



Logo artwork by Jim Glover

THE OHIO ATLASER

Newsletter of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II

THE 2009 ATLASING REPORT

by Matthew Shumar and Paul Rodewald
Ohio State University

The past four field seasons have flown by, and breeding bird records are rapidly adding up across the state. Volunteers have documented nearly 300,000 records of nesting birds for the Atlas, and there is much data yet to be compiled. Nearly 650 blocks are marked as complete and about 82% (3,640 blocks) have data. Some 203 breeding species have been recorded, 186 of which are now confirmed breeders. Though there is still a great amount work to do in our final two years, we are making solid progress in documenting breeding birds throughout Ohio. We have added an additional year to the project and to prepare for 2010 and 2011, we are reviewing our progress to date and where we need to focus future efforts (see *Strategies for Atlasing*, page 3).



Common Raven fledgling,
Jefferson Co., Ohio, spring 2008
Photo © Aaron Boone

Before we talk about future plans, let's review some important achievements in recent years. Above and beyond the stats just mentioned, one of the most interesting Atlas discoveries to date was the confirmation of **Common Raven** in spring 2008 when fledged young were discovered by Scott Albaugh in Fernwood State Forest, Jefferson County. This sighting marked the first confirmed breeding for ravens in about 100 years in Ohio! With other records of ravens in southeastern Ohio in recent years, atlasers should be alert to the possibility of other nesting pairs. In a similar vein, in July 2009 a female **Merlin** was observed by John Pogacnik feeding fledged young in Ashtabula County, the first well documented nesting since 1858! Welcome back, Merlins and Ravens! In addition to these returning species, a new breeder for Ohio, the **Eurasian Collared-Dove**, was documented by Troy Shively in Logan County. This dove has been recorded in six atlas blocks in western Ohio since 2007, but was not confirmed breeding until June 2009. This hearty dove was introduced to the Bahamas in the mid-70s and has established breeding populations across much of the U.S., especially in southern states.

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Several species are showing obvious shifts in breeding range since the first Atlas. **Bald Eagle**, with only 5 confirmed nests in Atlas I, now has over 200 confirmed nests with breeding occurring nearly statewide. Similarly, **Osprey** were not detected during the first Atlas, and we now have reports of over 50 breeding confirmations. Both of these species were affected by the pesticide DDT, and since its ban have seen population rebounds. Several species show a northward range expansion within Ohio. During 1982-1987, **Northern Parula** was found in 40 blocks (confirmed in 4), primarily in the southern third of the state. Results from Atlas II show a clear northward expansion with Parulas detected in over 400 blocks so far, and confirmed in 29 blocks. Similarly, **Pine Warblers**, detected almost exclusively in the Appalachian region of Ohio in Atlas I, are now found in other regions of the state, especially northeastern Ohio. Another amazing story in 2009 was the widespread breeding by **Pine Siskins**, following a major invasion in the previous winter. Though not a range expansion, the confirmation of breeding in at least 22 Atlas blocks(!) was unprecedented for Ohio;

breeding records were widely distributed in glaciated counties, but mostly in northeastern Ohio.

Interestingly, there are several species showing an apparent southward expansion within Ohio. **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were found in only two blocks during the first Atlas and observations were limited to Ashtabula County. In Atlas II, most records still occur in northeastern Ohio, but they are more numerous (42 blocks) with two records in the Mohican State Forest area and one in the Oak Openings. **Winter Wren** exhibits a similar southward shift. This beautiful songster was found in only two northeast Ohio blocks during Atlas I, but in Atlas II already has records from 27 blocks, including areas of Mohican State Forest and the Hocking Hills. Climate change has often been cited to explain many of the northward expansion trends in species occurrence, but our preliminary findings suggest that other factors such as habitat change may be involved. Succession of old fields to forest, urbanization, and other landscape changes along with changes in climate may create interesting new patterns of species distribution. Let's put it this way...who knows what you'll find when atlas-ing!!

