

Let's finish what we've started (and do more if we can)!

By Becky Stewart, Atlas Coordinator

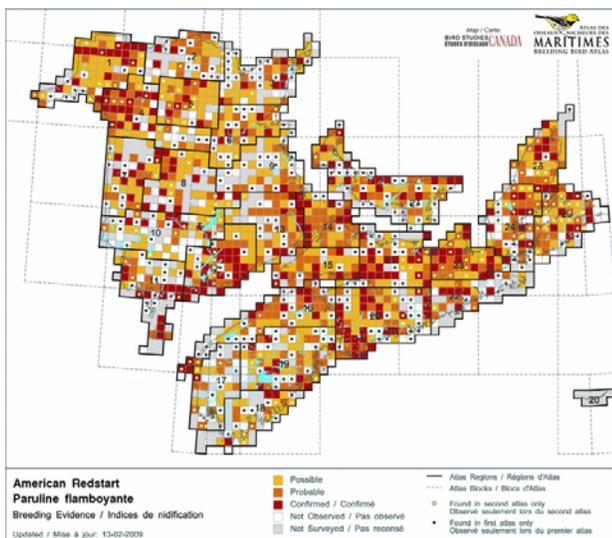
Before we dive into year four, let's take a moment to appreciate the hard work that went into year three and enjoy the fact that data entry is done (yay!). In the fall newsletter, I called year three a "banner year" and several RCs remarked that it was our most productive to-date. These opinions still stand. Volunteers conducted 3,392 point counts (that's more than in 2006 and 2007 combined); visited 1,185 squares and submitted 47,581 individual bird records. Forty-seven percent of priority squares (196 of 416 squares) have more than 20 survey hours and the online effort map has developed a distinctly green hue. Many birds, rare and common, were documented across the Maritimes: our project mascot, the Black-throated Green Warbler, was detected in 555 squares; Blue-headed Vireos were found in nearly as many squares (622) as Red-eyed Vireos (671); American Redstarts were recorded in 7 more squares (641) than American Crows ; and the second Atlas' first Yellow Rail was found near Queenstown, NB.



American Redstart, photo by Frode Jacobsen

Many species distribution patterns are already visible on the online species maps. Over the winter, these species maps have evolved and are now "change" maps, enabling atlasers to see each species' current distribution in comparison with the first atlas.

So, **what's next?** As we move into the project's fourth year, communication between atlasers, RCs
continued on page 2...



Change map for the American Redstart.

In this Issue	Page
Wading into Marsh Birds.....	2
Travel grants for Atlasers.....	3
New Guide to Atlasing for Species at Risk!	3
More than you ever wanted to know about point counts.....	4
Could 2009 be a big year for "uncommon" species?.....	7
Publication Survey Results.....	8
A <i>clearcut</i> waste of time? Certainly not!.....	9
Dabbling in Ducks.....	9
Thank you to our Century Club!.....	12

and the Atlas office is key to a well-coordinated and successful fourth field season. Areas requiring additional survey effort and/or point counts need to be identified and assigned either to atlasers or staff. Currently, 53% of priority squares still need additional survey hours (20 priority squares have 0 hours). There are also many non-priority squares that have been started but need several survey hours to be considered complete. In addition, **264 priority squares need point counts** (squares requiring point counts are listed on the final page of this newsletter). Point count analyses for the recent Ontario Atlas have shown that squares without a minimum number of point counts could not be used to map species relative abundance. So for all those Maritimes squares with fewer than 15 point counts, we need to do our best to top them up to the full 15, or as close to 15 as possible.

To help coordinate our atlasing efforts during the coming field season, online maps will be updated weekly and data summaries and square summary sheets are in real-time (i.e., updated automatically as data are entered). BUT keep in mind that most atlasers don't enter their data until the end of the season. Communicating with your RC ahead of time will help avoid duplication of effort and maximize our efficiency.

Priorities for 2009:

- Finish atlasing your assigned square
- Complete point counts in your square(s) if you can
- Make abundance estimates
- Collect data in unsurveyed squares

If you've finished your square and can take on another, or are willing to do extra point counts, your enthusiasm and expertise would be greatly appreciated in another square or region!

Wading into Marsh Birds...

By Kyle Wellband, Bird Studies Canada

The term "marsh birds" refers to a wide variety of species that are dependent upon marshes and other wetlands for survival and successful breeding. In general, they are secretive birds that are most active at dawn and at dusk, they are hard to locate and identify visually because they spend much of their time obscured by dense reedy vegetation, and their habitat is often difficult to access unless you own a canoe or chest-waders. But don't let that discourage

you! There is nothing like the satisfaction of finally finding that Virginia Rail hiding in the cattails.

Marsh birds are regularly used as indicators of the quality and abundance of wetland habitat. So importantly linked are the birds to these habitats that marsh monitoring programs based upon monitoring marsh birds (and amphibians) have sprung up all across Canada and the United States. Currently the Maritimes does not have such a program, making it even more important that we get a true picture of marsh bird distribution. The Atlas project is a perfect opportunity for us to determine the distribution of these secretive birds.



American Bittern, photo by Dan and Lin Dzurisin

There are a few things you can do to increase your detections of marsh birds. Visit wetlands in your square early in the morning or late in the evening. Marsh birds are most active in the 2 hours surrounding sunrise and the 2 hours surrounding sunset. Remember wetland habitat can be found anywhere. Check along streams and ponds in your square for areas with cattail or other reedy vegetation. You never know where that Least Bittern or Marsh Wren might be lurking. Visit your square several times over the breeding season. These secretive birds are most vocal during the courtship and laying periods so make an effort to check your square in mid-May and early-June.

