

Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas

NEWSLETTER



The Atlas is a co-operative project of Bird Studies Canada, federal and provincial wildlife agencies, NS Bird Society, Nature NB, PE Natural History Society and over 1000 volunteer participants. Together we are gathering the information that will direct bird conservation in the Maritimes for the next 20 years and beyond.

No. 7

Editor: Becky Stewart

Fall, 2009



Marsh Wren, by Becky Stewart

FOUR DOWN ONE TO GO

By Becky Stewart

In 2009 there were highlights in every province: Roberta Palmer and Ray Cooke had a Whip-poor-will on territory; Merv Cormier saw an Indigo Bunting carrying food; Brian Dalzell recorded a Willow Flycatcher nest building; Sid Watts found a Boreal Chickadee nest; Martin Turgeon heard a Virginia Rail; Todd Watts heard a Wood Thrush; Peggy Blair confirmed Vesper Sparrow; Eric Mills found Black-legged Kittiwake; Kathleen MacAulay saw a Nashville Warbler carrying food; Rick Whitman found a Spotted Sandpiper nest; and Laura Saunders encountered an agitated Greater Yellowlegs. And these highlights are just the beginning. A similar list could be made for every region and square where atlasers worked this summer.

Although everyone has until January 31st to enter their data, things seem to be shaping up well as we say goodbye to year four and hello to our fifth and final year of data collection (I would still encourage everyone to get their data in as soon as possible because the more

information we have, the easier it is to plan next year's efforts). Thus far atlasers have entered approximately 5,463 hours of observations for 2009 and have submitted records for 968 squares. But how does this compare to the amount of data collected at this time during the first Atlas? Some of you may have noticed that this summer we surpassed the landmark number of breeding bird records from the first atlas in early June. During the first Atlas a total of 144,642 records were submitted and thus far, 168,371 have been submitted during the second Atlas.

However, while we can pat ourselves on the back for setting a new record for records, we shouldn't be too over confident about our success because we really don't know what having more records means in terms of reaching our coverage goals. Some RCs have noticed a change in "atlassing style" since the first atlas: rather than individuals taking on a single square and making sure it is well-covered, this time atlasers have taken a "shotgun" approach, covering many areas and submitting observations for many squares without necessarily ensuring that any one square is complete. Of course, this approach was encouraged by the Atlas office as volunteers were asked to "share their square" and to "submit any and all observations for wherever they happen to be". Now some of you may be wondering if this approach isn't going to come back and bite us in the butt. However, when we look at where the first Atlas was, data collection-wise, at the end of year four, we see that 260 of 416 priority squares (62%) were complete and 25 of 31 special squares were complete (71%). Currently, 243 priority squares (58%) and 11 of 31 special squares (35%) are complete. Thus, in terms of survey coverage in priority squares, while we are "on track", we are not any further head than we were last time: we've still got a lot of work to do to

complete priority squares. However, in the case of non-priority squares, our efforts have surpassed those of the first Atlas. At the end of the first Atlas, 299 (25%) of non-priority squares were complete. Today, 330 non-priority squares are complete and many more are only an hour or two away from completion. As well, in the first Atlas publication 859 squares were deemed "adequately sampled" because they had 75% of expected species. At this point during the second Atlas it appears as though roughly 800 squares have 75% of expected species. In other words, we're not doing too badly.

An area where we are doing rather poorly is in gathering abundance estimates. Without these estimates we won't be able to compare abundance between the first and second Atlas. The first Atlas had 53,163 records with corresponding abundance estimates—thus far 19,000 (12%) of our records have abundance estimates. As well, during the first Atlas there were abundance estimates submitted for 1,115 squares. Currently we have abundance estimates for just 510 squares. So when you are out there next June, don't forget to make some note of each species' abundance, as we have some serious catching up to do.

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You may notice that we abandoned our usual format for this newsletter edition. The format and logo are from the first Atlas. We'd like to pay homage to those that made the first Atlas a success—you set the bar quite high and we hope this Atlas will measure up.

