



A Project of the
**FEDERATION OF NEW YORK STATE
BIRD CLUBS**

in cooperation with
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology
National Audubon Society
New York State Museum

BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 1

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Message from the Chairman

The field work of the initiating year of our Federation's New York Atlas Project is essentially at its end. Now comes the reporting of findings, their analysis and the planning for the years ahead.

This was by no means an easy year for those of us involved in the project. Unavoidably we started late with our planning and had to press hard to formulate our organization, policies and procedures. It was, however, the opinion of the majority we should proceed this year. As was to be expected, we have found rough spots, omissions and mistakes. But it would have made little difference on that score if we had delayed initiation until 1981. From the difficulties and problems of this year, we are learning what changes need to be made.

At this point, I express appreciation to the personnel of the Massachusetts and Vermont Atlas Projects who freely gave their time, advice and experience, making our beginning much smoother than it would have been otherwise.

Without the wholehearted and generous support of the Division of Fish and Wildlife of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, we would not have been able to make the progress we have. We owe them much.

And without the more than 600 volunteer surveyors who have participated this year, all our planning would have been for naught. They have done the nitty-gritty, hard work in the field, contributed their time, gasoline and thought to dig out the data. Warm and appreciative thanks go to each and every one of them.

Now it is time to appraise what we have done, how well we did it, and where we are going in the next few years. As a step in this assessment, the workshop session at the Federation's 1980 annual meeting will provide an opportunity for everyone to relate their experiences, voice the problems encountered, raise questions and make suggestions.

Ahead of us are some basic problems. The first of these is financing. If the nongame species bill is passed

by Congress and signed by the President, our problem may in major part be solved, but that is at least a year ahead of us. In the meantime, we are looking for support from other sources. Ideas from any of you will be welcome.

Our second major problem is the recruitment of more surveyors. We need many times the 600 plus people we now have to adequately survey the vast expanse of our state. Those of you who have participated this year can be one principal recruiting force by explaining the objectives and importance of the project to prospective surveyors. You can speak of the knowledge, fun and discovery of new birding areas and put potential workers in touch with your Regional Coordinator, and vice versa.

To the ten Regional Coordinators I extend, for myself and the Atlas Project Committee, heartfelt thanks for a time-consuming, difficult job well done.

While at this point I do not have statistical results to report, I am keenly aware of a wide-spread phenomenon that has occurred among the workers. From numerous sources I hear of a new satisfaction birders are deriving from Atlas surveying. They find they are looking more closely and carefully at birds, observing their behavior, and seeking its meaning. This has happened even to some who were skeptical about the project, or who entered it only through a sense of duty. Birding has taken on more meaning and satisfaction than simple listing. They are expressing eagerness to continue into the coming years. This change in attitude will, I think, provide an antidote for one of our concerns; namely, our ability to sustain participation.

This is the first issue of what is planned as a quarterly newsletter each year. Your suggestions and contributions of items which would increase its usefulness will be welcomed. Send them to the Atlas Project Newsletter Editors.

With appreciation for the interest and help of all of you, I wish you good birding and surveying.

Gordon M. Meade, M.D.

Atlasing in the Adirondacks--Mike Peterson's Journal

SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1980

9:00 p.m. Scott Clearing. Entered Atlas Block 5788A this afternoon about 4:30 p.m. one half mile past Rocky Falls (elev. 2200'). No birds to welcome the surveyor. In fact, there were no birds seen or heard along the more than one mile of trail until we (my dog, Max, and I) reached Scott Clearing at a little after 5 p.m.

The first two birds were worth the wait. We had just picked our campsite along the brook, just downstream from the dam, when a repeated "quee" - hard to reproduce, metallic, nasal, insistent - began close at hand in second growth paper birch along the stream. Apparently, two birds were agitated, at first by Max and then by my presence. The sound had enough of the quality of, yet was dissimilar from the "chway" of the Red-eyed Vireo, that I suspected what species was making it even before I raised my binoculars, which showed the yellowish breast and faint (but clear) eyeline of Philadelphia Vireo! A disturbed pair: PR-D. They attracted a pair of Black-capped Chickadees with their constant string of "quee's" - usually given in series of 9 or 10. Head feathers were erect on a vireo and on a chickadee (do only males do this?).