Using playback is often helpful in soliciting responses from even the most reclusive marsh birds. Least Bittern and Yellow Rail calls are on your Species At Risk CD, and you might also consider playing Sora, Virginia Rail and Pied-billed Grebe calls. If you intend to do so, play approximately 30 seconds of one marsh bird's calls and then listen silently for 30 seconds. Continue this alternating pattern of playback and silent listening for all the species you are looking for. If you get a response



from a species immediately cease playback. Continue with other species you haven't detected yet and please remember that our birds' safety and health are of the utmost concern. Use playback sparingly; enjoy the experience but please keep disturbance to a minimum.

Travel grants for Atlassers

Is there an island you've always wanted to explore but haven't yet? Is there a remote location in Cape Breton you're anxious to visit? The Atlas wants to help! Bird Studies Canada's Baillie Fund has provided the Atlas with funding (nearly \$5,000) to support volunteers willing to go the extra distance. Our goal is to encourage volunteers to travel to areas that would not otherwise be covered, as well as to subsidize the costs associated with atlassing either a large number of squares or traveling to remote areas (e.g., more than 150 km of travel, require a four-wheel drive vehicle, require a boat or canoe rental etc...). Trips must be long enough (or repeated) to obtain full atlas coverage (i.e., 20 survey hours and 95% of expected species detected). So, if you are willing to travel to Cape Breton, Digby area, Yarmouth, Miramichi, Bathurst or anywhere else where additional coverage is needed then this grant opportunity is for you!



Northern NB, photo by Becky Stewart

To apply for support, please send a one-page trip description including:

- Atlasser name(s)
- Priority square(s) to be covered
- Expected expenses (max. \$500)
- If you plan to do point counts

to atlasmaritimes@gmail.com or, MBBA, 17 Waterfowl Lane, Sackville, NB E4L 1G6.

Please speak to the local RC before applying to ensure coverage is required and/or that the square(s) is not assigned. Applications are due Monday, May

25, 2009 (applications will be accepted after that date if all funds haven't been allocated).

New Guide to Atlassing for Species at Risk!

In 2007 and 2008, four species – Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Canada Warbler – were designated as *threatened* by COSEWIC. For each of these species, updated breeding records, locations of key habitats, and an assessment of their Maritimes status, are required steps in the recovery planning process. To assist in the gathering of this information, atlassers are being asked to complete rare bird forms for these species. To help increase detections, a revised edition of the Atlasser's guide to "Atlassing for Species at Risk in the Maritime Provinces" has been created and can be downloaded from the project website. The revised edition was mailed with the fall newsletter. If you receive the newsletter electronically but would like a hard-copy of the guide please contact the Atlas office.

Atlas Coffee is back on the shelves!

Beginning in May, look for the yellow Atlas label on Just Us! coffee. Just Us! coffee is shade-grown in areas where many of our summer breeders spend the winter, and 10% of all profit from Atlas coffee will go to the project. Shade-grown coffee's multi-layered vegetation structure provides food and cover for many overwintering bird species. Visit one of four JustUs! Cafes (in Grand Pré, Wolfville, Halifax Barrington Street or Halifax Spring Garden) or, call 1-888-668-8436 to purchase Atlas Coffee.



LEAVE THAT SQUARE ALONE!

There are 92 squares with over 60 survey hours—20 with over 100 hours. To maximize efficiency and coverage it is better to spend an hour in a square with 0 hours than to spend another hour in a square that already has 60. So please, once you reach the 20 hour mark (even if you stretch it to 30), get out of that square and survey another. If you aren't sure which squares need additional coverage contact your local RC (or an RC from a nearby region).



More than you ever wanted to know about point counts

By Becky Stewart, Atlas Coordinator

As we enter year four, many atlasers are ready to do point counts. Below are answers to several questions that have landed in my inbox over the past three years as well as other questions based on situations that I've encountered and suggestions from your RCs. If you have other point count questions please don't hesitate to contact the Atlas office.

How do I know if I am ready to do point counts?

As a general rule, we suggest that if there is more than one bird that you cannot identify on any given point count you are not ready to do point counts yet. But keep practicing! While you may not be ready during the first week of June, you may be by the second or third week. Plus, don't be too hard on yourself, everyone has certain species that give them problems (e.g., distinguishing Philadelphia from Red-Eyed Vireo – even a good birder can confuse them). As long as you are aware of your shortcomings and double check your identification following the point count (e.g., use a recording to bring out the “mystery” vireo) you'll do fine.

How many point counts need to be done per square? Our goal is to conduct 15 point counts per priority square. Fifteen counts will provide an even sample of all habitat-types in the square.

What will happen to squares with less than 15 point counts complete at the end of the project?

Squares with too few point counts can not be used to determine relative abundance (i.e., won't be included in the final mapping analysis). While we may be able to include/use squares with slightly fewer than 15 point counts, we will not be able to determine the absolute minimum until the project's completion. So if you are conducting point counts, aim for the full 15 as per the atlas protocol.

Do we need point counts in non-priority squares?

Not necessarily. Point counts that have already been completed in non-priority squares are valuable and will be used to determine species relative abundance. But if you only have time to point count in one or two squares, focus on priority squares. If you can do point counts but are assigned a non-priority square, please contact your RC and she/he will direct you to a priority square that can use your expertise.

