

SWIFT Birding Software

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By Cindy Cartwright and Jay Fitzsimmons

SWIFT Birding Software is a list-based application that allows birders to keep track of their sightings. More than one birder can have accounts, and each birder can have multiple lists (e.g., a 2012 list with Ontario, Québec, and Michigan sub-lists). Overall, we found that SWIFT offers many useful features and provides excellent customer service, but its user-friendliness needs improvement.

SWIFT bills itself as “the world leader in listing software for birders,” and has users in over 45 countries (with most residing in England and the United States). SWIFT runs on Windows (and Mac with Windows emulators such as Bootcamp) and can be purchased and downloaded easily online. Free updates are made available regularly, which provide improvements to software functionality and updates to taxonomic revisions. Our review is for version 1.3.2.0, released March 2012.

SWIFT offers a number of useful features including:

- Allows users to import checklist data from other birder software formats, and allows data backup to preserve checklists.
- A “Regulars” tab that shows the most common birds you have observed in your list. This allows birders to quickly select frequently observed birds in new observation checklists. The threshold of how often a species must be observed before it appears in the Regulars tab can be changed easily by users.
- Allows export of lists to eBird.

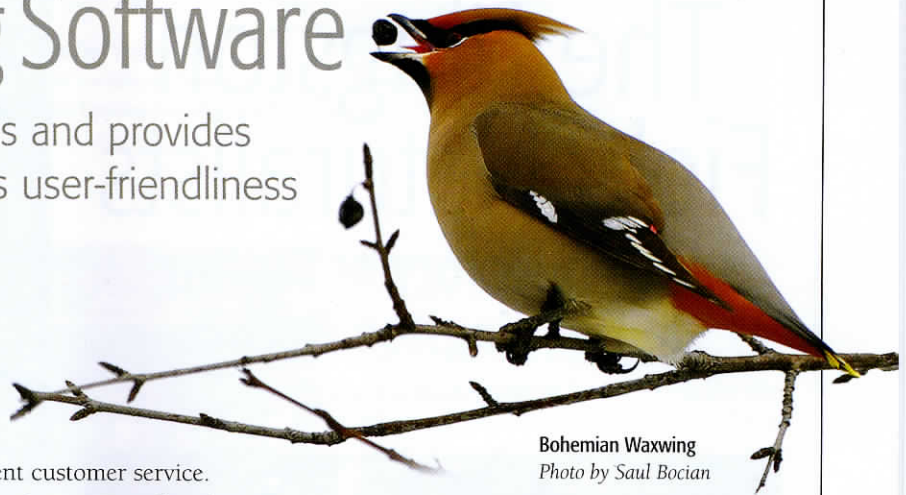
■ Excellent customer service.

We found SWIFT staff to be prompt and receptive to feedback. In fact, we had written our original review based on the previous version of SWIFT (version 1.3.1.0 released in January 2012), and re-wrote the present review because SWIFT improved their software in response to our preliminary review’s criticisms. SWIFT promises to release another version soon (perhaps by the time you read this review) that accounts for several of our remaining criticisms. Such rapid, positive response to criticism is laudable.

There were several opportunities for improvement with SWIFT that generally related to its layout and intuitiveness, especially for birders who are not computer savvy.

The tree-based structure of the program automatically recalculates the total number of birds in the higher branches on your list as new species are added but the actual species names do not appear. So if Snow Bunting is added as a new species to the Christmas Bird Count list, the totals on your Ontario, Canada and Life lists will all increase by one but Snow Bunting will not appear when these lists are opened. What we would like is a life list of species you have observed in all of your sub-lists.

The same name cannot be used for more than one list. For example, a list called “Ontario” cannot be included in a list called “CBCs” if it has already been used in a list called “Canada.”



Bohemian Waxwing
Photo by Saul Bocian

As the number of lists increases, the headings quickly disappear off the side of the screen and the user must scroll back and forth to find their lists. The spacing between the various lists is not adjustable to remedy this problem. According to SWIFT’s president, an upcoming version of SWIFT should include a fix for this problem.

The User Guide is quite long and complicated. For example, there are 10 pages dedicated to creating lists. These pages are critical to successfully using the software and visually appealing as a result of abundant screenshots, but difficult to manage.

We found parts of SWIFT, especially parts with moving animations (e.g., icons popping out of list names), slow for our computers to process. Given that we have common computers and operating systems (e.g., Windows Vista) we assume others may also periodically encounter slow processing with SWIFT.

The President of SWIFT, Steve McAllister, has already addressed some of our original criticisms in the latest version of SWIFT, and is working on further improvements for an upcoming version. We are thus optimistic that SWIFT will soon improve further. At present, birders who want basic, functional lists should use more intuitive and less complicated birding software.