



MINNESOTA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

NEWSLETTER OF THE MINNESOTA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS • ISSUE 2 FALL 2011

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IN CASE YOU HADN'T HEARD



CREDIT: ELLEN LOWERY

Great funding news! After an amazing outpouring of support, we successfully acquired the funding needed to complete the project. There were months of uncertainty as the future of the Atlas worked its way through the legislative process. Supporters made phone calls, sent emails, met with legislators, attended hearings and committee meetings, and posted information on web pages and blogs to ensure that the Atlas would finish. Thanks go to everyone who made this happen.

ATLAS SUPER SURVEYORS

The MNBBA has 14 super-surveyors who have all contributed more than 1000 observations. **Bob Russell** leads the flock and is in great company with: **Mike North, Dan and Pam Guynn, Bill Unzen, Carol Carter, Steve Wilson, Warren Nelson, Pam Perry, Jim Lind, Kevin Woizeschke, Jan Kraemer, Norma Malinowski, and Beth Siverhus.** An amazing group! There is room at the top for more of us, and we have two years to go. To check your totals, go to mnbba.org under Atlas Results, then, # of Reports.

YOU – YES, YOU!

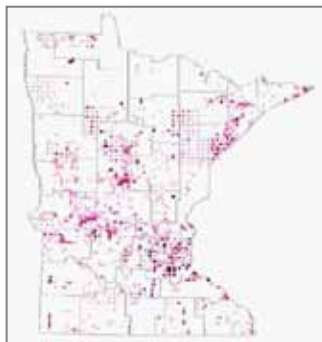
You are writing the book on Minnesota's Breeding Birds. With every species observation submitted, each of you is making it possible for Minnesota to document the current distribution ranges of breeding birds throughout the state. These results are based on observed evidence of breeding at the township level and really tell the story of which species are breeding in every neighborhood. We have already provided Atlas data to researchers working on species in decline, including Golden-winged Warblers, Common Nighthawks, Purple Martin, and Chimney Swifts.

3 SEASONS DOWN – 2 TO GO!

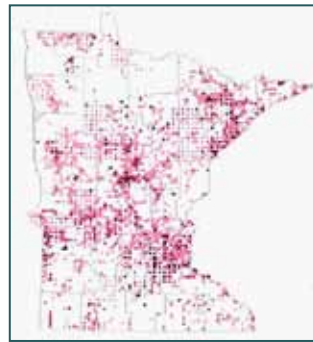
Just take a look at how far we have come. These maps display the number of species reported in each block; the darker the color, the more species reported. Data reported by our NRRI partners make a big difference and their 2011 contributions are not yet reflected on the Season 3 map. And new surveyors continue to join us. Between mid-August and mid-September, not a traditional recruitment time, 13 new participants joined the project.

More good news is that we have two more years of data collection. The bad news is that if you have not yet contributed observations, there are only two more years to get involved.

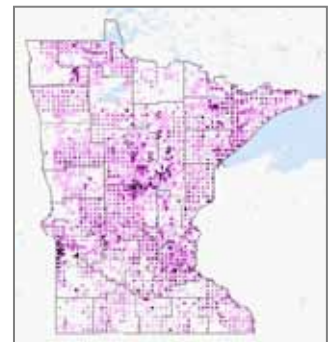
SEASON 1



SEASON 2



SEASON 3



HIGHLIGHTS FROM SEASON 3

We developed three new programs in 2011 to encourage more block coverage in Greater Minnesota in areas of the state with low block coverage.

Block-busting Weekends. Three weekend events were scheduled, in Itasca County, Mower County, and Stearns/Kandiyohi Counties with lodging provided. We had space available for more participants but it demonstrated that a small group of people, focused on surveys for a day and a half can make a big difference.

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**REWARDS –
YOU’VE EARNED THEM!**



Everyone who has contributed observations to the Atlas

database is rewarded with 1) a beautiful MNBBBA sleeve patch and 2) their name will be published in the final Atlas. The publication serves as a permanent and public record of your contributions and commitment to this historic project and bird conservation in Minnesota. And there is a third reward, the gratitude of all Atlas supporters.

If you know someone who has provided observations that were submitted to the Atlas but is not a registered participant or you have entered your data and do not have a sleeve patch, email Bonnie at bsample@audubon.org.

Just as important is the joy of finding interesting new places to bird, seeing a species for the first time (at last! a short-eared owl), or discovering new bird behaviors you did not expect, all part of the Atlas experience. And, for many, the satisfaction of really making a difference, of birding with a purpose, is worth the effort.



CREDIT: DORI

UNDER INVESTIGATION...

is a credible but not confirmed 2009 report of a burrowing owl in an unlikely region and a GWWA hybrid in Roseau County. The hybrid video was not quite clear enough to confirm – but maybe next year.