When, during the atlassing season, should I do point counts? The point count period runs from May 29th to July 3rd. You can do point counts any time within these dates but be aware of what is going on in the “bird world”. If spring migration is late then beginning point counts on May 29th in northern NB or Cape Breton is not appropriate (i.e., migrants are still passing through). Similarly, if spring migration is early, birds will long be established on territories in southern NS and will be relatively quiet by July. Point counts done outside of May 29th to July 3rd can not be used to map species relative abundance.



Winter Wren, photo by Guy Monty

When, during the day, should I conduct point counts?

Point counts can be done from a half hour before sunrise to five hours after sunrise, so if sunrise is at 5:15 am you can start at 4:45 am and go until 10:15 am. Please make sure you conduct point counts across this time period, e.g., if you only conduct point counts after 8:30 am you'll likely miss certain species. Research has shown that species richness and abundance decrease over the morning, particularly late in the season, so start as early as possible.

Are off-road counts done in addition to the 15 on-road counts?

No. If you do 3 off-road counts then you only need to do 12 on-road counts to have a total of 15 counts complete. The numbers of on- and off-road counts required are outlined on the square summary sheets (see below).

How do I know how many and where to do off-road counts in my square?

At the top of each square summary sheet (available online <http://www.mba-aom.ca/jsp/squareinfo.jsp> or from



the Atlas office), is a section entitled “target number of point counts in this square” that lists the number of on- and off-road counts required as well as the habitat-types that off-road counts should cover. For example, for square 20LR72 the target point counts listed are as follows: “11 road side, 4 off road (2 in Mature coniferous, 2 in Mature deciduous)”. The precise location of the off-road point counts is at the discretion of the atlasser. Off-road counts are called for in situations where habitats within a square are not expected to be sampled in a representative manner by on-road points alone.



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Birdfreak.com

How should I record my effort when doing point counts? If you are watching, listening and recording birds between point count locations then count the entire time towards your total atlassing effort. If you are “rushing” between points reduce your effort tally to reflect the amount of time actually spent atlassing.

What if there are less than 15 points on my square map (edge and sliver squares)? While the general rule for atlassing is that: if the land area constitutes 10% of the square, treat it like all other squares (p. 11 of the guide), the same rule does not apply for point counts. For point count data to be included in the final analysis (i.e., relative abundance contour maps), squares need a minimum number of point counts. So if there are fewer than 15 point counts in a square— typically an issue with “edge” squares along the coast or the NB border— please do point counts in a neighbouring, “inner” square instead (even if that square is not a priority square).

I sincerely apologize to anyone who already conducted point counts in edge or coastal square(s) because now I'm telling you that the data can't be used for contour mapping (although it will be used for distribution maps). As we began to analyze the point count data we realized

that data from edge squares are difficult to incorporate into the analysis. That said, we are working on a solution to the problem. I'm sorry for any inconvenience or disappointment that this may cause.

Extra point count tips:

- Don't try to do point counts your first time out—take time to re-familiarize yourself with birds' songs
- If this is your first time conducting point counts, do some practice counts to build your confidence—once you start doing point counts, you'll realize that most of the time the birds you're hearing are ones you know, and if you do point counts often enough in one particular habitat, you'll quickly learn to recognize a standard suite of species associated with that habitat type
- Use a timer that you can set to beep at 5 minutes
- Scout your route the day before, so you know where you are going and which points are inaccessible—you'll be much more efficient
- As you do the count, first write down all the species that you hear then figure out how many there are of each species. You'll find over the five-minute period that numbers of individuals become more apparent; plus, you may miss species if you spend the first three minutes figuring out whether there are two or three Red-eyed Vireos.
- If you are doing a count and you hear a species that you can't identify, note where the mystery bird is singing from and focus on recording the other birds that you are hearing. Otherwise you'll spend the five minutes figuring out the mystery bird and miss everything else. When the count is done, spend some time locating the mystery bird or use a mobbing recording to bring it out.

Some but not all point counts have been done in my square by someone else--how do I know which ones are done and which ones I need to do? Choose option three, from the online “Data Summary” page to list completed point counts for a square. The same information can also be accessed from the clickable maps--choose “list of completed point counts” option (below map) and then click on the square. If you do not have internet access contact your RC or the Atlas office for this information. Conversely, if you're doing point counts in a square that isn't assigned to you, let the local RC know (and try to enter your data ASAP) so that other atlassers don't duplicate your effort.

What if a point count location is inaccessible and how do I know if it is inaccessible? The goal of having pre-determined point count locations is not to create undue hardship. If you can't get to a point, do not feel guilty or think that you have somehow missed a "superior" count location (locations were randomly chosen using a computer program so there's nothing inherently superior about the first 15). Many things can make a point inaccessible. For example: too much noise (traffic or construction); what was once a road is now the remnants of a trail and you'll have to hike to get to your "on-road" count; to get to a single point you have to drive out of the square and an additional 100km; the point is on private property; a beaver has built a dam across the road (don't laugh that's happened to me more than once) etc... Any of these reasons are enough to consider a point inaccessible, particularly if time is a constraint. Bottom-line: if you feel a point is inaccessible, it is.

What if I arrive at my pre-designated point count and the surrounding habitat is not the same as what's on my map (e.g., according to the square map the point is in mature deciduous but in reality the point is surrounded by young forest)? Atlas maps were created with data, from the provincial governments, that are updated every 10 years. So at this point in the project, some maps may be 14 yrs out-of-date. If you find the habitat around you isn't what's on the map, indicate this on the point count data sheet using the habitat codes provided in Table 2 (p. 23-25) of the Atlasser guide. For example, if you find a young forest consisting of both deciduous and coniferous trees your coding would be as follows: class A (woodland), sub-class 3 (mixed), structure A (young). If you arrive at an area that was previously mature deciduous but has been clearcut then you should provide the class, sub-class and structure that it once was (based on what you see at the site) and the put "5" in the modification category for clearcut.

