

### Then and Now: Ten Years of Atlassing

By Kate Bredin and Ally Manthorne

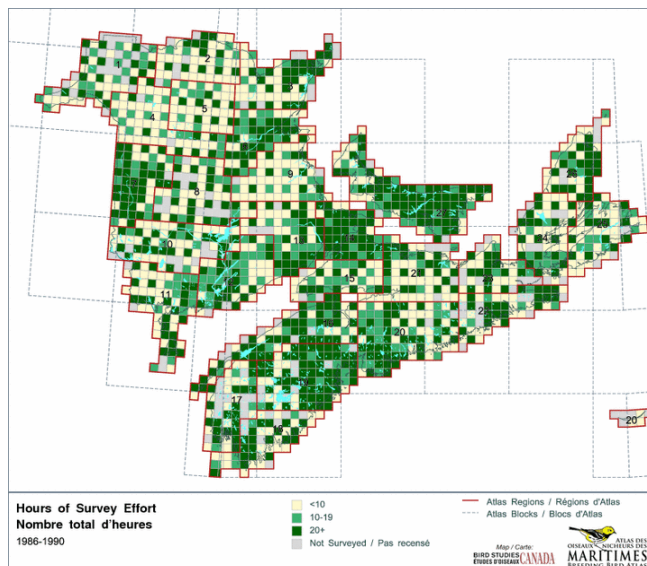
With our final field season of atlassing behind us, and with all the time and effort atlasers have put in, we deserve to look back and reflect on our accomplishments over the past five years. It is interesting to compare our achievements to those of the first Atlas. Participants in the first Atlas (1986-1990) set the bar high with 43,000 hours logged, and 1541 squares covered by 1,100 participants. Our challenge was to meet specific coverage targets so that we could assess changes in bird distribution and abundance over the 20 years between the two Atlases.

The maps at right show Atlas squares in each province coloured to indicate four levels of survey effort: grey: unsurveyed, yellow: 0–10 hours/square; light green: 10–20 hours/square, and, dark green >20 hours/square. In New Brunswick, the overall number of **light and dark green** squares (i.e., with 10 or more survey hours) was greater than the first Atlas, especially in the northwest and along the Fundy coast. Although PEI had many **green** squares during the first Atlas, atlasers completed over 500 more Breeding Evidence forms this time around, and detected 37 additional bird species! In Nova Scotia, the two maps depict a dramatic increase in hours of effort and the number of **dark green** squares across the province. In the second MBBA Atlasers detected an average of 20 more species per square in New Brunswick, than in the first Atlas, while in Nova Scotia an average of 17 more species were detected per square.

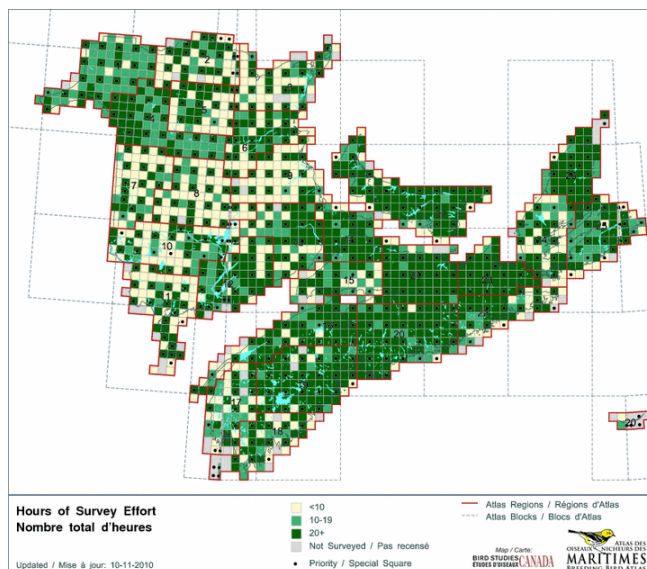
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First Atlas (1986-1990): Hours of Survey Effort per Square  
(see text for colour codes)



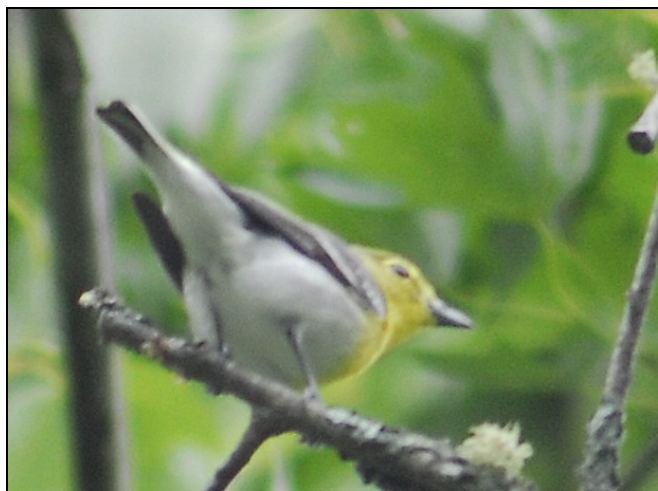
Second Atlas (2006-2010): Hours of Survey Effort per Square

In our final two field seasons, volunteers and staff worked hard to make sure coverage targets of 20 survey hours and 10 point counts per priority square were met; and we succeeded! This Atlas saw over 1000 atlasers spend 45,000 hours visiting 1685 squares. Though point counts were not part of the first



Atlas, nearly 13,000 point counts were conducted during the second Atlas.

