



Logo artwork by Jim Glover

THE OHIO ATLASER

Newsletter of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II

THE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS: a Brief History and Current Ohio Goals

By Aaron Boone and Paul Rodewald
Ohio State University

Breeding bird atlases have been around for some time now. Atlases are conducted primarily by volunteers and result in distribution maps for each breeding bird species. British ornithologists first developed this concept of documenting nesting bird distributions from field methods used to produce the *Atlas of the British Flora*. Since the inception of the breeding bird atlas in the United Kingdom during the late 1960's, the concept has become extremely popular, and numerous atlas projects have been conducted all over the world.

The first statewide breeding bird atlas in the United States was the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Vermont* (1976-1981), and atlas projects now cover the majority of North America, including nearly 40 U.S. states and Canadian provinces. Ohio's first atlas was conducted from 1982-1987 under the direction of Bruce Peterjohn and Dan Rice. The incredible effort and volunteer commitment that was invested in this project culminated in the publication of *The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas* in 1991.

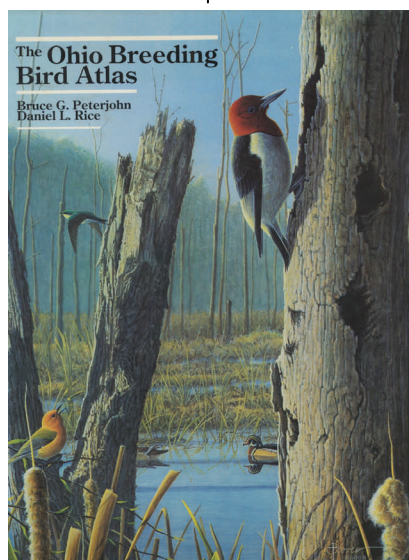
In 1993, the British Trust for Ornithology made history again by publishing their monumental *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991*. The value of the breeding bird atlas became apparent when comparisons between the two atlas projects revealed dramatic distributional changes for several British nesting species. Originally, project organizers never seri-

ously considered that such changes would have occurred in the relatively short period of time between atlases. Understandably, mindsets have changed and the UK is now in the beginning stages of initiating their third breeding bird atlas.

Several second atlas projects have been initiated here in North America. In fact, New York, Maryland, and

Ontario have recently completed data collection and are now poised for atlas publication. Michigan, Vermont, Indiana, and Pennsylvania are nearing completion of data collection, and others, like Massachusetts and the Canadian Maritimes, are in the beginning stages of field work.

Ohio joined these ranks in 2005 when Paul Rodewald (Ohio State University) and Scott Hull (ODNR-Division of Wildlife) initiated planning for the second breeding bird atlas effort. Ohio's first breeding bird atlas added greatly to the knowledge of Ohio bird life, and with the help of volunteers and various organizations from across the state, we will update and expand upon



Book Cover of *The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas*©
Courtesy of ODNR-Div. of Natural Areas & Preserves

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Ohio's Newest Breeding Birds?

by Jim McCormac
Ohio Division of Wildlife

Much has changed regarding the status of Ohio's nesting birds since the earliest ornithologists began documenting the state's bird life. Two former breeders are extinct, and seven species are extirpated (gone from Ohio; still nest elsewhere). Unfortunately, it seems likely that two others will join that latter category eventually; the Golden-winged Warbler and Loggerhead Shrike. Other species have been added as confirmed nesters in the past five years, though, like Canvasback and Common Merganser.

Nearly twenty long, significant years have passed since bird atlasers turned in their last data sheets from the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas I. It will be fascinating – and enlightening – to compare the results of OBBA II against the original study. It is likely that the new survey will result in new additions to our breeding avifauna, and this article presents some thoughts on species to be on the watch for.

There are other possibilities not on my list. For instance, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher has nested in Indiana and Kentucky and may still be expanding eastward. If this species ever discovers the massive reclaimed strip mine grasslands in southeastern Ohio, we may have this amazing flycatcher nesting in Ohio. There are also at least seven species that are only known to have bred once in the state, two species that have bred twice, and two that have been confirmed nesting three times. Most of the birds in these categories could be found nesting again someday, but to avoid writing a virtual novel, I limited this article to only birds that would be brand new to Ohio's list of breeders. I only include birds for which there are no indisputable breeding records; some of those below likely did nest at least sparingly historically, but we have no concrete evidence.

