



Black-capped Chronicle



Issue 12

Newsletter of the Maine Bird Atlas

Summer 2023

That's A Wrap! -- The Final Issue

By Adrienne J. Leppold, PhD, Project Director

WE DID IT! The Maine Bird Atlas 2018-2022 is in the books (well, not quite literally yet – see p. 3 for our publication progress and timeline), but you know...

Walking the halls of my office building in 2016, not even having completed my doctorate at UMaine yet or being past my six-month probationary period as the new state song-bird specialist with MDIFW, I knew Maine was long overdue for a contemporary, statewide bird atlas. The thought of pulling something like this off was, however, completely overwhelming. How does one even get started? But then a favorite Nelson Mandela quote popped in my head,

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

-We'll need a TON of funding (Thank you, IFW senior management and other supporters)!

-A logo (Thank you, Jada Fitch)!

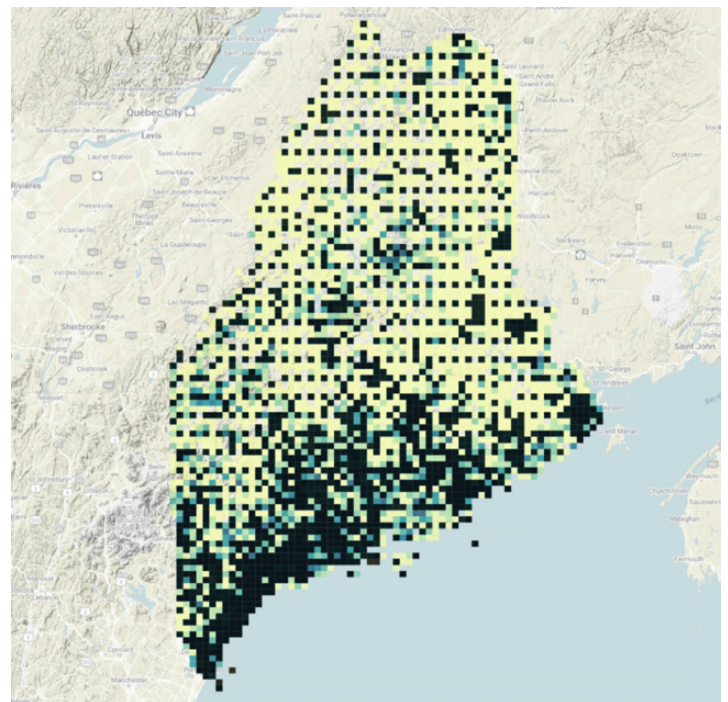
-A full-time project coordinator (Thank you, Glen Mittelhauser – Maine Natural History Observatory)!

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

-A steering committee (Thank you, volunteers)!

-Sampling protocols and statistical expertise (Thank you, Evan Adams - Biodiversity Research Institute)!

-A website (Thank you, Emily McCabe and IFW informa-



This map shows the cumulative effort of hours in each block during the breeding season, with the dark/black blocks being “complete.” It was a monumental effort to get all the priority blocks (and more) done -- thank you for making this possible!

tion/education staff)!

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

-Maps, so many maps (Thank you, Amy Meehan-McLaughlin – IFW)!

-Top notch birders for seasonal field technicians (Thank you, Logan Parker, for taking the lead)!

-Outreach and promotion (Thank you, Doug Hitchcox – Maine Audubon)!

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

-A way to collect the data (Thank you, eBird)!

-Thousands of birdwatchers (Thank you, staff and volunteers)!

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

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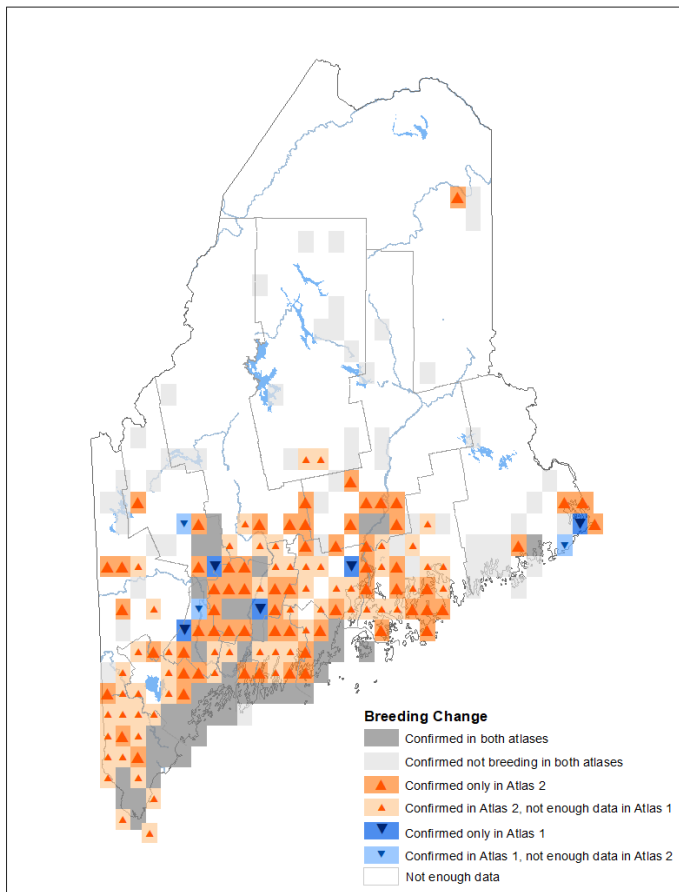
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That's A Wrap continued

Things slowly (or quickly sometimes depending on the day) started coming together. Now, here we are:

Primary Goal: Document the abundance and distribution of all Maine's breeding and wintering birds = 1,372 breeding & 1,490 winter blocks complete

Objective 1: Replicate Maine's first breeding bird atlas – define species' range limits and document patterns of diversity = 233 species confirmed breeding in the state & 239 species of wintering birds



Preliminary map of breeding change in Northern Cardinal since the first atlas (1978-83).