The Cheesehead Challenge. Six Wisconsin birders came to Sandstone for the challenge in Pine County. Minnesota’s team of 3 was small but scrappy. Weather was gray but in a day and a half we covered 26 blocks and one block more than met all but the time criteria for completion - 78 species with 64 probable or confirmed! The weekend was such a success and so much fun, Wisconsin is coming back next year. Minnesota is looking for experienced birders to fill out the team roster to really give Wisconsin a run for their money. Interested?

Reimbursed Surveyors. The third program reimbursed gas and lodging receipts up to \$100 a day for surveyors covering 3 blocks in areas needing special attention. Eight surveyors joined the program. Many reimbursed surveyors tested a revisit strategy to go back to point count sites, originally surveyed this year by NRRI staff, to increase Possible (X) codes to Probable (S) code status. We learned a lot and will do this again next year. We are doing great, thanks to the collective efforts of all our volunteers. It reminds me of public radio membership drives where every contribution counts.

**IMPROVEMENTS
IN SEASON 3**

Did you notice the improvements to the maps on the Cornell website? The old version was replaced by Google Maps so you can pan and zoom around the map, making them much easier to use. And Plot Location now works

great. The printable maps were revised too. These mapping changes required an update to the Data Entry Handbook; the revised version is on mnbbba.org under Materials. Click the Supplemental link on the bottom to get to the next page. Other updates for clarification were made to the Evidence codes and tips, Easy Guide, and the Volunteer Handbook.

SEASON 4 PREVIEW

After crunching all the numbers, if we maintain our current level of effort, add a bit more, add a few paid surveyors, and target our resources in specific areas, we can get this done in 5 years. Amazing! Our goal next season is to move 700 blocks that have 30% or more of the target species into the Completed column. This will be challenging but based on effort to date and some new strategies, it is possible (make that Probable). In many blocks all we need is one or two more visits to complete the block.

How are we going to make this happen?

- Block owners can finish their blocks
- Surveyors make an additional visit or two to selected blocks in their regions
- Pay seasonal surveyors to work in the areas of lowest population, an approach used in other state Atlases in the final years
- Continue the reimbursement program for experienced birders to survey in Greater Minnesota and conduct another Cheesehead Challenge

Looking for new Atlas ideas? Suggestions from our volunteers include:

- Increase your county lists by surveying in areas that need attention,
- recruit students to help,
- get friends together for a local block-busting day – or weekend,
- head out with a friend, survey a couple of blocks and go back a week or so later and make a second visit to those same blocks, or
- reward your friends or colleagues with ‘the best cookie in the state’ for every confirmed breeding species reported. It works great in Region 7.

UPGRADING EVIDENCE CODES

We are getting good geographic coverage for many species but too many have mostly Possible (X) evidence. How can we improve our results?

- Timing is everything and different species display nesting evidence at different times in the season. A couple of visits with a week or more in-between can provide great results.
- Remember to make a note where you hear singing species. The next time you go back during the same season, you may convert that X code to an S.
- Remember, Probable and Confirmed evidence codes can override the safe date. If you are **certain** the observation is truly Probable or Confirmed evidence and the birds are not migrants, when you enter the sighting, an Alert! message appears. Just scroll down to the species and click the Confirm box, then continue.

EVIDENCE CODE CORNER



CREDIT JAN KRAEMER

Many species don't sing - but they do vocalize. Use this code only for singing or territorial birds in 5 different locations (indicating actual or potential territories) in a single block on a single day. Hearing multiple birds in a flock does not indicate multiple territories. The idea here is that if you hear 5 males singing in different locations in the block within the safe dates, it is Probable that at least one of those individuals will/has found a mate and will breed in the territory.

Check out the updated Evidence Code descriptions and tips, available on mnbbba.org on the Materials tab, for additional guidance or talk with your Regional Coordinator.

OUT AND ABOUT

AN ATLAS ADDICTION

JAN KRAEMER, REGION 8

In 2010, I got a rocky start on the Atlas work when I reluctantly took on a difficult block with noisy highways and an international airport complete with F16 Fighter jets. It wasn't fun at all! My husband came with me to bolster my morale and is my constant birding companion.

Thinking that the Atlas work should be fun, I added my home block, a block in Itasca County where we fish, and blocks in Todd and Crow Wing Counties where we visit friends and hunt. We thoroughly enjoyed our new blocks.



CREDIT JAN KRAEMER

To continue the fun in 2011, I added four new blocks. We have birded these blocks by driving, boating, biking, walking and 4 wheeling. In mid July we had a very challenging day – we were a hundred and fifty miles from home and trapped inside the truck by unrelenting rain and thousands of deerflies. In spite of these difficulties, we still found many confirmations.