On the other hand, we are doing really well with point counts, which were the “major addition” to the second Atlas effort. Our initial goal was to complete point counts in at least all priority squares. Many atlasers put the push on point counts this year and as of today 379 of the 416 priority squares have been point counted (that’s 91%)...and I know there’s still additional point count data to come in. What’s great about point counts being nearly complete is that next year we will have all of June to focus on atlasing in priority squares (i.e., increasing effort hours and finding the remaining expected species). And apparently we need this time.

Since we are facing the same challenges that volunteers faced during the last year of the first atlas, I thought it was only fitting to leave you with the words that Brian Dalzell wrote in the spring newsletter of 1990, “We have left ourselves with fully 38 percent of our priority squares to be completed. While this is a big job, I’m sure we can do it. Why? Because we are Maritimers, that’s why. Because of our geography and history, we have come to be unusually self reliant.” Hear hear.

PREPARING FOR YEAR 5 (OR, YIPES! WE’VE GOT 1 LEFT!)

By Becky Stewart

If each summer you tell yourself that “next year” you’ll find more time to work on the Atlas, then guess what? Next year is here! And while we have collected a huge amount of data during the first four years of the Atlas, there is still a fair amount of work to be done to tie up loose ends, complete squares and ensure that we have the information needed to maximize the Atlas’ conservation potential. So what can you do as an individual to help reach this goal?

1. Make certain your square(s) is “complete”. A square is “complete” when you’ve:

- Spent approximately 20 hours atlasing the square (if you are at 19 hours and have met all the other criteria below then you can consider your square complete, conversely if you are at 20 hours but haven’t met the other criteria listed below then a bit more time in your square will help ensure you have gathered all essential information);
- Visited and surveyed all habitat types;

- Detected the majority of species (approximately 85-95%) detected in that square during the first Atlas. (If you aren’t sure what was found in your square during the last atlas, this information can be found on the online square summary sheets or from the Atlas office). Please note that there will be squares in which the habitat has changed substantially between Atlas periods or the amount of survey effort for the first Atlas far exceeds the 20-hour mark. In these instances you are less likely to detect the same number of species as the first Atlas so use the other criteria listed to help determine if your square is complete;

- Visited your square at different times of the year (e.g., during March or April as well as May, June and July) and at different times of day to detect early and/or nocturnal breeders (e.g., owls);
- Made abundance estimates for each species detected;

...and, if you are responsible for a priority square...

- Completed 15 point counts, both on- and off-road. If you are responsible for a priority square but won’t be conducting point counts, please ensure that someone has done them in your stead or tell your RC that point counts need to be completed in that square. Note: if you have a non-priority square and have done point counts that’s excellent and the data will be used; I’m emphasizing point counts in priority squares to make sure we can meet the minimum requirements for data analysis.

2. If your square is complete, adopt another square. Your RC or a neighbouring RC will be more than happy to direct you to where your help and enthusiasm are needed. If you don’t have enough time to take on another square consider sharing a square with a fellow atlaser (four eyes are better than two) or organizing a one-day square bash with some friends.

Not to sound ominous but this is our last chance to get the job done. Determining what species, habitats etc. need your attention now will help organize your survey efforts for next year and ensure that nothing is missed. For example, you don’t want to discover mid-July that you forgot to look for owls in mid-April.

ADOPT-A-SQUARE

If you look at our online effort maps you’ll quickly see that there isn’t a region where every square is complete (e.g., has 20 survey hours) and all but 2 regions have squares that haven’t been atlased at all. Now is the time to open your hearts and your field books to a new square. If you can take on another square or squares please contact the appropriate RC. If you would prefer to co-parent a square, talk to your RC. We’ve got a long way to go and it is going to take several adoptive parents to ensure all priority squares are complete.

