

MARITIMES BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER



No. 8

Editor: Judith Kennedy

Winter, 1987



Martin-pêcheur — Jean Raymond Gallien

1986 SUMMARY

Now that we have done some more thorough analysis of the 1986 data, we'll send out another round of applause for a fine effort. A look at the map of squares getting at least some coverage shows the areas of peak enthusiasm and those which need to get charged for year 2. A few figures to dazzle you: we received records from 372 squares (or 22% of the total). While this figure makes it sound as if we've virtually accomplished our 25% target, don't hang up your binoculars yet. Of these 372 squares, 192 were priority squares, 43% of the priority squares which must be covered. Looking even closer, only 17 priority squares met our adequate coverage criteria of 75% of the expected species but lack the 50%

confirmations, and 56 squares have between 50 and 75% of their expected species recorded. If special effort is made to bring these 81 priority squares to adequate coverage levels, we could have 98 priority squares completed (22%).

Cooperation is the key. Some of the squares in the 50 - 75% category may be missing species that the atlaser simply hasn't yet learned to identify. In the next couple of months, RCs will receive a batch of computer summaries for their region which will help point out groups of species which may be missing from these squares. If you're good at finding warblers and woodpeckers and 2 or 3 squares in your region have only patchy coverage of these species, why not offer to make a guest appearance in these squares. This

cooperative effort will not only top up a square close to completion (perhaps even unto completion) but will help another atlaser gain expertise in identifying some of his nemesis species. Keep in touch with your RC to develop your Year 2 strategy. □

WILDLIFE '87

Across Canada, the year 1987 has been designated a significant year for wildlife conservation and appreciation. Wildlife '87: Gaining Momentum, as this coordinated effort is known, was proposed to mark the centenary of the first sanctuary in the country at Last Mountain Lake, Saskatchewan.

The purpose of Wildlife '87 is to promote awareness of our wildlife heritage, as well as to give recognition to existing conservation projects and develop new ones. Any group of interested people can participate by implementing a project in their area which will benefit wildlife. Projects can range from nature workshops with Guides and Scouts to raising money for purchase of a land reserve.

More information on projects may be obtained from:

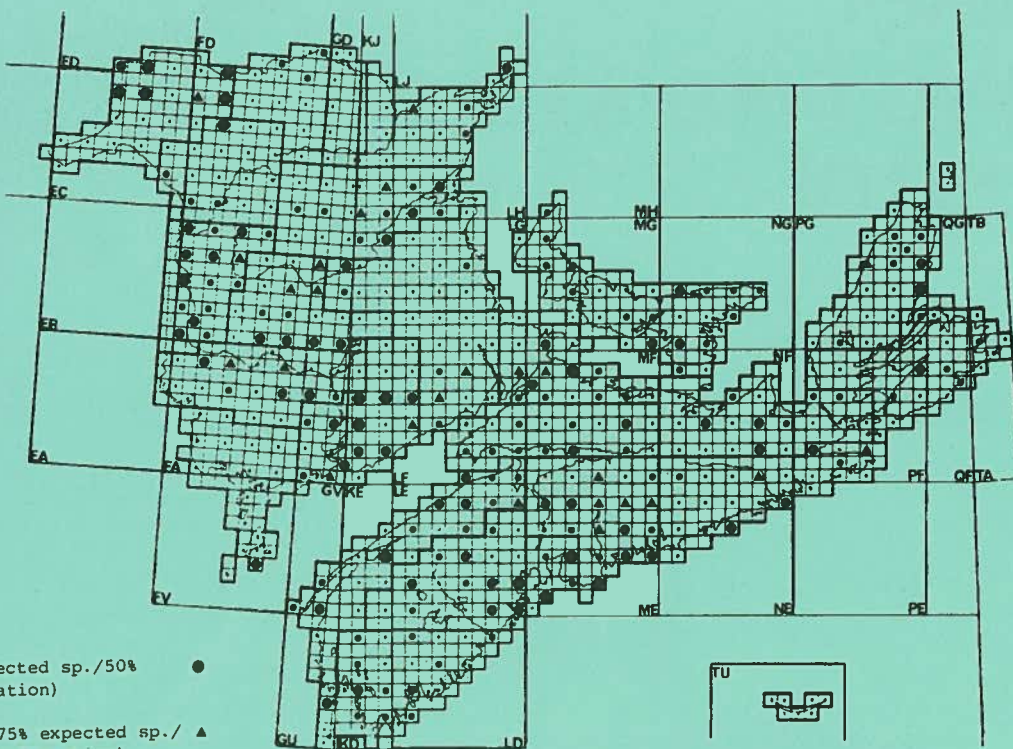
Dave Smith	Dan McAskill
149 Douglas Avenue	Charlottetown R.R.5
Saint John	Donagh, PEI
New Brunswick or	C1A 7J8
E2K 1E5	902-569-4351 (W)
506-652-2872 (W)	

