

*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 12                      OCTOBER 1984

## **Thanks, Thanks and Again Thanks For A Job Well Done**

As summer winds toward fall, as the birds are flocking to move south, the five-year marathon of the Atlas is drawing to a close. More than a thousand Atlas surveyors are relaxing, preparing their last green sheets, and wondering, "What do I do next year in the postmigration birding doldrums, now that the Atlas is over?" All this leads me to valedictory remarks.

First, my warmest personal thanks to each of you for the thought, time, energy, and expense contributed so wholeheartedly to the common effort of the Atlas. Without these contributions the Atlas would never have been possible. Thanks, merci, gracias-however you say it-for a monumental task well done.

Second, very special appreciation to the organizations which have worked so closely and harmoniously with us. To the DEC-Commissioner Williams, Eugene McCaffrey, Robert Miller, the computer staff, and the indispensable, indefatigable Janet Carroll. Without their support, services and financial help the Atlas would have limped along in a much less effective way. We owe much as well to the Cornell Laboratory for Charlie Smith's invaluable time and advice, committee meeting space and secretarial services. Also thanks to Ron Dodson, Northeastern Regional Representative of National Audubon for his advice and lobbying on our behalf.

The third corner of the Atlas triangle is the Regional Coordinators who have been the anchor men, anchor women (well, anchor persons). They have worked tirelessly to organize, to facilitate, at times to browbeat, and to pull things together, as well as to Atlas their own blocks. My hat, cap, beret, kepi or sombrero is off to all the Regional Coordinators and their assistants.

Underlying all these efforts has been the financial support of numerous individuals, corporations, foundations and the people of New York through the "Return A Gift To Wildlife" tax return contribution program. When we decided in 1979 to undertake the Atlas, we had a grand total of \$1500! In retrospect it seems like a foolhardy venture but we've come through the first major phase. Now comes publication.

The final picture of coverage of the 5334 blocks will become apparent at a tally-up meeting in Ithaca on November 3rd. But regardless of the results, one thing is already certain, we have developed a clear picture of the breeding distribution of the 244 species of the state; something very inadequately known before. In this we can take great pride for making an outstanding contribution to American ornithology.

Along the way we have Confirmed (CO) breeding for 231 species of which five had never before been detected as state breeders-Boat-tailed Grackle, Forster's Tern, Blue Grosbeak, Palm and Yellowthroated Warblers.

Repeatedly I have heard surveyors decry the approaching end of the Atlas. They have found in the Atlas work an entirely new aspect of birding, a revelation of excitement and interest, a way of keeping up enthusiasm at a time which, in the past, has been a doldrum period of the year. Many have said, "The Atlas may be ending but I'm going to continue on my own. It's such great fun." I echo these sentiments and urge all of you to continue in the future. It's possible we'll develop a way to utilize future data you may gather. In fact it's probable that at the end of 1984 there will

**Thanks, Thanks** continued on page 6

## ***Atlasing Misadventures***

Now that the Atlas field work is almost complete we are prepared to tell you some of the ordeals Atlas workers have gone through in the line of duty.

This from Walter Sedwitz of New York City... "When I and others I know well from neighboring squares go to our chosen park, field, forest, lake, beach or meadow, extreme caution rules our actions. We are alert not only for birds, but also for those who would prey on us: muggers, thieves, binocular snatchers, rapists, psychotics and others of that ilk. One day in the swamp at Van Cortlandt Park, I was scanning trees and marshes when a hand touched my shoulder. Swiftly I swung around to face a man of my age and height who probably was a walker in the park. "You better be more watchful around here, he admonished. Last week I was mugged not fifty yards from here by a guy with a knife. He took all my money. Lucky he didn't hurt me."

Though it was early in the morning and still cool, I wiped my brow. I thanked the gentleman, recalling that within the past few years not a hundred yards away on a joggers road several women runners had been molested, and in one tragic case raped, in the nearby woods. As you can see bad weather and stinging insects are not the only impedence to Atlas work."

