

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 3

SEPTEMBER 1981

**ATLASING IN REGION 1—
The Niagara Frontier**

The Niagara Frontier Region is extensive, encompassing all or parts of eight counties. Altitudes range from about 75 (246 ft.) to 776 (2548 ft.) meters above sea level, with flat to slightly rolling plains in the north separated by escarpments, and the dissected Allegheny Plateau in the south. This land relief, the vegetation types, an abundance of streams, lakes and ponds, some marshes and swamps, the Niagara River, and two Great Lakes, combine to provide an excellent variety of terrestrial and aquatic habitats for breeding birds.

Over the years 178 species and two hybrids have been found nesting in the region. The good aquatic habitats are reflected by the fact that 31 nonpasserine wetland species have been known to breed. Extensive forests in the southern part of the region, along with the more disjunct woodlands to the north, provide suitable habitats for 30 species of warblers and vireos. At least 21 species of fringillids have been found breeding, and the raptors, woodpeckers, flycatchers and icterids are well represented.

While Region 1 has always been attractive to birders as one of the country's better inland places for observing and studying bird migrants, nevertheless, some members of the region's several clubs have also devoted time to studying the breeding species. But it is this Atlas project that has stimulated more birders to go afield, especially in June and July, to record and learn more about nesting species. Surveying in over 150 blocks of the region's total 668, they tallied 156 species plus two hybrids and confirmed 135 last year. Considering the relatively late start in getting the project organized and underway statewide last year, this is a fine accomplishment for Region 1 surveyors.

I was surprised and very pleased to have over 100 birders participate in 1980. I heard many comments that they really enjoyed "atlasing" and thereby learned considerably more about the breeding birds of this region than they had known before. So I take this

opportunity to express my thanks to all, and particularly to the hard-working club representatives and those who helped with statistical work. I am sure that this first year's surveying gave all who participated good experience and a grounding in breeding bird biology that will certainly serve them well in the ensuing years of the project.

Both Brewster's and Lawrence's Warblers were found in 1980, and the former confirmed. Another rarity located was Kentucky Warbler, but with no evidence of breeding. Orchard Oriole confirmed is an excellent find, and of course the recent range expansion into this region of Golden-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped and Prairie Warblers, and Whitethroated Sparrow is being better delineated as surveying continues. The more unusual or difficult to find species which I hope that we either add and/or confirm in 1981 and following years are Least and American Bitterns, Pintail, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, King Rail, Common Snipe, Barn, Long-eared, Short-eared, and Saw-whet Owls, Whippoorwill, Winter, Carolina and Short-billed Marsh Wrens, Mockingbird, Swainson's Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Parula, Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Henslow's Sparrow.

Although we may find breeding species new to the region, I do not expect much in this regard because the area has been studied for many years and there are few species whose breeding ranges are near or expanding close to our boundaries. We may discover some unexpected isolated nesting species, such as the Common Goldeneye and Ruby-crowned Kinglet found several years ago. One hopes that Worm-eating or Kentucky Warblers will be recorded breeding in the southern counties. Actually, the chances of locating some new or rare species are enhanced because never before has there been such a widespread effort by so many observers.

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A hearty WELCOME to all new Atlas workers! Our volunteer numbers have passed the 1,100 mark and keep growing. We know you will enjoy Atlasing and we thank you for participating.

REGIONAL COORDINATORS What Do They Do?

With this newsletter we begin a series on each of the ten Atlas regions to let you know what Atlas workers are doing in other parts of the state. You will also be meeting each Regional Coordinator, so I'd like to tell you why we have RCs and what it is they do.

At the very inception of the project it was recognized that much of the workload must be decentralized to spread the responsibility, to provide opportunity for many persons to share in the operation, and to parcel out the workload.

In the first years of the Federation, the state was divided into ten regions for Kingbird reporting. These Kingbird regions have been maintained for the Atlas Project.