Get involved! This is a great opportunity to further the goals of the atlas and gain some recognition for the wild creatures we love. □

OUR THANKS TO:

Stora Forest Industries, for their donation to the Atlas project.

Priority square coverage 1986



KEY

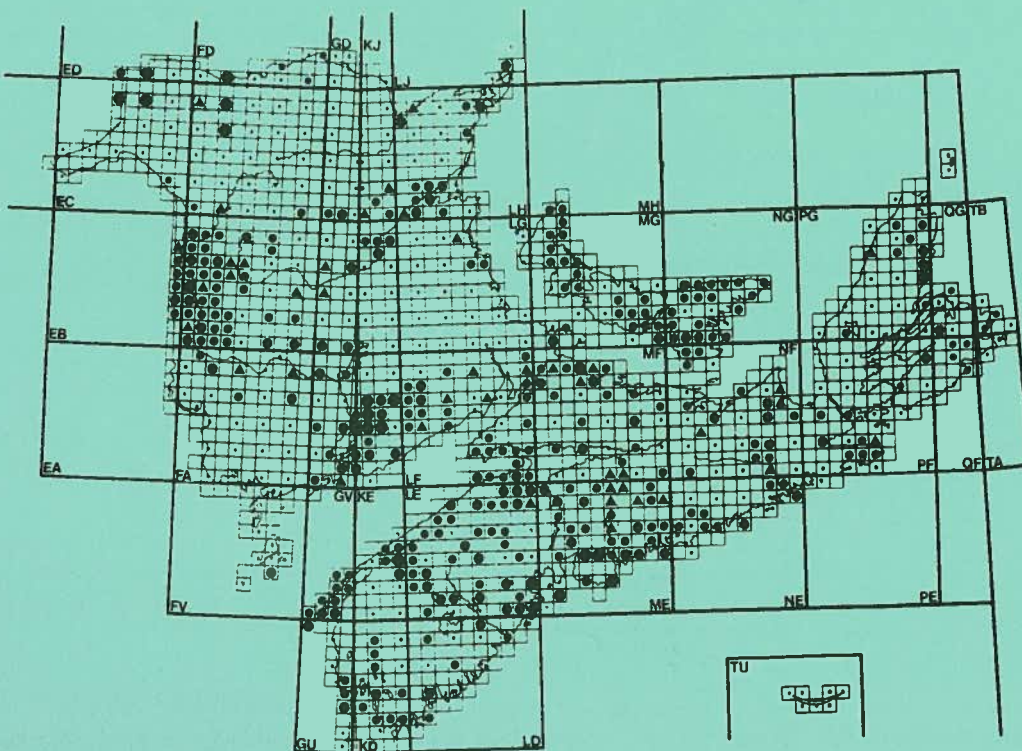
Complete (75% expected sp./50% confirmation) ●