Another worker encountered three dead bodies in the course of his Atlas work.

Life threatening experiences are not unique to New York City. At 7:30 pm on July 15, Terry O'Connell and Beverly Brown were blockbusting in Clinton County. They were looking for what might have been a Willow Flycatcher when a man stopped his car, asked what they were doing, and when Terry tried to give him an Atlas newsletter, the man became furious and pulled a knife. They began to leave in Terry's truck whereupon the man returned to his vehicle and got out a rifle. After a high speed chase, he overtook Terry at a stop sign, blocking the road with his car. Eventually, they parted ways, with the man threatening to report them to the State Police for jacking deer, saying that he'd seen their accomplices. There are other details, but as Terry reports, "He wasn't making too much sense."

Janet Carroll and Lori Riccardo had an interesting summer which included having a dog set on them, having their conversation tape recorded by a local couple when they refused to investigate violations at a landfill (driving a state vehicle has its disadvantages) and being chased off the property of a man who they were later informed by local policemen was "crazy and dangerous." This daring duo also ventured onto correctional facility property in the early morning hours to Atlas around a lake there. They were almost to the end of the lake nearest the incarceration buildings when they heard voices. The desire to get out of there was quelched by the thought that if the voices were guards they would probably be shot as escapees and if they were convicts who knows what could happen. They remained frozen

for several minutes until voices were silent and they heard a vehicle drive away. Needless to say they made a hasty exit from the area.

No less unnerving was this experience of Ferd LaFrance and Chris Spies. On the night of July 6 Ferd LaFrance and Chris Spies drove to the end of the road leading to King's Flow, a mile-long lake at about 1,770' elevation in northeastern Hamilton County, and slept in the car. Having studied the Atlas maps of blocks 5583B and D, their plan was to survey a camping area near their starting point in the B block, then hike south on a trail bordering King's Flow and a large swampy area that extended into the D block. They planned to continue south to the end of the trail, double back to the north, crossing two brooks (Humphrey and Wakely), to Round Pond-actually an arm of the larger Round Lake-and back to their starting point. They foresaw no great difficulties for this round-trip of under ten miles. Here's what happened...

They followed the trail to the south end of King's Flow then bushwacked to check the swampy area, but found it under water and unsurveyable. Regaining the trail, they followed it to the end, doubled back, and went northward to the first brook. "I don't know what sort of a storm that part of the Adirondacks got," says Ferd, "but Humphrey Brook was over its banks in spring that condition." At first it looked hopeless to cross, but they found a wide spot where the raging waters were only slightly over their knees. Using poles to brace themselves against the current, they prodded their way across the stream, backs to the current and the sapling poles pressed in the downstream bed to keep them upright. At Wakely Brook, the second crossing, they had to do the same thing. After reaching Round Pond, they continued north on the trail back towards their starting point.

"When we got to the north end of King's Flow, we got our biggest surprise," Ferd LaFrance recalls. The Atlas map shows a crossing of Round Pond Brook. This "crossing," the two observers discovered, was a dam with a foot of water roaring over its top, the torrent being the result of all the raging streams emptying into King's Flow following the early July deluge. "We knew it was impossible to cross the concrete dam because we would have no footing," Ferd points out. He adds, "To go back the way we came meant miles of extra walking and a good part in the dark. To go downstream meant more miles of walking."

The two studied the spillway closely, noting that the King's Flow side of the dam was reinforced by gravel. Chris said, "We did it twice before, let's do it again."

"You mean cross this spillway?"

"Yes," he answered, "Let's find two strong saplings and walk the gravel across." The spillway was about forty feet long and the waters rushing over the gravel

## ***Distraction Display in Louisiana Waterthrush***

Atlas block 6188D is located in eastern Essex County near Lake Champlain, between the villages of Port Henry and Westport. The area I was surveying, a well shaded, fern-floored ravine with a lively brook undercutting moss-draped banks, was typical Louisiana Waterthrush habitat. Two weeks before I had found the nest about three feet above the waterline in a steep mud bank. It contained five creamy white eggs flecked with brown and, since incubation averages fourteen days, I wanted to see if the young had hatched.