As with the first Atlas, volunteers and staff made a number of surprising bird discoveries, notably first confirmation of breeding for Tufted Titmouse, Yellow-throated Vireo, Lesser Scaup, Orchard Oriole, and Red-bellied Woodpecker and Sandhill Crane. As well, probable breeding evidence was found for Yellow-breasted Chat and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The discovery of breeding Gray-cheeked Thrush on coastal islands in Nova Scotia was another exciting find (see [www.mba-aom.ca](http://www.mba-aom.ca) for the full story).



*Kier Gigeroff documented this Yellow-throated Vireo in 2009. Photo: Kier Gigeroff.*

Some species showed unexpected increases: Pine warbler was confirmed breeding in just six squares in the first Atlas but in 170 squares this time. And, breeding evidence for both Black Throated-Blue and Palm Warblers was recorded in about 60% more squares during the second Atlas.

Unfortunately, however, several species are showing significant declines. Atlassers were less likely to observe birds whose population has declined, and this difference is reflected as a decrease in the probability of detection between the two Atlases. Aerial foragers like swallows have declined throughout north eastern North America, and the Maritimes is no exception to this alarming pattern. Throughout the region, the probability of detecting Barn, Bank, and Cliff Swallows declined by well over 20% since the first Atlas. Several grassland species such as Bobolinks have also suffered continent-wide declines; in the Maritimes there were 25% fewer squares with breeding evidence for Bobolink in the second Atlas. Many other species that are still relatively numerous in

the Maritimes also appear to have declined in numbers, or contracted their range, including Killdeer, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Canada Warbler.

Despite all of our accomplishments in this Atlas, there is one area where we have fallen short of our goal. Up to now abundance estimates have only been made for about 37% of our breeding records. In fact, there are just over 50 species for which no abundance estimates have been done, including Peregrine Falcon (found in 51 squares), Solitary Sandpiper (50 squares), and Long-eared Owl (54 squares). We need these estimates to compare abundance between the first and second Atlas, and although we made progress since last year, when we had estimated abundance for just 12% of the records, there is still room for improvement.

The good news is that it is not too late to complete your abundance estimates! If you do not feel confident that you can estimate the population of a species in your square, take heart – it is easier than you think! The six abundance categories are quite broad, and are designed to handle our ‘guesstimates’. Remember, if you spent significant time in a square, you are the best person to estimate abundances for the species you saw. Please give it a try, and if you have questions, don’t hesitate to contact the Atlas office. **See the box on Page 7 for detailed guidelines on estimating abundance.**

**Just a friendly reminder: the  
deadline for online data entry is  
January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011!**

## **Next Steps: Why Data Cleanup is Important**

*By Ally Manthorne*

A morning stroll through the Sackville Waterfowl Park last month yielded a lot of chattering Mallards and some very flighty Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, but almost no songbirds—quite a departure from my first ever visit to this spot in early June when I could barely count the Yellow Warblers and Alder Flycatchers streaking past me. The birds may be southbound in search of warmer climes, but here at MBBA headquarters we are settling down in our chairs with steaming mugs of coffee, busy with the crucial next stage of the project: data cleanup and database finalisation! This process will ensure that all



of our collected data is ready to be used for analyses and production of the book and web-based data products.



*Northern Waterthrush. Photo: Jim Stevenson.*

Before we can produce the maps and species accounts that you will see in the published MBBA book, the massive collection of paper and electronic forms must be carefully scrutinized for errors, inconsistencies and missing information. Detecting and fixing as many of these problems as possible will create a more robust dataset, which in turn will give us what we're all eagerly anticipating: the most comprehensive and accurate source of information on bird biodiversity in the Maritimes.

The first line of defence is the data-entry program itself. For example, if we try to enter "NB" for a Hairy Woodpecker, a warning will appear on-screen telling us that we have used an inappropriate breeding code. Checks like these help to catch simple mistakes during data entry, and thus save time on "house cleaning" later.

Sadly though, the data-entry program cannot catch all types of mistakes, so the second line of defence is our team of Atlas staff and Regional Coordinators. These folks review the forms submitted by volunteers, institutions and Atlas field teams. Each and every Breeding Evidence form, Rare/Colonial Species form and Casual Observation card that you send in gets checked for accuracy and completeness before it is entered into the database!

Once Rare/Colonial Species forms are entered into the database, they are reviewed by our RCs, who decide to

accept, reject, or modify records based on the information provided on each form. RCs then consult with the Atlas Coordinator on each record. If both parties agree, the decision is final. If not, the record is passed onto members of a data verification working group for further review. Although this process has been ongoing throughout the Atlas period, it is especially important now as we move to finalise the database for species population analyses and mapping. Additional data cleanup tricks are employed by the MBBA database administrators at BSC headquarters, who create and run programs to check the database from many different angles to highlight additional errors or inconsistencies that slipped past the data-entry program and Atlas staff.

As you can imagine, going through all of these steps is time-consuming, but the effort spent on data cleanup in the coming months will ensure that your 45,000 hours of atlasing collecting 250,000 records will produce an outstanding final product that we can all take pride in. We will raise our coffee mugs to that!