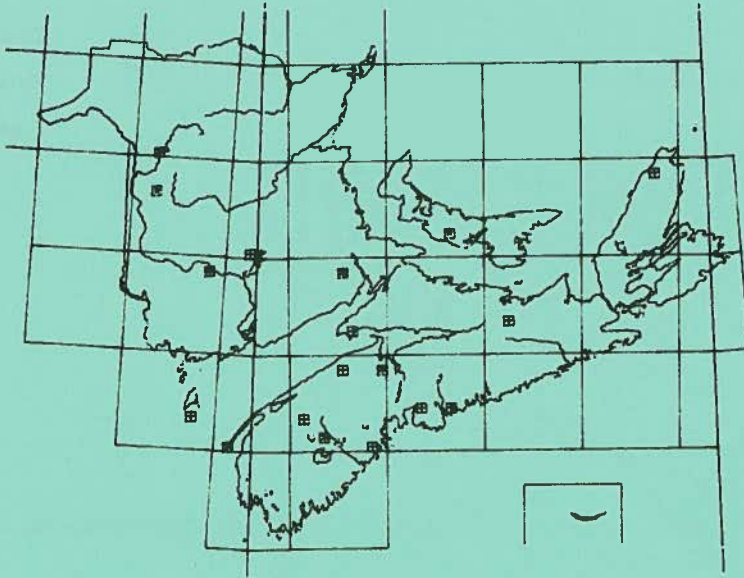
Nearly complete (75% expected sp./50% confirmation) ▲

