

Observations of Birds in Northeastern Delaware During Early November 1973-2003

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The following is an account of the birds seen during the first week of November along Route 9 between Reedy Point, Delaware and Kitt's Hummock, Delaware. The descriptions are based upon 31 years of observations carried out on the first Monday or the first Tuesday in November, 1973 through 2003.

The annual big day was begun in 1973 when the author was employed as a biology teacher in the Abington (PA) School District. Because voting took place in the elementary schools and a lot of vehicular traffic was generated, there was concern for the safety of young students. The school calendar had been structured so that the schools were closed. It followed that the author and one of his colleagues decided to go birding in Delaware. That was the beginning of an annual Election Day event that has proven to be an extremely interesting and rewarding endeavor.

For many years, we would bird along Delaware Route 9 from early morning until 3:30 P.M. followed by a frantic drive home to reach the polling place in time to cast our ballot. Since most of the participants have been retired for some time now, we have shifted the date from Election Day (the first Tuesday in November in Pennsylvania) to the first Monday in November in order to gain a couple of hours of additional valuable birding time.

Observation ordinarily begins at 7:30 A.M at the southern end of the Route 9 bridge over the Delaware-Chesapeake Canal at Reedy Point and includes stops at Port Penn, Taylor's Bridge, Woodland Beach Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Port Mahon, and the Little Creek WMA. For the last five years, the birding day has been concluded at about 5:30 P.M due to the loss of light, typically in the area of Kitt's Hummock (see Map 1).

Over the 31 years of observations, the group conducting the big day has been as small as two individuals and as large as eight. Participants have included the following DVOC members, some of

whom are now deceased: Robert Anderson, Harold Jackson, John Janowski, Donald Jones, Alfred Kronschnabel, John LaVia, Ronald Logan, Robert Sehl, William Tucker, and Francis Windfelder. Non-DVOC participants have included: Joseph Kenneally of Chatham, MA, Neil Mercando of Pipersville, PA, and David Sharp of Ardsley, PA.

During the 31 years that the big day has been conducted, a total of 155 species have been recorded. The highest number of species (88) was recorded on Monday, November 4, 2002 while the average number of species seen each year is 80. During the 31 years of observations, there have been a number of memorable sightings.

On November 3, 1981 at about 9:00 A.M., Harold Jackson and I came upon a large gathering of shorebirds about a mile below the Reedy Point Bridge on Route 9 that we could hear but could not see due to extremely thick fog. I parked the truck next to the water, and as the fog rolled away, tens of thousands of shorebirds were revealed to us. We sat transfixed by the spectacle as 18 species of shorebirds including Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, American Avocet, both Dowitcher species, 4 species of peeps and others came into view. By using the vehicle as a blind, we observed many of the birds at very close range.