Key Goals for 2010

The Atlas is faced with some major tasks to finish this project by 2011 (yes, if you hadn't heard, we have added an additional year to the project). The only way to complete the project will be to have continued strong support from those already contributing field time, and to have involvement from new individuals and volunteers that have been slow to get involved. With only two years remaining, 2010 and 2011 is the time to make it happen!! If you are interested in contributing, please make sure that you are part of this historic project! Here are our key goals for volunteers in 2010

1. **Finish your owned blocks in 2010**—Many people signed up for the Atlas early on and have been slow to start work in their blocks. This is the year to finish those blocks, so that we can easily assess what will be needed in 2011.
2. **Identify blocks in need of coverage**—Whether you wish to own a block or not, try to identify areas near you (or farther afield) that have little survey effort. Try to contribute a morning of your time to the block(s). Please contact a Regional Coordinator or us for assistance in selecting blocks if you need help.
3. **Enter your data (ASAP)**—It is more important than ever to enter your data in a timely manner. There is no easy way to know if a block has bird records if your data have not been entered. Please enter data from previous years as soon as possible. If you need help, just mail or email your records to us and we will enter it. Also, at this point, new data need to be entered within a few weeks after you collect it...if at all possible.
4. **Encourage friends not involved in the Atlas to contribute**—This is an historic project and one that we hope birders of all experience levels will contribute to. If you know anyone not yet involved, please encourage them to volunteer for the Atlas.
5. **Get involved in a block busting event (or organize one)**—Contact us or your Regional Coordinator to learn about events in 2010. See page 6 for a report on a block busting weekend in northeastern Ohio last year.

Strategies for Atlasing

by Matthew Shumar and Aaron Boone
Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II

The past four years have been very productive for OBBA II, and Ohio birders should be proud of everything that the Atlas has achieved. Goals for the second Atlas are broader than those of OBBA I and volunteers have contributed an incredible amount of effort towards those targets. That said, there is still much to do and planning for the last 2 years of the atlas is important to identify gaps in coverage and prioritize your efforts. Here are some things to keep in mind when planning your atlasing in May, June, and July.

Explore block maps & species lists

While any and all observations are important to the Atlas, it is important to get good coverage across all blocks in the state. There are still hundreds of blocks that lack bird records, and many others are incomplete. Certain areas of the state show larger numbers of blocks with little or no data, and this is especially true for areas like Lima, Zanesville and Portsmouth (Figure 1). If you live or travel in these areas, any data would be a very significant contribution! In addition, many atlasers are surprised



to learn that a nearby park, wildlife area, or state nature preserve has few submitted records.

Identify blocks in need of data

In 2010 we strongly encourage volunteers to complete all blocks that they own and promptly enter their data or mail to us. Once complete, we ask that volunteers look for new blocks in need of data and sign-up for one or more of those. Whether you are a block owner or just wish to contribute records, there is a need to identify blocks in need of data. Have a look at our website: <http://www.ohiobirds.org/obba2/>

or contact your Regional Coordinator or us to find out which blocks near you need coverage. See Key Goals for 2010 (page 2).

Identify habitats in the block

The number of species that can be recorded in a block is driven by the variety of habitats. As a result, birding by habitat is typically the best approach to effective atlasing. At times, it can be challenging to find a variety of habitats within a 10 square-mile area, but this adds to the fun. You'll see that exploring the nooks and crannies of a block often yields interesting surprises, even close to your home. Some habitat patches may not look like much, but can still be worth investigating. In Columbus, for example, patches of habitat within city limits have yielded tremendous discoveries for Ohio such as *breeding* Upland Sandpiper, Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, and Lark Sparrow — the last two have bred on OSU campus just one mile from Ohio Stadium!!

If you're unfamiliar with habitats in your block, the most efficient thing to do is get out and explore the road network in the block. Many rural roads are quiet, and they frequently traverse great habitat that can easily be birded from the roadside. It's best to avoid atlasing along busy roads and highways as roadside stops are dangerous, and traffic noise makes it hard to detect singing birds. Using electronic mapping tools can also be useful to find habitats in your block that you may have been unaware of. Careful examination of these maps will frequently reveal patches of habitat that may not be obvious when you're in the field. Of course, the majority of these areas will likely be private property, but select parcels of private land may be worth investigating, so investing effort into contacting certain property owners may pay off in a big way.

Use time effectively

Efficiency in the use of your field time will be key, especially considering that excess unproductive time spent in one block could be devoted to a

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Key Points for Everyone

- There are only two years left for OBBA II (2010 and 2011).
- You don't need to "own" a block or enter data on a computer or turn in hundreds of records—any level of participation is welcome.
- All we need for a species record to count is the date and specific location (street address, GPS Coordinates, or written description).
- We can accept any bird record from Ohio **back to 2006**. Check your field notes... We will gladly accept photocopies of field notes or any other format.
- **NOW** is the time to get involved! Thank you for your contributions!
- Encourage others that you know to get involved.