50 - 75% expected sp. ●

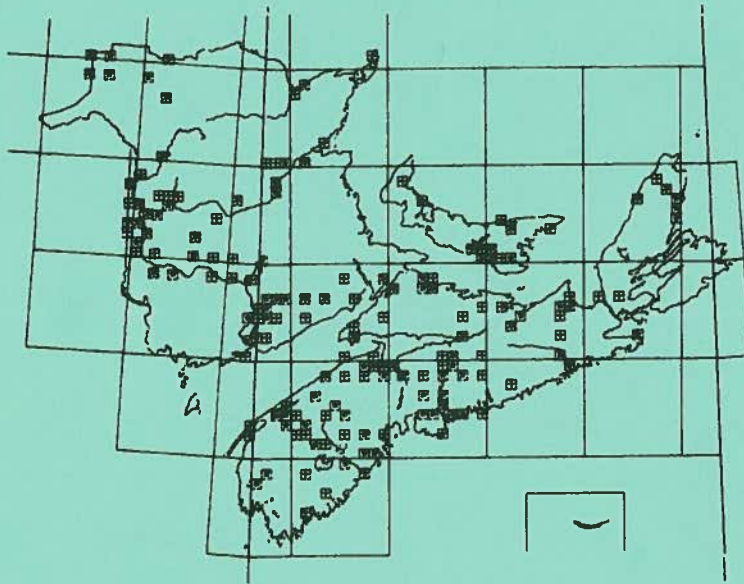
<50% expected sp. ●

Total square coverage 1986

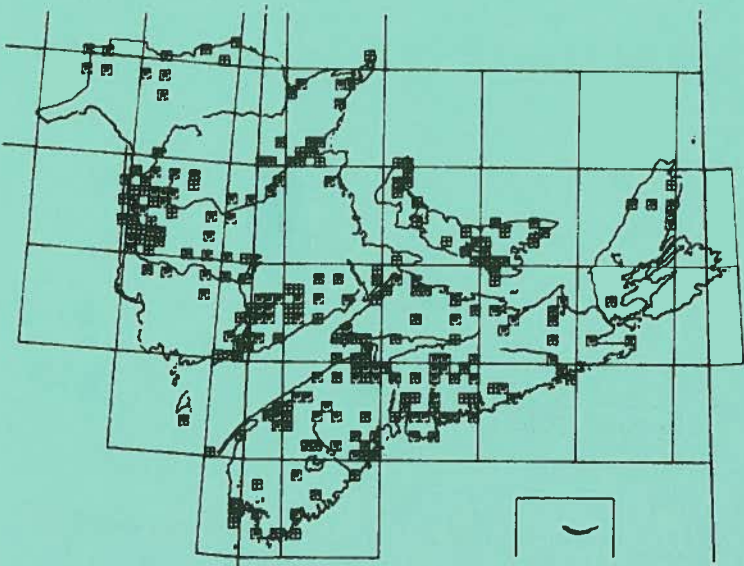




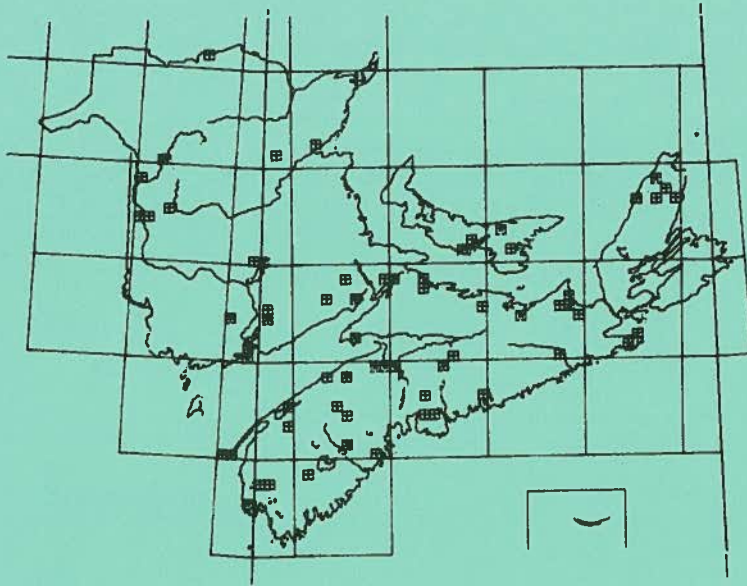
Saw-whet Owl



Downy Woodpecker

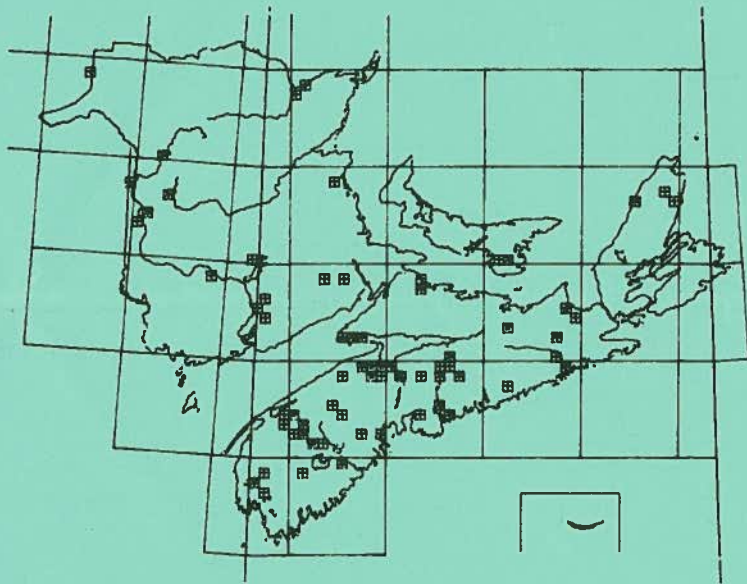


White-throated Sparrow

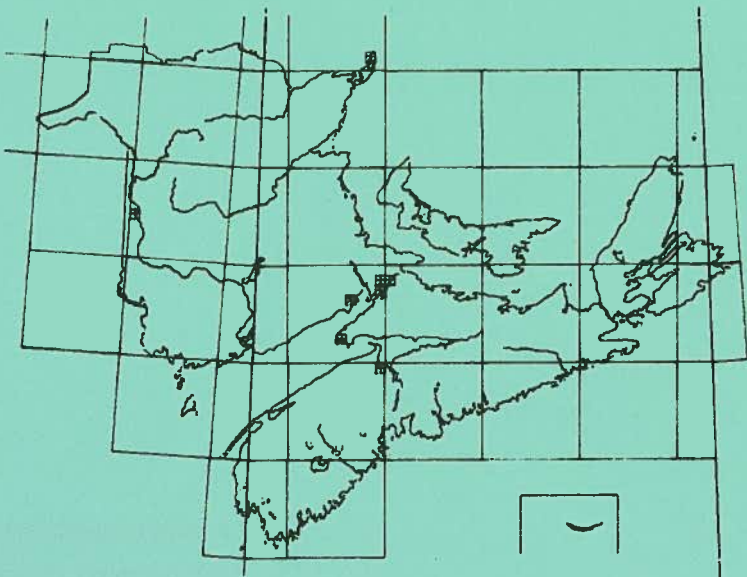


Possible □
 Probable ▨
 Confirmed ⊠

Great Horned Owl



Barred Owl



Short-eared Owl

OWLING

It's the time of year to think about owling efforts again. This year should bring markedly greater success with the use of owl tapes. If you don't have a copy of the owl/rail tape yet, your RC has one you can duplicate, or there are a few copies still available for \$3.00 from the atlas office.

If our maps are to reflect owl distributions at all accurately it is imperative that every atlaser get out to specifically survey for owls. Crows and the owl tape are useful in locating owls (O-X or PO-H), but we would like confirmations whenever possible. A stomp through owl habitat on snowshoes is a good way to check for old stick nests that can be monitored later. Don't wait for leaves to make life complicated. An exhilarating owl-prowl is the way to conquer those mid-winter blues. Re-read the article in Newsletter No. 1, and the following tips from the New York atlas newsletter, to find out "how to".

In the course of our atlas work we do not want to be the cause of any nest desertion. It is difficult to confirm owl breeding without finding nests, so please keep these points in mind:

1. If you find a nest, don't stay in the area — make your record and leave. If nesting adults are kept off the eggs, the eggs may freeze or addle.
2. Disturbance is most likely to cause nest abandonment early in the breeding season.
3. Make your observations from a distance. It is not necessary to climb to a nest. You will not only upset the birds, but you may be risking injury from an irate parent. Human scent around a nest area also attracts mammalian nest predators, like the raccoon. Scattering moth ball chips on your trail is an effective way of covering your tracks.

Calling Owls — Recordings of owl calls played in likely habitats within your block should elicit responses from resident owls. Start by playing the tape softly. Play a cadence, then listen for a response. Increase the volume gradually. Don't call on windy, snowy, rainy or foggy nights because the owls are much less apt to respond.