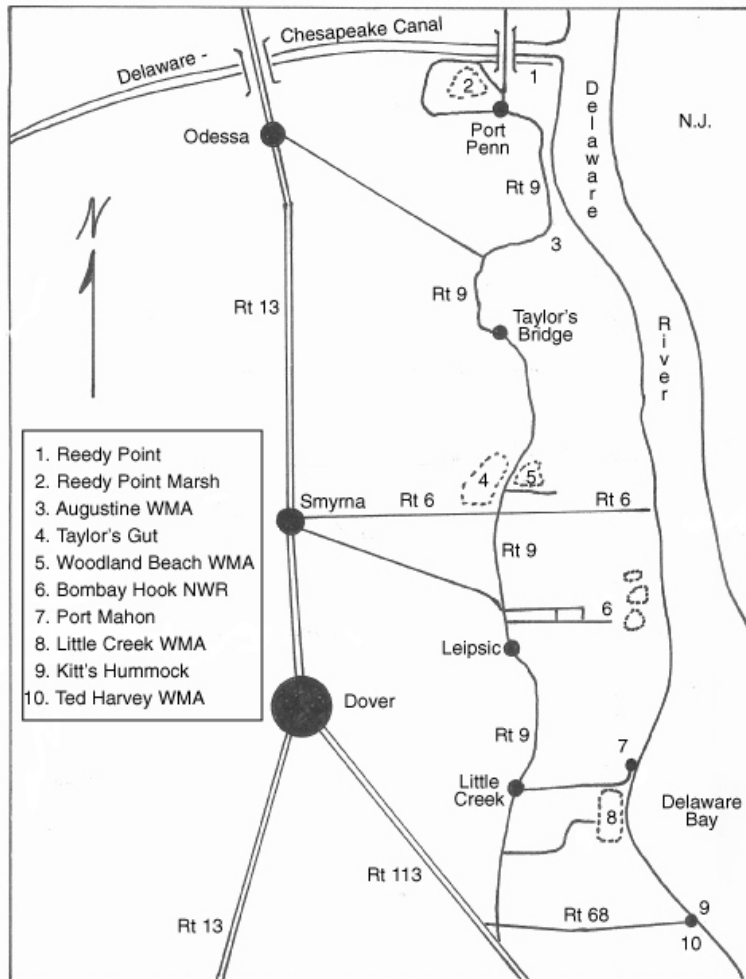
On November 1, 1974, David Sharp, my colleague from work, and I counted 137 raptors of 7 species perched on the poles of the electrical substation below the Augustine WMA. The species observed were Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and American Kestrel.

In 1975, on the only day that it rained in 31 years, Ronald Logan, Robert Sehl, Harold Jackson, John LaVia, Alfred Kronschnabel, and I sat in Robert Anderson's van and watched over 200 Common Snipe in a large puddle next to the road at Woodland Beach.

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Other memorable sightings were a low-flying Goshawk at Reedy Point in 1993 and a Loggerhead Shrike at Woodland Beach found by William Tucker in 2001. Interestingly, we have recorded Lincoln's Sparrow twice at the exact same location under the

Reedy Point Bridge near the canal, albeit ten years apart. Some additional interesting birds observed include Ross's Goose, a Yellow-headed Blackbird at Augustine WMA in 1992, and a very late Baltimore Oriole at Port Penn in 2002.



Map 1. Route and Birding Locations.

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The following is an annotated record of each of the species recorded in Northeastern Delaware during the first week of November 1973-2003.

1. Common Loon - *Gavia immer*

Early wintering birds were seen on twelve occasions in the Delaware River at Reedy Point and/or in the Delaware Bay off of Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

2. Red-throated loon - *Gavia stellata*

Early wintering birds were seen on five occasions in the Delaware Bay off of Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

3. Pied-billed Grebe - *Podilymbus podiceps*

Fairly common. This species has often been located in the marshes and impoundments along Route 9 and at Bombay Hook NWR.

4. Horned Grebe - *Podiceps auritus*

One individual was observed on Nov. 3, 1995 in the Delaware River at Reedy Point.

5. American White Pelican - *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

A single individual was observed in the marsh at Reedy Point on Nov. 3, 2003.

6. Double-crested Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Fairly common - especially at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

7. American Bittern - *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Uncommon. One individual was observed in the impoundment south of the Port Mahon Rd. on Nov. 1 1999. A second individual was observed along Route 9 at Taylor's Bridge on Nov. 8, 1988.

8. Great Blue Heron - *Ardea herodias*

Common.

9. Great Egret - *Ardea alba*

Common - particularly at Bombay Hook NWR.

10. Snowy Egret - *Egretta thula*

Fairly common at Bombay Hook NWR and in the marshes at Reedy Point.

11. Little Blue Heron - *Egretta caerulea*

One individual was observed at Kitt's Hummock on Nov. 1, 1994.

12. Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis*

Three individuals were located in a field along Route 9 south of Taylor's Bridge on Nov. 5, 1991.

13. Green Heron - *Butorides virescens*

Green Herons have been found on about half of the big days at a number of locations along Route 9.