What if the roads, and thus the designated point count, don't exist (i.e., are on the map but are no longer there)? There are 40 count locations on each map to help address this issue. Use the first 15 locatable points. If some are unlocatable, move sequentially to the next point.

What if you realize after you've done a point count that you are on the wrong road (i.e., not where you thought you were)? If you do a roadside count in the wrong location—don't worry

about it and don't throw away your point count data. Record your location using a GPS or your square map and enter the location information (as well as the habitat codes if possible) on your point count form. Be sure to fill in the circle that indicates that it was an on-road count and leave the "designated number" box blank. This count can then be counted towards the total 15 point counts.



Song Sparrow, photo by T. C. Davis

What should I do if I can't find a point count because my GPS stops working (e.g., under trees or batteries die)? Use your square map to determine your location—usually you'll be able to figure out where you are relative to a particular landscape feature like a bend in the road, a change in habitat-type etc... If not, and your GPS continues to be uncooperative, don't waste time trying to find one particular point, cross it off your list and go to the next point.

How close to the GPS point do you have to be? One point took me on an increasingly bad road and I didn't dare drive the last kilometer, the habitat was fairly consistent all the way along—could I have done the point count there? Ideally, it would be best to skip that point and go to the next. But, if it is the end of the day and it is the difference between finishing point counts in a square or having to return (which might not be possible), I would do an undesignated on-road count. Be sure to mark

down the coordinates and surrounding habitat-type and do not assign the point a number.

Does my point count data automatically get added into the breeding evidence data for that square or do I need to add it separately? If you submit point count data for a square, the database will automatically generate a breeding evidence form that includes those data. Thus, if you enter point count data, you don't need to enter a separate breeding evidence form. But, if you've done point counts in a square, you likely have additional observations of other species or higher breeding evidence that are not reflected on the point count forms. In this case, filling out a breeding evidence form can provide important additional information. Duplication of observations is not an issue because distribution maps only show species presence or absence (i.e., whether you saw 1 or 100, it will still show up in the database as being "present" in that square).

What if a bird seen on a point count is far from the point count? Record all birds seen and heard whether they are 5 m away or 1 km away.

What if I see the same bird, e.g. a soaring Red-tailed Hawk, at more than one point count? Record it only at the first point count location where it was observed.

I'm conducting 5-minute point counts for another project. Can the Atlas use these data even though counts weren't done at the pre-determined locations? If you conduct any 5-minute point counts and those points are geo-referenced, we would love to include this information in the Atlas (provided you have permission to share the data) If transferring data from your database to the Atlas database is an issue (e.g., labour-intensive), contact the Atlas office and we'll help.

How should I handle a woodpecker drumming that I can't confidently identify? The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is one of the only woodpeckers that birders can confidently identify by drumming—others are much more difficult to identify by drumming alone. After the 5-min. period, try to locate the drummer and/or use mobbing or owl calls to bring the individual in. If you can't find and/or identify the woodpecker do not record it on the form (but still submit your point count data).

Will Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data be incorporated into the Atlas? Yes. In fact, BBS data from 2006-08 has already been included as breeding evidence. It can't be incorporated as point count data because of differences between the projects' protocols (the most significant being that BBS is only a 3 minute count). Since BBS surveyors aren't required to record breeding evidence, BBS data will automatically be entered as "H"s. If you record higher breeding evidence while conducting your BBS route please submit it directly to the Atlas database.

Could 2009 be a big year for "uncommon" species?

By Ivy Austin and Becky Stewart, Coordinators

Two thousand and nine may be the year that atlasers are rewarded with some unusual visitors from both the north and south. "Why might that be?" you ask. Food availability (scarcity or surplus), population size, and other environmental factors can temporarily or permanently affect winter and breeding bird distributions. Populations of species like Snowy Owl and Common Redpoll sometimes undergo "irruptions", wherein some members of the population migrate south, outside their regular wintering range, in search of food. Irruptions usually follow a summer of high breeding productivity which leads to high population densities and increased demand for winter food supplies. Other, species like the Northern Cardinal and Mourning Dove appear to be undergoing range expansions northwards, taking advantage of increased food supplies (feeders). As a result of these factors there are times when "uncommon" species that appear in the Maritimes for the winter stay on for the summer and attempt to breed. This winter, birders have seen "peak" numbers of three relatively uncommon species – Red-bellied Woodpecker, Boreal Owl and Northern Hawk Owl—and there is a possibility that one or all of these species will remain in the Maritimes beyond the winter months to breed.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker does not appear in the first Maritimes Atlas. None were recorded here during the summers between 1986 and 1990. Typically found in the eastern United States, this species appears to be expanding its range northwards extremely rapidly. Since 2001, Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been consistently recorded on Maritimes Christmas Bird Counts—in 2005-2006 they were recorded in 20 count circles. In 2006, a



pair stayed in the Halifax region, bred and raised young. The same summer, another individual was observed in Region 16. This winter they have been observed fairly regularly so during the coming months keep your eyes peeled for signs of breeding Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Their breeding season begins in April and can go through August. Preferred breeding habitats include open deciduous woodlands as well as residential areas or parks with mature deciduous trees.



