

# COUNTING COUNTRIES

## An In Depth Look

Don Jensen

### INTRODUCTION

Despite claims to the contrary, radio's first listeners were more interested in logging large numbers of DX targets than hearing farm reports or opera.

Program listening? Who cared? Was there anyone who tuned in to hear an amateur soprano violate Verdi, or a technician-cum-announcer render a dramatic reading of "Casey at the Bat"? Early programming, at least until the first networks were established, was awful!

What really brought Americans to their crystal sets was the novelty of hearing distant radio stations. Common questions of the day: How many stations have you heard? How far away?

When shortwave broadcasting began a few years later, pioneer SWBC DXers began asking the same questions of each other. With the international dimension there was another question asked: How many countries have you heard?

The answer, at first, was easy. There weren't that many countries on the air. Even in the early 1950s, I recall it only took about 60 or 70 countries verified to attain a reasonably prominent spot on a "countries verified" scoreboard. Major names in the hobby, Arthur Cushen and Sydney Pearce, tallied about 120 verified countries.

I don't know if shortwave clubs in the 1930s maintained country lists. Probably not, but if they did, surely it was no big deal. For the most part, a DXer didn't need a special list to know that Germany was Germany, Holland was Holland, Japan was Japan, and they were all, indisputably, countries. The few question marks that existed were resolved by tacit agreement in the DXer's favor.

It was the radio amateurs, with many more stations operating and an increasingly competitive DXing spirit, who developed the first widely used radio country list.

Maximizing DX targets was the goal. That led, in time, to a philosophy which one unsympathetic DXer later described as "counting rocks in the ocean that are dry only at low tide." But for the hams' purposes, apparently, the ARRL Country List has served well for many years.

The most prominent U.S. all-band listener's organization in the post-WWII era was the Newark News Radio Club. Its monthly bulletin regularly contained scoreboard listings of members' countries "heard" and "verified." The now-common terms, HIC and VIC, abbreviations for "Heard Individual Countries" and "Verified Individual Countries," apparently originated in this NNRC column.

In fact, NNRC had separate scoreboard tallies. One was for those SWL members who tuned the ham bands. The other, titled, "Shortwave Except Amateur," counted everything else.

It was a traditional approach that had existed in the shortwave hobby since the 1930s. Virtually no hobby distinction was made between broadcast and utility transmissions as long as they operated in the shortwave frequency range.

And the stations themselves, particularly during and immediately after WWII, often tended to make no distinction. Point-to-point services would switch to broadcasts, clearly intended for direct reception by listeners, and then back to carrying PTP traffic again. Military transmitters, particularly on the Pacific islands, could be heard airing Voice of America or armed forces programs.

A slow transition to today's hobby concept of shortwave broadcast, separate and distinct from utility transmissions, began in the late 1940s and probably culminated in the switch by the North American SW Association (then abbreviated NASA) to "All Shortwave Broadcast" in July 1966.

But this different way of looking at the hobby, specialization and separation of shortwave broadcast from other non-ham transmissions, was quite well established by the late 1950s and early '60s. A growing number of SWBC specialists were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the ARRL-based NNRC country list. It had then nearly 300 countries listed, a substantial number of which had no operating SWBC stations. It was a list which seemed alien to the needs of those who had become SWBC specialists. SWBC listeners could never match the HIC/VIC totals of utility DXers, with whom we inevitably were

compared in a scoreboard such as NNRC's "Shortwave Except Amateur."

Additionally, the members of a small round-robin correspondence group, DXplorers, which included, at the time, Gerry Dexter and this writer, felt that there were other unsatisfactory aspects to the NNRC Country List.

In the early 1960s, DXplorer members studied the shortcomings of the NNRC and other lists and sought ways to improve upon them. A general philosophy was formulated and, ultimately, a list was created. It was used and tested internally within the DXplorer group for about a year.

Then, at my instigation as an advisor to then-publisher, Bill Eddings, this list was adopted by the newly "all-SWBC" NASA/NASWA. A committee was established to maintain and periodically update the country list. I was appointed chairman of that committee, a post I retain today.

The rest of the committee now consists of Gerry Dexter, Jerry Berg, Robert Wilkner and John Bryant. Past committee members have included Ralph Perry, Dan Ferguson and Gregg Calkin.