NEW BREEDING RECORDS FOR THE ATLAS

By Becky Stewart

Although few people would call me a rarity chaser (in fact fellow birders often chastise me for not chasing rarities enough), I did want to share some significant “rare” bird sightings that atlasers have submitted to the Atlas. Listed below are species which were not considered breeders during the first Atlas but for which there has been some breeding evidence recorded during this second effort. These examples may represent distributional changes, range expansions or breeding anomalies. Whatever the reason for their appearance, detecting any one of these rare birds is enough to make any atlaser’s day.



Yellow-breasted Chat, photo by Doug Day

Carolina Wren

During the first Atlas Carolina Wren wasn’t detected but in the second Atlas it has been recorded in 6 squares. Documented observations include two Carolina Wrens seen near Douglas, NB,

a FY found on Grand Manan this summer and one wren seen and heard in a spruce bog near Paddy's Head Road, NS, in 2006. In the case of the latter, the wren was still singing from the same spot a week later. Whether this should count as a possible or probable breeder will be left in the capable hands of the Data Verification Working Group.

Yellow-throated Vireo

Although this species was detected during the first Atlas, the single observation was omitted from the final publication. During the second Atlas, Yellow-throated Vireo has been detected in 5 squares (in all three provinces) and confirmed on PEI thus securing the vireo's spot in the final publication this time around.

Tufted Titmouse

The first Atlas had one record: a "pair" of Tufted Titmice seen near Florenceville in June of 1986. More recently (2008), Mrs. Willi Evans Wolfe observed a titmouse gathering nesting material (dog fur) from her deck in St. Andrews, NB, and later that summer, Tracey Dean banded recently fledged titmice at her banding station, also in the St. Andrews square.

Yellow-breasted Chat

This species is another that was recorded (as "H") during the first Atlas but didn't make the final publication cut. During the second Atlas, Yellow-breasted Chat was found singing on territory in NB (at the Pennfield Airstrip in the Charlotte Region) and in NS (along the Musquodoboit Trailways in the Chebucto – Musquodoboit Region).

Lesser Scaup

Lesser Scaup were not recorded during the first Atlas. During this effort they have been detected in six squares and confirmed (FY) near Shediac, NB.

Orchard Oriole

Orchard Oriole was not recorded during the first Atlas. In 2009 a nesting pair was found in Carleton County, NB (unfortunately the nest failed). There are three additional Orchard Oriole records, all in NS—Brier Island, Annapolis Royal and the Pictou-Trenton area. In some of these cases birds may have been migrants rather than breeding birds.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

During the first Atlas there was a single Yellow-billed Cuckoo sighting near Centreville, NB in 1988. Thus far during the second Atlas, Yellow-billed Cuckoos

have been recorded in four squares in western NB and NS.

Red-bellied Woodpecker

The Red-bellied Woodpecker was not recorded during the first Atlas. Since then, this species has become more prevalent on Christmas Bird Counts and nesting was confirmed in the Halifax-Dartmouth area in 2008. Red-bellied Woodpecker has also been recorded in the Annapolis Valley and Kent Regions.



Sussex's LeConte's Sparrow, photo by Hank Scarth.

Le Conte's Sparrow

Who can forget the famous Le Conte's Sparrow that sang for much of the summer of 2007 near Sussex, NB? The individual did not appear to find a mate (but not for lack of trying) and the species has not yet been found elsewhere during the second Atlas. Whether the 2007 sighting(s) should be recorded as evidence of possible or probable breeding (or just "X") has and will continue to spark some debate (thank goodness the Data Verification Working Group will have to sort that one out).

While all of the "finds" listed here are exciting, it reminds us of how important it is to fill out rare bird forms (DON'T GROAN...give me a chance to explain). For each of these species we will have to think carefully about how the behaviour we record fits into the breeding evidence categories and whether our established rules apply to rare breeders. For example, if a male Orchard Oriole is observed foraging in mid-June, is this single observation sufficient to record the

species as a possible breeder? Would your answer change if a female Orchard Oriole was observed instead of a male? How would you decide whether to accept or reject this observation if the only information you had was a letter "H" without any details on the bird's sex, the habitat and the circumstances of the sighting? As the Atlas comes to a close, these are the types of questions that we are going to have to think about and the more information that is available for each rare bird sighting, the easier it will be to make a judgement call.