*Nellie Snyder talks about atlasing. Photo: James Hirtle.*

## **Incredible Atlasers: Nellie Snyder and her Walking Car**

*By Kate Bredin*

Borne of necessity, Nellie Snyder had a unique method of Atlasing. At 93, Nellie was not able to forge through the woods to confirm the identity of a bird she heard singing, or nimbly chase after a female to see if it was carrying food back to its nestlings. Instead, Nellie explains, "I made my car walk!". She

would drive slowly up and down the back roads around Crousetown and Bridgewater with her windows down, her binoculars ready and her foot poised above the brake pedal, ready to stop short at sight or sound of a breeding bird. Nellie was able to survey two Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas squares this way – recording 95 species for Crousetown and 86 for the Bridgewater square. And Nellie was familiar with combing those country roads, as she also surveyed the Crousetown square for the first Atlas - back when she was only 73! When asked if she noticed any differences between the first Atlas and this one, Nellie had an all-too-familiar answer: “The birds are a lot scarcer”, she says, especially the swallows.

As far back as she can remember Nellie possessed a passion for natural history – and not just birds – she knows her plants as well! She wanted to pass on her life-long love of nature to young people, as she is convinced this is the only way to ensure its protection. So Nellie took on the leadership of a Wolf Cub Pack and a Girl Guide Troop, taking her young charges on camping and fishing trips to instil in them an appreciation of the natural world.

As a nursing supervisor, mother, and partner in the family woodworking business (making dory oars and tool handles), Nellie has been driving the back roads of south-western Nova Scotia all her life. But in her 90’s, Atlassing all on her own with her “walking car”, and frequently out of cell phone range, Nellie’s love for “exploring back roads full of birds” led to some close calls.

An enticing network of logging roads recently “bought by a gravel pit man” beckoned one summer morning in 2008. The gate was open so Nellie drove on, sure that she would find the quarry owner before too long to ask permission to explore. One shady branch led to another and hours of great Atlassing passed with no sign of anyone. Nellie finally decided to make her way home, retracing her path. When she reached the main exit, Nellie found it securely shut with a great big padlock and a long wire across the road. She was trapped in the gravel pit!

Nellie got out her canes and made her way to the nearby highway, a seldom-traveled rural route. After a very long and tiring wait without any passing traffic, a pick-up truck finally stopped, but only after Nellie “just about put myself in his path”! “I think I can get you out of here,” the young man told Nellie. He held the wire across the gravel road high in the air while

Nellie drove her little low car under it. Nellie figured this was not the first time he had employed this trick!

On another trip in 2007 on Easter Monday, when back roads are notoriously waterlogged and the ditches full of snowmelt, Nellie got her little car thoroughly stuck in a ditch. As the water seeped into the car and reached the floorboards, Nellie told her dog that they “just had to go for it” because, as she said to me, “I had no intention of staying there!” She rocked the car back and forth as if in a snow bank and managed to get out, luckily without any major damage to her trusty Atlassing “car partner”.

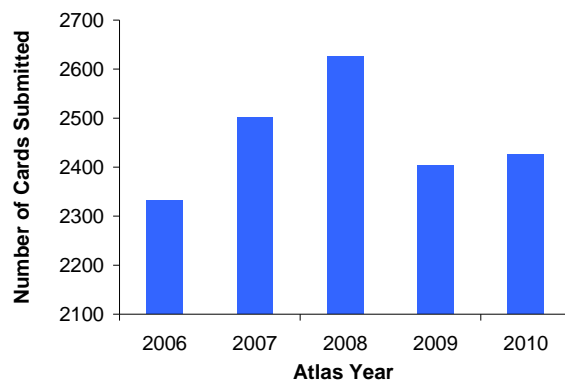


Early season atlassing. Photo: Raymond Chiasson.

## Five Years of Atlas Field Work: Peaks and Valleys *By Kate Bredin*

These bar graphs show the changes over the five years of Atlas fieldwork in our volunteer efforts and atlassing achievements.

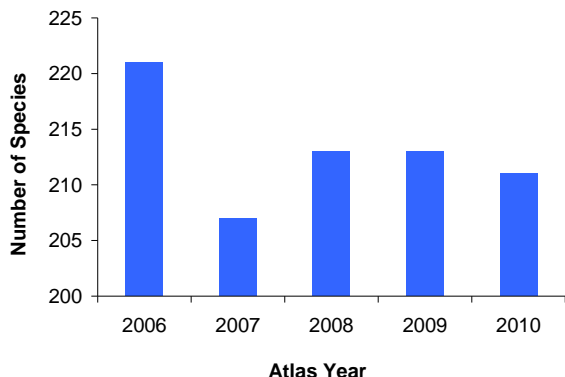
### Breeding Evidence Cards Submitted per Year



The number of Breeding Evidence forms submitted per year is one measure of the effort that participants

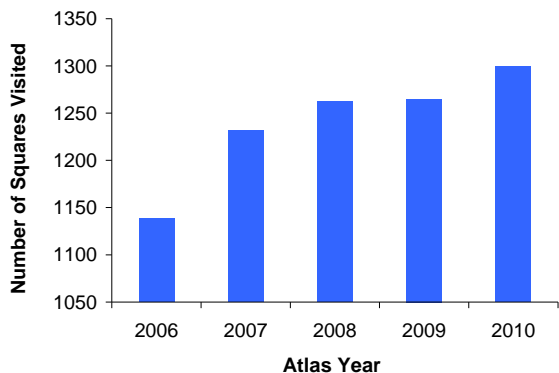
put into Atlassing each year. The number of cards submitted peaked in 2008, midway through the Atlas project, when Atlasser participation was likely at its highest. By this time many volunteers had signed up and were Atlassing effectively, but few had completed their squares or stopped atlassing. Fewer forms were submitted in 2009 and 2010 as volunteers completed field work for their squares.