Looking for Owl Signs — Once you have a response from an owl, or even if you don't (owls don't always respond to taped calls) but have good habitat in your square, you must make a ground search to locate a nest. Area usage by owls is evidenced by signs. Your biggest problem will be to distinguish whether the sign is that of a hawk or owl.

Both hawks and owls pass conspicuous urates, commonly called whitewash. The whitewash of hawks generally splashes into spots and streaks and is ejected out and away from the perch. The whitewash of owls is more solid and forms puddles and is ejected directly below the perch. Numerous whitewash blotches at the base of a tree means an owl has been roosting there.

Both hawks and owls regurgitate pellets. Hawk pellets usually contain only fur because their powerful digestive enzymes break down the bone into indistinguishable fragments. Owl pellets on the other hand, contain large and recognizable skull parts and bones in addition to fur. A section in "A Field Guide to Animal Tracks", one of the Peterson series, gives the size and shape of various raptor pellets.

Before hatching, the area around the nest is fairly clean, but after hatching pellets, whitewash and food remains will be much more obvious. In most species of owl, the male selects a roost tree close to the nest tree. Accumulations of fresh pellets and whitewash beneath a tree signal that a nest is nearby. (Old pellets may indicate a winter roost).

Where to find nesting Owls — Don't expect owls to be waiting for you at the nest. That's too easy. Most owls will be long gone before you arrive at the nest site.

Eastern Screech Owl: Keep eyes and ears open for this species which has been seen in southwestern N.B. This bird is a cavity nesting species which will use old Flicker holes in open woodlands and orchards.

Great Horned Owl: Great Horned Owls most commonly use old nests of hawks, particularly the Red-tailed Hawk. Nests can be found in almost any small or large wooded area, but they prefer coniferous or mixed woods with adjacent open areas for hunting. Pellet and whitewash accumulations under the male's roost tree indicate that a nest is nearby.