MINERS WANTED!

Species sightings and breeding information posted on listservs (Nature NB, NS-RBA etc...) doesn't always make its way into the Atlas database and yet many of these observations are reliable breeding records (some are posted by registered atlasers). Before Ivy Austin, our Assistant Coordinator, left to take on a new position, he had been "mining" data from provincial bird and/or nature listservs to include in the Atlas. Now that Ivy has left us we have a hole to fill and we are looking for keen volunteers willing to take on this task—looking through listservs for breeding evidence and species that can (and should) be included in the Atlas. The inclusion of these additional observations will help to create a more complete snapshot of our region's bird diversity. All information gleaned from listservs will be carefully reviewed by RCs to ensure that observations included in the Atlas are accurate and are breeding records. If you are interested in taking on this initiative, please contact the Atlas office via phone or email.

BIRDATHON BLUES

by Becky Whittam

I've got the Birdathon blues. As I write this, it's October, it's raining, and Birdathon is seven months away. Our breeding birds are winging their way south (if they're not there already) and I'll have to survive the winter on Christmas Bird Counts alone. To wile away the time, I thought I'd share with Atlasers a great new opportunity to raise some really helpful funds for the Atlas.

The Baillie Birdathon is an annual fundraiser undertaken by Bird Studies Canada. Each year, participants choose a single day in May (of their choice), get sponsors, then bird to their heart's content, keeping track of the number of species seen for a maximum of 24 hours. Some people go all out and don't stop

until their 24 hours are up. Others spend just a few hours birding their favourite spots. At the end of the day, they count the number of species they've seen and collect money from sponsors. Money raised goes toward the Baillie Fund of Bird Studies Canada which provides funding to amateur and professional ornithologists across the country. Indeed, the Baillie Fund has been providing money to the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas since 2006, to engage volunteers in fieldwork in remote or difficult-to-access areas.

Now here's the interesting part. Traditionally Birdathoners can specify a birding or naturalist club or a bird observatory which will then receive up to 50% of the funds depending on the total raised. As of 2008, Birdathoners can specify an Atlas project as the "club" of their choice, and a full 50% of the funds raised will go to the Atlas. I think this is an excellent opportunity to go birding, have fun, and bring in a few dollars for a project which is close to your heart. If you already conduct an annual Birdathon and specify a local club as your beneficiary, please don't stop! But, if you have never done a Birdathon, or have never specified a beneficiary, please consider participating next spring and naming the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas as your club of choice. It's always an adventure to try to see as many species as you can in a single day, and the best part is – it doesn't matter if you only see a few. What matters is that you got outside after a long winter and challenged your dormant birding self.

We'll be sure to remind you of this opportunity in the spring newsletter. In the meantime, you can find details at <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/support/birdathon/index.jsp?lang=EN&targetpg=index>

RCS NEEDED FOR SOUTHWEST SHORE AND CARLETON-VICTORIA

We are looking for two enthusiastic individuals to coordinate volunteer efforts in the Southwest Shore Region in NS (Region 17) and in the Carleton-Victoria Region in western NB (Region 7). As we enter our final year of data collection, it is vital that we increase coordination and coverage in these two areas. Please contact the Atlas office (bstewart@bsc-eoc.org or 1-866-5ATLAS5) if you would like to take on this important role (or if you want more information before you commit yourself).

LATE BREEDING IN 2008

By Tony Erskine

Birds breeding in 2008 were generally near average in timing, but one brood record was later than any known records for that species. On 19 October, an adult female Ring-necked Pheasant brought a partly grown young male to our feeder (at 16 Richardson Street, Sackville, NB).