14. Black-crowned Night-Heron - *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Fairly common. Black-crowned Night Herons have often been seen at the north end of the Bear Swamp at Bombay Hook NWR.

15. Tundra Swan - *Cygnus columbianus*

While very common in late fall and winter on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, this species is far less abundant along the Delaware Bay. Nevertheless, small flocks have been observed on about one third of the birding days.

16. Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*

An introduced species that used to be very common. Recent efforts at Bombay Hook NWR to reduce the population have been successful. A few individuals are found each year in areas away from Bombay Hook NWR such as Reedy Point.

17. Snow Goose - *Chen caerulescens*

Exceedingly common. The population is expanding.

18. Ross' Goose - *Chen rossii*

Found on six censuses: 1988, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2002, and 2003. Individuals were probably present in most years but the censusing group was not successful in locating them in other years in the large flocks of Snow Geese with which they associate.

19. Canada Goose - *Branta canadensis*

Exceedingly common.

20. Wood Duck - *Aix sponsa*

Common. Easily found in appropriate habitat.

21. Green-winged Teal - *Anas crecca*

Common.

22. American Black Duck - *Anas rubripes*

Common.

23. Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*

Exceedingly common.

24. Northern Pintail - *Anas acuta*

Common - especially at Bombay Hook NWR.

25. Blue-winged Teal - *Anas discors*

Uncommon. A pair was seen at Bombay Hook NWR on Nov. 5, 2001. Another pair was found at Bombay Hook NWR Nov. 3, 1981.

26. Northern Shoveler - *Anas clypeata*

Fairly common - especially at Woodland Beach WMA and Taylor's Gut.

27. Gadwall - *Anas strepera*

Common.

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- 28. American Wigeon** - *Anas americana*
Fairly common. Some early migrants can be found in most years.
- 29. Canvasback** - *Aythya valisineria*
Uncommon. This species was found at Port Mahon and/or Kitt's Hummock on five occasions.
- 30. Greater Scaup** - *Aythya marila*
Fairly common in Delaware Bay.
- 31. Lesser Scaup** - *Aythya affinis*
Fairly common in Delaware Bay.
- 32. Long-tailed Duck** - *Clangula hyemalis*
Uncommon. This species has been seen on three occasions in Delaware Bay off of Port Mahon or Kitt's Hummock.
- 33. Surf Scoter** - *Melanitta perspicillata*
Uncommon. Found on three occasions at Kitt's Hummock.
- 34. Common Goldeneye** - *Bucephala clangula*
Uncommon. Seen occasionally in Delaware Bay off of Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock. One individual was found in the impoundment at Little Creek WMA on Nov. 3, 2003.
- 35. Bufflehead** - *Bucephala albeola*
Seen most years in Delaware Bay.
- 36. Hooded Merganser** - *Lophodytes cucullatus*
Fairly common.
- 37. Common Merganser** - *Mergus merganser*
Uncommon. Individuals were located in the Delaware-Chesapeake Canal or in the Delaware River at Reedy Point on six occasions.
- 38. Red-breasted Merganser** - *Mergus serrator*
Common in Delaware Bay.
- 39. Ruddy Duck** - *Oxyura jamaicensis*
Common at Bombay Hook NWR and Taylor's Gut near Woodland Beach WMA.
- 40. Black Vulture** - *Coragyps atratus*
Common.
- 41. Turkey Vulture** - *Cathartes aura*
Exceedingly common.
- 42. Osprey** - *Pandion haliaetus*
One or two lingering birds have been seen each year.
- 43. Bald Eagle** - *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
One to five individuals have been seen each year.
- 44. Northern Harrier** - *Circus cyaneus*
Common.
- 45. Sharp-shinned Hawk** - *Accipiter striatus*
Common. Recorded nearly every year.
- 46. Cooper's Hawk** - *Accipiter cooperii*
Fairly Common. Recorded on three-fourths of the censuses.