Objective 2: Produce baseline abundance estimates for measuring change over time = 15,747 point counts completed including statewide road-based, marsh, alpine, grassland, and nightjar surveys

Objective 3: Identify priority bird regions and habitats to help inform conservation management = From the mountain tops of western and northern Maine, the lowlands of Aroostook county, central farmlands, cities, coastal influenced ecosystems, downeast blueberry barrens, to everywhere in between, staff and volunteers were out looking for birds

Objective 4: Inspire people to connect to nature through the enjoyment of Maine's birds = Total people engaged through atlas, 3,463 breeding volunteers and 6,901 winter volunteers



Big smiles from this group of atlas staff and volunteers after completing the last priority block of the breeding season.

While final results aren't in just yet (see p. 4 to learn more about our current data review and analysis phase), preliminary information collected for the Atlas has already been hard at work for Maine's birds. For example, Bird Atlas data helped inform the recently accepted recommended updates to the Maine Endangered Species Act for Saltmarsh Sparrow (endangered), Bicknell's Thrush (threatened), Blackpoll Warbler (threatened), Bank and Cliff Swallow (threatened). We can't wait to see what comes next!

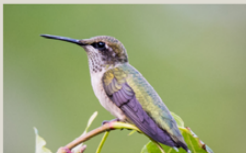
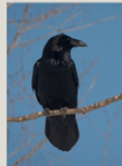
THANK YOU ALL AND CONGRATULATIONS!

Note: There obviously was not enough space here to individually thank all those who helped make this project a reality, but please know that is not meant to trivialize anyone's contribution.



Back row: Adrienne Leppold, Louis Bevier; middle row: Bob Duchesne, Doug Hitchcox (with trophy), Evan Adams, Glen Mittelhauser; front row: Herb Wilson, Amy McLaughlin, Amber Roth; screenshot inset: Mac Hunter; not pictured: Bill Sheehan, Judy Camuso

MAINE BIRD ATLAS ROADMAP TO PUBLICATION



Photos by Logan Parker

Maine Bird Atlas Data Review

By Evan Adams, Ecological Modeler, and
Glen Mittelhauser, Project Coordinator

The Maine Bird Atlas is complete with volunteers generating millions of breeding bird records. Congrats to everyone who contributed – this is truly worth celebrating! The process of turning all of this hard work from thousands of contributors into maps showing breeding distribution by species is complex, and one of the first steps is ensuring we have as much quality information as possible.

Over the past eight months, atlas staff have dug deep into the data to verify that these millions of breeding bird records each help to paint a picture about the breeding status of species. As you can imagine, this is an enormous task and a significant step to wrapping up this project. We have been building ways to visualize the data to look for and correct errors. For example, traveling checklists that spanned multiple atlas blocks were sometimes mistakenly included, but remember, the Atlas is focused on collecting breeding bird records at the atlas block scale of around 9 square miles. We developed tools to check for and remove these kinds of errors so they don't skew our analysis for the final published atlas.

We also discovered checklists from offshore boat surveys spanning multiple blocks that presented strange results like breeding bird records in blocks with no land. These types of errors are to be expected in such a large project and were fairly straightforward to catch and fix.

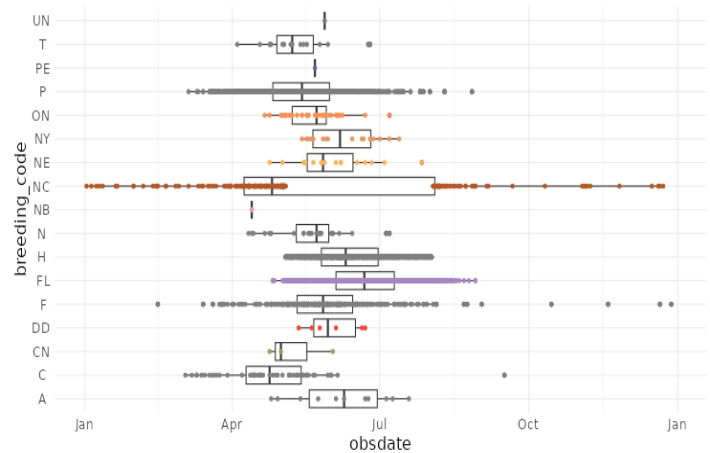
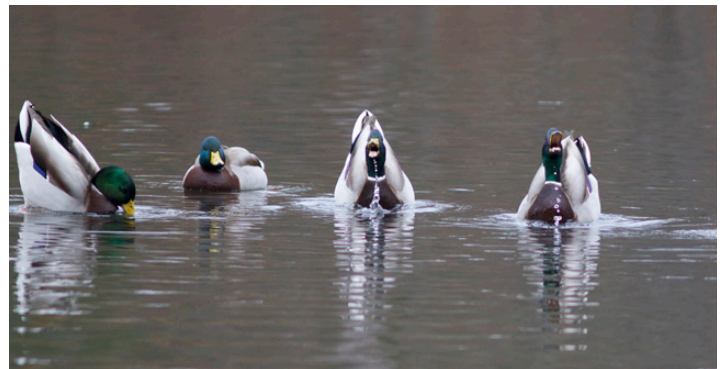


Seabirds, like this Common Tern carrying food, were often improperly plotted because they were seen from boat traveling across multiple block boundaries.