Other country lists have been created and used by various radio clubs or organizations over the years. On two occasions, Association of North American Radio Clubs committees were established to draft a master country list which would be used by all-ANARC clubs. An ANARC list, in fact, was compiled, approved and adopted by the organization's representatives. But no ANARC club, to my knowledge, ever made use of it and, except, perhaps in the ANARC archives, there may be no copies extant.

There are several country lists in use overseas, probably the best known being those of the European DX Council (EDXC) and, to a lesser extent, the Australian Radio DX Club (ARDXC). Each enjoys reasonably widespread use in its region of the world.

These all have followed or follow today a basic approach which I call the "on-or-before/after" philosophy. The NASWA list, on the other hand, is based on the theory of "once-a-country, always-a-country." Both will be discussed further.

In 1981, New Zealand DXer Cecil Symmes, after examining all the above lists and one used by some DXers in his own country, concluded that the NASWA approach offered the most logic and benefits. He attempted to interest radio hobby clubs in the Pacific area and around the world in supporting a universal list, patterned largely on the North American model. As with most other attempts to impose use of a particular country list by decree from "on high," this attempt failed.

The use of any country list, it seems, comes from the grassroots up. It becomes the hobby's standard ONLY when DXers, voluntarily, accept and adopt it as their own, as the list best suited to their interests and needs.

To a very great extent, the North American Shortwave Country List has reached that point today. If not in universal use, it is, at least, the most widely used country list among shortwave broadcast DXers.

## ● UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHIES AND PRACTICAL REALITIES

Why is there such a thing as a radio country list? Who needs it?

A substantial number of today's shortwave listeners and a lesser number of hardcore DXers have no need for such a list. They do not participate in the NASWA or other scoreboards. They do not seek awards. They may not even be particularly interested in the number of different countries they hear or verify.

But probably a greater number follow the long tradition of the shortwave listening hobby and count the number of countries heard and/or verified. Some do it to measure their own accomplishments against those of other DXers in a scoreboard setting. Others, caring less about competitive aspects, simply want to measure their own DXing progress over a period of months or years, or to qualify for awards.

Clearly, no club or outside authority can insist that anyone use or support a particular country list. It is only if the individual decides to enter the "game" -- become involved in either scoreboard or awards programs -- that he or she need accept the established standards.

A standard is the base line against which measurements are made. It must be easily understood, conveniently usable and unchanging.

A country list is not, contrary to popular assumption, a simple thing to create. As someone, in all apparent seriousness, once commented to me, "What's so hard? You just write down the names of all the countries."

A key problem, of course, is determining what, for radio hobby purposes, is a country. There is no workable definition. So anyone who hopes to create a standard radio country list must first define the unit to be counted.

Certainly we could avoid the dilemma by letting somebody else, a disinterested party, define country for us. We could, for instance, use some existing country list, such as the United Nations membership, the countries of the Universal Postal Union, or even the index of a certain atlas.

Such a list would be easy to manage, easy to use and the hard decisions would be avoided. But it would be unacceptable to most shortwave DXers. For another important purpose of a country list is to serve as an incentive to keep alive the interest in hearing new catches. A list should offer enough listening targets to keep a person interested in the hobby for many years.

The sorts of outside lists mentioned above are just too restricted. They have too few countries to sustain a DXer's interest for long. After logging a fairly limited number of countries, the DXer would reach the end of the line. The incentive, like the list, is too limited.

Also, these lists would have nothing to do with radio, including countries which have no shortwave facilities and excluding some places which do.

At the other end of the scale, SWBC DXers could -- and once did -- simply use the radio amateur list, which includes well over 300 "country" entries. This large number is largely the result of amateur radio operators seeking out uninhabited rocks-in-the-sea to which DXpeditions journey merely to put a new "country" on the list. Many DXers who are not hams see this approach as carrying the incentive idea so far as to make a total mockery of any rational concept of a country.

Years ago, NASWA, with its country list, chose a middle ground. The list that resulted provides a large number of target "countries" -- around 240 -- to give sufficient long term listening incentives while avoiding the other extreme of counting every sandbar and islet as a country.

The major flaw in most other lists, as I see it, is that they are based on a false assumption that there can be developed a set of fully logical and non-arbitrary fixed criteria to define a radio country.

The NASWA list, on the other hand, begins with the basic premise that there are three factors that combine to determine country status. They sometimes conflict and only an arbitrary decision by the list-making committee can resolve the irresolvable.