- 47. Northern Goshawk** - *Accipiter gentilis*
One individual flew low over our heads and continued flying westward over the marsh at Reedy Point on Nov. 3, 1981.



Northern Goshawk by Adrian Binns

- 48. Red-shouldered Hawk** - *Buteo lineatus*
Uncommon. Individuals were found near Augustine WMA on Nov. 1, 1974, at Reedy Point on Nov. 4, 1980, and at Bombay Hook NWR on Nov 5, 2001.
- 49. Red-tailed Hawk** - *Buteo jamaicensis*
Common.
- 50. Rough-legged Hawk** - *Buteo lagopus*
One very early light-phased individual was observed on Nov. 1, 1993 near Bombay Hook NWR.
- 51. American Kestrel** - *Falco sparverius*
Common.
- 52. Merlin** - *Falco columbarius*
Fairly Common. Individuals have been seen on about one third of the census days.
- 53. Peregrine Falcon** - *Falco peregrinus*
Rare in the 1970's and 80's, at least one individual has been observed in 9 of the last 12 years - usually on or near the Reedy Point bridge over the Delaware-Chesapeake Canal.
- 54. Ring-necked Pheasant** - *Phasianus colchicus*
An introduced species. It is far less common than in the 1970's and 80's. A few individuals have been heard in recent years at Reedy Point and Port Penn.
- 55. Northern Bobwhite** - *Colinus virginianus*
Less common than in the 1970's and 80's, Bobwhite can still be seen and heard at Bombay Hook NWR and in the adjoining woods. We have also found Northern Bobwhite at the Ted Harvey WMA near Kitt's Hummock.

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56. Common Moorhen - *Gallinula chloropus*

Uncommon. Individuals are sometimes seen in the marshes near Reedy Point, Taylor's Bridge, and Woodland Beach.

57. American Coot - *Fulica americana*

A few individuals are found each year at Bombay Hook NWR.

58. Black-bellied Plover - *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common.

59. American Golden-Plover - *Pluvialis dominica*

One individual was located in a plowed field along Route 9 south of Leipsic on Nov. 1, 1999.

60. Semipalmated Plover - *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Common at Kitt's Hummock.

61. Killdeer - *Charadrius vociferus*

Common.

62. American Avocet - *Recurvirostra americana*

Seen every year at Bombay Hook NWR and/or Little Creek WMA.

63. Greater Yellowlegs - *Tringa melanoleuca*

Common.

64. Lesser Yellowlegs - *Tringa flavipes*

Uncommon. A few individuals are seen each year.

65. Willet - *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

Uncommon. Most have migrated by November first. An occasional lingering bird can be found.

66. Hudsonian Godwit - *Limosa haemastica*

Fairly common. One to five individuals were found on each of twelve big days.

67. Marbled Godwit - *Limosa fedoa*

An individual was found a mile south of the Reedy Point bridge on Nov. 3, 1981.

68. Ruddy Turnstone - *Arenaria interpres*

Uncommon. A few individuals are usually found at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

69. Red Knot - *Calidris canutus*

A species that is in severe decline. Fairly common at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock in the 1970's and 1980's, the only sighting in the last 6 years was that of three birds at Kitt's Hummock on Nov. 3, 2003.

70. Sanderling - *Calidris alba*

Fairly common at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

71. Semipalmated Sandpiper - *Calidris pusilla*

Fairly common.

72. Western Sandpiper - *Calidris mauri*

Uncommon.

73. Least Sandpiper - *Calidris minutilla*

Fairly common.

74. White-rumped Sandpiper - *Calidris fuscicollis*

Uncommon.

75. Pectoral Sandpiper - *Calidris melanotos*

Fairly common.

76. Dunlin - *Calidris alpina*

The most common shorebird at this time of the year.

77. Short-billed Dowitcher - *Limnodromus griseus*

Uncommon.