On that date, the young bird had body perhaps 2/3 as large as that of its mother, tail less than half as long as in adult males, with male plumage appearing in several body tracts. We later watched the young male, accompanied by an adult female on 5 dates through 30 October, until 13 November when it was not surely distinguished from older males.

I estimate the young bird to have been 4-5 weeks old when first noted, suggesting that it was hatched in the third week of September. Earlier data, summarized in the first breeding bird Atlas of the Maritimes (Erskine 1992), included no evidence of pheasant broods hatched after the middle of August.

Since having written this note, Tony encountered another late Ring-necked Pheasant brood on four occasions between October 24 and November 6, 2009.

TRAVEL GRANT REPORTS

For the past three years, Bird Studies Canada's James L. Baillie Memorial Fund has provided the Atlas with funding for volunteer travel grants to help subsidize the costs associated with travelling to remote areas and ensure that every corner of the Maritimes gets covered. To date, travel grants have supported 63 volunteers in their atlassing efforts in some of the more difficult-to-access areas of the Maritimes including northern NB, St. Paul's Island, High Island, Tusket Island, Cape Breton and southwestern Nova Scotia. In 2009, 6 travel grants were awarded to Atlas volunteers. One recipient, Pierrette Mercier—the RC for Madawaska Region who moved to Quebec mid-Atlas but still continues to actively coordinate her region—used these funds to help cover her travel costs for the 480km round-trip from her home to her region. Pierrette travelled 3,700 km this summer. At the end of the summer, the Atlas office asks travel grant recipients to submit a short report on the activities for which grant funds were used. Below are excerpts from two other grant recipients: Roy LaPointe who travelled logging roads and

ATV trails to access some of the most northern sections of NB, and Chris Field who led an excursion to Flat and East Ironbound Islands.

ATLASSING REPORT FOR 09

by Roy LaPointe

My goal for this season was to do at least 250 point counts and accumulate 225 hours of atlassing. I had 8 trips of 2 to 5 days planned primarily for point counts in June and another 6 trips of up to 5 days planned for BE atlassing in July. I expected to travel around 6,000 km with at least 4 trips to include travel by kayak or canoe.



The no longer elusive Spruce Grouse, photo by Roy LaPointe

In all I managed to do a total of 150 point counts and accumulate 243.5 hours of atlassing. On point counts I accumulated 1,363 records for 84 species. On BE atlassing I accumulated 1,670 records for 124 species. My most interesting find was a Field Sparrow singing in a clearing in the middle of the forest (19FN48). Finally, after 3 years of atlassing, I managed to find a Spruce Grouse (19FN40) and the very next day, a family of 3 more of these elusive birds (19FN42). Point counts fell short of original goals primarily due to poor weather. Two blown tires and the loss of a notebook containing 3 days of point counting effort also contributed to the shortage. I managed to do only 4 trips of 2 days duration each. The rest of my PC work was reduced to seven single-day trips by the uncooperative weather and aforementioned mishaps. BE atlassing in July was also greatly affected by the weather. I managed only one 4-day trip and one 3-day trip. I did squeeze in

another 10 single-day trips for BE atlassing between the wet days. From April 12th to August 2nd, I made 38 atlassing trips covering 45 days. Because many trips were reduced to single days, distance travelled was considerably higher than anticipated totalling 7,990 km (this does not include vacation travel to region 11).

TRIP TO EAST IRONBOUND AND FLAT ISLAND

by Chris Field

The trip took place on July 1, 2009 on a boat chartered from Daryl Gates, a local fisherman from Blandford. There were six birders, Alan Covert, Blake Maybank, Ian McLaren, Eric Mills, Hans Toom and me, Chris Field. We left the dock in Blandford shortly after 6:00am and headed to East Ironbound. The wind was light from the southeast with overcast skies and light fog. On the trip out, there were a number of seabirds including a Wilson's Storm-petrel, several gannets and several Greater and Sooty Shearwaters. Once on East Ironbound, we split into two groups, one heading east and the other west. The birdlife on the island was quite active and we were able to both add new species and get confirmations for several other species for square 20MQ12. We added Fox Sparrows (CF), Bay-breasted Warbler (S) and Cliff Swallow (P). We confirmed Barn Swallows (NY) (large numbers of barn swallows around the fish sheds), redstart (CF), Savannah Sparrow (CF), Boreal Chickadee (FY) and Black Guillemots (AE). In terms of

improving the breeding status, we had Blackpoll Warbler (A). Another 11 species were found on the island for which there was already comparable breeding evidence.

