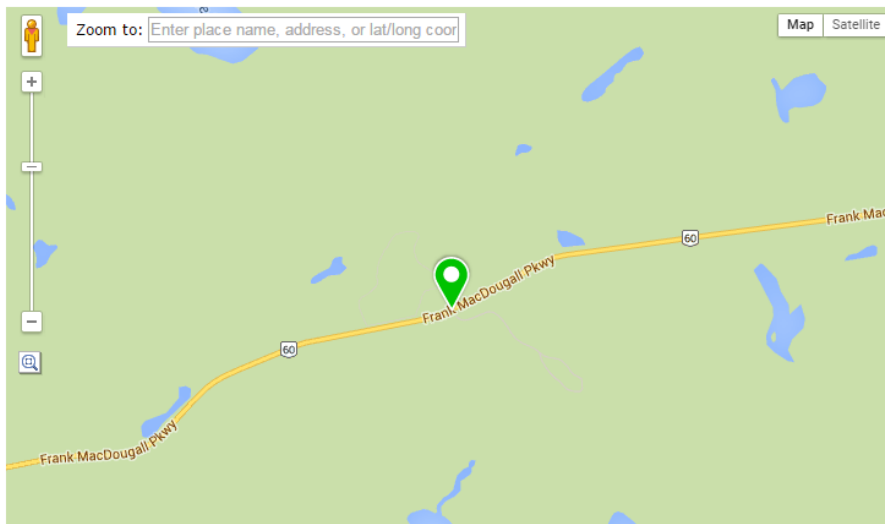


Figure 2: The edit location screen

A note about location ownership

Whoever creates a location is the “owner” of that location. Only the owner can change the official name, move, merge, or suggest a location as a hotspot. So that means that if I create a location, then share a checklist with someone else, they will have that location in their account but will not be able to suggest it as a hotspot. If you have a shared location in your account you can open the edit location screen for it and below the location name there will be text like the following “Shared location owned by XXXX” to indicate who the owner is. If you think a shared location should be moved, merged, or made into a hotspot, you’ll have to get in touch with the owner and ask them to do it. All hotspots are technically “owned” by eBird, so only an eBird administrator can move, merge, or change the official name.

De-cluttering your location list

As time goes on, you’ll inevitably accumulate a large list of locations. This can grow to the point that it makes finding a particular location to submit data for or to explore becomes difficult. Below are some tips for “cleaning up” your list of locations.

Renaming/re-ordering

One trick is to re-order your location list. To do this, you just have to rename the locations, since eBird automatically sorts your location list in alphabetic order. If you have a couple locations that you regularly submit data for, try adding an asterisk (*) in front of the location name; this way it will move to the top of your list. You can get even more complex using a hierarchy of 2, 3, or even 4 asterisks at the front of the location name to sort your favourite sites to the top of your list. Likewise, you could add a “zz” to the front of a location name if you don’t want to see it, so that it appears at the very bottom of your list. Some people get quite complex with their location naming conventions adding country, province, and even county codes to the front of their location names so they sort out nicely (for example, adding “CA-ON-FRON” in front of a Kingston location). Whatever you decide, renaming locations is a great way to stay organized. Keep in mind that even if you don’t own a location (i.e. a hotspot) you can still rename it – the renaming will only affect how the location appears in your account so everyone else still sees the original.

To rename a location, find it in your list of location and click the “edit” button to open the edit locations screen (Figure 2). From there, make sure the “Rename” radial button is selected, then edit the name in the box and click the “Rename” button to the right. Make sure the name in bold at the top of the screen changes to your new name before closing the window or clicking the back button.

Merging

It’s quite possible that you will accidentally create a duplicate location. For your sanity and to keep the eBird maps as tidy as possible, these are important to correct. To merge one location into another, open the edit location screen for the location you don’t want to keep. In the example below, I accidentally created a location for Marshlands Conservation Area, even though there is already a nearby hotspot for the same location, called “Kingston—Marshlands CA”. Whenever possible, it is best to use a hotspot so that your data for that location is combined with everyone else’s data. Once you have opened the edit location screen (Figure 2), select the “Merge” radial button (Figure 3). By clicking the merge option,

eBird will display your location with a green pinpoint and other nearby locations either as blue (personal) or flaming orange (hotspot). Find the location you want to merge your location with, click it and the text “Merge # checklists with [destination location name]” will appear. In this example the text reads “Merge 1 checklists with Kingston—Marshlands CA”, which tells me that I had one checklist in my duplicate location and the destination location is titled “Kingston—Marshlands CA”. Confirm that the location to merge with is the one you wanted. In most cases, you’ll want to delete your location after you have merged the data with the destination location, so the “Delete after merging” checkbox is checked. This just means that once all of your checklists are switched to the destination location eBird will delete your old location. If everything looks good, go ahead and click the “Merge” button and you are done!

NOTE: if the merge option does not appear, it means one of the following things:

- a) You are not the owner of the location; only location owners can merge locations
- b) There are no checklists associated with this location. If that’s the case, there will be an option to just delete the location.

