

Welcome to the 2nd Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas!

From 2008 through 2012, we have the great opportunity to systematically survey Delaware's breeding bird fauna. Most of us have likely seen an American Robin nest in a local park or woodlot. Along the coast, Ospreys seem to inhabit any structure on which they can assemble a few sticks. Look at some nest boxes erected for Eastern Bluebirds, but look carefully. Maybe it contains Tree Swallows or Carolina Chickadees instead! Many of us might associate these birds with a healthy population or consider them relatively common. Now, imagine yourself along a roadside in early May listening to Black Rails call from a high marsh. Or stumbling across a Cooper's Hawk nest along the White Clay Creek. Or maybe, observing a Swainson's Warbler carrying food along a marshy creek bottom in Sussex County! Exciting indeed, and as important to know as the robins, Ospreys, and swallows!

All of these examples represent important data for OUR atlas project! Why, though, is it important for us to do a second breeding bird atlas for Delaware? Don't we already know what birds breed here and where they are?

These are reasonable questions to ask, and they have reasonable answers. Delaware completed its first atlas in 1987. Since then many changes have occurred throughout Delaware. We have seen the decline of some species that were once relatively common become relatively scarce. For example, according to the first atlas project Northern Bobwhite could be found in 99% of atlas blocks. Today, it has become a challenge to locate a bobwhite north of the C & D Canal. Conversely, some species appear to be increasing in Delaware, such as the Bald Eagle. In 1987, at the completion of the first atlas, only 4 breeding pairs of Bald Eagles had been confirmed in the State. Today, more than 40 pairs are known to breed within Delaware's boundaries after a remarkable comeback! What other information can we learn of during this project? Do we have any "new" species breeding here? Has a species changed its breeding habitat? Are species breeding at different times than they did 20 years ago? These are all questions to be answered, and they will be answered by the second Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas!

The second Delaware Breeding Atlas is primarily a volunteer citizen science project. As a participant, you have a grand opportunity to enjoy our exciting bird fauna and contribute valuable data to science that will update our knowledge of Delaware's breeding birds. Your contribution of time, skill, knowledge, and data are the key to the success of the atlas! Most importantly, EVERY contribution counts! Whether you contribute many hours atlasing several blocks or report just a single nest you found in your backyard, your contribution helps to create this atlas. We welcome everyone to join us in making the second Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas a project to be enjoyed by all. In the process we hope that you can both learn from the project and teach others about the wonders of our bird diversity! Along the way, we may learn a few things about those birds, become better at identifying them, or simply take pride in contributing to their survival. All of this is possible with your support and assistance.

How a Breeding Bird Atlas Works

A breeding bird atlas is a complex study with many components. To understand how an atlas works, you need to look at the big picture. As a volunteer, you should be familiar with the basic principles behind atlasing. In our atlas, there are three primary positions: volunteer atlasers, regional coordinators, and project coordinator. Each position has an important role to play!

A volunteer atlaser spends time in his or her “block” attempting to confirm breeding for as many species as possible. A block is approximately 10 sq. miles and is created using a standardized grid that is overlaid onto a map of Delaware. Delaware has 265 blocks divided into six regions in the State. Typically, each block has one “owner”. Each atlaser spends time in their block surveying during the breeding season (for most birds, April - July), and observing and recording data about the birds they encounter on field cards. Data is recorded in the form of codes that indicate the likelihood a bird is breeding. The volunteer atlasers report this data using an online, interactive data entry application. Once the data is entered the volunteers “save” it to the database for verification.

Aside from also being a volunteer atlaser, regional compilers have additional responsibilities. The regional compiler is the primary contact for each region. Each of the six regions contains more than 40 blocks. The role of the regional compiler is to assist in facilitating the volunteer atlasers. Volunteers will contact their regional compilers for most day-to-day questions and issues. Regional compilers will also assist in recruiting block owners for their regions and assuring the coverage of blocks is being met. Lastly, regional compilers have the important task of verifying data. Once a volunteer enters and save his or her data, the regional compiler will review it for accuracy and verify it, placing it into the database as valid data.