### Total Number Bird Species Recorded per Year



During our first field season in 2006, volunteers recorded a greater number of different bird species than in any other year. This is likely because, once atlassers had confirmed that a species was breeding in a square, they did not need to record it in subsequent years. 2007 was a low “species year”, but volunteers recorded more species again in 2008 and 2009. This increase may reflect a concerted effort to confirm species from less-explored habitats (e.g. wetlands), or a focus on certain species guilds (e.g. owls or seabirds) to fill gaps in the list of expected species in each region.

### Number of Squares Visited per Year



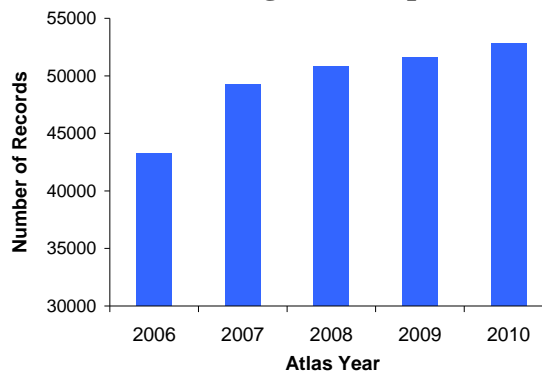
The number of squares visited per year increased steadily throughout the entire Atlas period as Atlassers were encouraged to move to new areas to collect data. In the final years, volunteers and staff pushed to increase coverage of un-surveyed squares in order to

meet the target of 20 hours in all priority squares, and to ensure that coverage was similar to the first Atlas so that our results could be readily compared.



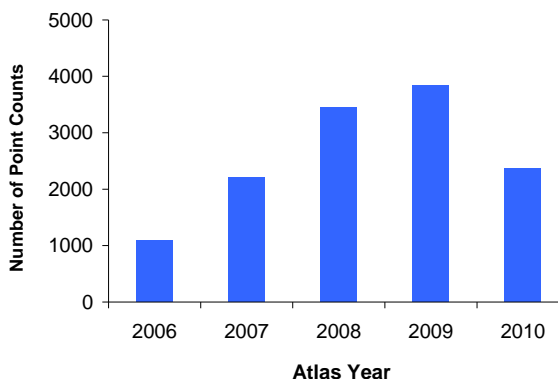
*Kelly Carter observed this Northern Cardinal male with its fledged young in 2010. Photo: Kelly Carter.*

### Number of Breeding Records per Year



Each species recorded with associated breeding evidence on a Breeding Evidence form constitutes an Atlas “record”. The number of individual breeding records submitted increased yearly throughout the Atlas period. We see this encouraging result as a sign that every year, atlassers worked harder to find and record breeding evidence for birds!

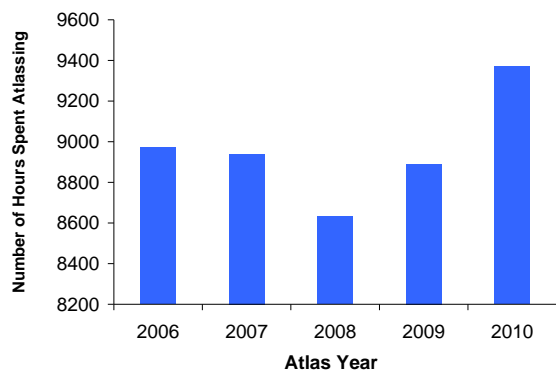
### Number of Point Counts Completed per Year



The number of point counts completed increased annually until 2009, as volunteers gained confidence in point counting and conducted more counts. At the

beginning of 2009, volunteers were encouraged to finish off any remaining counts required for their squares, to ensure that the point count component of the Atlas dataset was complete. Many Atlasers then focused on Atlassing in priority squares and under-surveyed areas in the final year, rather than devoting time to completing point counts.

### Total Hours Spent Atlassing per Year



The number of hours spent Atlassing is another measure of overall annual Atlassing effort. After similar numbers of Atlassing hours in the first two years, there was quite a dip in 2008, even though this year produced the most breeding evidence forms. However, the number of hours spent Atlassing continued to increase again during the last two years, as volunteers worked harder to finish their squares, record those harder-to-find species, and to bump up breeding evidence to “confirmed”.

### Birding Through the Winter: Six Ways to Get your Fix

*By Ally Manthorne*

It’s a bittersweet time for atlasers. While it’s exciting to see the results of our Atlas results take shape (see the Data Summary feature on the website), many of us are going to miss those morning point counts and forays into unexplored habitat in search of breeding birds. I remember one morning after packing up camp, our crew found five different species of woodpecker, including American Three-toed and Black-backed, while bumping along an old logging road in northern New Brunswick! That was definitely a sighting I would have missed if I had not been out there atlassing. Even though our Atlas fieldwork is over, there are still many ways that you can get your birding fix, even in the dead of winter!