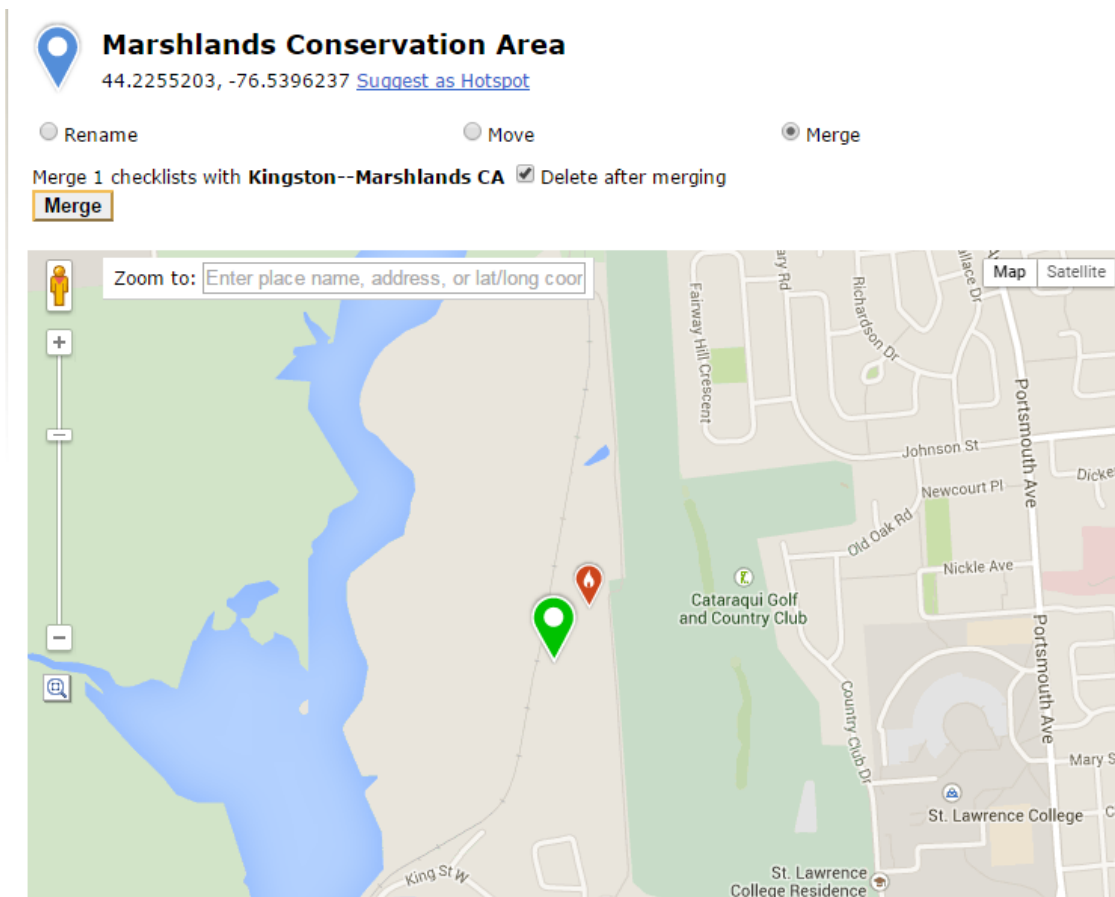


Figure 3: Merging a location

Hiding locations

As your eBird entries continue to build, your list of locations will inevitably grow – but many of these locations are unlikely to be used ever again, especially if you regularly travel to new places for birding trips. eBird offers a way to hide locations from the list of locations that you use for data entry. This is really handy because you could remove all but your most visited locations, so that when you go to enter your data, you can quickly find the location in your “my location” list in step 1 of data entry. If you can’t find a location in the list, they will still show up on your map and can be selected that way.

To hide a location from your location list, open up the “manage my locations” (Figure 1). Select the locations you want to hide by checking of their checkboxes (Tip: you can select a block of locations by clicking the first one in the list, then holding the shift key and clicking the last in the list; this will select all locations between the first and last that you clicked). Once you have selected the locations you want to hide, select “hide from my locations” from the options dropdown menu (circled in Figure 1) and then click the “submit” button. You can reverse this decision by selecting the locations and then selecting “show in my locations” from the dropdown menu. Whether a location is shown in your location list or not is indicated with a yes or no in the “In my Locs” column.

Preferences

eBird offers a variety of ways for you to customize your eBird experience. Below we’ll go over a few of the helpful options that can be set using the eBird preferences settings. To open the Preferences menu, sign in to eBird, and there will be a “Preferences” link at the top of the screen beside your name.

On the preferences page, you can set all sorts of things; most of these are self-explanatory so have a look. A couple important ones are the ability to hide or show your checklist comments. Checklist comments are the ones you enter on the same screen as the date and your effort. These typically include details about things like the weather, where exactly you were, people you were with, etc. By default, these comments are private (only visible to you and eBird reviewers) but if you regularly put important information in here that you want to be visible to everyone else on eBird, by all means, select the option to show your checklist comments. You should note that species comments (the comments you put in the notes section for each species on your checklist) are always visible to the public.

On the preferences page you can also toggle your privacy, such as opting out of the “Top100” or hiding your name to the public. Select the options you are most comfortable with. Even if you choose to be anonymous, your name will still be visible to eBird editors so they can contact you for details about your sightings.

Conclusion

In this issue we’ve explored some of the options for getting more out of eBird. In eBird 203 we’ll explore some of the ways to really explore the details of the eBird data exploration tools. In the meantime if you have any questions about using eBird don’t hesitate to contact Mike Burrell (613-442-0020, mburrell@birdscanada.org).