Northern Hawk Owl, photo by Richard Wolfert

The Northern Hawk Owl is one of the least-studied birds in North America. It typically breeds in the circumpolar boreal forest zone from British Columbia to Newfoundland—north of the Maritimes and beyond most breeding bird survey routes. Although it typically overwinters within its breeding range some individuals occasionally invade southern Canada—these invasions, or “irruptions” are thought to be correlated with a high reproductive rate in the summer followed by food shortages during the preceding winter (Northern Hawk Owl diet consists of small mammals/rodents, hares, ptarmigans and grouse). In June of 1996, Northern Hawk Owl was seen in Cape Breton Highlands; in 2005 a nest was found in Nictau, NB; and Hawk Owls were also detected in three squares during the first MBBA. This winter, three Northern Hawk Owls were observed in NB, one near Waterside/Cape Enrage seen on several occasions, one near Fredericton and another near the Little Main Restigouche River at the limits of Madawaska Co. (reported on the

NatureNB listserv). Northern Hawk Owls typically nest in dead tree stubs or woodpecker holes. They hunt by day from high perches in open areas, like marshes, burned over or clear-cut areas, or open spruce forests. Their breeding season generally begins in April but can start as late as May and they can raise up to two broods in a “good” year.

The Boreal Owl, a species with a small but stable Maritimes breeding population (detected in 13 squares thus far), is another owl whose populations occasionally undergo irruptions, dispersing in years of low prey abundance. This past fall, the Tadoussac Bird Observatory in Tadoussac, QC (located on the north shore of the Saint Lawrence and northwest of the Maritimes Provinces) had one of their highest count years for Boreal Owls with 178 individuals captured at the banding station. This high capture rate may mean that 2008 was a year of high productivity for Boreal Owls which would set the stage appropriately for a mid-winter irruption. Thus far this winter Boreal Owls have been observed in Grand Barachois, Mechanic Lake and Shediac in NB, Canso, NS and Charlottetown PE. Given that Boreal Owls are often missed—owing to the general “remoteness” and inaccessibility of their preferred habitat (dense coniferous forest and bogs) as well as the fact that these owls are most vocal in early spring when few observers are afield—this may be a sign that Boreal Owls may breed in higher numbers this year. Their breeding season generally runs from April through to the end of July.

Publication Survey Results

In the fall newsletter atlasers were asked to voice their opinions about the final Atlas product(s). Fifty-seven of you responded and here’s what you had to say:

- 94% would like to see the Atlas results in a book;
- 90% plan to purchase a book;
- 80% want two, single-language publications;
- 34% would pay \$40-50 for the book.

Many of you also provided thoughtful comments and, while there isn’t enough space to list them here, the Publication Sub-committee will use your suggestions to make decisions for the final publication. We will also do our best to cut costs wherever we can with minimal sacrifice to quality or content. Thank-you for taking the time to complete the survey.

A clearcut waste of time? Certainly not!

By Ivy Austin and Becky Stewart, Coordinators



Mourning Warbler, photo by Brian Kala

Have you ever gone to an area of your square thinking you'll find one habitat type and once you're there, you discover the area has been clearcut? Frustrating, isn't it? – particularly if you were going there to target a certain bird species (e.g., Brown Creeper in mature coniferous forest). However, clearcut areas can provide breeding habitat for several early successional species (e.g., Mourning Warbler) as well as species that more typically nest in bogs (e.g., Lincoln's Sparrow), open areas (e.g. Common Nighthawk) and/or certain cavity nesters, depending on the structural elements left standing (e.g., hollow logs, snags) as well as the surrounding habitat type(s). Woodpeckers often use decaying snags left standing, particularly when they are less than 100 m from the forest edge. The habitat available in a clearcut also depends on the length of time since the cut/disturbance. As the area regenerates it will go through several changes in bird species composition and abundance. A recently cut area with little variation in habitat structure supports fewer species than an area where natural succession has been ongoing for several years. For example in an area that has been cleared within the past year or so, you are likely to find White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos. In an area that has been regenerating for several years you may find Alder Flycatchers and Chestnut-sided Warblers. See table 1 for a list of species that may breed in clearcut areas.

Clearcut areas may also be a good place to confirm species that are difficult to spot in wooded areas but use more open areas for foraging. Warblers, flycatchers and vireos often use edges to forage for

insects and raptors such as Red-tailed Hawk and Merlin will hunt in these open areas, using trees left standing as vantage points. So don't be a habitat snob—by atlassing all habitat types in a square we'll get the most complete picture of which bird species are breeding in the Maritimes. Plus, you never know what you might find—last year, on an atlassing trip in Northern NB, Ivy Austin found a Great-Crested Flycatcher foraging in a clearcut.

Table 1. Early successional and/or bog species that may breed in clear-cut areas
Solitary Sandpiper
Common Nighthawk
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Black-backed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Olive-sided Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Nashville Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Palm Warbler
American Redstart
Mourning Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Wilson's Warbler
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco

Dabbling in Ducks

by Kyle Wellband, Bird Studies Canada

Atlassing for ducks and other waterfowl can be both rewarding and frustrating. The ease of confirming waterfowl as breeders – most often females with a brood in tow – is offset by the occasional difficulty of correctly identifying female waterfowl. With a little practice and knowledge of where and what to look for, atlassing for waterfowl will be a snap.

Ducks are split into two groups (see Box 1). Dabblers feed off of the surface of the water as well as tipping up and feeding off the bottom in shallow areas. Divers completely submerge themselves and capture food while underwater. The way that these ducks feed can tell us the type of habitat that they are most likely to be found in.

Box 1. Ducks can be split into two groups.