At one of the early meetings of the Atlas Steering Committee, names for possible coordinators for each region were suggested. When invited to so serve, they accepted with alacrity, almost without exception. The system and the selectees have proved to be a success.

For two years now they have worked diligently and long to make the project run smoothly. During that time, there have been only two changes. The press of other personal commitments required Kate Dunham to relinquish her work to Dick Guthrie in Region 8; and Roger Robb's change of residence to another state led to the appointment of Berna Weissman in Region 9.

The duties of a Regional Coordinator are many, requiring dedication and hard work. At the outset they must familiarize themselves with all aspects of the project, including the habitats of their region. The most essential task comes next, the recruitment of surveyors, the assignment of squares, and instruction in the procedures and techniques of surveying. Many hours of time and miles of travel are given to arranging and attending workshops where the project is explained and promoted. Often they enhance this promotion by stimulating or writing articles in bird club newsletters and local newspapers which in turn generates phone calls and letters which require answers.

Along with the instruction goes the distribution of project hardware-handbooks, field cards, data sheets, maps, etc. And as the season progresses, coordinators interpret instructions, detect problems and suggest solutions. At the close of the breeding season an avalanche of the green data sheets descends on them for review for accuracy and completeness. This task is especially important since the major responsibility for the data is theirs.

Then all data must be shipped off to the Delmar computer center for development into analytical printouts which, when returned to them, must be distributed to the surveyors and discussed and explained. Finally, there is a period of evaluation of the coverage achieved in each block-is it adequate, what are the deficiencies?

Possibly most stimulating are periodic meetings with other coordinators and the Atlas Steering Committee (of which they are members) to discuss problems, suggest solutions, and make plans for next year.

Theirs is a sometimes onerous, but generally satisfying task, which each surveyor can make easier by recording the data with meticulous care. Our Regional Coordinators deserve enormous credit for a job well done. Thanks to each of them.

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



**ROBERT F. ANDRLE
Region 1 Coordinator**

Robert F. Andrle is Curator of Vertebrate Zoology at the Buffalo Museum of Science. He earned his doctorate at Louisiana State University where his thesis dealt with some biogeographical aspects of the Sierra de Tuxtla in Veracruz, Mexico. He has published papers on the birds of that region, and his interest in tropical ornithology has continued with research in Mexico and Guatemala on the Horned Guan, and in the West Indies on two endemic warbler species. Dr. Andrle has long been actively engaged in Niagara Frontier Region ornithological studies and was a major contributor to and instrumental in editing and publishing the definitive work "Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region" by Clark S. Beardslee and Harold D. Mitchell. Gulls have been one of his major interests in a region that is renowned for its numbers and variety of these birds. He secured there the second specimen of the Lesser Black-backed Gull for the United States, and also five of the six specimens of Thayer's Gull for New York. His published papers on Thayer's Gull and on some presumed gull hybrids have appeared in several ornithological journals. During the past three years he has taught courses at the Museum on gulls and breeding birds, and he is continuing his investigation of the breeding range expansion of Golden-crowned Kinglet in western New York.

ATLAS DATA

Its Ownership and Release

When you, as an Atlas surveyor, are straining to see if that warbler is going to eat that wiggling worm himself or fly off to feed it to a nestling, the questions of the ownership and release of the data obtained from your observations probably never occur to you. But, such questions become important when independent but closely cooperating organizations are involved in the data collection and processing.

The conception, organization, and data collection of our Atlas Project is a function of the Federation. Without the dedication of our surveyors there would be no project. Once collected, the data goes from surveyors to Regional Coordinators and then to the Wildlife Resources Center of the DEC at Delmar where it is fed into the computer for analysis.

Soon after the project began, the question arose as to who owns the data and controls its use? (Obviously, information that you as an Atlas worker collect is yours to use for your own purposes.) Early this year these questions called for an answer as requests from outside organizations for use of the data began to be received. Because of this question and a number of others, a letter of agreement between the Federation and the DEC has been adopted by both the Atlas Steering Committee and the Federation Executive Committee.