After leaving East Ironbound, about 9:30am, we headed towards Flat Island. This island is uninhabited and has a fringe of live boreal forest around the perimeter, with deadfall in the interior. We landed in a small boat and again split up into groups. We were on the part of the island in 20MQ11 (Pearl Island) so almost all the breeding observed was new. There was evidence of a Great Black-backed Gull colony but no fledged birds but one nest contained a broken egg. It was felt that the breeding had not been successful and we wondered if it had been predated by the Bald Eagle on the island. Eric Mills observed a single Greater Yellowlegs which might be a possible breeder. Other notable birds were a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (S) and a Lincoln's Sparrow (S). We had a total of 20 species on Flat Island of which Song Sparrows (CF) were by far the most abundant. We also confirmed eider (FY), crow (FY), robin (CF), Yellow-rumped Warbler (FY), Savannah Sparrow (CF) and raven (FY).

We then headed to Grassy Island in 20MQ02 (Tancook). Grassy Island is a rock outcrop with a small grassy area in the center. There were fledged young Herring Gulls and we estimated the colony size to be between 11-100 pairs. We had Arctic Terns and a tree swallow

near the island and large numbers of eiders with fledged young. As we sailed past Little Tancook, we were able to confirm Greater Black-backed Gulls (FY) and Herring Gulls (FY). We returned to the wharf in Blandford shortly after 1:30pm. Everyone agreed it had been a very successful atlassing trip.

ATLASSING BY CANOE AND HOW TO PLAN YOUR WILDERNESS ADVENTURE

by Becky Stewart

There are numerous islands, river systems, lakes and marshes that can be far better explored, and atlassed, by ditching the car and hopping into a canoe or kayak. This past summer I had the opportunity to visit the Tobecoic Wilderness area in southwestern NS twice. The first visit, which I undertook with Oliver Barden, was a two-day overnighter to the Sporting Lake priority square to do point counts. The second visit was a five-day trip with Kyle Wellband to finish surveying the priority square and atlas the surrounding squares, many of which weren't surveyed during the first Atlas.

There were many amazing moments so it's hard to know where to begin. To start, I have never been anywhere where the Blackburnian Warblers were so plentiful. In June I was literally trying to "tune out" the Blackburnians so I could hear other species. This high density of Blackburnians is almost certainly explained by the habitat. On Sporting Lake there are three islands that make up a 25 hectare nature reserve. These islands harbour one of the few remaining stands of old-growth forest in NS. Here you can find huge hemlock, pine and spruce trees that have grown, relatively undisturbed, for hundreds of years. It was on these islands that Kyle Wellband and I encountered, Pine Grosbeak during our second visit to the square in early July. We had pulled up to the islands to have lunch and explore the island. Shortly thereafter, we heard a bird singing that sounded familiar but wasn't anything we had encountered in recent weeks. As I looked through my binoculars at the rosy-red singer I vaguely remember hollering, "Omigod, I think it's a Pine Grosbeak". A few minutes later Kyle spoke up, "ah...I've got a fledged young grosbeak here". With a bit of pishing we had the entire grosbeak family flitting above us, and they weren't the only ones that came in to check out the commotion. Soon the canopy was "hopping" with warblers,



Spotted Sandpiper on Flat Island, photo by Hans Toom

many of them fledglings, including Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, Parula and Palm Warblers, plus a male Bay-breasted Warbler carrying a big green caterpillar in his bill. The islands were also the only place where we encountered Black-throated Green Warbler in the square, a strangely uncommon bird in the area. All of this transpired around noon hour: a time of day not usually associated with high bird activity. It just goes to show that magic can happen at anytime.