After Max and I brought our packs up from the lean to to our campsite, the Philadelphia Vireos again began their scolding. We left our gear and went up to pond and they haven't reappeared again. Had a male Black throated Green near the pond.

At the pond, we had a mystery bird giving a call something like a thrush on the far shore, then had two Rusty Blackbirds - apparently a pair - fly along the east shore and land, giving the squeaky door call.

Too much "white noise" here from the brook, so after dinner we again walked up. A Swainson's Thrush was singing back in from the east shore. Through binoculars I could see a swallow (probably Tree) against Indian Pass skyline, but lost it high against outline of Wallface Mt. While waiting for it to reappear, a larger bird came up out of the pass, flapping. Having once had a Common Raven do that here in winter several years ago, I was ready for a raven. But this bird didn't have a raven tail. As it flew closer, over ridgeline to west of pond, it was seen to be an accipiter. Fairly good sized - not a sharpie - but with none of the power (or general form) of a Goshawk. Closer yet and the tail proved to be clearly rounded - a Cooper's Hawk! Disappeared to west toward Scott Pond. Approaching darkness and a light mist sent us to the tent. Only 7 species in the block so far, but several good ones: Cooper's Hawk, Philadelphia Vireo and Rusty Blackbird. Also interesting that I had none of these three (or Black-capped Chickadee) last weekend in 5888A, almost next door. A good, if slow, start.

SUNDAY, JULY 13, 1980

7:30 a.m. Leaving Scott Clearing. Promises to be a love ly day. Cedar Waxwing and Dark-eyed Junco at the

shore of the pond; Black-capped Chickadees and Red

breasted Nuthatch around dam. On way up Blue Trail to Scott and Wallface Pond.

10:00 a.m. Wallface Pond (3100' el.) An interesting transition on the way up here. Leaving Scott Clearing I had a Black-throated Blue and several Black-throated Green Warblers singing. Saw a nice Black-throated Green higher up, then a Black-throated Blue. In a wet area of conifers saw and heard first Golden-crowned Kinglets; had them again at the second Scott Pond and again here. Also have seen several Swainson's Thrushes. The surprise at Scott Pond was a Spotted Sandpiper. Heard first Whitethroated Sparrows just before the pond and then all around the shoreline. After the third pond, I heard and then saw a Solitary Vireo. Heard Yellow-rumped Warbler at second pond, Nashville at third, Canada along the way between the ponds. A concerned female Canada near here (brought mixed flock).



Mike Peterson and Max on the summit of Mt. Marcy (**5,344'**), **July 5, 1980**; Panther Gorge, Mt. Haystack, and Gothics in background. Only Blackpoll Warbler and White-throated Sparrow were noted above the five thousand foot level in Square **5888**.

But the high point, literally and figuratively, has been here at Wallface Pond. As I sit on a rock by the shore with McNaughtori Mt. above the opposite side of the spruce-lined pond, I hear Blackpoll Warbler, Rubycrowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Boreal Chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Canada Warbler and Swainson's Thrush. The first boreals were along a wet section just before the pond; the first blackpoll here near the shore. Blackflies are also abundant despite a nice breeze off the pond. Must go - the boreals are calling.

10:45 a.m. *Magnolia* again in wet section; Nashville again at third pond; pair of concerned white-throats same place.

11:15 a.m. Northern Parula singing above Scott Pond dam.

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What We Hear

"The reaction I have had from several field workers is that they are looking at birds in a whole new way. Before it was identification with some observation. Now it is observation that is emphasized, watching what the bird is doing and trying to figure out what it means. All say they are learning a lot and want to continue next year. They are surprised at how much they have been taking for granted. 'Of course, the catbirds are nesting; they are all over the place.' Then, when asked for further details, they admit they have not seen them carrying food, nor found a nest, nor seen the fledglings, though sometimes they have seen a pair, again mostly assumed.