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neighboring block with little or no coverage. Judging the productivity of your field time might be challenging so it may be useful to keep a log of how many new species you add during each bout of atlasing. For example. You set a goal of 75 species for your block based on the block's habitat diversity and results from the first atlas. For your first day in the field, a complete 5-hour canvas of your block on an early June morning quickly generates a list of 45 species. Subsequent days in the field gradually increase your species total and by 15 field hours, you've accumulated 70 species. Have you noticed that it is getting hard to add new species? The fact that you already have 70 species is fantastic, but strategy is now key in order to make the most of your future time investment. At this point, we suggest that you target a few new species and limit your effort to just a few hours.

Your next step should be looking for holes in your block's species list. Looking at this will reveal species that should or could be present. Future survey efforts should be focused on filling in these gaps. You may be missing nocturnal species or even common species, like Northern Cardinal, that were somehow overlooked. It is good to have a direction in mind while atlasing. The "let's go see what I can find today" approach is less effective for surveying a block once you have a fairly high species total.

Now that you have an idea of the additional effort required, review your block for areas that could add new species. If you are surveying a priority block, keep on track towards the 25 hour goal that OBBA II is seeking. Pay close attention to the new species added per time invested. If you are up to 15-20 hours of effort and have only added 1 or 2 species in the past 5 hours despite focused effort, please consider moving on to another block and discussing with Regional or Project Coordinators about assigning complete status to your block(s).

An additional suggestion for detecting the most species: spread your survey effort throughout

the breeding season. A few field hours in early spring can be good for nesting owls and raptors. June will add the widest diversity of species. And late summer atlasing (for example, mid-July to early-August) can also be very rewarding despite the fact that birds tend to be more quiet. Many species are still actively feeding young during this period, so it is a great time for increasing the number of breeding confirmations on your list. Note that getting to the field early in the day is especially important when the weather is hot.

Atlasing is great fun and certainly has the potential to improve anyone's birding skill. The possibilities for increasing our knowledge of Ohio's nesting birds are numerous. Learn what atlasing is all about today and sign up to survey breeding birds in Ohio! We guarantee that you won't be disappointed.



Barn Swallows
Fledglings
Photo © Dane Adams

Species Spotlight: Golden-crowned Kinglet

by Bill Whan
Columbus, Ohio

Golden-crowned kinglets (*Regulus satrapa*) are among Ohio's rarest regular nesters. Because their habitat needs are seldom met in Ohio, finding their nests involves painstakingly searching in a fairly small number of locations. Although M. C. Read of Hudson wrote in 1854 that this species "remains in pairs throughout the summer," no other early authority mentions it as a breeder, and Ohio's first confirmed nesting came from Columbiana County in



1962. Since then nests have been found in Lucas, Medina, Summit, Portage, and Lake counties. Their stronger showing in northeastern Ohio may reflect earlier appearances in nearby areas of Pennsylvania, but they should be looked for wherever suitable habitat exists.

Historically, Golden-crowned Kinglets nested in eastern coniferous forests well north of Ohio, except for areas at higher altitudes in the Appalachians south to North Carolina. Over the past few decades, however, small numbers of kinglet nests have been discovered in plantations of mature conifers at much lower altitudes in Ohio and nearby states. Kinglets prefer trees from 30 to 60 feet tall for nesting. Nearly all the Ohio nests have been found in spruce trees (often Norway spruce) in dense, closed canopy conifer plantations, with a few nesting in hemlock stands. They have nested in pine plantations in West Virginia, however, and elsewhere in more open situations.

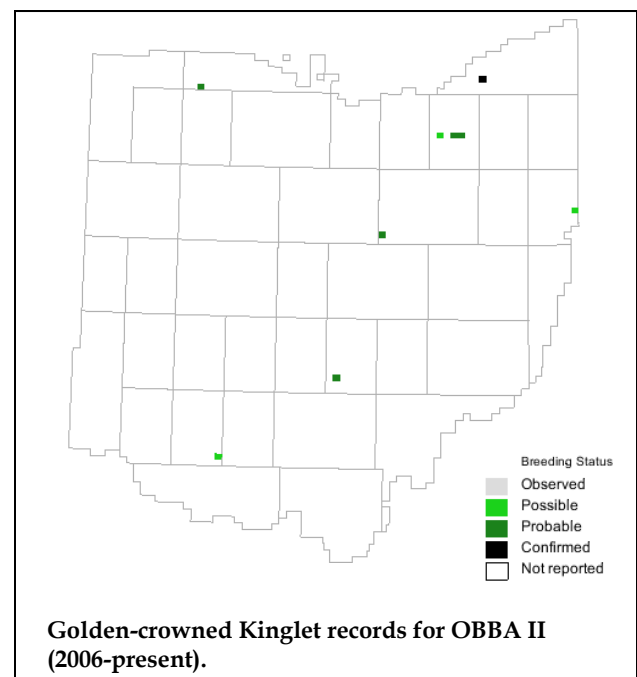
Ohio nestings date from as early as late April. Nest construction usually takes five days, laying as long as ten days (kinglets are prolific; the first Ohio nest examined contained nine eggs), and