The Tobeatic Wilderness Area with our canoe route in red and the Sporting Lake square marked. Map in upper right corner shows wilderness area's location in southwest NS.

The geology/geography of the area was almost as spectacular as the birds. Many lakes as well as rivers are littered with erratics of all sizes—some no more than a foot across while others are large enough to have lunch on. We found pairs of Common Terns on nearly every reasonably-sized lake, often resting on these large erratics. At Fifth Lake Flowage, just north of the wilderness area, we found a Common Tern nest on a small grassy island measuring about 2 by 3 metres. And with all that space and so many other islands to nest on, who did we find nesting on the same island? A pair of Great Black-backed Gulls, which are known predators of tern eggs and young. I guess the saying “keep your friends close and your enemies closer” is true even for birds.

Admittedly, no trip is all roses. It was during our fifth or sixth portage—and by “portage” I mean that we were pushing through thick shrubbery on a path too narrow to be a path—that the comment

was made, “I didn’t realize that when people said they ‘paddled the Tobeatic’ they meant they walked the Tobeatic with a canoe on their head.” However, it is incredible how many warbler songs you can hear with a canoe on your head. The Black-and-white Warbler, for example, comes through loud and clear! And as we continued on our trip, the portages got easier (i.e., wider) and it was with sorry disappointment that Kyle and I paddled to the end on our final day knowing that we would now have to go back to “regular” atlassing.

Atlassing by canoe isn’t for everyone but I know there are some adventurers out there just waiting for someone to point them in the “right” direction. I myself am not a “tripping” expert, far from it. But I have a few pieces of advice which I will pass along to those interested in combining atlassing with outdoor adventure. First, plan your trip well (and well in advance), e.g., get books (“Paddling the Tobeatic” was the most useful \$30.00 I ever spent). Second, find detailed maps (road maps, topo maps, plus atlas maps). Then, talk to local guides or wilderness clubs (Hinterland Adventures near Weymouth Mills was extremely helpful with the planning of our trip). Make certain what you are planning is realistic and doable. Plus, although it may seem obvious, make sure you allow time for atlassing (e.g., a three-day backpacking trip may need to be four or five days in order to have a chance to atlas). For those interested in atlassing by canoe, trips may need to be made early in the season while the water is still relatively high (many Maritimes rivers and streams become low by late June, particularly in southern NS).

How to get started? There are a few approaches you can take to planning your atlassing adventure. An important first step is to contact the RC(s) where you hope to Atlas and find out what squares need to be covered. Plus by 1) looking at the online effort maps, you’ll see that there are many squares that have a long way to go before they are complete and some of these are best accessed by canoe or foot. The NS and NB “Backroad Mapbook: Outdoor Recreation Guide” is not only an excellent mapbook for backroads (it uses the same UTM system as the Atlas so the “squares” in the book are the same as your Atlas square maps) but it is also a good starting point because these mapbooks list hiking trails and paddling routes. The books are a bit pricey (\$22 to \$25) but are worth it for anyone who

does extensive backroad travelling. Be sure you get the latest edition and check the mapbook website for recent updates (e.g., corrections and additions since the latest publication; www.backroadmapbooks.com).



Our preferred mode of transport, photo by Becky Stewart

A CALL FOR BIRD PHOTOS

by John Chardine

I am assuming the role of photo editor for the Atlas publication and am soliciting good quality photographs of Maritime breeding birds for the final Atlas publication. We plan to include an outstanding colour image of each species with its write-up. If you have any photos please consider submitting one or more to me for evaluation by a small selection committee. If chosen, your name will be printed alongside the photograph. If you know of someone who has images please put them in touch with me (contact info below).