Those three factors are politics, geography and hobby traditions:

## ● POLITICS

The role of politics in determining country status is important, but not all important. It defines many countries on the NASWA list. Portugal, Brazil, Japan, etc., are considered countries because they are, in fact, independent, sovereign political entities that the world commonly calls countries. If only they were all so simply determined.

But political situations change and standards must remain fixed. The country list must remain reasonably constant. A DXer who has counted 100 countries today should not have only 99 tomorrow, if, overnight a country is annexed by its neighbor and ceases to be a sovereign nation.

The map of today is not the map of five years ago. So to give at least some reference point, NASWA's Country List committee arbitrarily fixed the approximate end of WWII -- actually, Sept. 1, 1945 -- as the starting point. As new political developments have occurred since then, real countries have been created by independence, revolution or partition. And others have disappeared for political reasons.

How should a list handle these political changes in a supposedly fixed standard? virtually every other radio country list has opted for what I call the "on-or-before/after" method.

Example 1: Country B invades neighboring C on Jan. 1, 1989. A DXer on Dec. 1, 1988, hears a shortwave broadcaster in the capital cities of both B and C and can legitimately count both countries. Another listener hearing the same stations on Feb. 1, 1989, merely hears two outlets in Country B, which has absorbed C into its national identity. What becomes critical to a listener in counting his countries is whether he has heard C on or before Jan. 1 (the "on-or-before" date).

Example 2: A certain colonial power grants independence to two provinces of an African protectorate known as D. These two areas become the new independent nations of E and F on Jan. 1, 1989. A listener hears shortwave outlets in the major cities of both provinces on Dec. 1, 1988. He can, of course, count both receptions as only one country, colonial D. Another DXer hears the same two transmitters on Feb. 1, 1989, each now being the national voice of its respective country, E and F. The first listener can count only one country; the second, two. Whether a DXer can count one or two countries depends on the Jan. 1, 1989 "on-or-after" date.

Different country lists handle this situation differently. One approach is to have a single alphabetical listing of countries, with parenthetical "on-or-before" and "on-or-after" dates to guide the user in what he can and cannot count. Another approach is to have a main list of current countries, plus a separate and distinct listing of no-longer countable "on-or-before" countries.

The NASWA list takes a different, "once-a-country, always-a-country"

approach. As political changes occur, the list makes parenthetical note of the new/current name but does not discard the old. Newly created countries are added to the list as well.

The "on-or-before/after" approach is unfair to both the newcomer to the hobby and the longtime DXer. The former is precluded from counting countries which politically ceased to exist before he began in the hobby, even though the same station/transmitter can be heard afterward. The veteran DXer loses, or at least must demote to some "asterisk" special category, a country he once counted just because some political change has occurred.

The NASWA list approach avoids both aspects of that unfairness. Consideration is given to the experienced DXer who can count countries which no longer exist politically in the real world or whose stations are no longer on the air. And the newcomer can count countries which ceased to exist, politically, but within whose former borders there still are active shortwave broadcasters. No countries, therefore, are lost, even though from a political standpoint they no longer exist.

What is surrendered to political reality is made up in fairness to both new and veteran listener.

## ●GEOGRAPHY

The second criterion in determining country status is geography. This is rather obvious since distance is often, although not always, a factor in shortwave reception. It is, by definition, the basis of the term, "DX."

There are considerable differences in reception patterns and conditions, for example, between Irian Jaya and the western tip of Sumatra -- both parts of the same nation, Indonesia -- and between Magadan and Moscow -- widely separated

cities in the Soviet Union.

Even when the separations are not so extreme, geographical considerations regularly are an important part of determining country status.

## ●TRADITION

The third factor is hobby history or tradition. It is not enough for a country list committee to sit in an ivory tower and hand down decrees. A standard country list must recognize traditional practices in the hobby or it will be rejected by DXers.

As noted earlier, ANARC attempted to create a list acceptable to all clubs, be their members interested in shortwave broadcasting, medium wave listening, utility DXing, etc. Creating that list involved much effort by volunteers with the best of intentions. But it was not accepted by American DXers, largely because it ignored or was unsuccessful in resolving differences among the various listening interests. The counting of certain countries was unacceptable to one group, not counting other countries was equally unacceptable to another group.