Another easy error to catch and fix was breeding codes dependent on safe dates. We developed tools for detecting these codes, like appropriate habitat (H) and singing (S), that were outside of the breeding safe dates for the species, and corrected those. Birds sing in the non-breeding season (think about a spring migration dawn chorus and how few of those species actually nest there), and these behaviors do not indicate a nearby nesting location outside of safe dates. While our many volunteers loved documenting these behaviors, we don't use all of those data for the Atlas to avoid inaccurate breeding distribution maps.

But these were the easy problems to solve. How do we deal with more challenging issues regarding incorrect usage of the more complex breeding codes? Addressing each record individually would just not be practical and most do not contain enough information to evaluate alone, so the steering committee agreed on a more holistic approach. We decided to review the outliers, observations in an abnormal block or time of year for a species. An example is a northern breeding species like the Bay-breasted Warbler being observed singing within the safe dates in the southern portion of the state in May. This observation would be a spatial and temporal outlier, so we would review the record and determine if the bird could have possibly been breeding there.

That sounds nice and clean, but how do we actually do this? Well, we have to decide if there is appropriate breeding habitat for said Bay-breasted Warbler in a given block, and that takes a log of expert knowledge to be confident one way or the other. Fortunately, we have outstanding staff and volunteer birders on the project that we just needed to leverage knowledge from. To do this, we ran two 5-day data proofing retreats bringing together experts to help us interpret these outlier records and make difficult decisions. This was no small task since we had to review all 200+ breeding species, assess their distribution maps, and check for phenology outliers, such as egg laying in August for a spring and early summer breeding species.



An example of the seasonal data we reviewed, looking at each breeding code chronologically. This is the data for Mallards, which had lots of coded records outside of the safe dates that we needed to review.

Data Review continued



A behind-the-scenes look at our data proofing retreat in Gray. Reviewing the distribution of American Bittern records.

To answer these questions, we often dug into specific checklists to look for comments entered by the atlaser and the published literature to guide our decision on how much of an outlier this record was and whether it is biologically possible, given our current knowledge about the species. As you can imagine, these were difficult decisions to reach, and we spent ten long days getting through everything.

Over these ten days, we put our eyes on many thousands of checklists, read countless comments, bantered amongst each other over tough decisions (we're all still friends!), smiled at hundreds of cute fledgling photos, and ended some of the days with shared dinner.

Many of these records ended up being biologically possible and were kept in the Atlas. Some behavioral observations seemed a bit too outlandish and also entertaining (see article on p. 9) to keep in the Atlas (for example, a Blackpoll Warbler nesting in downtown Portland seemed too unlikely to let be), but all observations found within the safe dates will contribute to the final Atlas maps.

Thanks again for all your hard work in collecting valuable Atlas data. A big shout-out to everybody who included comments on seemingly unlikely records. Those made our jobs easy when we desperately needed the help.



Another behind-the-scenes view of a data retreat, this one at Schoodic Institute. Here we were reviewing Pine Warbler breeding records while a family of Red Crossbills, including recently fledged young, called outside the room.

Preliminary Results

by Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator

Over the last five years it has been really interesting to watch data pour in across the state and finally take shape. Some changes in the distribution of our birds were easy to predict, while others were a bit surprising. During those data review sessions (see page 4) we got to look at the changes from the first atlas, species by species, and I wanted to share some of our takeaways from that experience here:

New Arrivals - There are a handful of species found breeding in Maine during the current atlas (2018-2022), that were not breeding here during the first atlas (1978-83), a few noteworthy ones including:

Red-bellied Woodpecker - the first nesting of this species was from May 1996 in Harpswell, and their spread has continued ever since. They are now breeding across the southern coastal half of the state, with confirmed records nearly to Bangor, and even possible records into Aroostook!

Carolina Wren - follows a similar pattern, though in lower densities, to Red-bellied Woodpeckers. This species appears to struggle more with Maine's winters, though they are a common breeder in many coastal sites, including islands.

Merlin - the species to have perhaps the largest gain in occupied land, this medium-sized raptor has taken over the state with confirmed records in every county.

Orchard Oriole - less abundant than any other newcomers, this small oriole has moved into sites in southern Maine, with a couple surprising nesting successes coming from Rockland.

Sandhill Crane - since the satellite population began nesting at Messalonskee Lake in Belgrade, in 2000, this species has spread to a variety of lakes and bogs around central and into western Maine.

Great Egret - though Maine's other egrets were estab-



lished by the first atlas, the first Great Egret didn't nest in Maine until 1994. Thanks especially to surveys by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, this species was confirmed nesting in rookeries in Saco and Casco Bays.

American Oystercatcher - our only new breeding shorebird, this species is very sensitive to disturbance and only nests on offshore islands. They now range all along the Maine coast, albeit in small numbers, during the nesting season.

Fish Crow - are you surprised we are seeing more southern species expanding northward? "Uh-uh!" Omitted from the first atlas, this species was found nesting in Brunswick in 1978 and has spread, though highly localized, as far north as Bangor.