*White-breasted Nuthatch: coming to a feeder near you this winter? Photo: Kyle Blaney*

Check out the many volunteer opportunities on the Bird Studies Canada (BSC) webpage. Why not join **Project FeederWatch** and put your backyard birding to good use this winter? Scientists use FeederWatch data to study the broad-scale movements of bird populations during the winter months. Your FeederWatch sightings help to track the long-term distribution and abundance trends of birds overwintering in North America. To find out more or to join in the fun, contact:

**Project FeederWatch**, Bird Studies Canada  
 P.O. Box 160, 115 Front Street, Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0  
 Phone: 1-888-448-2473, or (519)586-3531  
 Email: [pfw@bsc-eoc.org](mailto:pfw@bsc-eoc.org)

Many atlasers also participate in the annual **Christmas Bird Count (CBC)** as a great way to keep in touch with fellow birders while brushing up on our winter bird identification skills. The CBC began in 1900 as an alternative to the annual “side hunt”, where hunters competed for the highest tally of birds and other animals shot on Christmas day. Together with the annual Breeding Bird Survey (see below) the CBC continues to be an invaluable source of long-term data on bird populations across North America. To find a count near you, contact:

**Christmas Bird Count**, Bird Studies Canada  
 P.O. Box 160  
 115 Front Street, Port Rowan, ON N0E 1M0  
 CBC Coordinator: Dick Cannings  
 Phone: (250) 493-3393  
 Email: [dickcannings@shaw.ca](mailto:dickcannings@shaw.ca)

### Abundance Estimates...we still need them!

If you haven't had a chance to do so yet, it would be great if you could make abundance estimates for all species in squares where you have been working. Right now we have estimates for just 37% of our records, which will make it difficult to compare our results to the first atlas.

Remember to estimate the number of **breeding pairs of each species in the square, based on the amount of suitable habitat for the species in the square**. And keep in mind that these are estimates so we are asking for your "Best Guess". Because the abundance categories are very broad (**0 = 0 pairs; 1 = 1 pair; 2 = 2 - 10 pairs; 3 = 11 - 100 pairs; 4 = 101 - 1000 pairs; 5 = 1001 - 10,000 pairs**) it is not hard to estimate species abundance in squares you have atlased on a regular basis.

The online form for making abundance estimates is straightforward - give it a try! Simply login, choose a square and then click the green "Abundance Scores" button (it's on the right, beside the "Casual Obs." button). For additional instructions, check page 12 of your Atlaser Guide, as well as MBBA Newsletter Issue 5, Fall 2008 (p.11). If you have any questions or want assistance in making your abundance estimates, please contact the Atlas office. **Help us maximize our ability to compare between the first and second Atlas by making abundance estimates.**

While you wait for the snow to melt and the songbirds to return, find out which **Nocturnal Owl Survey** routes are available in your area. This program targets owl species but also American Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe which, because of their crepuscular habits, aren't usually detected on daytime surveys. Last year my route took me along a moonlit lake in Guysborough County, where I was thrilled to find Barred, Northern Saw-whet and Great Horned Owls, along with a pair of Common Loons calling to each other. To see which routes are available, contact:

#### **Greg Campbell**

Bird Studies Canada - Atlantic Region  
P.O. Box 6227 Sackville, N.B. E4L 1G6  
Phone: (506) 364-5025  
Fax: (506) 364-5062  
Email: [gcampbell@bsc-eoc.org](mailto:gcampbell@bsc-eoc.org)

Coming soon to a chimney near you: **Maritimes Swiftwatch!** BSC's Atlantic office is anticipating the launch of a pilot project this coming spring. Aimed at monitoring the threatened Chimney Swift, this program will debut in major cities across the Maritimes and will help monitor swift numbers, behaviour, and movements throughout their Maritimes

range resulting in comprehensive and comparable population trends for our region. For more information, contact:

**Becky Stewart** Bird Studies Canada - Atlantic Region  
P.O. Box 6227 Sackville, N.B. E4L 1G6  
Phone: (506) 364-5047 Email: [bstewart@bsc-eoc.org](mailto:bstewart@bsc-eoc.org)



*Purple Sandpipers are surveyed where they overwinter on rocky coasts here in the Maritimes. Photo: Peter Thomas.*

Can you identify shorebirds? Do you visit our rocky coasts in the winter? Volunteers are needed to survey rocky coastal sites this winter for Purple Sandpipers for the **Maritimes Shorebird Survey**. The data that shorebird surveyors collect are used to assess shorebird population trends and distributions and to identify areas of importance to shorebirds in the Maritimes. For more information please contact:

#### **Kate Robinson**

Maritimes Shorebird Survey  
PO Box 6227, Sackville, NB E4L 1G6.  
Phone: (506) 364-5058.  
Email: [kate.robinson@ec.gc.ca](mailto:kate.robinson@ec.gc.ca)

Why not consider getting involved with **Piping Plover conservation** in 2011! Every spring Piping Plovers return to Atlantic Canada to nest on our sandy beaches. From April through August, a dedicated team of staff and volunteers help protect and monitor this endangered shorebird. Conservation work is coordinated by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and they need your help! Volunteer opportunities can range from one time efforts helping put up educational signage to becoming a dedicated monitor for the season. To learn more or get involved contact the coordinator in your area:

#### **In PEI: Island Nature Trust**

Tracy MacDonald (902) 892-7513  
[plovers@islandnaturetrust.ca](mailto:plovers@islandnaturetrust.ca)

**In northern New Brunswick / Acadian Peninsula:**

Nature New Brunswick: Lewnanny Richardson  
(506) 395-3500 [pluvier@nb.aibn.com](mailto:pluvier@nb.aibn.com)

**In New Brunswick's Bouctouche area:**

Irving Ecocentre / La Dune de Bouctouche  
Michelle Maillet (506) 743-2600  
[niccomax@hotmail.com](mailto:niccomax@hotmail.com)

**In Nova Scotia: Bird Studies Canada**

Sue Abbott (902) 426-4055  
[nsplovers@gmail.com](mailto:nsplovers@gmail.com)

All of these projects make an invaluable contribution to the growing body of avian knowledge in the Maritimes, and as a bonus, they will help keep our bird identification skills honed until the next Atlas! Let's beat the end-of-atlassing blues and keep on birding!