incubation averages 15 days, with fledging 18 days later. Hatchlings date from as early as late May in Ohio. Pairs normally produce two broods in a season, so a second fledging could occur in late July. Young (which lack the golden crown, and could be mistaken for ruby-crowned kinglets, which despite two tantalizing reports have no firm record of breeding in Ohio) have been observed in August in Ohio, so evidence of nesting can be secured during five months of the year. Farther north, observers have reported young being fed as late as mid-September.

Kinglets perform courtship feeding, and the male may feed the incubating female. They glean insects and spiders, only rarely consuming fruit and seeds. The globular nests, with an entry in the top, are composed of mosses, lichens, spider web, leaves, bark, rootlets, hair, feathers, and plant down. Nests are usually close to the trunk, often suspended from branches, and in Ohio have averaged about 30 feet from the ground.

These tiny birds are generally confiding and tame, allowing close approaches. They often flutter and flick their wings while seeking food. The song is very seldomly heard from passing migrants, and could go unnoticed from breeders because it is high and thin and does not carry well. The familiar call is a high see-see-see.

Large stands of mature conifers in Ohio, especially those containing spruces, may harbor nesting kinglets. All such finds have thus far come from the northern parts of the state, but surprises may lie farther south. Small and inconspicuous, their vocalizations are nevertheless distinctive, and their nesting season is a long one. This Atlas period is a great opportunity to learn more about these charming sprites.



Findley State Park Blockbusting

by Terri Martincic
Berea, Ohio

Block busting is similar to a Christmas Bird Count in some ways... you record as many birds as you can within a defined area. Atlas volunteers usually focus on several to many blocks and do this over a weekend, day, or even a morning. Some individuals have even spent a week or more atlasing in parts of Ohio with low coverage.

Last year we held a blockbusting weekend in Lorain County on June 13-15. Brad Philips from Erie Metro Parks, Grant Thompson from Lorain County Metro Parks and I decided to focus our efforts on Findley State Park and surrounding areas. When planning our event, we selected priority blocks within this area. Outside the park, we knew how important access to private property would be. The Western Reserve Land Conservancy helped us connect with local property owners in the southern part of Atlas regions 39 and 40.

Many calls went out to Audubon groups, field trips leaders, property owners, and data entry volunteers. We gathered at the Wellington Nature Center at 7:00 am on Saturday. From there groups went out to parkland, private property, and other hotspots in multiple priority blocks.

For lunch we gathered at a fast food restaurant with wireless internet. The data entry volunteers

entered all of our sightings while we relaxed and shared birding stories. It was very helpful to get the sightings entered while the observers were present to answer questions. After lunch a few hardy souls went out for more birding... atlasing can be so addictive! We birded these and other areas on Sunday morning as well, adding many new records.

We were impressed by how much data we collected by devoting just two weekend mornings to block busting. Once the weekend was over we had added at least 433 block records to atlas regions 39 and 40. Our data came from at least 22 different blocks and included 84 hours of field work. Some of the highlights for our block busting weekend were

A few of us got our "lifer" Vesper Sparrow (thanks Brad!), a common species in western Ohio but far more local in our region. Other highlights included:

- A family of American Kestrels (2 adults and a fledgling) - the adults took turns fending off mobbing starlings while the fledgling sat on a wire.
- White-eyed Vireo
- Barred Owl—at Findley State Park in Block 40D1NW

A total of 38 people helped make this event successful. Thank you, each and everyone.

Terry Martincic is a Regional Coordinator for the Atlas in region 40. She would be happy to answer questions that you may have about joining or organizing a block busting event in your area (or anywhere else!).