What has surprised me was the necessity of frequent observation. At Piseco Lake, on two consecutive days, we saw three species of warblers carrying food for young, watched three more warbler species feeding fledglings, obviously just out of the nest (the trees and bushes were full of begging birds and busy parents) and another warbler, pewee and hummingbird feeding young in the nest. Two days later nearly all had scattered. One has to be out there on the right two days."

Dorothy McIlroy, Region 3
Coordinator

"We owe a considerable debt of gratitude to local residents, most of them relatively inexperienced birders, who are helping with the Atlas Project. Many sightings of the larger, more dramatic birds in Region 7 have been reported by those to whom warblers and vireos remain something of a mystery. Thanks to their efforts, we've added records of Common Loon, Great Blue Heron, Wood Duck, Common Merganser, most of the hawks (Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Broad-winged, and Marsh), both Golden and Bald Eagles (!), Osprey, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Great Horned Owl. Since even a Possible "X" is welcome for these species, the importance of their sightings is emphasized when we consider that several were Confirmed "NY"-the highest code possible."

John M. C. Peterson, Region 7
Coordinator

Letter to Chris Lehman;

"I was very much surprised upon receiving this well-organized material, and realized that our amateurish efforts could not possibly do justice to the numerous species which abound in our area, since we are still learning the rudiments of observation and identification. Also, and really no excuse for a conscientious birder, is the fact that our viewing territory was limited to our immediate home acreage because we have just moved here and we're still digging in. In the future though, we look forward to a more comprehensive search of our area, the polishing of our skills, and the broadening of our identification potential. How can you expect a city-boy to distinguish from half a dozen types of sparrows.

Hoping our small contribution will aid in your's and Jay's greater work, I leave you, as I, with field glasses and book in hand, go off in quest of the speckletoed what's it.

Have you ever seen a wild turkey fly? Amazing!"

Charles Nicofia

Letter to Gordon Meade;

"John and I wish we had confirmed a greater percentage of nesters for the Atlas, but we have, nevertheless, thoroughly enjoyed birding for it. We aren't fond of racing to add up species of birds to our list - rather we like to spend a while watching behavior of individual birds or interactions between individuals. Birding for breeders has slowed us down to our preferred pace, and we have had some interesting and beautiful experiences following 'our' birds. Amazing how much one can miss by just checking off numbers. This summer we have more thoroughly learned to appreciate the struggle avian life endures to reproduce its kind.

My, oh my - those feathered creatures have evolved to make finding their nests nearly impossible!

Good!"

Karen Allaben-
Confer

"A comment I've heard from several workers is that Atlasing has stimulated them to look at birds more and notice things they had not realized. They spend more time observing just what birds are doing, especially involving breeding behavior."

Dr. Robert Andrie, Region 1 Coordinator

Bits and Pieces

Elizabeth (Betsy) Brooks, an Atlas worker from Allegany County found an American Goldfinch with three young in the nest on July 25th. In Bull's "Birds of New York State," he lists the earliest date for young as August 3rd.

To hear about it is one thing; to see it another. On a noon Atlas walk around the pond near the Wildlife Resources Center, I heard the loud and determined food begging call of a young bird. The source of the raucous vocalization was a cowbird, nearly full grown, sitting on a branch. After a moment, the calling ceased as a Yellow Warbler hovering above the cowbird stuffed some food down the gaping mouth.

A few weeks later I heard that same demanding food begging in another area. This time a young cowbird was being cared for by a Red-eyed Vireo. Each time the vireo approached, the excited cowbird would increase its volume, wings and body all aflutter.

Funny I never noticed this noisy call before, but perhaps I didn't listen. I could confirm the cowbird, of course, and mentally checked off another anomaly of nature I had actually seen.

Janet Carroll

Want to find a rare bird? Try Atlasing. Wilfred Howard found a Harris' Sparrow and Herb Saltford located a Yellow-throated Warbler.

In late May, an Atlas project survey party at Deer Lick Sanctuary near Gowanda in Cattaraugus County observed a Goshawk in agitated behavior apparently protecting a nest in the area. On June 1st, the nest was discovered about 45 ft above the ground in a large beech tree. Observation from a nearby tree revealed one egg in the nest. Continued observations during June verified that the egg was successfully hatched. On the 9th of July the fledgling was photographed in the nest and both the male and female adults vigorously protested the intrusion and tried on several occasions to drive the observer away with diving attacks. This is one of a series of Goshawk nests found in Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties over the last two decades. After nests were located in 1908, none was recorded in western New York until the discovery of one in Allegany State Park in 1960. The number of relatively recent sightings indicates a resurgence of nesting activity by the Goshawk in the western region.