The relative abundance of Black-throated Green has been mapped by Andrew Couturier. Photo: Ruth Strohmer.

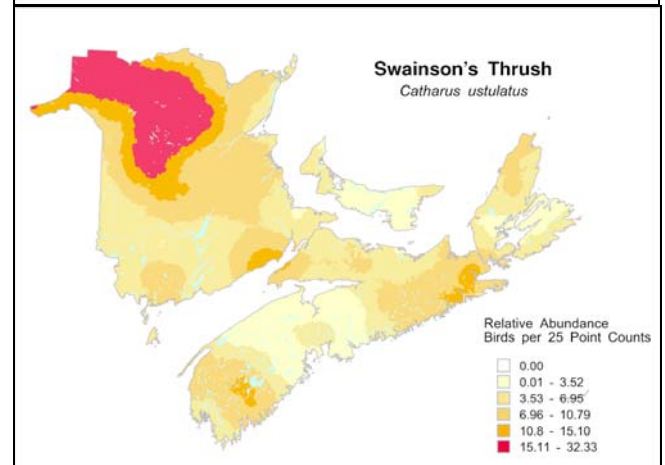
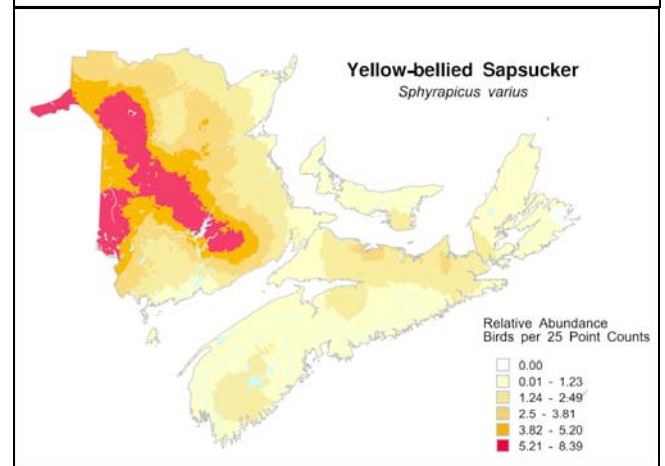
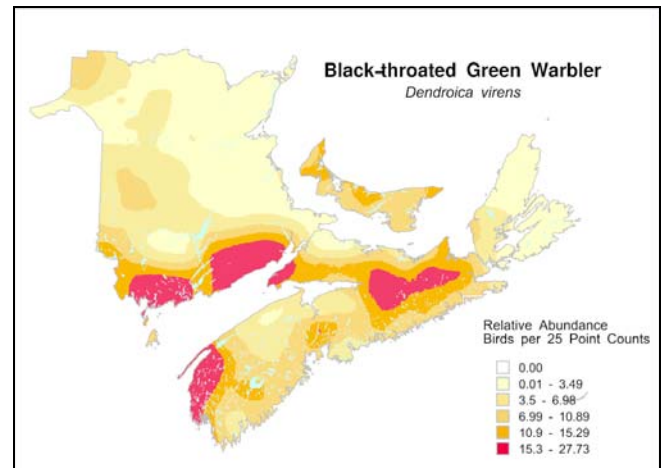
**Moving from Birding to the Book**

By Kate Bredin

Although we still have much to do, we are now planning what dedicated volunteers are anxiously awaiting - the book! The Atlas will be published as an English and French book, as well as a bilingual web-site. Once we have cleaned and finalized the Atlas dataset, the final maps of distribution and abundance (from point counts) for each species will be produced at BSC headquarters.

In late October, Atlas staff and partners held a publication meeting at the Beaubassin Field Station, at the edge of a salt marsh overlooking the Bay of Fundy. It was a serene setting to tackle plans for the final stages of this multi-faceted Atlas project. At Beaubassin, we drafted outlines and assigned writers for the introductory chapters and appendices that will set the stage and provide the context for the heart of the book - the species accounts. In the not-too-distant future, volunteers will be able to see the fruits of their labour and look with pride at the printed product that sums up their five years of accomplishments. Our

Atlas publication is destined to become a standard on the bookshelves of naturalists, birdwatchers, educators and professionals interested in, and responsible for, conserving bird diversity across the Maritimes for the next twenty years.



A taste of what's to come: Andrew Couturier at BSC created these draft Relative Abundance maps for Black-Throated Green Warbler (top), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (middle) and Swainson's Thrush (bottom) using MBBA point count data.

## Return to St. Paul Island: The Search for Sympatric Thrushes

By Greg Campbell and Kate Bredin

Last summer, Greg Campbell took a break from his High Elevation Landbird Program field surveys to join an Atlas expedition to St. Paul Island - a small, isolated island about 5 km long by 1.5 km wide, 25 km off the north-eastern tip of Cape Breton in the Cabot Strait. Greg's experience with Bicknell's Thrush songs was needed determine whether they nested there, or whether only Gray-cheeked Thrush was present, or if - even more tantalising - both thrush species might breed together on St. Paul.