Dabblers	Divers
Canada Goose	Ring-necked Duck
Wood Duck	Greater Scaup
Gadwall	Common Eider§
American Wigeon	Harlequin Duck
American Black Duck	Common Goldeneye
Mallard	Hooded Merganser
Blue-winged Teal	Common Merganser
Northern Shoveler	Red-breasted
Northern Pintail	Merganser
Green-winged Teal	

The majority of dabbling ducks prefer fertile freshwater wetlands with lots of emergent vegetation such as cattails. These wetlands tend to be shallow and provide good habitat for nesting and raising young. Sewage lagoons and beaver ponds are other areas that provide quality habitat for ducks. Divers generally prefer wetlands that are deeper like ponds, lakes and large rivers that allow them to dive in search of food and escape predators. Most of our waterfowl require freshwater habitat but a few, such as Red-breasted Merganser, use coastal marine environments. Green-winged Teal and American Black Duck also occasionally use coastal salt-marshes.

It is worthwhile to visit some of the wetlands in your square early in May to survey for ducks. Most waterfowl arrive on their breeding grounds already paired and an early visit will allow you to observe both male and female ducks together. Male ducks' brightly colored plumage is easily recognized and seeing pairs together will give you a chance to study females. Clues such as size, shape, color and behavior will help you identify females later in the season when their colourful mates have departed.

When coding for waterfowl there are a few breeding codes that should be used with caution.

P – Waterfowl pairs are readily identifiable due to the differences between male and female plumages. However, waterfowl will often be seen in mixed sex flocks which are not indicative of breeding. This code should only be used when a male and female are seen in each others' sole company in appropriate breeding habitat early in the breeding season.

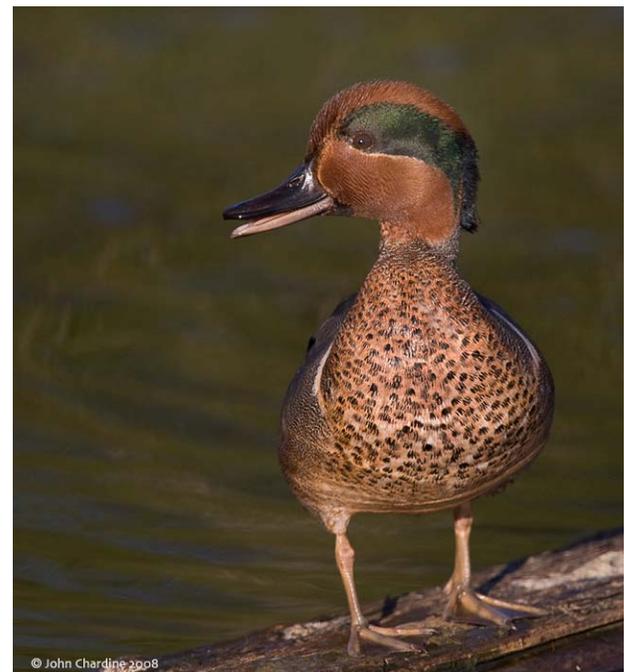
T – Territory should be used with caution because male ducks do not defend territories and rarely take part in raising their young. A male sighted twice, a

week apart, in the same pond in July is unlikely to be breeding. This code is better applied to pairs earlier in the breeding season.

D – Displays in ducks vary from the simplicity of one male chasing another away from his mate to the complexity of the head-throw displays of Common Goldeneye. Pair bonds begin to form in some species as early as December on their wintering grounds.

V – Visiting a possible nest site is only applicable to our cavity nesting ducks such as Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser.

Codes such as CF – Carrying Food and FS – carrying Fecal Sac are not applicable to waterfowl because young leave the nest soon after hatching.



Green-winged Teal, Photo by John Chardine

BIRD STUDIES CANADA INVITES YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN BIRDATHON

The Baillie Birdathon is the oldest sponsored bird count in North America. This year, for the first time, participants can designate the Maritimes Atlas to receive a portion of the funds they raise. Visit www.birdscanada.org/support/birdathon for details.



Species in Focus

Northern Parula



Northern Parula, photo by Brandon Holden

Maritime Atlassers may not realize that this region is Canada's (and probably North America's) hotspot for the cheerful and pretty Northern Parula, aptly named Paruline à collier in French, for the male's gray and red necklace. The Breeding Bird Survey has detected an average of 7.5, 6.4 and 4.0 Parulas per route in NB, NS and PE respectively since 1966. This is in comparison to only 0.6 and 0.2 Parulas per route in QC and ON. Maine comes close, at 5.0 Parulas per route. New Brunswick has shown a significant increase in Northern Parula (1.5% annually) on BBS routes from 1968-2007. A preliminary comparison of the first and second Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas also shows a small increase in the number of squares with Northern Parula. This species seems to love the moist mixed forests of the Maritimes with their plentiful supply of *Usnea* lichen for nest building. Air pollution leading to the loss of *Usnea* and other epiphytes in some parts of the northeastern United States has led to the extirpation of Northern Parula in these regions. We can hope that the Canadian Maritimes will remain a stronghold for this species in the future.