Shifting Range - Along with the new species mentioned above, there are many birds seeing huge breeding area gains in the state as they expand their range northward. This list includes, but is not limited to: Indigo Bunting, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, Prairie Warbler. There are a select few that appear to be spreading southward into the state, like Merlin and Fox Sparrow. And perhaps more worrisome, some species that are shifting northward and leaving areas of Maine, notably Boreal Chickadee, which has nearly vanished as a breeder from the downeast region, and Olive-sided Flycatchers.

Range Contraction - I'll emphasize again that these are preliminary results, but looking through the maps, there are a few groups of birds that stand out as having dramatic range loss since the first atlas:

Northern warblers - The first atlas was conducted on the heels of a large spruce bud worm outbreak, so many of the species that feed on those were going through a huge population boom during that atlas. We are in a smaller outbreak now, but have yet to see the populations of Cape May, Bay-breasted, or Tennessee warblers rebound to their previous numbers.

Aerial insectivores - With headlines highlighting the "insect apocalypse" it shouldn't be surprising that many of our obligate insectivores are seeing population declines, especially Bank and Cliff swallows, and Purple Martins.

Grassland dwellers - Many habitat specialists saw range changes as landcover also changed since the first atlas, but grassland birds appear to be struggling the most as species like Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlarks have seen large contractions in their range.

Surprising Others - There are also species that could lead to some interesting discoveries of the atlas pending a bit more analysis. Two that stick out as unexpected range contractions, to me, are Killdeer and Northern Mockingbird. As more of the state becomes forested (since the first atlas), Killdeer may have fewer dirt and gravel patches to nest on. Mockingbirds on the other hand seem like they thrive in suburban areas, and we've seen no slowing of suburban sprawl in the state, yet their population has pulled back from nearly all sides.

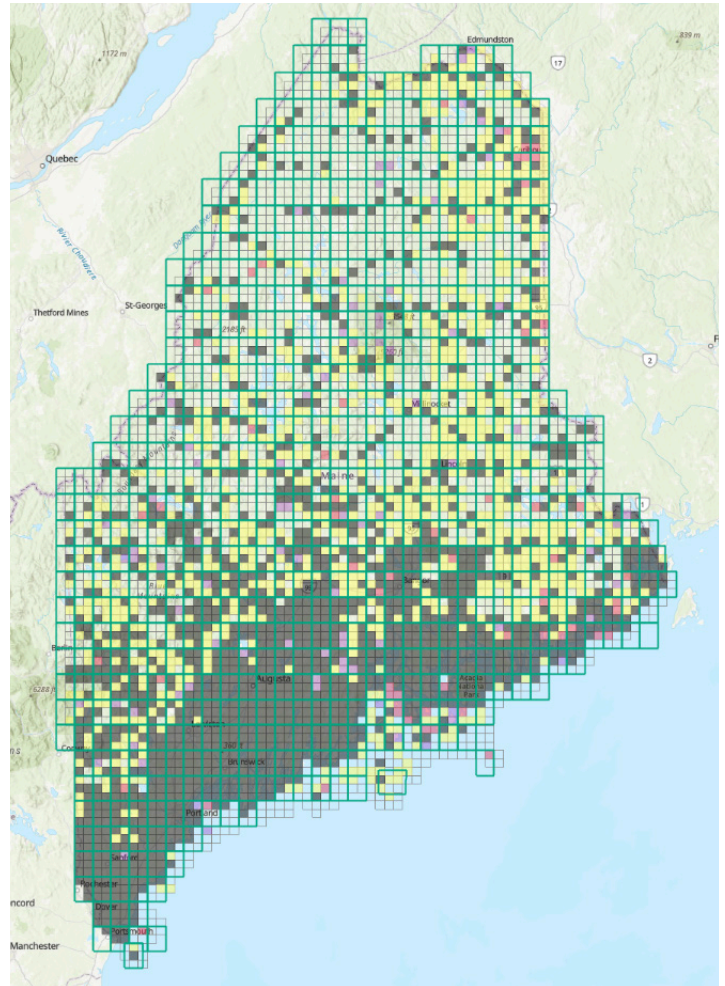
Winter Atlasing 2022/23 Results

The final winter atlasing period wrapped up this year, on March 15th, and it is incredible to see the amount of effort that you all were able to contribute in this final season!

At the beginning of this final winter atlasing period, we had 1,032 blocks completed. These were mostly in the southern half of the state, and mostly biased towards the coast. So we doubled-down on our goal of getting better state wide coverage, and you all made it happen. An additional 458 blocks were completed this winter, which is especially remarkable because these were in some of the hardest areas of the state to reach.

One of our primary goals was to get at least one block completed within every topo quad (a 2x3 area of blocks) to better distribute effort across the state, and with those new blocks completed we reached 83% of all the topos having at least one block completed. This is a really amazing accomplishment when you think about how difficult access is to many of those blocks.

We cannot thank you enough for toughing it out this winter. We had stretches of days with temperatures well below zero, including the cold snap in early February when Frenchville had wind chills of -61°F , and Portland hit its all time wind chill record with -45°F . This was also the second snowiest year (by depth) since the start of the winter atlas. But that didn't stop you from putting on snowshoes, cross-country skies, or riding snowmobiles into these un-atlased blocks. The map on the right shows the distribution of effort from all the winter atlasing--a monumental effort!



Map from the Maine Wintering Bird Atlas Dashboard showing block completion (completed blocks in gray) through the end of the project, March 2023.