Members of the 2006 Atlas expedition to St. Paul thought they heard Gray-cheeked Thrush, but lacked the equipment and expertise to catch the birds or record their songs. This year's team included Greg, Atlas Coordinator Kate Bredin, Environment Canada's Richard Elliot and atlasser Malcolm Elliot, and BSC summer staff Joel Ralston and Avery Bartels, who were tasked with catching, banding and taking blood and feather samples from any thrushes caught in their mist nets.

St. Paul is surrounded by rugged cliffs, and its hilly terrain is covered with impenetrable *tuckamore* - thick waves of spruce and fir stunted by wind and harsh weather. Few cliff-nesting seabirds breed on its steep and exposed wave-swept shores. The island has had a varied history of habitation, beginning with construction of the first lighthouses in 1838, and ending when the last light keepers departed in the 1980s. The island has hosted a life-saving station, a cannery, a war-time Marconi wireless station, and a radio location aid for ship traffic. Though most structures have disintegrated, a few recent buildings stand empty and forlorn on grassy hilltops.

St. Paul also has a darker history. Its ragged shores, stormy and foggy weather, and proximity to Gulf of St. Lawrence shipping lanes led to its nickname "Graveyard of the Gulf". It has seen 350 shipwrecks, and several thousand people are buried in unmarked graves. However, modern navigational aids have reduced the island's menace since the 1950s, and we were prepared with an expert boat captain with an expert boat captain, floater suits, a week's supply of food, and team members experienced in fieldwork on North Atlantic islands.

We left the Bay St. Lawrence wharf in early evening on Canada Day, aboard Captain Cox's 24-foot whale-watching Zodiac. We were treated to Northern Gannets plunge-diving near the cliffs of Cape North, Black Guillemots speeding past like low-flying torpedoes, and occasional Leach's Storm-petrels dancing across our bow. Suddenly Captain Cox turned to the right - a Humpback Whale blew just ahead! Cox eased in behind the whale as it lifted its flukes high and dove - a thrilling first sighting for the "landbird" types on board.



Atlantic Cove Camp, St. Paul Island. Photo: Richard Elliot.

We came ashore at Atlantic Cove, the main landing site on St. Paul's eastern shore for hundreds of years, once outfitted with winches and sloping wharves for hauling up supplies. In 2010, it was simply a sheltered cove with a cobble beach, topped by an 8m cliff which we had to scale to get onto the island! Richard, a veteran of cliff-nesting seabird research, scrambled up the cliff and secured a rope to haul up our gear and ourselves. As we scouted for a camp-site, we could hear a Bicknell's Thrush singing in the evening light - a promising start!

The sun was rising when Greg awoke at 4:30, and checking around his tent, found he had almost slept on a Leach's Storm-petrel burrow! We downed our coffee and headed out to set up mist-nets where we had heard Bicknell's Thrush singing the evening before. Within 10 minutes we had caught the first Bicknell's of the day, and another shortly thereafter! The habitat around the mist-net site was very different from typical Bicknell's habitat - impassable dense fir thickets. Here, Bicknell's Thrushes were singing with

Tennessee Warblers in sparse, boggy spruce and alder groves. We watched as the team banded and fitted the birds with geolocators, small devices that continually record time and day length to provide data on the birds' location over the course of a year.



*The rugged topography and dense spruce forests on St. Paul Island are favoured by Bicknell's Thrush. Photo: Greg Campbell*

We then left the banding team to hike to Lena Lake, a high pond near on top of the island, while others banded birds and atlassed around Atlantic Cove. As we climbed the mountain, vegetation quickly changed to a nearly impenetrable wall of spruce and fir, so thick our feet rarely touched the ground as we pushed through. Here we had expected to find Bicknell's Thrush, but noted only a few singing, along with Fox Sparrows, Blackpoll Warblers, Mourning Warblers, and White-winged Crossbills. We finally reached Lena Lake after three hours, with severely bruised shins and minus a GPS, compass, and map! Those bristly spruce boughs seem to have fingers that reach into pockets to pull things out. We checked our remaining GPS to find we had only travelled about 2 km in three hours!

There were no ducks along the lake's margins, but we did spot a family of crows and a young Bald Eagle, and heard the only White-throated Sparrow of the trip. We then crashed our way back down the hill, finally emerging from the tuckamore on the south side of Atlantic Cove, where several Black Guillemots flew out of nesting crevices in the cliffs. We had covered only about 4 km in over five hours, though we

managed to add seven new species to our list and increased breeding evidence for three others.

The rest of the day was spent atlassing in the strip between impenetrable forest and cliff edges, recording a single Bank Swallow, Song Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers carrying food, and a pair of agitated Spotted Sandpipers. At sunset, we set up the nets close to camp, ready to open at first light, where we could hear two Bicknell's Thrushes duelling songs in the gathering dusk. We ended the day by the campfire, recounting our adventures surrounded by surf and stars, and wondered if Gray-cheeked Thrush lurked somewhere, hidden in the island's forests.



*A Blackpoll Warbler sports a newly acquired CWS band. Photo: Greg Campbell*

We arose at 3:45 the following morning, and again caught and blood-sampled a Bicknell's Thrush within 10 minutes of opening our nets. Joel and Avery spent much of the morning trying to catch more thrushes without success, while others atlassed around the cove.

### **Help with Hand Writing**

One challenge we occasionally face while entering Atlas data is interpreting illegible writing! This can slow data entry, and we do not want to lose your valuable information. Messy Breeding Evidence forms cannot be read by our data scanner and must be re-written or entered manually. Rare and Colonial Species Forms, Point Count Forms, and visit information and additional comments on Breeding Evidence forms, are always entered into the database by Atlas staff. If this information is unclear we have to contact you to confirm your data. As rare and colonial bird sightings and habitat descriptions are further reviewed by other experts, clarity and legibility are essential. So before you send in your completed forms, please ask yourself: "Will others be able to read my writing?"