Robert W. Brock



The MacIntyre Mountains (Square 5788) from the top of Indian Falls (Square 5888). Among the birds noted at Indian Falls (3,700') were Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, and Blackpoll Warbler.

What We're All About

The Atlas project is designed to inventory the more than 200 bird species which breed in New York State. To accomplish this, the state has been divided into approximately 5,000 blocks of roughly nine square miles each. Surveying of the blocks for breeding evidence is being done by interested amateur or professional ornithologists. We estimate that 10 hours of field work per Atlas block will be necessary to find 50 percent of the species in the block. The ultimate goal will be to determine the breeding distribution of all species nesting in New York, for use by conservationists and land use planners. It will also provide base line data for 1980-1985 which can be used as a measure of environmental change in the future. The Atlas project is also an opportunity for all New York birdwatchers to increase their knowledge of the state's birds, and to contribute to a major scientific endeavor.

Atlasing in the Adirondacks . . .

11:25 a.m. Scott Pond (3000' el.) Spotty giving full distraction routine to Max. Boreals upset by all the commotion. White-throat pipes up. Common Yellowthroat singing. Magnolia appears with beak full. Tree Swallow. 12:30 a.m. arrive Scott camp. 3:30 p.m. Indian Pass (2834'el.) All this for a pair of agitated juncos and a singing white-throat! Max couldn't make it up with his pack (the Max Pack) on, so I wound up carrying it - sort of a super Mike Pack. Was that a Nashville or a Tennessee? Too tired to care much. Breezy.

6:15 p.m. Wallface lean-to (2000' el.) Arrived here at 5:45 and am preparing dinner. Finally heard Winter Wren coming down; then added a Wood Pewee along the brook in hardwoods. Habitat is quite different from north side of pass. Forest is more mature here with more yellow birch. Hope to hear something other than the ubiquitous Swainson's Thrushes this evening. Data sheet shows 26 species thus far - not a bad list for midJuly.

MONDAY, JULY 14-Bastille Day 1980

9:30 a.m. Wallface lean-to. If birds that sing persistently and late in the season are those who can't find mates, then Max and I aren't the only love-starved males in the woods. At 5 a.m. I was awakened by a Winter Wren presenting an awesome dawn performance. For the next 40 minutes or so, he sang constantly, one song following another. With each song burst lasting 9 to 10 seconds, he rivalled John Burrough's Whip-poor-will. Finally, about 5:45, he began to pause for a few seconds longer between songs, then gradually stopped, with only a few isolated bursts since. At the height of his singing, however, he must have delivered at least 250 full songs of the Winter Wren in rapid succession, with less than a second's pause between each. Both memorable and irritating, given the hour he chose.

Computer Up-Date

Data sheets are now coming in and they will soon be sent to DEC's Data Processing Unit for keypunching. Once the information is in the computer, the data will be processed for errors. A printout listing errors will be sent back to the Regional Coordinators with the original data sheets for correction. When all the data is corrected, reports will be printed by the computer. Reports for this year will consist of tables of data on species distribution and breeding status .

The Making of the Maps

Imagine, 1,410 Atlas maps cut, pasted, divided into blocks, numbered, printed and distributed. This was by far the biggest Atlas project job undertaken to date. It took approximately 1,000 hours and was done mainly by two people: Sandy Zeh and Cathy Goodrich of the DEC's Nongame Unit. It is hard to conceive of such an undertaking. The best we can do is to tell you how it was done and leave it to you to imagine the patience involved in this task.

First, cartographer Sharon O'Connor of the Habitat Inventory Unit made a mylar overlay grid to fit a 1:750,000 scale planimetric index map of New York. The grid represented the Atlas squares which were subsequently numbered on the overlay so we could see which Atlas squares were in which topographic or planimetric quad.