78. Long-billed Dowitcher - *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Fairly common.

79. Wilson's Snipe - *Gallinago delicata*

A species that was found on almost every trip in the 1970's and 80's has only been seen 3 times since 1994. In 1975, over 200 individuals were seen in a large puddle on the side road off of Route 9 at the Woodland Beach WMA during a heavy rain.

80. Laughing Gull - *Larus atricilla*

Most have migrated by the first week in November but a few lingering birds can be found - particularly at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

81. Ring-billed Gull - *Larus delawarensis*

Common.

82. Bonaparte's Gull - *Larus philadelphia*

Uncommon. Sometimes seen at Kitt's Hummock.

83. Herring Gull - *Larus argentatus*

Fairly common.

84. Lesser Black-backed Gull - *Larus fuscus*

Exceedingly rare in the 1970's and 80's, this species has been seen in four of the last seven years - usually at Kitt's Hummock.

85. Great Black-backed Gull - *Larus marinus*

Common.

86. Royal Tern - *Sterna maxima*

Fairly common. Usually seen at Port Mahon.

87. Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*

Rare. Individuals were seen on Nov. 4, 1980 and also on Nov. 3, 1981. Both sightings were at Kitt's Hummock.

88. Forster's Tern - *Sterna forsteri*

Common at Port Mahon and Kitt's Hummock.

89. Rock Pigeon - *Columba livia*

Exceedingly common.

90. Mourning Dove - *Zenaidura macroura*

Exceedingly common.

91. Eastern Screech-Owl - *Otus asio*

Common. Can be found in the Wood Duck Nesting boxes at Bombay Hook NWR and Little Creek WMA.

92. Great Horned Owl - *Bubo virginianus*

Fairly common in wooded areas.

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93. Barred Owl - *Strix varia*

Fairly common in wet, wooded areas. Individuals have been located at Port Penn, Bombay Hook NWR, and Augustine WMA.

94. Belted Kingfisher - *Ceryle alcyon*

Fairly common.

95. Red-bellied Woodpecker - *Melanerpes carolinus*
Common.

96. Downy Woodpecker - *Picoides pubescens*
Common.

97. Hairy Woodpecker - *Picoides villosus*
Uncommon. This bird has been found on five censuses. Locations include Reedy Point, Ted Harvey WMA near Kitt's Hummock, and Augustine WMA.

98. Northern Flicker - *Colaptes auratus*
Common.

99. Eastern Phoebe - *Sayornis phoebe*
Uncommon. Sometimes found under the bridge at Reedy Point.

100. Horned Lark - *Eremophila alpestris*
Common.

101. Tree Swallow - *Tachycineta bicolor*
Common.

102. Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*
Common.

103. Blue Jay - *Cyanocitta cristata*
Common.

104. American Crow - *Corvus brachyrhynchos*
Common.

105. Fish Crow - *Corvus ossifragus*
Common.

106. Carolina Chickadee - *Poecile carolinensis*
Common.

107. Tufted Titmouse - *Baeolophus bicolor*
Uncommon in our experience. This species has been difficult to find due to the fact that Tufted Titmice seem not to call very often at this time of year. Surprisingly, this is a bird that we have often failed to locate.

108. Red-breasted Nuthatch - *Sitta canadensis*
Uncommon.

109. White-breasted Nuthatch - *Sitta carolinensis*
Fairly common.

110. Brown Creeper - *Certhia americana*
Fairly common.

111. Carolina Wren - *Thryothorus ludovicianus*
Common.

112. Winter Wren - *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Two individuals were found in two different locations in the thick brush under the Reedy Point bridge on Nov. 3, 2003.

113. Marsh Wren - *Cistothorus palustris*

Uncommon. Most have migrated by the first week in November.

114. Golden-crowned Kinglet - *Regulus satrapa*
Fairly common.

115. Ruby-crowned Kinglet - *Regulus calendula*
Fairly common.

116. Eastern Bluebird - *Sialia sialis*
Fairly common - particularly along Route 9 between Port Penn and the Augustine WMA.