Here are some guidelines to help you select images to send in:

1) We’d like to include photos of breeding birds taken in the Maritimes by as many Maritime photographers as possible. We may have to go further afield for more difficult species.

2) Photos should be of the whole bird, in good, even, front light. The subject, particularly the head and eye should be sharp with minimal if any habitat elements in front of the bird. Optimum head angle is looking in the direction of, but not straight at, the photographer. Images showing breeding activity such as carrying nest material or food for chicks are particularly appropriate.

However, we do not plan to show images of birds at the nest except in rare circumstances.

3) Submit your images at a minimum resolution of 1200 pixels wide x 1200 high in jpeg or tiff format on a CD, DVD, or by email. Images larger than 10 megabytes will be rejected by our email system so these will have to come on disk. Good quality slide scans are also acceptable.

4) If one or more of your images is chosen you will be asked to sign a release for one-time use of the image. Copyright will remain with the photographer.

My contact information is as follows: John Chardine, Environment Canada, P.O. Box 6227, Sackville, NB, E4L1G6; john.chardine@ec.gc.ca; 506-364-5046.



Is he the quintessential Common Tern? Photo by John Chardine

SPECIES IN FOCUS: TENNESSEE WARBLER by Julie Paquet

Despite its name, the Tennessee Warbler neither breeds nor over-winters in Tennessee. Instead, this species got its name when the first specimen was discovered on the banks of Tennessee's Cumberland River by Alexander Wilson in 1811. Throughout its breeding range, the Tennessee Warbler is generally associated with the boreal forest, usually found in coniferous but also in mixed-aged stands ranging in age from early successional to mature. The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) has detected an average of 7.1, 3.9 and 1.1 Tennessee Warblers per route in NB, NS and PE respectively since 1966. This is in comparison to 15.9, 7.10 and 5 Tennessee's per route in QC, ON and

NL, where boreal forests dominate the landscape. NB has shown a significant decrease in Tennessee Warblers (-5.3% annually) on BBS routes from 1968-2007, though no declines have been detected in the other two Maritime provinces. A preliminary comparison of the first and second Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas data shows a substantial decrease in the number of squares with Tennessee Warblers. Tennessees have only been detected in 428 squares in comparison with the 934 squares in which they were found during the first Atlas.



Tennessee Warbler, photo by Trisha Shears

The Tennessee Warbler is a forest songbird that responds to spruce budworm outbreaks – otherwise known as a “spruce budworm specialist”. Populations of this species can fluctuate dramatically from year to year, reaching their highest densities (up to 500 pairs 100 ha) in forests with budworm outbreaks. Local population increases seem to be the result of abundant food as new birds are attracted to the area. According to the Canadian Forest Service, the spruce budworm is native to North America and periodic outbreaks are part of the natural cycle in spruce–fir forests. Tree ring analysis has shown that outbreaks occurred as far back as 1704 in Quebec and published records kept for over 150 years show that outbreaks occur, on average, every 35 years. The last outbreak in Atlantic Canada began in the late 1960s, reaching its peak in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in 1975, in Nova Scotia in 1976, and in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1977. Only very low, or endemic, levels of budworm have been found since the mid-1980s in the Atlantic Provinces.

In determining the population status of a spruce budworm specialist like the Tennessee Warbler we need to consider the population status of the spruce budworm as well as the factors that can alter the severity of spruce budworm outbreaks (e.g., climate change, active

suppression of Spruce Budworm, changing forest composition, etc). Looking back at BBS data in New Brunswick within the context of budworm outbreaks, we can see that between 1966 and 1975 (peak outbreak in NB), Tennessee Warblers increased significantly by a whopping 15.1% annually. Since then however, Tennessee Warbler populations, as well as those of other budworm specialists like Bay-breasted and Cape May Warbler, have shown annual significant declines. It is conceivable that the observed declines may be attributed, in part, to declining levels of spruce budworm.

Thank-you Atlas supporters!



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