Seeing courtship displays, watching nest building, and finding eggs and fledglings becomes addicting. The variety

of birds and habitats keep the Atlas work challenging, ever changing and mostly fun. Beautiful dragonflies, butterflies, wild flowers and animals add to the allure. Don't forget your camera.

Important Reminders

- **Coordinates are not required for all observations.** They are only required for Species to Verify and encouraged for other unusual sightings. If you don't have a GPS unit, you can use the Plot Location link on the data entry review page.
- **Our goal for each block is strongest evidence for as many species as you find.** In a block, you only need to report new species and, when a species has already been recorded, observations of stronger breeding evidence.
- **Fall and winter are a great time to look for used raptor nests;** go back later in the winter/spring and look for breeding evidence.
- **Enter Field Notes** to describe what you saw when the sighting is unusual or doesn't quite fit the codes.
- **For monomorphic species** (same plumage for male and female) just seeing two individuals does not always indicate a pair. Look for other evidence that suggests they are a pair; it is a great way to learn more about bird behavior.
- **There is a wonderful collection of avian images** in the Atlas Gallery on mnbbba.org and new photos are being added all the time, like this juvenile Horned Lark.



CREDIT LARRY SERVO

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FLEDGLING BIRDERS

SID STIVLAND, REGION 22

When I decided to adopt a priority block to survey for the Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas project, I saw it as an opportunity to make a contribution to our scientific knowledge. Even better, it was an activity I could do while already pursuing my favorite activity, birding. Little did I know how much fun it would be and what other great discoveries were in store!

I adopted two priority blocks in Pope County where I grew up and still have extended family. One of my cousins, with kids interested in all outdoor activities, lived in the middle of one of those blocks. In early June I sat down with 11 year old Aanan and 13 year old Mason and briefly explained the Atlas project. They were enthusiastic. I gave them a very basic outline of the tasks and sent them material from the BBA web site and a copy of Sibley's bird guide.

A few weeks later, when I returned from a birding trip, I was amazed to learn that they were well on their way. They had created a working manual, developed a birding route around their farm, studied the breeding bird codes, documented bird sightings including location, time and weather conditions. They had filled tally sheets, started a separate notebook with carefully written information, and Mason created reference tabs in the Sibley bird guide, making it much easier to find birds in the book. All of this was done on their own with no further coaching from anyone. Their reporting accuracy was excellent. We spent much of the day birding the area and virtually all of their identifications were on target.

Aanan and Mason's teamwork, enthusiasm, and initiative were terrific and truly inspiring. For his effort, I placed Aanan's name in contention for a pair of binoculars through the "Biology Binocular Bob" program at the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union Youth Mentorship Program and he was selected to receive a pair this year.

(Ed. Note: Congratulations, Aanan! You and Mason inspire us all. For the full story, including a great Common Yellowthroat encounter, check out the News tab on mnba.org.)



CREDIT SID STIVLAND

YOU'VE GOT WHAT IT TAKES

Everyone interested in birds can make a valuable contribution to the Atlas.

- Only know a few species? Then only report those species, but report Probable or Confirmed evidence in every block you see them.
- Don't think your hearing is as good as it used to be? You can still report critical breeding evidence like a pair in suitable habitat or birds carrying nesting material or food. Most strong evidence of breeding is based on behaviors you observe.
- Don't have time to take on a block? Just make one or two visits to unowned blocks that have data already. We complete many blocks by the combined efforts of different people who report what they see in the same block.

LATEST NEWS

We are hiring experienced birders for 7 weeks in 2012 to conduct Atlas surveys in areas that need attention. If not already posted at the time this newsletter is sent, look for emails and position postings with application instructions soon.

We will continue our reimbursement program next season as well. This requires experienced birders and a commitment to cover 3 blocks a day in target areas.

Our annual Regional Coordinator event was held on October 8 in Sandstone, MN. 17 attendees talked about the latest status, goals, and strategies for block coverage and recruitment; lots of great ideas were shared around the table.

TRACKING THE ELUSIVE BBCU

ANDY NYHUS, REGION 26

I was surveying T104R19a during the block-busting weekend in Austin, a block of mostly farmland, in an area with a small grove of pine and a wetland. A brownish bird

with a long tail flew out of a cluster of brush. Brown Thrasher? But it didn't seem quite right. Parked the truck and walked in with my camera, got one brief glimpse and then nothing after searching for half an hour.

Back to the truck thinking, time might be better spent finishing the block visit, browsed the field guide and decided a black-billed cuckoo would be worth it. Back to the field, caught sight of it and got this photo of the bird with a tent caterpillar. Persistence – and block busting - can really pay off.



CREDIT ANDREW NYHUS