Taking a comfortable position amid moss and mosquitos, I was waiting for signs of activity. For more than a half hour there was neither movement nor song, so I began to cautiously approach the nest. I was about five feet away when, in an explosion of noise and frantic fluttering, the female fell from the nest into the water and was swept downstream. She appeared to be in serious trouble with wings widely sculling the surface and head bobbing into the water between panic "cheep-cheep" notes when, going down for the third and presumably last time, she rose from the stream like a hummingbird and disappeared into the forest.

Later, seeking consolation in the wisdom of elders, I found the following in A Natural History of American *Birds* by Forbush and May: ". . . when the bird is surprised on the nest it will tumble out of it and into the water in the most surprising and startling manner, and then flutter and roll over and over for several yards downstream, as if its head were severed from its body."

Blockbusting kept me away for several more weeks, but a final visit assured me that a successful brood had been raised. In the future, whenever I dally by moss-covered banks in the company of Ovenbirds and Veerys, I will always remember a most remarkable distraction display.

-Tom Barber, Region 7

**Editors Note:** Bull gives the northernmost breeding limit of the Louisiana Waterthrush as ". . . Port Henry, near Lake Champlain, Essex County, both in 1941 and 1947 (Carleton). "Geoffrey Carleton had since extended that limit with a sighting in Elizabethtown, Essex County, in 1976. Breeding Bird Atlas observations indicate that the range may extend to the border. There has now been a sighting in Skerry, Franklin County, along the Little Salmon River and two records from Cadyville, Clinton County.

## ***Say What?***

I was trying to finish up a block that needed only a few species. One of the birds missing was Northern Cardinal, which certainly occurs in the area. There was a small town in the block, so I decided to drive the few streets to see if I could find a feeder. No luck, but I saw a woman walking down the street. I spoke to her and said, "This is kind of a strange question, but I wonder if you watch birds." She looked rather

baffled, but answered, "No, I don't." I said, "I'm sorry to have bothered you. I'm working on a breeding bird survey in this area. I thought if you had a feeder, you might have seen a cardinal. You know, that is the bright red bird." She said, "No, we only get channels 3, 5 and 9 in this area."

Dorothy Crumb, Region 5

## ***Atlasing in North America***

For those of you who can not fathom a summer without Atlasing, here is one remedy. Atlasing is quickly becoming a national phenomenon. Are you planning a vacation to any of the states or provinces listed below? If so, write to Janet Carroll, Atlas Coordinator, NYSDEC, Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar, NY 12054, and she will provide you with the name of the coordinator for the state or province you are visiting. Experienced Atlas workers will be welcome I assure you.

Alabama*	New Hampshire
Connecticut	New Jersey
Delaware	Ohio
Indiana*	Ontario
Iowa	Pennsylvania
Kentucky*	Quebec
Maryland/DC	Rhode Island
Michigan	Saskatchewan
Minnesota*	West Virginia
	Wisconsin*

Sorry, Vermont, Massachusetts and Maine have already completed their Atlas work.  
In planning stage.

## ***Volunteers***

"Volunteers are like yachts. They have style. They're fiercely independent. If you have to ask how much they cost, you can't afford them. They are the only human beings on this earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfishness, caring, patience, need and just plain loving one another. Their very presence transcends politics, religion, ethnic background, marital status, sexes, even smokers vs. non-smokers. Maybe like the yacht, the volunteer is a luxury. And luxuries are too often taken for granted. Did the media stand behind them when they needed a boost? Did the professionals make it a point to tell them they did a good job? Did the recipients of their time and talent ever express their gratitude? It frightens me, somehow, to imagine what the world would be like without them:" Erma Bombeck

**"Fringe Benefits  
Taken from New Hampshire  
Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter**

The air is empty of birdsong, the lush green growth obscures any hint of trail, several layers of bug dope ward off the mosquito swarms. But something always occurs to lift the spirit, and it is here in a patch of lilac. With "oohs" and "ahhs" the three bird atlasers forget the thick, silent, mosquito-filled woods to admire the Purple Fringed Orchid.