In February, Heather Wyman and Stacey Keefer went atlasing in the Forest City and Brookton region, here by the Forest City Stream, right at the border with Canada. Photo by Stacy Keefer

Photo Highlights from the Field

Many of our volunteers add photos to their eBird checklists and they often capture some amazing shots! Here are a few highlights from the last winter season:



We don't love that rare birds take so much time away from atlasing in priority blocks, but the return of the Steller's Sea-Eagle to Georgetown was definitely a highlight of last winter! Matt Felprin got this shot of the sea-eagle showing its magnificent size compared to two Bald Eagles.



Shawn Morneault wins the award for "Cutest Bird of the Winter" with this [scientifically] adorable Northern Saw-Whet Owl.



Another noteworthy rarity was this Common Ringed Plover. This species is the old-world counterpart to our Semipalmated Plover, and was found by regional coordinator Tom Aversa in Biddeford. Photo by Doug Hitchcox.



Barrow's Goldeneye have a few choice rivers where they winter in Maine, and Gary Jarvis got this stunning fly-by shot.



Northern Shovelers tend to be shy and hard to see well in Maine, with most leaving the state as bodies of water freeze over. This drake was very confiding here, posing for Cameron Johnson, at Legion Pond in York.



Not always present, Bohemian Waxwings are irruptive and do make great subjects for photographers! Photo by Mael Glon.

Beyond the Bird Atlas

By Malcolm (Mac) Hunter, Regional Coordinator and Amy McLaughlin, Spatial Analysis and Mapping

With field work for the Maine Bird Atlas (MBA) in the rear-view mirror, are you feeling lost, directionless, a ship at sea without its rudder? I am. Sure, I know that we can just keep birding and recording our observations in eBird, but it's not the same. I will miss the hours of planning bird excursions designed to be strategic and efficient. I need an incentive to linger in one spot for 20 minutes, straining to glimpse a bird carrying food.

I would like to share four ideas for coping with this dilemma:

1. **Go for the gold:** I am still haunted by over a dozen bird species that my wife (Aram Calhoun) and I were not able to get beyond Probable in our main "home range", roughly a 30-minute drive circle around our home. For example, in our region Kestrels, Thrashers, and Wood Thrushes are very spottily distributed and these are also species for which better range documentation is desirable. Even more important are the many species of statewide conservation concern and we will continue our efforts to search for them in our region, for example Bank Swallows and Cliff Swallows which have recently been added to the Maine Endangered Species list.*

*Species of greatest conservation need for Maine can be found here: https://www.maine.gov/IFW/docs/swap/Element1_Table1-3_SGCN_version2015-09-17_FINAL.pdf

2. **Think remotely:** When we travel to remote parts of the state, we will think about birds that entirely eluded us. For example, we will stop to scan stands of dead conifers for American Three-Toed Woodpeckers and search the database for mountains to climb where Bicknell's Thrushes were not recorded during the MBA's five years.



Bicknell's Thrush seen near the summit of Sugarloaf Mountain.

3. **Act locally:** For some of our favorite birding blocks we will make a list of ALL the species that were not Confirmed during the atlas period, and we will focus much of our birding on them and their habitat. For example, we did not Confirm our first Pine Siskin until the last year of the atlas and we were in Ashland, 160 miles from home; a week later we Confirmed them 150 yards from our back door!

4. **Broaden your horizons:** Birds are special, but Maine has lots of other species and one set, amphibians and reptiles, are in the last year of a push to gather data for the 3rd edition of a Maine atlas. And searching for them can be productive all day long, from April to November. To get involved go to: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/reptiles-amphibians/atlas-project.html>

-Mac



DeKay's Brown Snake

As Mac described, it is difficult to move on from Bird Atlas field work. It sure was a fun challenge to find those confirmations and have an excuse to stand and observe bird behavior, rather than just checking off a list of species. However, there are other volunteer opportunities/ways to help birds and other wildlife species now that the Atlas field work is over. I'd like to present a few of the options below. Hopefully you can find one that sparks your interest!

1. **Adopt a Maine Breeding Bird Survey Route.** Over half of Maine's routes remain uncovered! The Breeding Bird Survey is a long-term project to monitor the status and trends of North America's bird populations. It has been ongoing since 1966. Find out more here: <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/eesc/science/north-american-breeding-bird-survey>

To adopt a route, please contact Maury Mills, Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge @ 207-454-1702.

2. **Join the Maine Natural History Observatory's Nest Box Monitoring Program.** Volunteers are needed to deploy and monitor nest boxes for Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, American Kestrels, Northern Saw-whet Owls and even Cliff Swallows! This is one way to do some truly "hands-on" conservation and to enjoy birds right in your own backyard. Learn more here: <https://www.mainenaturalhistory.org/nestbox>

Beyond the Atlas continued

3. The Maine Natural History Observatory also runs the Maine Nightjar Monitoring Project. Consider adopting a route to survey for Eastern Whip-poor-will, Common Nighthawk and other nocturnal bird species. Nightjar and other aerial insectivore populations are declining, and this is one way to help gather more information on these species in Maine. See: <https://www.mainenaturalhistory.org/mainenightjar> for more information!