Black-necked Stilt. One nesting attempt at Big Island Wildlife Area in Marion County in 2004. I include this one because as far as we know, stilts have yet to successfully breed in Ohio. This could represent the first of future nesting attempts by this species, which may have bred in Ohio's wet prairies historically. Recent major wetland restoration projects within the former Sandusky Plains prairie region may be

stimulating former breeding species to re-occupy this part of their nesting range. A corollary is the Wilson's Phalarope, a species of similar habitat preferences, which has now bred on several occasions in restored former wet prairie sites, including the site where the stilts attempted nesting in 2004.

Brewer's Blackbird. It is almost surprising that this species has not been documented nesting in Ohio yet. Brewer's Blackbird would be easy to overlook, as possible nestings would be in a region that isn't heavily birded, and it would certainly be possible to dismiss them as other more common blackbirds like Common Grackle without a careful look. They would also likely occur in towns, parks, farms or other well-settled and relatively uninteresting areas that could easily be ignored by birders.

Brewer's Blackbirds began an eastward expansion around the 1920's, and have colonized as far east as southern Michigan and eastern Ontario, Canada. This species has an interesting relationship with Common Grackles where the two come into contact. There is competition between the two species, and in some areas grackles dominate and apparently exclude Brewer's Blackbirds in suburban sites. In less populous open field and brushland habitats, Brewer's have dominated. Brewer's has bred within fifty miles of Ohio in Michigan, and Fulton and Williams counties would be key areas in which to search. Look for them at places like Lake La Su An Wildlife Area in Williams County, the Maumee State Forest in Fulton, Henry, and Lucas counties, and in or around small towns in this region.



Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)©
Photo by Jimmie Campbell

Clay-colored Sparrow. This species has expanded north and east in recent decades, and there is one confirmed nesting attempt from Franklin County in 1996, but it was unsuccessful. There have been a few other summering non-territorial males, such as in Stark County in 2006 and Williams County in 2005. The eastward expansion of this sparrow of open brushy habitats largely mirrors that of the Brewer's Blackbird. While Clay-colored Sparrow might turn up anywhere except unglaciated southeastern Ohio, it should be watched for carefully in the same areas mentioned for Brewer's Blackbird.

Merlin. Populations of this small falcon are steadily growing, and migrants and wintering birds are becoming more frequent in Ohio. Breeding populations are increasing, and Merlins appear to be recolonizing former nesting regions, and perhaps spreading into new areas. They also show a trend of occupying increasingly urban sites. Historical evidence suggests



Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*)©

Photo by Aaron Boone

that they once bred in Ashtabula County and possibly adjacent parts of northeastern Ohio, but there is no absolute proof of this. Breeding Merlins should be watched for in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, and surrounding counties. They could appear in surprisingly urban sites, too.

Yellow-rumped Warbler. A bit of a longshot, but not an impossibility. There have been a number of records of territorial male Yellow-rumps in appropriate habitat in Ohio, all in recent years. This species regularly breeds fairly near Ohio in Pennsylvania, and there is evidence that Yellow-rumped Warblers are expanding their breeding range in western Pennsylvania. This warbler's breeding distribution extends down the Appalachians, and many species with similar distributions do nest sparingly in Ohio, like Blackburnian and Canada warblers. This species should be watched for in large hemlock gorges, such as at Holden Arboretum in Lake County and Mohican State Forest in Ashland County.

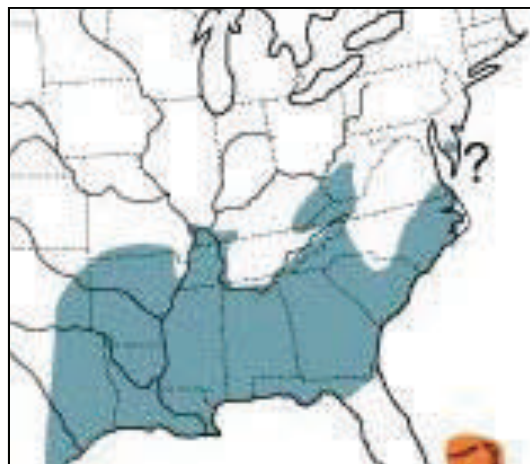
Forster's Tern. Breeding – at least occasionally - occurs as close as Monroe County, Michigan, which adjoins Lucas County, Ohio. This tern also breeds sparingly in other nearby Michigan and Ontario, Canada locales. Forster's Terns nest in large mixed-emergent marshes, placing their nests on rafts of floating vegetation or muskrat lodges. It could be difficult to discover a nest of this species in the vast and hard to penetrate marshes of western Lake Erie, where it should be sought. The number one place to look, in my opinion, would be the Cedar Point unit of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge.