--Becky Whittam

Black-backed Woodpecker

The Black-backed Woodpecker might not be the rarest woodpecker in the Maritimes but it is one of the least detected. This species' distinctive glossy, black back and males' yellow crown patch

distinguish it from other woodpeckers. Black-backed prefer to eat wood-boring beetles that live in dead and decaying wood. They are most often found along the edges of clear cuts and burnt areas, especially where standing dead trees that are left along the edge can be used for nesting. Their preference for disturbed forests might seem to suggest that they should be an easy species to find, given the number of clear cuts in the Maritimes. However, detections of this species in the current Breeding Bird Atlas are low. Forest fire suppression and relatively low levels of spruce budworm in recent years have resulted in less widespread forest destruction which creates less food for wood-boring beetles. This in turn may affect the abundance of Black-backed Woodpeckers. BUT, they are likely still more widespread than the current distribution map suggests. Spending some time in and around clear cuts can be a rewarding experience (see article on atlassing in clear cuts). Last season, one of my atlassing highlights was finding a Black-backed Woodpecker nest with young in a tree that was 20 m into the middle of a clear cut. It just goes to show that spending some time poking around the edges of clear cuts, bogs and burnt areas can be extremely worthwhile and even if you don't find a Black-backed Woodpecker you will certainly still find an abundance of avian life and you might stumble upon an Olive-sided Flycatcher or even a Solitary Sandpiper.

--Kyle Wellband



Black-backed Woodpecker, photo by Ron Wolf



Thank you to our Century Club!

Atlassers who have contributed over 100 field hours:

Ken McKenna (778), Roy D LaPointe (732), Sean Blaney (608), Becky Lori May Stewart, Roger T. Burrows, Rick R. Hawkins, David B McCorquodale, Fritz McEvoy, Rob Woods, Greg Campbell, Susann E Myers, Andrew Horn, Blake Maybank, Peter Hope, Donald G Gibson, Karen Chiasson, Kyle Wellband, Wayne P. Neily, Denis A Doucet, Rosemary Curley, Gareth Akerman, Brian Dalzell, Michael Lushington, Sylvia J. Fullerton, Scott Makepeace, Suzanne Borkowski, Karen MacLeod, Martin N. Turgeon, Isabelle Robichaud, Bill Winsor, Cathleen A Gallant, Leonel Richard, Tracey H Dean, Beverly A. Brett, Patrick M. Kelly, Richard Blacquiére, Rick J. Whitman, Jeff B Ogden, James R. Hirtle, Kathy Bunker-Popma, Lucas Emmett Berrigan, David Johnston, Roslyn MacPhee, Dorothy M. Poole, Anthony J Erskine, Jacques Perron, Steve G. Vines, Harold Stewart, Merv J Cormier, Judith King, Jim D Cameron, Richard D. Elliot, Sharon Charlene Hawboldt, Gilles Bourque, Marie Ellen Stradeski, Ivy Austin, Yvon Beaulieu, Pamela J Watters, Jim A Elliott, Tanya Blanche King, James G. Wilson, Dwayne Sabine, Ross A Hall, Julie B Singleton, Karel Allard, Gail V. Davis, Steven Furino, Myrna West, Emily A. McKinnon, Richard Stern, Bill Billington, Chris A. Field, Henrik Deichmann, Eric Cole, Megan Crowley, Richard G. Mash, Brian M. Cowan, Eileen Billington, Ted L. Sears, Harry Walker

Atlassers who have completed over 100 point counts

Becky Lori May Stewart (530), David B McCorquodale (425), Roy D LaPointe (424), Emily McKinnon, Ken McKenna, Scott Makepeace, Greg Campbell, Kyle Wellband, Dwayne Sabine, Isabelle Robichaud, Karen Chiasson, Cathleen A Gallant, Jonathan Cormier, Stuart I. Tingley, Gareth Akerman, Wayne P. Neily, Ivy Austin, Megan Crowley, Judith King, Roger T. Burrows, Sylvia J. Fullerton

Atlassers who have observed a 100 species or more

Scott Makepeace (168), Dwayne Sabine (157), Roy D LaPointe (153), Ivy Austin (153), Sean Blaney, Ken McKenna, Roger T. Burrows, Brian Dalzell, Stuart I. Tingley, Martin N. Turgeon, Becky Lori May Stewart, Isabelle Robichaud, Karen Chiasson, Emily A. McKinnon, James G. Wilson, David B McCorquodale, Cathleen A Gallant, Wayne P. Neily, Andrew Horn, James R. Hirtle, Denis A Doucet, Ted L. Sears, Susann E Myers, Tracey H Dean, Blake Maybank, Randy F. Lauff, Gareth Akerman, Richard Blacquiére, Donald G Gibson, Steve G. Vines, Pamela J Watters, Michael Lushington, Suzanne Borkowski, Judith King, Kathy Bunker-Popma, Bill Winsor, Merv J Cormier, Rosemary Curley, Julie B Singleton, Stephen Gullage, Kyle Wellband, Jonathan Cormier, Karel Allard, Julie Paquet, Chris A Field, Richard D Elliot, Jeff B Ogden, Leonel Richard, Greg Campbell, Fritz McEvoy, Patrick M. Kelly, James Taylor, Raymond H. Cooke, Sharon Charlene Hawboldt, Gilles Y. Belliveau, Jim D Cameron, Sylvia J. Fullerton, Henrik Deichmann, Rob Woods, Peter Hope, Denise Godin, David Johnston, Verna J. Higgins, Becky Whittam, Anne M. Richard, Ross A Hall, Anthony J Erskine, Steven Furino, Roslyn MacPhee, Jollande St-Pierre, Jacques Perron, Roger Leblanc, Andrew R. G. MacInnis, Phil Taylor, Julie Palmer, Dwaine Oakley

Thank-you to Junco Technologies who have provided the two volunteers with the most hours and the more species with a nestbox each for their great contribution to the Atlas project. For more information on Junco Technologies, visit their website (www.nichoirs-junco.com).
Congratulations to all of the Atlas volunteers for their hard work and dedication!