This agreement confirms the desire of both to cooperate in conducting the survey, and has the general purpose of coordinating activities, assigning responsibilities, and providing for the sharing and appropriate dissemination of information obtained as a result of the project's efforts.

The agreement includes an enumeration of the responsibilities of each group. The DEC agrees to provide technical assistance, computer services, a share of the printing and mailing as appropriate, maps, and publicity through its informational and educational services. The Federation agrees to provide overall direction of the project, volunteer field workers, and Regional Coordinators, a share of the printing and mailing as appropriate, publicity through Federation and member club publications, and funding by solicitation from private sources and from sale of Atlas products.

What are Atlas products? Tables, maps, block and statewide data, and a final publication are considered to be Atlas products. These Atlas products are agreed to be the property of the Federation. The DEC is to be allowed use of the data without charge for uses deemed appropriate by the Atlas Steering Committee. Guidelines establishing costs and conditions for use of data have been established by mutual agreement and approved by the Executive Committee.

Why have charges and conditions for use of data been established? Much thought, effort, and expense goes into the collection and analysis of the data; data which is unique. We need funds to continue the project, and it seems entirely reasonable to charge outside organizations for our data. With that in mind, a scale of charges has been established based

upon such factors as the nature of the requesting organization and the amount of data requested. We do not expect to make money in this way or to secure any large sums but we should be able to offset some expenses.

All requests for use of data should be referred to the Atlas Project Data Committee. They will consider the suitability of the request and determine the charge. Send requests to Atlas Project Data Committee c/o Dr. Gordon M. Meade, 27 Mill Valley Road Pittsford, N. Y. 14534

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

Peregrines in the North Country

While battling blackflies and coping with large unexpected ursine visitors, four hack site attendants at two new Peregrine Falcon release sites in the Adirondacks have been caring for ten young falcons this summer. Historically, before DDT affected the birds' reproduction, the High Peaks region had a dozen peregrine eyries. The intent of this program, conducted by DEC's Endangered Species Unit with captive-bred birds supplied by Cornell's Peregrine Fund, is to reestablish these magnificent cliff dwellers. The birds are released from their hack boxes at 42 to 45 days of age and fed pigeons for approximately eight weeks until they hunt on their own. For the attendants it is a rare opportunity to observe this endangered species at close range and see the birds progress from chasing insects to swooping on larger prey. Hopefully, in several years, the once downy nestlings will return to raise their own young as the peregrines did years ago on the cliffs of the North Country.

Barbara Allen Loucks

The released peregrines were sighted by many observers in the Adirondacks this summer. Here is one account . . .

On July 19, 1981, I guided a group of children and adults sponsored by the Elizabethtown Social Center on a hike up the trail to nearby Hurricane Mountain from the east, arriving at the 3,694' summit at about 1:00 p.m. Among the members of our party were Louise and Terry O'Connell of Cadyville, Atlas observers in Square 5994. We were recording the birds around the summit of Hurricane (block 5989B) on a field card, and had made note of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco and White-throated Sparrow.

Suddenly, someone shouted, "Here comes a hawk!" Low overhead, circling the summit and turning its head to show strong dark facial markings, rowing strongly and gliding on pointed wings, was a Peregrine

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MERGANSERS-Their Similarities and Differences

Mergansers are tricky! All three species, the Redbreasted, Common and Hooded, have many similarities and few differences making them difficult to confirm. Knowledge of both is essential for accurate Atlas reporting.

First, the similarities. All three species begin their courtship at the wintering areas and have pair bonds formed before they travel to the breeding site. The males desert the females soon after laying is completed, leaving incubation of the eggs and raising of the young solely to the females. The females of all three species are similar in appearance, particularly the Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, so without the males which are slightly easier to identify, the females are difficult to distinguish. All three mergansers may move their broods many miles from their nesting area to a brood rearing area which means that mergansers seen with all but newly hatched young may be along distance from their nest. Broods of the Common Merganser and also the Red-breasted Merganser may combine with members of the same species or with each other as they move from their nesting area to their brood rearing area. The young of all three species are abandoned by the females long before they can fly.