Another hot, quiet time and Mother Nature rewards our diligence, not with birds but with ruby red drops of delicious raspberries. The day becomes sweet.

But it is not only "unsuccessful" birding days that nature livens with surprises. The best gift she gave was when the many warblers were flying about so swiftly that we knew not where to look first. Out of the corner of the eye was seen a brown creature on the trail. Just another Whitethroated Sparrow suggests the brain but the subconscious continues to turn the head for a full look at ... a baby weasel! The mouth overflows with excitement, "Look Sally, it's so small ... the tail is so short ... color of chocolate ... long neck ... bounds so funny ... and on and on." The words seem not to scare the curious baby. It comes up, just four feet from us, and stretches up on tiny hind feet so that its chocolate brown eyes can gather us in. When it does turn and bounce down the trail (the action of its long looping body a cross between inchworm and rabbit) we try hard to suppress laughter. It does not leave quickly and we wait hoping for its return. And yes, from just where it emerged the first time it comes out again! Giving us another chance to study the perfect white of chin and belly which extends to the paws delicately outlining each little toe. What does he see of us?, for he studies us as well. The happiness of the moment cannot be improved, but it is nonetheless doubled when a twin emerges. Yes, two little Shorttailed Weasels delighting us and we delighting them. A very soft churring indicates momma is near. Yet they do not heed her swiftly. They bound slowly down the trail, bodies arching and flowing, then disappear into the brush. We wait breathlessly, but the magic of the moment is over. Yet never over for it replays within our mind whenever we ask.

A delicate orchid, sweet berries, curious babies, all fringe benefits of breeding bird atlasing. And there are many more ... giggling with Sally as if we'd been friends for years ... hunting a Raven, chills traveling the spine each time it calls ... hearing canaries and having the guide agree that White winged Crossbills sing canary-like ... a first Black backed Woodpecker dressed in a thick black velvet cape.

The list is long and though each atlasers list is different they are all filled with good memories.

Johanna Ludewig

***Everything is Somewhere***

Time is running out for reporting any "extra" birds; those seen outside or beyond the boundaries of assigned blocks. Many observers undoubtedly recall, perhaps with a twinge of guilt, some special records still not reported for the Atlas: the hummingbird nest discovered, the great blue heronry located, the Cooper's Hawk found nesting, or other significant encounters since 1980.

"But it wasn't in my Atlas block," is the frequent response. So the Blue-winged Teal or Northern Waterthrush, the Great Horned Owl or Northern Goshawk, goes unreported. In answer to this, Berna Weissman adopted a motto for the Atlas: *Everything is Somewhere*. The Regional Coordinators, given the proper information, know where that "somewhere" is. Each is intimately familiar, at least on paper, with every inch of their regions and can locate anything in the right block, given sufficient information.

Take a moment, then,, to reflect on those special 1980-84 encounters with birds. Such casual records should include carefully written details, with locations precisely described. Send to the appropriate regional coordinator, right now.

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**Region 10**

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**Region 10 Atlas Workers Take Note**

**Gil Raynor, Region 10 Coordinator, is gravely ill. Region 10 Atlas workers can continue to send green sheets to his address or to John McNeil, 168 Lexington Road, Shirley, NY 11967 who is taking over Gils Atlas responsibilities along with other members of Moriches Bay Audubon. Please cooperate fully with John should he have any questions.**