4. One of the most drastic declines in aerial insectivore populations has been in Maine's Purple Martins. They need help! The state currently has fewer than 10 active colonies. If you have appropriate habitat, consider putting up a nest box for them. If you do not have the habitat or feel like you couldn't do it on your own, consider working with a local land trust, scouting group, school group or birding club. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife has more information on Purple Martins and other aerial insectivores here: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/056adobe3f9f40b3b8befe33dfd05b26> Or for all things Purple Martin (and some great, detailed information) visit the Purple Martin Conservation Association at purplemartin.org

5. Consider adopting a heron nesting colony to monitor. The Heron Observation Network of Maine is a community science adopt-a-colony program in which volunteers monitor great blue heron colonies throughout the state and record information regarding the number of active nests each spring. Learn more at this link: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/community-science-projects/heron-observation-network.html>

6. If you are willing to travel, there are other regional Bird Atlases going on that you could participate and they could really use our help! Below are the websites for each: New York: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7312.html> Newfoundland: <https://nf.birdatlas.ca/> Ontario: <https://www.birdsontario.org/> Maryland/D.C. area: <https://ebird.org/atlasmdcc/about>

7. The Maine Owl Pellet Project is a collaborative project trying to better understand the diet of Maine's owls. <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/community-science-projects/owl-pellet-project.html>

8. Lastly, the Maine Piping Plover Recovery project is looking for volunteers. If you like to spend time on the beach, this project could be for you! For more information: <https://maineaudubon.org/projects/plovers-terns/>

Again, there are non-bird related volunteer opportunities as well! Below are a few:

1. Mac mentioned the Maine Amphibians and Reptiles Atlas Project. Among the longest running projects using volunteer scientists in Maine, this effort has been on-going since 1986, generating over 16,000 records. That said, 2023 is a particularly significant year because it will be the last year before information is codified in the 3rd edition of the book "Maine Amphibians and Reptiles" (University of Maine Press). Learn more here: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/reptiles-amphibians/atlas-project.html>

2. Do you enjoy watching deer? The Maine Deer Spy is the umbrella term for Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife community science projects for deer. It began with the flagship "Deer Spy," which is a project developed to improve MDIFW's understanding of deer recruitment in Maine. See this link for more information: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/mammals/maine-deer-spy/index.html>

3. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife is looking for information on New England Cottontails as well. More information is at this link: <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/wildlife/species-information/mammals/rabbit-sightings.html>

Hopefully these suggestions can help to ease your Bird Atlas "withdrawal", get you outside, and best of all, help Maine's wildlife!

-Amy

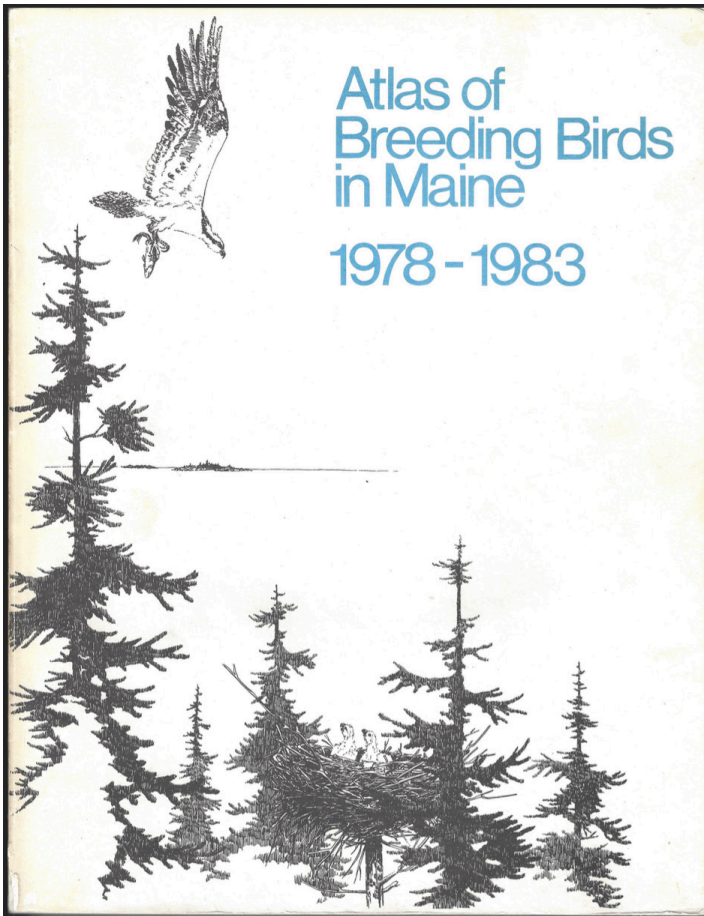
Tales from the Final Q&A

At the end of the season, during our final zoom Q&A, we asked volunteers to share stories or highlights from the project. Transcribed below are a few we thought were worth sharing for entertainment, joy, and lessons learned. This project meant a lot of things to many people, and that makes it a success on so many fronts.

Janet Galle

Janet got involved in the final year of Maine's first bird atlas, in 1983 and joined the zoom to share what the maps and annual block summaries looked like back then:

"Fascinating when you look at what you guys have all done with the technology and being able to show us where things are. And this is all mimeographed, or typed, or whatever it was. That was a long time ago when I was part of that."



Cover image of Maine's first breeding bird atlas.