Approximately 900 topographic and planimetric maps were ordered and upon their receipt, the job of marking squares and cutting maps began. Groups of maps were laid out side by side, square sections marked and numbered with pencil and then cut out and sorted. The pieces for each square were matched, trimmed and glued. Only one Atlas square required no gluing; the rest required at least two and often four pieces to make a square.

After the squares were put together, the 4 blocks were marked and stamped with the A,B,C,D designation and the square number applied on the upper right hand corner. The completed maps were sent to the printer usually in groups by region.

In order to keep track of the status of each map, a large outline of New York State was made with the grid squares marked on it. As each map was ready for the printer, half the square was colored in red; when it was returned, the square was completely colored. This made it easy to see what was done and what was left to do.

Problems with the maps kept developing. Some of the topo maps were outdated and where a housing development or major highway would show on one map, its adjacent map would show nothing. Slight changes in the earth's axis over a period of years made adjacent old and new map coordinates slightly off.

Despite the problems and despite the seemingly overwhelming magnitude of the task, the maps were completed.

Above and Beyond

While every contribution by our Atlas workers is important, we feel the following efforts are noteworthy and deserve special attention.

Gerry Smith of the Derby Hill Bird Observatory in Region 5 worked 10 blocks by himself this year and 5 additional blocks with others. His average species count per block was 70.4. Another worker, also of Region 5, worked in 12 blocks, either alone or with others. In two of the blocks, he had over 80 species. What else can we say but **THANKS**.

Dr. Stephen W. Eaton recorded 95 species of birds in block 1966B (Cattaraugus County) of Region 1, including confirmation of Ruffed Grouse, Turkey and both waterthrushes. He tallied 17 species of warblers in this block, including the Kentucky Warbler. In two other blocks he recorded 78 and 77 species.

Dorothy Crumb, Region 5 Coordinator, recorded 94 species in block 4373A (Madison County), confirming 51. Among the confirmed breeders were 11 warblers, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Solitary Vireo. She also found a lone, singing Cape May Warbler in the block. Says Dorothy, "This has been some block!"

Mark Gretch recorded over 90 species in both blocks 6197A and 6296A (Clinton County), with a confirmed Long-eared Owl in the former and a Short-eared Owl in the latter, plus Screech and Great Horned. He noted such diverse species as Ring-necked Duck, Black Tern, Red-headed Woodpecker and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

Ferdinand LaFrance and Chris Spies surveyed all four blocks of square 5184 (Hamilton County). In 5184A and B, the blocks encompassing Ferd's Bog, they noted 78 species, 11 marked with *. Among their confirmed birds were Common Loon, both three-toed woodpeckers, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Rusty Blackbird and Lincoln's Sparrow.

This field work represents a great deal of experience, time and effort and is greatly appreciated.

Hints to the Less Experienced Birder

Atlasing will be a real learning experience, and your contribution to this project can be significant. In order to make the most of this experience, here is what you can do when you see a new or unfamiliar species.

First, look at the data sheet to make sure the bird is breeding in the state. Review the field marks you observed using your field guide as a reference. Make a note of the habitat in which you observed the bird and any noticeable behavioral characteristics. Do a little research on the bird when you have access to other reference material to see if all the pieces fit together. If the bird is an asterisked species on the data sheet or indicated as rare or uncommon in the field guide, call an experienced birder or your Regional Coordinator to discuss your sighting. The next time you see the bird, your identification will be that much easier.

Be conservative in recording species on the data sheet and don't get discouraged if your identification turns out to be questionable. It happens to all of us.

Natasha Atkins Leaves

DEC Fish and Wildlife Technician Natasha Atkins has left her post as the first statewide Atlas coordinator, to take a position in Washington, DC with the Humane Society of the United States. Natasha was responsible

for preparing most of the forms now being used by Atlas workers (data sheets, field and computer record forms) and worked with Gordon Meade in designing the instruction booklets. Her birding abilities, good humor and writing skills will be missed at Delmar,

Atlas Logo and Letterhead

Have you noticed our new Atlas logo? The design was contributed by Karen Allaben-Confer. Thank you, Karen. We think it's terrific!

New York State Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter

Janet Carroll and John M. Peterson, Co-Editors