Although the similarities are many, there are obviously differences which set each species apart from the others.

Nesting sites chosen by the Hooded Merganser are often in remote areas near swamps, river bottomlands, beaver ponds, wooded streams and lakes. This merganser is a cavity nester choosing a nest hole in a tree very near water, often in a Wood Duck box. As a matter of fact, Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers will lay their eggs in the same nest. Either female may incubate the clutch and since they have nearly the same incubation period, both species of eggs will hatch at the same time. All ducklings apparently respond when called off the nest by the female, so don't be surprised if you see a mixed brood of Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers. (If you are checking nest boxes, Hooded Merganser eggs are more spherical, larger and whiter than Wood Duck eggs.)

Incubation for the Hooded Merganser begins in either April or May with the young hatching in about 30 days. When the young are only 24 hours old, the female calls them out of the nest. The chicks tumble out of the hole and the family heads for water.

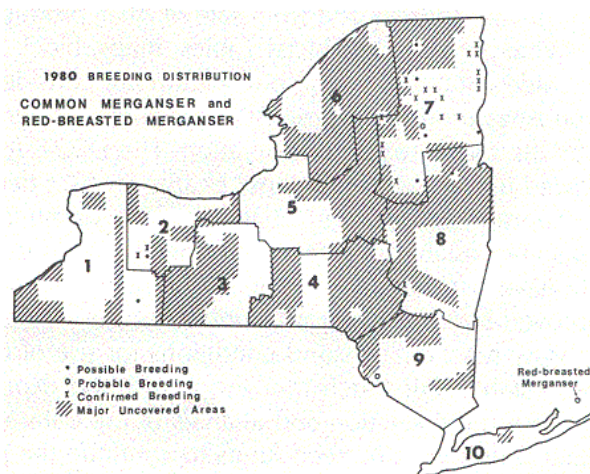
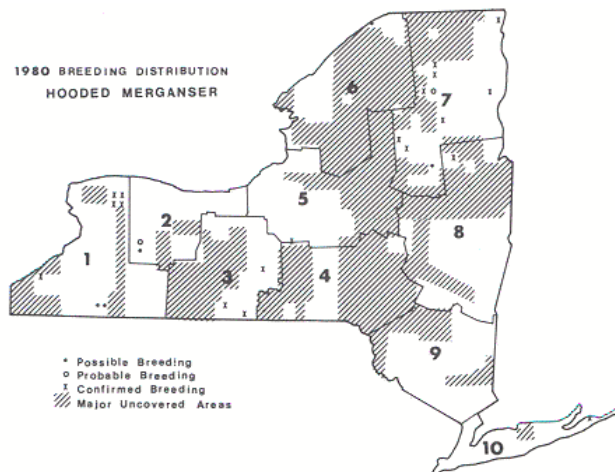
If you've seen the Hooded Merganser female with her newly hatched young consider yourself lucky. These birds are extremely adept at hiding, but if you do come near enough, the female will exhibit a distraction display similar to shorebirds. She simulates lameness and flutters in distress to lead the source of her fright away from the young.

Common Mergansers are also hole-nesting birds, but will build a nest on the ground if no nest cavity is available. These divers breed commonly in the Adirondacks near mountain lakes or wilderness streams. They also breed in similar areas in western New York and the Catskills. Commons sometimes share their nests with others of their own species, as well as with Hooded Mergansers when nest holes are few.

While Common Mergansers lay their eggs in April or May, the Redbreasted begins egg laying in early June. Mergansers with broods in June, therefore, will most likely be Commons, while broods appearing a month later will most likely be Red-breasteds.

