



# VIKING SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS®

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## VDE—DATA ENTRY FOR THE BIRDS

### BIRD OBSERVATORY SPEEDS UP DATA ENTRY AND MEETS DEADLINES

Entering data into the computer is a time-consuming task—particularly when you have data files that have as many as several hundred thousand records. A nonprofit bird conservation organization found that inputting data using VDE was five to ten times faster than typing into a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel. Spreadsheets are great for manipulating and presenting data but they just don't cut it when you need to enter a lot of data fast.

#### About the Black Swamp Bird Observatory

Located in the Great Black Swamp region of Northwest Ohio, Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) is a nonprofit group dedicated to protecting avian wildlife in the Lake Erie Marsh Region.

Mark C. Shieldcastle is a biologist at BSBO. He gathers banding data and other field information about birds locally and in the Great Lakes region. He inputs the data, analyzes it, and then uses it to produce reports. These reports have been used in big conservation efforts like the Clean Water Act and the Lake Erie Management Plan.

#### So Many Birds, So Little Time

BSBO gathers data while in the field. They needed a way to get the data from paper to the computer and then to SAS—the program they use for statistical analysis.

As an experienced researcher, Shieldcastle has learned over the years that trying to input data using a spreadsheet program is very time-consuming. Data entry programs are much faster and more accurate than spreadsheets for this purpose. He once ran a test that found that entering data into a data entry program was five to ten times faster than Microsoft Excel.

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“Many of today's researchers are entering in Excel and it's just because it's a package that pretty much every computer has.” said Shieldcastle. “The purpose of a data-entry program is to get data into a computer. The purpose of a spreadsheet is to play around with that data once it's there.”

Since BSBO often works under tight timeframes and must maximize their research time, Shieldcastle set out to find a data entry program that had all the features that BSBO would require and one that would be easy to setup and learn. He also needed a product that would output a file that Excel and SAS could read as he uses those programs to analyze and present the data.

#### VDE to the Rescue

That product turned out to be Viking Data Entry (VDE) from Viking Software Solutions. VDE has features like auto-advance, auto-dup, and look-up files that help get data into the computer faster and with more accuracy. Since VDE exports to a column-delimited ASCII text

file, the data can be read by any spreadsheet or statistical analysis software package. The observatory uses SAS but they could just as easily use SPSS. Or they can share the data with other organizations that might use some other statistical program.

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Setting up the formats is simple. When data comes in on a paper form, as much of it does, Shieldcastle likes to set up the data entry screen to look just like the form to make it easier for the data entry operator. Programming table lookups is fairly simple too.

With the time they have saved using VDE, the bird researchers can spend their time doing more important things. “Our time isn't spent getting data into the computer. It is spent analyzing data and getting the report out.” said Shieldcastle. He also noted that they now have more time to gather and input a larger sample of data. Wildlife researchers always feel they can use more data.

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