Northern Hawk-Owl: This owl nests in hollow tops of tree stubs, in old woodpecker holes and deserted hawk and crow nests. It is usually found in open woodland or burn areas with standing tree stubs. Restricted to northern New Brunswick in the Maritimes.

Barred Owl: The Barred Owl nests in tree cavities or old stick nests in wet woods, river bottomland and heavily wooded swamps. These owls are very secretive, preferring to roost and nest in conifer stands, but pellets and whitewash will give away its residency.

Long-eared Owl: This owl prefers to use the old nests of hawks or crows in coniferous or mixed wooded areas. Long-eared owls are very defensive of the nest and may give away its presence.

Short-eared Owl: A mere depression in the ground, the nest of the Short-eared Owl can be found in a marsh or meadow. This raptor depends for its livelihood on meadow mice and tends to be where there are irruptive populations of mice. This dependence on a single prey item not only makes the species vulnerable, but also keeps it on the move.

Boreal Owl: Boreal Owls are also cavity nesters, using holes in both coniferous and deciduous trees. Pileated Woodpecker holes are frequently used instead of natural cavities. Although uncommon in the Maritimes, its breeding range is not clearly defined; be sure to distinguish the field marks from those of the similar but more usual Saw-whet Owl.

Saw-whet Owl: Our smallest owl most often nests in old woodpecker holes, mainly that of the flicker. Deciduous and coniferous woods, especially wooded swamps are the preferred habitat. If tiny pellets and whitewash are near a suspected nest tree, rap on the tree and the owl may appear at the hole entrance. □

WHENCE COMETH THE TAX MAN

Don't forget that as a registered charity the atlas can provide official receipts for income tax purposes. As we are still trying to raise money for our continued operation, your contribution will help foster your favourite pastime. Your donation also has the potential to generate more funds through various dollar-matching schemes. Your help means a lot. Please send in the accompanying donation card with your gift. □

BONE UP FOR '87

Now would be a good time to re-read your Atlasser Handbook. With one season under your belt some of the items in the handbook which mystified you last year may be obviously logical now. There might even be a few things you *thought* you knew but on closer inspection will find you had slightly muddled. Being absolutely certain of atlas procedure will save trouble in the long run. Spend an hour reviewing your handbook as part of your preparation for the coming field season. Don't forget that back issues of the newsletter have important information and can help you develop your atlassing skills. □

QUALITY CONTROL

One of the necessary evils of a project such as the atlas is sifting through the data to find any records about which we have questions. Part of this procedure involves the documentation forms (as explained in the *Atlasser Handbook*), but other queries may circumvent this route. All breeding codes do *not* apply to all species. When a breeding code is used for a species to which we don't feel it applies we need to know exactly what you saw. This will help us determine whether a different code is more suited to the situation. Some of these problems arise out of the fact that a few of the breeding codes were not clearly defined. Other times it is a simple misinterpretation of a code, or an incomplete understanding of the breeding biology of a species. We hope to prepare a list of species and breeding code combinations which are unsuitable for use. In the meantime, please bear with us as we request clarification. We really do have to go through this to produce a quality atlas. Your prompt response to any queries will greatly assist us. Ideally, we'd like to have all the 1986 data "cleaned" before we start data collection in 1987.