Logan Parker - technician

"I did some remote work in north-western Maine. One thing that was cool, but also kind of unnerving, This stretch of road I had to go onto to get to my bunkhouse, I drove in and out of there every day, and occasionally I'd have to drive a long way out. In any case, so there was this cow moose that I'd see all the time while I was out there. She'd often be in the road and trot off. But as the winter went on and the snow banks got higher and higher and higher, it took longer for her to leave the road, and so there was one day towards the end of the season when the snow banks were over six feet that she did not want to leave the road. She

had stopped ahead of me on the edge of a block, and I had gone to make my way over there and thinking "she'll leave the road." But she didn't. So she'd trot along ahead of the truck, and we were doing this back and forth for three miles, she was just trotting along ahead of me, and I kept stopping and letting her get ahead, but she'd just stop in her tracks and stand there. I ended up moving along behind her, and she suddenly and abruptly stopped, and spun around, and dropped her head down, then moved full tilt right towards the truck. I was thinking "oh no!" I threw it into reverse, but of course its a winding snow covered road, so I'm driving the truck in reverse but need to keep glancing at where she is. She chased me down the road for probably 50 feet or so and then decided that was enough of that—she effectively scared me. She did go off a branch on the road. Then I saw her again, about a week later, and she just kind of gave me a side-eye and immediately left the road, as if saying "I'm not dealing with this guy anymore." So that was an exciting adventure.



Barred Owls are easier to find when agitated birds give away their presense, as Bob describes below.

Bob Duchesne

"My experience was eye-opening to say the least. And I think it is very subtle, but like most people probably, I think I am an observer of nature, an observer of wildlife, but it has always been a kind of standoff relationship. I look and see them. Throughout this whole process, both summer and winter, it became clear that they know I'm here, I know they're there, we're actually experiencing each other, and it really became, as you're watching for breeding behavior, you're also watching am I disturbing them? How are they reacting to me? How do I react to them? And it became very much more a mutual relationship with each other. And I would start to notice things, like when a Barred Owl just flew through, who got mad and who didn't. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, they're pissed off. But some of the other birds, don't care. And you start to notice these subtle little things to more time you spend in the woods doing this. Especially

all of their little subtle behaviors. And especially when are they mad that you're there, and when are they not mad when you're there. Or are they mad at all. And in most cases they're not particularly mad once they real you're not a threat. How do you personally act so that they're not threatened? And it became very much a relationship between me and them instead of a standoff scientific experiment. And over the five years, that was a way cool development!

Stacey Keefer

One of those sweet little moments that I had in a really random spot that I would've never gone otherwise. It was one of the Liberty blocks and I was snow shoeing you know by myself it was real quiet in there, not a very birdy day. Even just the chickadees, you try to start to understand their dee-dee and is it, you know, a threat or is it not. And so I glimpsed a few at times and I wasn't seeing many birds so I thought "I'm gonna follow this little stream it looks to be a trail down here" and the birds sort of they got very chaty all of a sudden, the nuthatches and chickadees, almost like "you should come down here! You should come down here!" Kind of inviting me. You know it was the nuance of their calls, their tone, so I go down and there was a random lobster bait bag hanging in a tree down this tiny trail. And it appeared someone stuck a beaver pelt inside the bait bag. And it seemed to me the chickadees were like "check it out

there is food over here!' And they were being so sweet about it, taking turns going to nibble off the bait bag and kinda calling me over. It's just interesting to see their reactions and I felt welcomed at that point and guided to this random little place.'

Linda Wynott

"If I didn't get that email from Maine fish and game three years ago I wouldn't even be into this. I am so addicted to birding it's not funny right now. My friends think I'm out of my mind. But my great memory was when I went with you, Adrienne and Dale and we were up at that place, I don't even know where it was! But we're in the truck, and we're getting ready to leave, then we saw something in the bushes and we waited. Then all of a sudden it was a whip-poor-will, and it screamed right next to you, and we both jumped a mile! And since I didn't know anything about birds, Adrienne goes "do you know what that was?" And of course I knew that one, it was a whip-poor-will! That was a great weekend and I'll always cherish that memory. Thank you."

Louise Bartreau

"I learned that my car can go places that I never thought it could. And a couple of places that I never thought it should. And I came out and I told Woody, I said "Woody, we're gonna use your car next time!"



Much like the birds described by Stacey above, this Black-capped Chickadee was a highlight of a block-busting trip near St Agatha in Aroostook County. This was one of a flock that was clearly habituated to taking handouts from humans and helped warm spirits on this otherwise cold and snowy atlasing trip.

Best and Worst of... eBird Checklist Comments

By Project Director, Adrienne Leppold, PhD.

Many of us have been there...we enter records into eBird and a message pops up – “Please add comments,” whether because something is flagged as rare or the number counted exceeds expected value. So, you add a comment about the observation. Admittedly, though, we don’t already know everything about what should be expected by birds in Maine to always correctly “flag” a record and request a comment, or else there would not have been a need for an Atlas in the first place.

Even if an entry does not trigger a need for a comment by the system, I’ve learned over the last five years the value of entering comments on species’ observations for a variety of reasons. I do, however, use the term “value” loosely, having been guilty myself of some of the “worst of” examples. But, let’s not refer to them as “worst”. Rather, there are helpful and much less helpful checklist and species comments. There are also, of course, those that are simply rewarding for staff to read (examples below).

As you saw from our earlier article, expert staff and volunteers spent ten intensive days reviewing the more than 1 million breeding bird records submitted to the Maine Bird Atlas. During that time, we relied heavily on individual checklist comments when an observation raised suspicion or excitement. So, we thought it would be fun to compile some of our favorites and share them here. While this is presented with “in good fun” intent, I admit I came away from this review experience with a deeper appreciation of the importance of comments on eBird checklists. Additionally, I learned how to leave more valuable notes in the future and hope others take a similar lesson from this article.