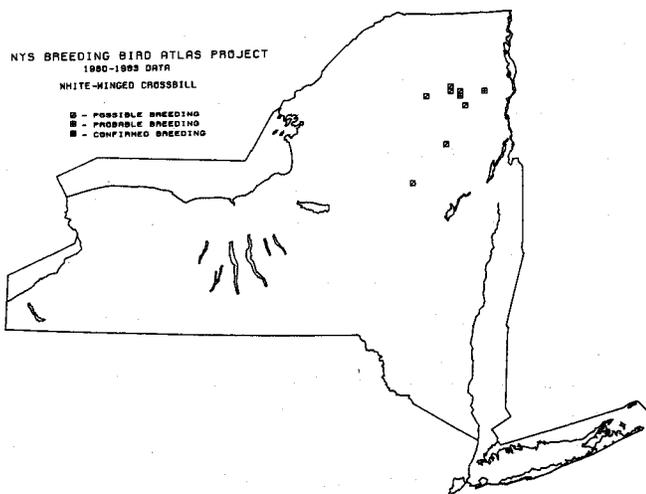
Continued from page 2  
 up to 22-inches deep, or just over their knees. LaFrance could see that it was possible.

They found two good poles and slowly, with legs apart and poles firmly braced in the gravel, crossed the spillway. "It was one scary forty feet," Ferd recalls. "I always felt that spelunkers and mountain climbers were crazy; now I'm adding bird watchers to the list." Naturally, the two blockbusters managed to hang onto the field cards, bringing the B block up to 56 species (including Common Loon and an FY Sharp-shinned Hawk), plus 33 species in the D block. Both LaFrance and Spies enjoyed the Atlas work. "Went to places we would never have seen," Ferd concludes, "and been to places we wished we had never seen, but it was a lot of fun."

## Of Cones and Crossbills A Last Chance

Observers whose blocks include tracts of white spruce and tamarack, or hemlock (or maybe even other conifers), still have a last opportunity to record a species still not Confirmed in New York State. The bird is the White-winged Crossbill, whose specialized hooked mandible is designed for opening cones of these trees and whose appearance in numbers accompanies bumper conifer crops. Records of the closely related Red Crossbill are also a possibility.

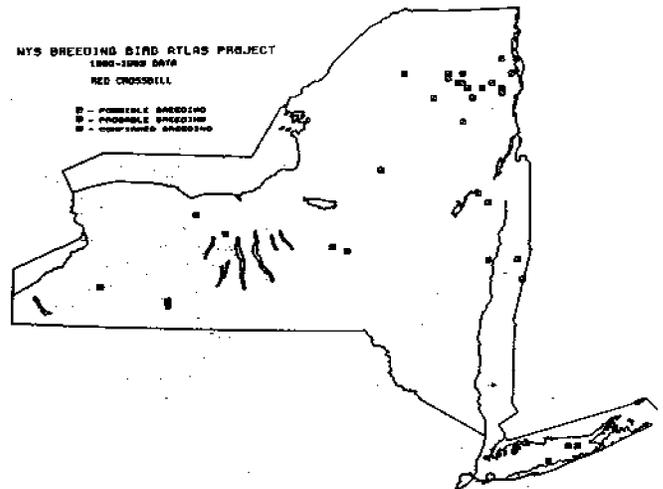
The last good spruce crop in the Adirondacks formed in the winter of 1979-80. Correspondingly, the last evidence of White-winged Crossbill nesting was observed just two days before the Atlas began, when a female was spotted carrying nesting material at Chubb River Swamp outside Lake Placid, December 30, 1979. During the next four years, spruce cones were poor to nonexistent across northern parts of the state and only nine records of White-winged Crossbill, all just Possible or Probable, were added. The tally for the Red Crossbill was just slightly better, 34 blocks with just three of those Confirmed, perhaps because various species of pines did produce good cones.



Now the spruces are producing again. The last time that trees were so top-heavy in fact was the winter of 1974-75. Already, the crossbills, at least the White-winged,

are gathering from wherever their five-year wanderings in search of cones have taken them. Since late July, White-winged Crossbills have been added to six more blocks and nesting has probably begun.