The nest of the Red-breasted Merganser is a hollow in the ground concealed among low woody growth or low overhanging shelter like conifer limbs. Known breeding areas in New York include small islands in Lake Ontario and on the coast. It will, however, nest by rivers, ponds and lakes.

1980 reports on the Common and Hooded Merganser were fairly numerous, but only a "Probable" record from Long Island was received on the Red-breasted Merganser. Remember, the Redbreasted Merganser is an "asterisked" species, so a verification form must be filled in. If you see a merganser during the breeding season and have any doubt about its identity, call your regional coordinator or an experienced birder for help.



Confirming the Chimney Swift

I had Chimney Swifts in my block. That was certainly easy to determine since they chattered noisily in the air above my house daily. I also had the perfect nest site nearby-an old boarded up building with three large chimneys. My problem was to confirm breeding when it was impossible for me to look into the chimney for a nest.

I did some research on the swift and found that certain breeding criteria did not apply to the Chimney Swift. The FY code could not be used since swifts carry the food for their newly hatched young inside their mouths. Only a very close inspection might show a bulging gullet on a swift about to feed its young. The FS code also would be an unlikely way to confirm since adult Chimney Swifts have not been observed carrying a fecal sac. As soon as young swifts can move about, they defecate over the edge of the nest. It is not known what the adults do with the feces when the young are immobile.

Since I couldn't use either the NE or NY code, I was left two possible codes-ON or FL. The most obvious assumption would be that swifts seen entering or leaving a chimney would certainly fit in the ON code. This is apparently not always true, however, since unmated birds will also roost in chimneys. If I wanted to be sure of breeding I had to go one step further. I had to wait until the young hatched, around July 4th, and then watch the chimneys. According to Dr. Richard Fischer of Cornell University, who did considerable research on the breeding biology of Chimney Swifts, an adult will enter a chimney with food, stay between 5 or 10 minutes feeding the young, then leave. The other adult enters, feeds the young and leaves. This type of behavior is continuous during the day and confirms breeding (ON).

One other choice is the FL code. Young swifts fledge about 30 days after hatching. At the same time, adult Chimney Swifts begin their moult. An adult will have inner wing feathers missing while the young, of course, will be in perfect feather. The young fly with the adults and stay near the nest site for a few days after fledging. If a group of swifts is observed containing both birds in moult and birds in perfect feather near a likely nest site in early to mid-August the FL code can be used to confirm breeding.

On July 4th, I visited the abandoned building to test out my research. I was there only a few seconds when I observed a swift drop into one chimney. Another swift soon flew out, presumably the mate, and then came back about five minutes later and dropped back into the chimney. All three of the chimneys in the house had swifts going in and out and I certainly had no doubt that the young had hatched and that these chimneys were the nest sites of breeding Chimney Swifts. While it's too late this year to confirm the Chimney Swifts in your block, tuck this information away for use next breeding season.

Janet Carroll

FORSTER'S TERN A New Breeding Species

The first breeding record in New York of the Forster's Tern was reported by Atlas worker, John Zarudsky. A co-worker of John's, Jim Brone, first located the tern when in the course of his survey of tern colonies for the Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways, he heard an unusual tern call not at all like that of the Common Terns in the area. He took particular note of the plumage and bill color of the calling tern and determined the bird to be a Forster's. He reported his findings to John who visited the area with several other birders. They verified the report and also located the nest. Tern biologist, Mike Gochfeld banded the one unfledged tern found in the nest and the terns were photographed -a standard procedure for a new breeding species.

This breeding record may be the result of an expansion in the breeding range of the Forster's Tern. The salt marshes of New Jersey support an increasing population of these terns. After a dearth of reports for many years on the Forster's Tern in New Jersey, a nest was found in 1956. By 1959, more nesting Forster's Terns were located and the species was listed as reasonably common in the salt marshes. More recent surveys seem to indicate a population upswing. In 1976, 230 adults were located in six New Jersey colonies and by 1979, surveys indicated 24 colonies with 1,328 individuals. (This dramatic increase may in part be the result of improved survey techniques.) Perhaps New York is benefiting from this growth.