Responsible for organizing the atlas project, the project coordinator holds the same responsibilities as, and provides support for, the regional coordinators. The project coordinator ensures that volunteers have all the tools that they need to make the atlas project successful. In addition, the project coordinator is responsible for maintaining communications between volunteers, coordinators, project supporters, landowners, and others. The project coordinator handles all of the financial and logistical issues of the atlas, including reports and data analyses. The project coordinator is available at any time to assist the volunteers or regional coordinators and can provide support wherever it might be needed. Of course, don't be surprised if you see your coordinator out in the field atlasing too! A goal of organizing a successful atlas project is to make it enjoyable for everyone!

Delaware's First Breeding Bird Atlas

From 1983 through 1987, over 100 volunteers participated in compiling data for Delaware's first breeding bird atlas, Delaware's largest and most comprehensive ornithological project. This effort, published in *The Birds of Delaware* (Hess *et al.*),

2000) summarized the distribution of the breeding birds during those years along with species accounts and data about all birds which occurred or were thought to occur in the State. Since then, the first atlas has become an important resource, providing much data about Delaware's breeding avifauna. It is often used by researchers, scientists, government officials, and birders alike. But much has changed in the last 20 years. Development encroaches in every county. New roads are being designed and constructed. Wetlands are being created and clear cuts are regenerating. Some agricultural lands are being pulled from production to make way for new homes, other parcels are allowed to lie fallow for several years, and still others are being created to make more room for important crops. Beyond observable change, we also must consider climate change and how it has and will affect our landscape. Our challenge now is to examine how change, to our landscape or our climate, has impacted our populations of breeding birds!

Delaware's Second Breeding Bird Atlas – OUR ATLAS!

On November 30, 2006, a group of interested and dedicated parties met at the University of Delaware to begin discussing our second atlas effort. At that time the foundation was laid for an atlas unlike any other. An atlas committee was formed and divided into two sub-committees: a technical committee to deal with the issues of methodology, protocol, data, and databasing, and a logistical committee to deal with the issues of finding a coordinator, assembling volunteers, developing a steering committee, and publicly promoting the atlas project. Now it is up to you, the volunteers, who are taking part in a project which uses methods from past successful atlases, incorporates novel ideas, and will produce a product that will compliment the efforts of the first atlas and set standards for years to come.

Objectives for the Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas:

- To determine the current distribution of all bird species breeding within Delaware, as well as within specially designated areas.
- To assess changes relative to the first Delaware breeding bird atlas and establish protocols to allow for better comparisons with future atlases.
- To generate improved information on the status, distribution, abundance, and habitat associations of species of Special interest within Delaware.
- To be a forum for education and conservation awareness in Delaware.

Products anticipated from the Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas:

- Develop species-specific summaries of the breeding history of Delaware's birds.
- Detailed distribution maps for all bird species breeding in Delaware.
- Analysis of changes since the first atlas.
- Provide conservation recommendations.

- Permanent records of the data collected that are electronically and conventionally published and available to all interested parties.

Training

Training will be provided at various locations throughout the State. Please be aware that these training sessions will likely include some time in the field. Dates for training sessions will be established during early March and occur from April through June at various locations, dependent on need.

We encourage everyone, regardless of your level of commitment, to attend at least one training session. Whether you have never atlased before or you are a seasoned veteran, a training session is a great way to meet other atlasers and for everyone to understand the importance of our atlas project! Attending a training session will also present you with an opportune time to ask any questions, express any comments, or make any suggestions regarding the Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas!

Coordination

The Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas is a complicated project involving a large number of people, most of which are volunteering their time. To facilitate the success of this project, we have one project coordinator, assisted by six regional compilers. Compilers are available to assist you in all manners of the atlas project, from establishing your block, to providing you with necessary materials, to reviewing your data, and even assisting you in the field when necessary.

For more information or to volunteer, contact:

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