Thank-you Atlas supporters!



Priority and special squares that still require point counts. Number in brackets (#) indicates number of counts already completed; no number means that no counts are completed. An (A) following the square number indicates that the square has little land base and that point counts should be done in an adjacent square rather than the designated priority square.

Region 1	20LT30 (8)	19FL44	20LQ38 (3)	20MQ96 (7)	20PS50 (3)
19EP80 (9)	20LT41	19FL60(4)	20LQ58	20MQ98	20PS72
19FP00 (13)	Region 7	19FL62 (13)	20LQ76 (12)	20MR30	Region 25
19EN02	19FM02	19FL80 (14)	20LR50 (A)	20MR50	20PR74 (2,A)
19EN24	19FM03	Region 12	20LR70 (14)	20MR70	20PR96 (13)
19EN44	19FM04	19GL00 (3)	20LR90	20MR90	20QR16 (11)
19EN64	19FM11	19GL20	20MQ16 (8)	20NQ14 (A)	20QR18 (3)
19EN04 (A)	19FM28	19GL22 (9)	20MQ18	20NQ16	20QR27 (3)
Region 2	19FM44	20KR61-19GL31	20MR10	20NQ18	21TL78
19FN46	19FM46 (14)	20KR70 (2,A)	Region 17	20NR10 (8)	21TM70 (8)
19FN48	Region 8	20KR72	19GJ26	Region 21	21TM72 (6)
19FN68	19FM40	20KR74	19GJ28 (13)	20MR54 (1)	21TM90 (8)
19FN88	19FM60	20KR76	19GJ33 (A)	20MR56	Region 26
19FP40	19FM62	20KR94 (2)	19GJ43 (A)	20MR58 (A)	20PS54
19FP60	19FM64	20KR96	20KQ70 (11)	20MR72	20PS56 (12)
19FP80	19FM80	20KR98 (12)	20KP74 (10)	20MR74 (2)	20PS58 (A)
19FP82	19FM82	20LR14	20KP78 (12)	20MR76 (7)	20PS77
19GN08	19GM00	20LR16 (10)	20KQ90	20MR92 (3)	20PS78
19GP00	19GM20	Region 13	20KQ92 (12)	20MR94 (12)	20PS87
19GP02	Region 9	20KS90 (8)	Region 18	20MR96	20PS96
19GP12 (A)	20KS94	20LR34	20KP72	20NR12	20PS98
19GP11 (A)	20KS96	20LR36	20KP92	20NR32 (14)	20PT70
19GP20 (12)	20LS16 (13)	20LR38	20KP94 (10)	20NR34 (1)	20PT90 (14)
19FP61 (12)	20LS18 (12)	20LR55	20KP96 (10)	Region 22	Region 27
Region 3	20LS34	20LR56	20LP14 (8)	20NQ56 (A)	20LS96
20KT98	20LS36	20LR76 (A)	20LP16	20NQ58 (8)	20LS98 (6,A)
20KU90	20LS38	20LS10	20LP34	20NQ98 (A)	20MS16
20LT18	20LS54	20LS12	20LP36	20PR10 (14)	20MS32 (A)
20LT34	20LS58	20LS30 (1)	20LP56	20PR30 (A)	20MS34 (3)
20LT36 (12)	20LS74 (9)	20LS32	Region 19	20PR31	20MS36
20LT38	20LT50	20LS50 (6)	20LP58 (14)	20PR32	20MS52
20LT58 (7)	Region 10	20LS70 (13)	20LQ10 (8)	20PR50 (A)	20MS54
20LU70 (6,A)	19FL06	Region 14	20LQ52 (9)	20PR52	20MS70 (A)
20LU81	19FL08	20LR96	20LQ74 (2)	Region 23	20MS74
Region 5	19FL26	20LS90 (13)	20LQ90	20NR54 (7)	20MS90 (A)
19FN62 (12)	19FL46 (3)	20LS92 (A)	20LQ92 (6)	20NR56	20MS92 (4)
19FN64 (10)	19FL66	20MR07	20LQ94	20NR72 (9)	20MS94 (8,A)
19FN66 (14)	19FL68	20MR16 (10)	20MQ14	20NR74 (2)	20NS10 (11)
19FN82	19FL88 (14)	20MR18 (10)	Region 20	20NR76 (11)	20NS12
19FN86 (14)	19GL06	20MS10 (9)	20MQ32	20NR85	20NS14
19GN02 (12)	19GL26 (1)	20MS11	20MQ34	20NR92 (4)	20NR18 (A)
19GN06 (9)	19GL38-19KR68	20MS30 (2)	20MQ36 (4)	20NR94 (12)	20NS30 (8)
19GN22 (13)	Region 11	Region 15	20MQ38	20PR14 (8)	20NS32
Region 6	19FK66	20LR72	20MQ52	Region 24	20NS34
19GM28	19FK68	Region 16	20MQ54 (13)	20PR16 (3,A)	20NS52 (A)
20KS76 (12)	19FK75	19GK00 (A)	20MQ56 (1)	20PR18 (9)	20NS54
20KS78 (6)	19FK79	19GK22	20MQ58 (9)	20PR34 (11,A)	20NS74
20KT72 (2)	19FK84 (13)	20KQ74	20MQ76 (4)	20PR38 (14)	
20KT90 (10)	19FL40	20LQ16 (14)	20MQ78 (1)	20PR58 (9)	
20LT10 (3)	19FL42	20LQ36 (8)	20MQ94 (A)	20PS32	