117. Hermit Thrush - *Catharus guttatus*
Fairly common at Reedy Point.

118. American Robin - *Turdus migratorius*
Common.

119. Gray Catbird - *Dumetella carolinensis*
Though many have migrated by November first, they are fairly common.

120. Northern Mockingbird - *Mimus polyglottos*
Common.

121. Brown Thrasher - *Toxostoma rufum*
Fairly common.

122. American Pipit - *Anthus rubescens*
Fairly common in plowed fields near Bombay Hook NWR.

123. Cedar Waxwing - *Bombycilla cedrorum*
Fairly common.

124. Loggerhead Shrike - *Lanius ludovicianus*
One individual was observed opposite the environmental center at the Woodland Beach WMA on Nov. 5, 2001.

125. European Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*
Exceedingly common.

126. Red-eyed Vireo - *Vireo olivaceus*
Uncommon. Sometimes seen under the Reedy Point bridge or near Port Penn.

127. Yellow-rumped Warbler - *Dendroica coronata*
Common.

128. Pine Warbler - *Dendroica pinus*
One individual was found under the Reedy Point bridge on Nov. 6, 1979.

129. Common Yellowthroat - *Geothlypis trichas*
Befitting its name, it has frequently been observed - especially at Bombay Hook NWR, Woodland Beach WMA, and at Reedy Point.

130. Northern Cardinal - *Cardinalis cardinalis*
Common.

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131. Eastern Towhee - *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*

Fairly common.

132. Chipping Sparrow - *Spizella passerina*

Uncommon.

133. Field Sparrow - *Spizella pusilla*

Common.

134. Vesper Sparrow - *Pooecetes gramineus*

One individual was observed at Bombay Hook NWR on Nov. 3, 2003.

135. Savannah Sparrow - *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Fairly common.

136. Fox Sparrow - *Passerella iliaca*

Uncommon.

137. Song Sparrow - *Melospiza melodia*

Common.

138. Lincoln's Sparrow - *Melospiza lincolnii*

One individual was found at Reedy Point on Nov. 1, 1993. A second individual was at Reedy Point on Nov. 4, 2002.

139. Swamp Sparrow - *Melospiza georgiana*

Common.

140. White-throated Sparrow - *Zonotrichia albicollis*

Common.

141. White-crowned Sparrow - *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Fairly common at Port Penn and in hedgerows near Bombay Hook NWR.

142. Dark-eyed Junco - *Junco hyemalis*

Common.

143. Snow Bunting - *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Occasional at Bombay Hook NWR. This species was observed on about one-fourth of the censuses - usually on the dike road at Shearness or Raymond Pool.

144. Red-winged Blackbird - *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Exceedingly common.

145. Eastern Meadowlark - *Sturnella magna*

Fairly common.

146. Yellow-headed Blackbird - *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

One individual stood out in a large, mixed flock of blackbirds south of Augustine WMA on Nov. 4, 1992.

147. Rusty Blackbird - *Euphagus carolinus*

Fairly common at Port Penn and Reedy Point.

148. Boat-tailed Grackle - *Quiscalus major*

Regular at Port Mahon.

149. Common Grackle - *Quiscalus quiscula*

Common.

150. Brown-headed Cowbird - *Molothrus ater*

Fairly common.

151. Baltimore Oriole - *Icterus galbula*

One record near Port Penn on Nov. 3, 2003.

152. American Goldfinch - *Carduelis tristis*

Common.

153. House Finch - *Carpodacus mexicanus*

Common.

154. Purple Finch - *Carpodacus purpureus*

One individual was observed at Reedy Point on Nov. 3, 2003.

155. House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*

Exceedingly common.

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Editor's note: The 32nd annual Delaware birding day was held on Nov. 1, 2004. A new high of 98 species was seen and 4 new species were added to the list: Stilt Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper and Spotted Sandpiper at Bombay Hook NWR, and Virginia Rail at Reedy Point Marsh. The total species list now stands at 159.