An Atlas Dilemma

In addition to the Forster's Tern, the state has another new breeding species - the Boat-tailed Grackle. A female with young was seen in two locations on Long Island, but unfortunately the observations were made too late in the breeding season to mark them as confirmed in either block. Atlas workers will be on the alert to confirm this species next year.

Atlasing-- Continued from page 1

If we are to survey in all blocks of Region 1 in the five years of the project, as well as attain a reasonable potential of species in each block, I think that we must not only maintain our present number of participants, but hopefully increase it. In Region 1 we particularly need more coverage in the north along and inland from Lake Ontario, along the eastern border of the region, in southern Erie County, in many blocks of Chautauqua County, and in various parts of Cattaraugus County. Persistence and thoroughness are the keys to completing successfully a most stimulating project in which so many birders can cooperate and contribute to our knowledge of breeding birds in New York.

Robert F. Andrie

Peregrines-- Continued from page 3

Falcon. Even the final thin white band at the tip of the tail could be seen. The falcon caught a thermal and began to rise.

The show that followed was more stirring than any accounts in the literature, as the peregrine folded its wings back to plunge into a dive, swept them out and dropped its legs with talons clenched to pull out, rowed upward, and dropped again. Here it was, that almost mythical falcon, known only as a bird of passage in the northeast for nearly a quarter of a century, soaring freely in midsummer over the Adirondacks. Around us in all directions stretched a panorama of wilderness: Giant, the Great Range, Cascade, Algonquin, the Crows, Lost Pond, the Jay Range-forest expanse, cliff, mountain tarn. With ease the bird performed a rollover through 360°, a loop, a vertical dive and pull-out, then slid off into the distance, a memory captured in our minds forever.

All of us who shared its memorable performance hope that the Peregrine Falcon will return to nest and stir others in the High Peaks in years to come. Its return would mark a piece of wildness restored.

John M. C. Peterson

Northeast Atlas Conference

The Vermont Institute of Natural Science will host a conference on Atlasing in October. The purpose of the conference is "to facilitate communication between state Atlas projects." Two or three representatives from each of seven states and the Province of New Brunswick will participate as well as Chandler Robbins of the Migratory Bird and Habitat Research Laboratory, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Many topics will be discussed including standards for adequate coverage, data analysis, code standardization, verification of records and newsletter content. New York State will be participating and you will be informed of the highlights of the conference.

New York State Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter
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Janet Carroll and John M. Peterson, Co-Editors

Atlas Workshop

Those of you who will be attending the Annual Meeting of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs be sure to come to the Breeding Bird Atlas Workshop. It will be held on Friday, September 25th from 7:00 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. Dr. Charles Smith will be defining and explaining the breeding criteria codes and there will be plenty of time set aside to answer questions you have about any aspect of Atlasing. See you there!

Help!

In going over the computer reports, we have found a number of species with possible and probable records, but few confirmed records. We are, therefore, appealing to those of you who have successfully confirmed any of the species listed below to write and tell us how you did it. You may have just been lucky, but then again you may have learned something that would be helpful to others. Please write us (Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter, Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar, N. Y. 12054) about any of the following: Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, American Woodcock, Common Snipe, Whip-poor-will, Belted Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, Great-crested Flycatcher, Veery, Ovenbird.

Atlas T-Shirts

A Breeding Bird Atlas T-shirt will be for sale at the Federation Annual Meeting. The T-shirts will have the Atlas logo on the front and will be available in adult and children sizes for \$6.00. The profit from the sale of the T-shirts will go into Atlas Project funds. If you can't make it to the Annual Meeting, have a friend pick one up there for you.

Send in your completed green data sheet to your Regional Coordinator by September 15th.

IMPORTANT: PLEASE NOTE

This year's data sheet should include ONLY 1981 data.