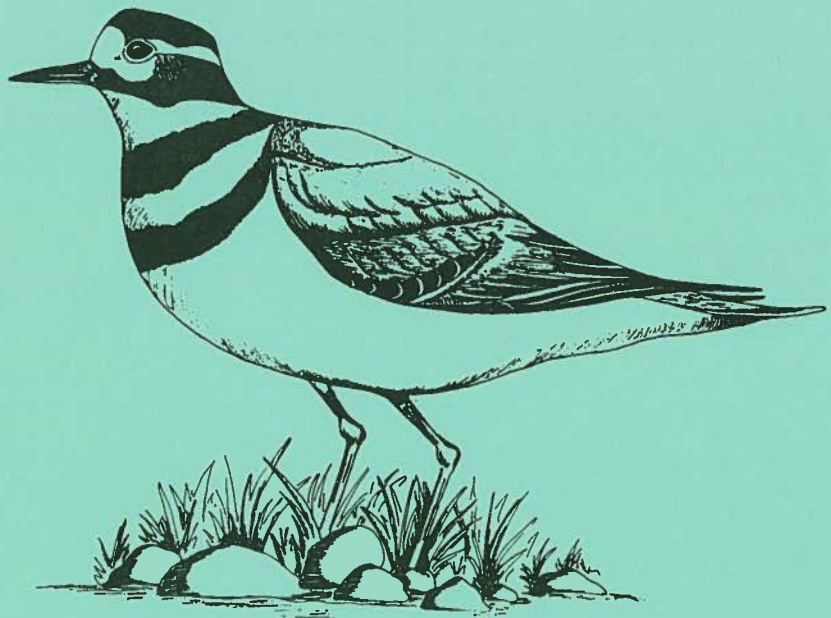
Two of the codes which have been frequently misinterpreted are:
AY - attending young, and **T** - territory.

AY has been used for adult females seen with several young, such as a duck or grouse with a brood of chicks hot on her heels. This situation would be better described by the code **FL** for fledged young. The code **AY** strictly applies to an adult seen carrying food to provide for nestlings or removing a faecal sac from the nest. Ducks and grouse (grice?) do not attend their young as the chicks are precocial, that is they can fend for themselves shortly after hatching.

Be careful when using the code **T** as well. Just seeing the same species in the same location twice doesn't qualify for code **T**. You must also observe territorial behaviour. Winnowing Common Snipe or warbler songs heard a week or more apart count as territorial behaviour.

Make sure you fully understand the definitions of the breeding categories and don't misinterpret them based on the abbreviation to code letters. We will have articles in future newsletters to help clarify the usage of codes in particular circumstances and for certain species. □

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Pluvier kildir — Jean Raymond Gallien

ATLAS DAY II — THE STORY CONTINUES

Mark off July 4th on your calendar right now. You won't want to forget about the second annual Atlas Day in the Maritimes. Get in touch with your RC to find out what's planned for your region. If your RC hasn't got an outing organized yet, nominate your favourite uncovered priority square. Even if your RC has Atlas Day outings all lined up, you can organize one in your area. We want everyone interested in the atlas to spend July 4th in the field. With everyone blitzing a priority square on Atlas Day we could take a big bite out of the work remaining. Who could pass up a chance to go birding at the height of the breeding season? Atlas Day events will be publicized in the next newsletter. □

STANDARDS ARE FOR THE BIRDS

by Bernice Moores and Liz Townsend

We began atlassing in our chosen square, the West Jeddore/Ostrea Lake area of the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia, during the trial year of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas survey. During the second hour of our first visit to the square, we discovered an occupied Osprey nest. The nest was very large, shaped like a deep cup and attached to the side near the top of a black spruce tree. The nest cavity was so deep that when the bird was inside, its head could not be seen.

So anxious were we to confirm Osprey in the first official year, we made a special trip to check the nest on April 20th of 1986. One Osprey had settled in the nest. We assumed the bird was a male since we understand that the male usually returns about a week before the female.

Shortly after our arrival, the Osprey flew out of the nest to a nearby tree. We thought we were in luck — the nest would be occupied in an atlas year! Two Gray Jays (out for an afternoon lark) made two attempts to climb to the top of the nest and look in but were given the bum's rush by the Osprey. The nest had received considerable damage during the winter and we left the scene with visions of the pair busily repairing their home during the next few weeks.

May and June visits revealed an empty nest and no indication that repairs had even commenced. Our feminine intuition soon took over and it became clear what had transpired. When the female returned, she took one look at the nest, and screamed "If you think I'm going to raise another brood in this shack, you are greatly mistaken. Now get busy and find us a new home!"

We have since heard Osprey calls from another part of the square. It seems the pair has set up housekeeping in a brand new home where we hope little calls for food will be heard for each of the remaining years of the atlas. □