Crossbills don't follow the calendar; they follow the cones. Nesting may take place in any month as long as the cones are there. Nor do the cones have to be ripe or open, according to Craig Benkman, a graduate student at SUNY Albany who is studying crossbill foraging behavior, and who reports that the spruce-tamarack cone crop now extends at least from Ontario, across northern Quebec, and into Maine and the Maritimes, with both crossbill species rearing young by August. Benkman also notes that he has observed nesting by "subadult male" crossbills, a useful tip for Atlas observers who might otherwise be inclined to dismiss birds in this plumage as too young to breed.



Male White-winged Crossbills sing from the tip-top of spruces, sometimes engaging in aerial duels, and deliver a long, canary-like trill, rivaling the Winter Wren. Call notes are *wink-wink-wink* with an upward, questioning inflection. They also give a soft dry chatter or trill that at first may sound like a red squirrel or distant kingfisher. The only nest found in NYS was about 20 feet up in a spruce bough. The Red Crossbill sings a variable series of whistles, trills, or warbles, and the call note is a flat *jip-jip-jip*.

Since all data sheets have (hopefully) been submitted, crossbill records should be reported to regional coordinators as promptly as possible. Once more into the spruces, dear friends.

### STOP PRESS

White-winged Crossbill was finally added to the NYS Atlas list of Confirmed species on the morning of

September 11, 1984, by Craig Benkman and Mike Peterson. Location was Bloomingdale Bog, Franklin County (Block 5691A), where Peterson and others had found a singing male on August 25th. The confirmation was provided by a young fledgling, its bill still not developed enough to allow it to forage successfully on its own, accompanying the adult male in a cone-laden spruce. Both crossbill species continue to be reported in the Adirondacks, and observers are again urged to search conifer stands for additional breeding records, reporting any encounters with either Red or White-winged Crossbills to the regional coordinator at once.

## Thanks, Thanks continued from page 1

still be some significant gaps in coverage which we may ask some of you to help fill in during 1985.

### Appointment of Atlas Editors

The collection of Atlas data is ending but the next phase, publication of the Atlas begins. The Atlas Publication Committee has asked Dr. Robert Andrie to serve as Editor and Janet Carroll as Associate Editor. Dr. Andrie is Curator of Vertebrate Zoology at the Buffalo Museum of Science, Region 1 Atlas Coordinator and member of the New York Avian Records Committee. Investigation of possible publishers is proceeding and as work on publication progresses we will keep you informed.

Good birding to all of you!

Gordon M. Meade, M.D.  
Chairman, Atlas Project



### GREEN SHEETS DUE!

If you have not yet done so, please submit your Green Data Sheets to your Regional Coordinator NOW. Just as a reminder, you do not have to include previously reported data for a block on your 1984 data sheet.

### *New Breeding Species*

The first records of breeding Yellow-throated Warblers were found this year near S. Cairo in Greene County and in Allegany State Park in Cattaraugus County. The Greene County birds were first located on June 6th foraging in the tops of sycamore and cottonwood trees along Catskill Creek by DEC blockbuster, David Gagne. The following weekend, Regional Coordinator Dick Guthrie made a follow-up visit and observed two birds building a nest about 45 feet up in a white pine tree. The birds were subsequently observed incubating and finally feeding young at the nest on July 1.

The birds in Allegany State Park were located by Tim Baird on July 9. The nest was found on July 21 by Betsey Potter. The birds were observed feeding young in the nest. This pair chose a nesting site in a red pine tree, one in a row of red pines along Science Lake. The habitat in the park is a beech/birch/maple/hemlock forest association.

The northern range of this species has been documented as southern New Jersey, along the Delaware River in southeastern Pennsylvania, southern Ohio and Indiana, central Missouri and south to the Gulf Coast of Texas, and Florida.

The Greene County birds were of the inland race of the species which as described in Bull's Birds of New York breeds northeast to southern Ohio, and more rarely to the Delaware Valley of western New Jersey.

The nests were collected and the Greene County nest submitted to the American Museum of Natural History and the Cattaraugus nest to the Buffalo Museum of Science.

**New York State Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter**

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