*A Bicknell's Thrush, about to receive a geolocator during the St. Paul Island expedition. Photo: Kate Bredin.*

We broke camp by 9 am, lowering our gear by rope over the cliff edge to the waiting boat, one piece at a time. Captain Cox arrived at 11am sharp to get us off the island before the rising winds stranded us. Wet and tired, but happy with our results, we were back at Bay St. Lawrence by 1 pm. We had recorded 35 species, including nine new for the square, and had caught, banded and blood-sampled three Bicknell's Thrushes, fitting two with geolocators.

We didn't hear a single Gray-cheeked Thrush throughout our stay. However, as the first Atlas expedition had camped at Petrie's Cove on the opposite side of the island, we can't say for sure that Gray-cheeks are absent from St. Paul. The question of whether both species breed there together will have to remain unanswered... for now.

### Spotlight on Institutional Data

In addition to data from registered atlasers, we have also been gathering breeding bird observations from "institutional" sources, such as federal and provincial government agencies, forestry and wind power industries, NGOs, and ongoing volunteer bird survey programs that compile breeding bird data.

For example, aerial surveys for Maritimes breeding waterfowl conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) are a wonderful source of data collected by an effective method that we do not have the resources to employ. Similarly, Nova Scotia aerial Bald Eagle surveys provide data for remote eagle nests that would be difficult for volunteers to access. Environmental

NGOs like the Nova Scotia Bird Society have generously provided data collected by their members. And, one of the richest institutional data sources are volunteer data collection programs that are ongoing, such as the CWS-led Breeding Bird Survey and Nest Record Scheme, and Bird Studies Canada's projects like the Nocturnal Owl Survey and the High Elevation Landbird Program.

Although nothing comes close to 45,000 hours logged by volunteers since 2006, the MBBA is very grateful to our partners for access to these data; their information invaluable augments and enriches the MBBA dataset. In turn, the MBBA can add value to these institutional data, by adding them to volunteer-collected breeding records for the same species, or similar species guilds, and then mapping species distributions on a regional scale.



*A Barred Owl watches the atlaser. Photo: Ally Manthorne.*

### Calling All Photographers!

As we plan for Atlas publication, we continue to look for good quality photographs of Maritime breeding birds and their habitats. We require a representative colour image of each species to include with its write-up, and we are also looking for photos that depict the range of breeding habitats throughout the Maritimes. If you have such photos, please consider submitting them to John Chardine, MBBA Photo Editor (contact info below) for evaluation by the photo selection committee. And if you know of someone who has images, please put them in touch with John. Here are the Atlas photo guidelines to help you select images to send in:

**Location:** We would like to include photos of breeding birds and their habitats taken in the Maritimes by as many Maritime photographers as possible.

**Quality:** 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.

**Composition:** Photos should be of the whole bird, in good, even, front light. The subject, particularly the head and eye should be sharp with minimal 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. We do **not** plan to show images of birds at the nest except in rare circumstances.



*Hmm...Would this Eastern Wood Pewee make the cut?*  
Photo: Ally Manthorne

**Ownership:** 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. Your name will be printed alongside the photograph.

We welcome your photo submissions! Please send images to:

John Chardine, Environment Canada  
P.O. Box 6227  
Sackville, NB E4L 1G6  
Email: john.chardine@ec.gc.ca  
Phone: (506) 364-5046.

### **Encounters of the Large, Furry Kind...**

*By Patrick Kelly*

This past June I was atlassing in the bottom of a sparsely inhabited square - 20LQ14 (Dargie Lake) - in Region 16, about 30 km inland from Annapolis Royal. I was trying to cover the south edge of the square and was at least 10 km from the nearest house. The map showed a bridge ahead over a very short stream that connected two lakes. I didn't want my car to scare any waterfowl, so I parked about 300 metres before the bridge and started to walk quietly towards the water. As luck would have it, there were no ducks. I took a few pictures of the lake and my camera was at the ready as I crossed the bridge and headed around a turn. There seemed to be a marsh ahead on the left that looked like it was worth checking. Suddenly a large adult black bear came into view around the turn, and was walking right towards me in the middle of the road! We both stopped dead and looked at each other. The bear retreated first, thank heavens, and I heaved a sigh of relief!



*A Black bear ambles towards the surprised atlasser.*  
Photo: Patrick Kelly

But after a minute my curiosity finally got the better of me so I walked slowly forward to see where the bear had gone. The road had a short straight section and then curved to the left. The bear was just standing at the far curve, looking back over its shoulder at me. When it saw me again it ambled off into the woods. I turned and went back the other way, whistling loudly so it would know where I was. After taking a few more pictures, I returned to the car and decided, in the end, I had atlassed close enough to the south edge of that square!

*Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas is a cooperative project of Bird Studies Canada, Environment Canada, the provincial governments of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, Nature NB, the NS Bird Society, the PEI Natural History Society and hundreds of volunteer bird watchers. The project will determine the distribution, abundance and status of all birds breeding in the Maritimes. For more information, or to donate to the project, please visit our website [www.mba-aom.ca](http://www.mba-aom.ca) or call toll free 1-866-528-5275 (1-866-5ATLAS5).*

### Thank-you Atlas Partners and Supporters!

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