SWBC DXers, years ago, began using a country list which had been created for hams. While eventually rejecting that list as a whole, many listeners clung to some of its aspects. Certain of those traditional counting practices were folded into the NASWA list, even though the political or geographic logic may have been lacking. These traditions legitimized, for example, the separation of the United Kingdom into its several parts, the USSR into its union republics, Indonesia into its main island groupings but not the partition of the U.S. into individual states, except for the non-contiguous Alaska and Hawaii. These decisions represent a continuation of long accepted hobby traditions among DXers.

## ●CREATING A LIST

Theory is one thing; putting it into practice is another. For one thing, a format is required. Even something as basic as alphabetizing a country list for easy use is not the simple matter it would seem.

Countries once placed on the NASWA list are not removed despite political changes. And in certain parts of the world, country names seem to change only somewhat less frequently than their governments. A country list must reflect such name changes.

The NASWA list responds by adding the new designations parenthetically after the earlier name.

Example: Belgian Congo, after independence, became the Republic of the Congo and, still later, Zaire. It appears in the NASWA list as Belgian Congo (Rep. of the Congo)(Zaire). A glance through the list will show that there have been a good many other changes during the past four decades or more.

Why, some have asked, does the list not alphabetize by the current popular name, e.g., Zaire (Rep. of the Congo)(Belgian Congo)? This approach, the questioners point out, quite logically, would make it easier to find particular entries since most users will be more familiar with present country names than with those used decades ago.

The answer is that to reverse the order with the current name first would require the entire list to be realphabetized each time any country changes its name, or, less satisfactorily, to scratch out the old and pen in the new in the appropriate place. However the order remains relatively stable if the countries are alphabetized by the names under which they originally entered the list.

Now this does, admittedly, present a minor inconvenience to the user, who must, therefore, acquaint himself with the history of some of these nations, at least to the extent of knowing past commonly used country names.

To make it easier to use, the NASWA list is presented in two parallel formats. The main list is broken down by continents. Assuming that one knows Zaire is in Africa but is unaware that in 1945 it was called the Belgian Congo, it is no great task to skim through the shorter list of African countries.

The secondary list, known as the gazetteer, is arranged alphabetically on a worldwide basis and contains a variety of supplemental data, such as the locations of some of the major stations, dates when political changes occurred, and when shortwave broadcasting activity began or ended.

Not much time passed after the creation of the NASWA Country List before users began asking for additional guidance. In response, the committee created a series of station counting rules.

In some cases, these rules have proved to be controversial. But the committee believes that they represent a consensus of the SWBC DX community.

An SWBC station is defined in those rules as one whose fundamental frequency lies in the radio spectrum range between 2,000 and 30,000 kHz, whose broadcasts are intended for reception by the general public.

The "fundamental frequency" clause eliminates harmonics of medium wave stations which fall within the shortwave frequencies as defined. Those objecting to this say that any sort of broadcast within that range should be fair game. They point to the goal of maximizing country "targets".

The committee has rejected this argument consistently, believing that there is a point at which attempting to maximize targets tends to damage the list's credibility. A more middle-of-the-road approach is to raise the issue of station intent. With rare exception, medium wave stations do not intend to radiate harmonics for shortwave listeners. The committee believes that most SWBC DXers do not consider such harmonics as "real" shortwave stations.

The "between 2,000 and 30,000 kHz" clause was amended from an original 1,605-30,000 kHz. Both lower limits expand upon the scientific definition of High Frequency (HF) as 3,000-30,000 kHz, because that unacceptably excludes the 120 meter band.

Originally the 1,605 kHz lower limit was chosen because it marked the traditional boundary with the medium waves. But in time it became unsatisfactory because of pirate stations, which considered themselves to be operating in an extension of the MW band, using frequencies in the 1,610-1,620 kHz range. So the lower limit was modified by the committee to exclude these out-of-band MW pirates, but include the 120 m.b. shortwave stations.

The definition phrase, "broadcasts...intended for reception by the general public" fits the concept of a listening hobby which evolved between about 1945-1960, that shortwave broadcasters are different from point-to-point communications transmissions.

"Broadcasts" are educational, informational or entertaining and are directed to a general audience. A useful synonym is "programs." But a "program" which is merely beamed from point A to point B, where it is destined to be retransmitted to a broad listening audience, is not a broadcast. Nor are radiotelephone conversations, ham QSOs or weather forecasts directed to mariners, pilots or other specialized groups.