Volunteer Photographs



Downy Woodpeckers
Block 40A3SE, June 2009
photo by Bill Deininger



Barred Owls
Block 39C7SE, February 7, 2010
photo by Darin Adams



Black and White Warbler
May 21, 2006
photo by Dave Lewis



Spotted Sandpiper fledgling
Block 39C7SE, June 27, 2009
photo by Darin Adams

Share your Atlas photos and stories with us!

Getting Connected!

Linking the Natural World With the Virtual World.

With the first Breeding Bird Atlas of Ohio, data were submitted in the form of paper checklists through the postal service. That tradition still continues today because many volunteers either have limited or no internet access or simply prefer the traditional method of data submission. Any and all data, regardless of the form, are welcome and important contributions to the Atlas. Though, times have changed in the last 25 years. One of the biggest advances with the second Breeding Bird Atlas, has been the availability of new technologies. With online data submission, coverage can be assessed on-the-fly, and efforts can be immediately directed to areas that need attention.

Not only has technology helped the Atlas, but it's been a big help for birders as well. Most people traditionally enjoy bird watching as a "low-tech" hobby or adventure. But for some there was often the dilemma of "What to take with you into the field?" Many of us have several field guides, desk references, and CDs full of audio vocalizations.

iPods and other mp3 players make it possible to carry thousands of bird songs and calls in your pocket. iPhones, Droids, and other "smart phones" can be loaded with field guide applications to check identifications instantly, or sort through field marks to key out a species. Web access from a phone also allows birders to instantly post sightings and to ebird with geographic coordinates or send emails to listservs. It's now easier than ever for both beginners and advanced birders to identify birds and stay current (up to the minute even) on bird sightings. Below are some online resources of potential interest to Atlasers:

Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II—on the Web:

<http://www.ohiobirds.org/obba2/index.php>

OBBA2—Discussion Forum:

<http://www.ohiobirds.org/obba2/forum/index.php>

OBBA2—Facebook Group:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=60223528081>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology—Species Information:

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org>

e-Guides and Other Pocket Electronic Resources

BirdJam — bird song & photo collection — <http://www.birdjam.com/>

Peterson Bird Guide — smartphone application — http://wildtones.com/peterson_iphone_bird_guide

iBird — North American field guide — <http://www.ibirdexplorer.com/>

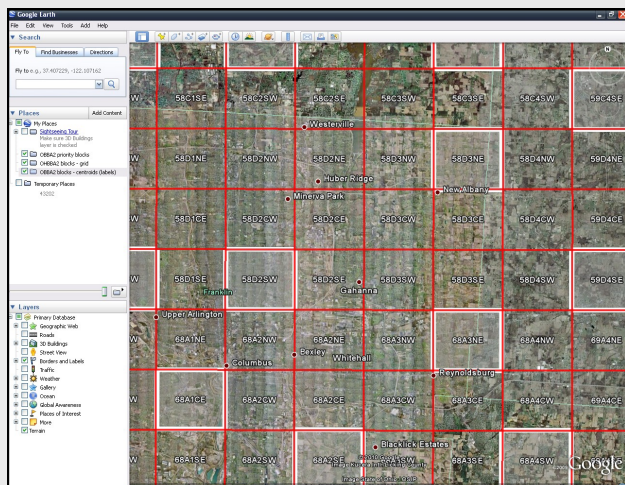
BirdsEye — sightings, list, and ID guide — <http://www.getbirdseye.com/>



iPhone with web browser

Mapping Resource: Google Earth

As we mentioned in the previous newsletter, there are some great online mapping tools. One of our favorites is the free desktop application—Google Earth (<http://earth.google.com/>). Google Earth has the ability to quickly load and pan across maps for the whole world, and quickly access information on roads, parks, buildings, and entertainment. You can also add your own data layers, images and links. We have been able to incorporate block boundaries, priority block IDs, and regions into Earth to quickly generate maps for Atlasing. If you'd like to learn more about Google Earth and obtaining Atlas layers, contact us and we'll try to get you set up!



Screenshot of Google Earth (Columbus, OH) showing block boundaries, labels, and priority blocks.



Close-up of an area where 4-block boundaries meet (block borders in red). Note the block in the upper left is a priority block (red and white border).

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The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II is a joint project of The Ohio State University, School of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife. The Atlas Advisory Board includes Audubon Ohio, Black Swamp Bird Observatory, Ohio Ornithological Society, Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife. This large-scale effort is made possible only through the assistance of hundreds of citizen volunteers, and other in-kind contributions from conservation groups, and federal, state, and local government agencies in Ohio.

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