In the category of **Most Useful**, we start with a really good example of helpful checklist comments, from one of our regional coordinators, Tom Aversa. Here are his notes on grosbeaks coded as recently fledged outside safe dates:

3 Rose-breasted Grosbeak
“although well beyond the safe date, an adult female was observed feeding a young, very dependent youngster. The juvenile seen the best looked very weak in flight and was actively begging (wings flapping and vibrating)”

Now here is an example of another useful description, from atlas tech, Zach Holderby, comments on out-of-safe-date fledged goshawks, but this is where things also start getting entertaining...

1 Northern Goshawk (FL Recently Fledged Young)
“Nest near zircon spring house. Hiker told me about nest with young it would viciously defend injuring his head and stealing his favorite bandana which I found. From the spot of the nest I could hear a distant juvenile and tracked it down.”

Of course one of the most useful parts of eBird’s checklists are the ability for observers to add photos. While we usually hope for just a few words added in the notes, a photo is worth a thousand words, and sometimes we even get photos with words added to them! Like this very helpful shot from Daniel Livesey showing the site of a Turkey Vulture nest:



One downside of photos and falling in the category of **Worst Of** is the amount of checklists where the only comment was “see photos” and none were added...

From our **Most Entertaining** category, we did get a chuckle out of a couple courtship descriptions:

2 Tennessee Warbler
“pair making eye contact and spreading tail feathers”

4 Canada Goose
“One pair engaged in extended period of copulation.”

And I’m glad this Chipping Sparrow was coded Agitated Behavior (or Territorial also would have been acceptable), rather than courtship:

5 Chipping Sparrow
“In the air and on the ground going at each other like roosters”

We know we said “all birds count” for the atlas, really hoping people wouldn’t ignore common or even non-native species, but perhaps we should have specified wild birds. Nonetheless, we did really get a chuckle out of these comments from a farm list in Aroostook:

2 Mallard (Domestic type)
Ali and André
21 Red Junglefowl (Domestic type)
“Runner, Mrs. Featherbottom, Mrs. Honkers, Flutterella, Chickel-ta, Queenie, Jasmine, Jazlynn, Emereld, Poppy, Silk, Cyrilla, Swift, Stella, Sheila, Cocoa, and Chantie.”
2 Budgerigar (Domestic type)
Kiwi and Pop

article continues on next page...

eBird Comments Cont'd

And finally, winning the category of **Most Poetic** came from atlas tech, Jonah with these notes:

Bicknell's Thrush

Details

A spiritual encounter: just as I was breaking above the krummholz line, a musty brown bird scurried like a mouse from right under my feet and into the midst of the trail, resolving there instantly into a gorgeous juvenile Bicknell's: dull brown/gray tones throughout, with no eyering, and some speckled white spotting retained around the head from earlier FL plumages. As I walked, it proceeded almost to walk with me, hopping or making miniscule flights ahead with each of my own steps, only to perch on the next rock or branch and regard me with soft curiosity. At several points I was so close I felt I could have reached out and plucked it from the rocks, but it always stayed just out of reach. We meandered together from the steep ladder all the way to the first lookout, where it finally dashed off into the brush again in the last light of day.

Bird Photos Needed

The Maine Bird Atlas is looking for submissions of exceptional bird photos to feature on each species page of the published atlas. Please consider sending us your best bird photos (featuring only species that breed or winter in Maine) to be considered for inclusion in the published Atlas. Final selections will be made by committee closer to the publish date (2023-2024). If selected, your photos will be credited to you, and you will retain the copyright.

See also our article in the [Winter 2020-2021 Black-capped Chronicle](#) for more information.

Get Merch Before It's Gone

This is your final chance to get stocked up on Maine Bird Atlas logo'd merch. The gift-giving holiday season will be here before you know it, and nothing will put a smile on a gift-receiver's face quite like a Maine Bird Atlas hoodie or coffee mug. Already have a mug? Get a second one because you know how devastated you'll be when you drop that one reaching for your binoculars because a Barred Owl flew by your window. Trust us.

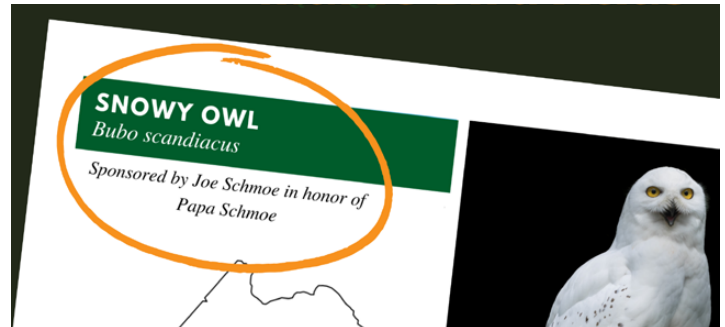
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Still Time to Sponsor a Species

You have until the end of this year to Sponsor a Species, which get, **your name will be in print (along with anyone you choose to sponsor in honor of) in the final Maine Bird Atlas publication.** Each of Maine's breeding and wintering bird species have been divided into sponsorship levels ranging from \$30-\$2,000 and are available to sponsor for each year of the project.

Proceeds from will help fund account authors and printing costs to keep book costs low.



Sample species account for Snowy Owl with Sponsor a Species example circled in yellow.

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