Several specific exemptions have been made in response to widespread user requests. Countable as SWBC stations are standard time/frequency stations which have voice announcements, satellite stations in space which transmit intelligible material (Examples, in practice, are rare, but include the early orbiting Chinese satellites and perhaps some Soviet space shots), and utility stations which on rare occasion air genuine broadcast programming intended for general audiences (Also rather uncommon these days, except for special DXer test transmissions, e.g., Radio Syd, Gambia).

Incidentally, while a satellite transmission may be considered an SWBC station, outer space is not a country.

The committee also granted country status to Monaco for hobby tradition reasons. The tiny principality has no shortwave transmitters inside its borders. The stations' sites are actually a few miles outside Monaco in neighboring France.

Most, though not all Vatican SW signals come from transmitters outside the Papal City, although on territory which is decreed to be part of the Vatican State.

Azad Kashmir is not the same case. It has a single SW transmitter within its boundaries. The rest of the outlets relaying Azad Kashmir Radio are plainly on Pakistani territory. Reception of those signals should be counted as Pakistan, not Azad Kashmir.

Such cases are handled by the committee on a case-by-case basis.

## ●THE NASWA COUNTRY COMMITTEE AND ITS WORK

The NASWA committee is made up of five members. Membership turnover has been limited over the years. Thus the committee is composed of veteran, active SWEC DXers with considerable interest and knowledge of worldwide political and geographical matters and experience in the SWEC listening hobby.

Although it remains an NASWA committee, the influence and use of the the country list has spread beyond NASWA membership. The committee, therefore, is mindful that it has something of a trustee's duty to maintain the list for SWEC DXers regardless of club affiliation.

The committee meets on call, through correspondence, round-robin letters and, occasionally, phone conversations and in person. Significant additions were made to the list in early 1988, after about six months' deliberations. Since that time two other countries have been added as new stations came on the air.

Periodically the chairman presents to the members a series of possible changes/additions to the list. These suggestions may have originated from committee members or DXers at large.

Some proposals will be routine housekeeping chores, e.g., Country A has changed its name to AA and that parenthetical addition should be made in the list. Others are more substantive or controversial.

Two full rounds of round-robin discussions follow in which members discuss and argue the merits of each proposal. Then a vote is taken. A country is added or the proposal rejected by a majority vote.

In the 1987-1988 actions, about half of the proposals were accepted, with votes ranging from 5-0 to 3-2.

As in most deliberative bodies, some members tend to be more conservative, others more liberal, and those viewpoints may vary with the particular proposal.

All sides of the issues are fully discussed prior to a vote.

The discussions often involve various informal guidelines which committee members have adopted over the years. Questions commonly asked and answered would include, typically: "Is there a substantial mileage separation between A and B to warrant considering the latter a separate country?" "Has A been functioning autonomously for at least a year after its revolutionary split from B?" "Is A really independent or is its supposed sovereignty just a sham?"

And, often, the bottom line that members cite in deciding if a certain territory should be considered a radio country: "Is there that undefinable sense that this is a 'country;' does it have the right 'feel'?"

The new countries admitted to the list in 1988 included Katanga, which had been rejected by the committee in several previous considerations. This time the majority was willing to take a fresh look at the situation.

One member noted: "My conclusion...is that the Katanga situation is not really different in kind or degree from that of Biafra. They were both major 'breakaway' efforts that has some visible viability and that lasted for an appreciable period. I think they should both be treated the same in the country list."

The committee, however, declined to alter its 1980 rejection of Transkei as a country. The majority, again, concluded that the South African "homelands" have no history of separate status and are not recognized by any country, apart from South Africa, as independent or semi-independent entities. The committee indicated its decision was not based on anti-apartheid reasons, although one member did suggest that the committee might be "subconsciously influenced by the political situation." That may or may not be true, but the majority felt there were ample other reasons not to count Transkei.

The committee decided to split off Bali from Indonesia's Lesser Sunda Islands, creating another country. After discussion, the majority was convinced by one member's argument that "the original decision to lump Bali and the Lesser Sunda Islands together as one unit was wrong or ill informed."

He reasoned that "If there is any island in Indonesia that is singular, it is Bali!"

These examples may shed some light on the sort of reasoning and discussion which go into the committee's decisions.

I am confident that the process we use to create and maintain the NASWA Country List is as democratic as possible. Input from all DXers is always welcomed.

Clearly no country list can satisfy all SWEC DXers. But I think the present list, by its widespread acceptance, has become and will remain the basic standard in the hobby.