Mississippi Kite. Probably not a candidate on most Ohio birders' radar in terms of a possible breeder, but should not be ruled out. Mississippi Kites seem to be actively expanding northward in recent years and reclaiming areas that were probably part of their former breeding range. They now nest sparingly in southwestern Indiana and western Kentucky. This kite is strongly associated with alluvial floodplain forests of the Missis-

sippi Valley in the Midwest, and is also increasingly occupying forested urban areas. If nesters were to appear in Ohio, the St. Marys River in western Ohio, primarily in Mercer County, and the Ohio River Valley in the vicinity of Brown, Clermont, and Hamilton counties might be likely locales. The lower valley of the Great Miami River is another potential area.

Ring-necked Duck. This duck nests widely across southern Canada and the northern U.S., within 150 or so miles of northern Ohio. They will sporadically nest well south of their primary breeding range, and have bred on the Pennsylvania side of Pymatuning Lake, which shares a border with Ohio in Ashtabula County. Should be watched for in larger wetlands in Ashtabula, Geauga, Portage, and Trumbull counties, and Singer Lake in Summit County.

Swainson's Warbler. This species breeds in Kentucky and West Virginia, very near Ohio, although it is not common in the northern reaches of its range. There have been records of summering territorial males in Ohio, in Jackson, Jefferson, and Lawrence counties. The primary habitat for nesting Swainson's Warbler in eastern portions of the range are Canebreaks (sites dominated by a large bamboo-like grass *Arundinaria gigantea*) underlying riparian woodlands. This habitat no longer occurs in Ohio, at least of a size that would accommodate breeding of this species. In montane Appalachian haunts – which occur very near Ohio - Swainson's occupy two distinct habitats. The first is cool forested slopes with a preponderance of Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) overstory (tree canopy),



Breeding Range of Swainson's Warbler©

Courtesy of Birds of North America Online

and understory (shrub layer) thickets dominated by large species of *Rhododendron* and Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), with interspersed American Holly (*Ilex opaca*). Such habitat does not exist in Ohio in sufficient quantity to support nesting Swainson's Warblers; for instance, our only large native *Rhododendron* is Great Rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) and it is considered threatened in Ohio. The primary *Rhododendron*

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2006 Suburban Sprawl Atlasing Adventures

by Mike Busam
West Chester, Ohio

Never having been burdened with an original thought or experience in my life, I imagine that a number of OBBA II atlas volunteers began the 2006 season with the same good intentions and well-laid plans that I did. So, how did your year go? Chances are you served your blocks better than I served mine, but I managed to learn a few things during 2006 despite—or because of—committing a couple of obvious blunders.

Blunder number one: overbooking. Like many people, when the opportunity to sign up for atlas blocks came around last winter, I put my name down on the blocks near where I live. I live in southeastern Butler County, and two of my blocks are anchored by locally significant birding areas. Block 74B3NE, contains Gilmore Ponds—or most of it. To catch all of Gilmore Ponds, I had to add 74B4NW to my basket. Luckily for me, I live on the eastern edge of 74B4, so that worked out. Block 75B5NW is largely developed, but the Voice of America Park is in the northwest corner of this block. Since 2001, I've run a grassland breeding bird survey at the VOA, so adding that project to OBBA II atlas duties didn't seem like a big deal. And how difficult could it be to add to the OBBA II work data from the Bluebird trail at the VOA?

To round things out, I added blocks 74B4CW and 75B4CE. There are a number of small pocket wetlands and accidental industrial grasslands in these blocks, not to mention a fairly unpolluted section of the Mill Creek that runs through West Chester Township's heavily wooded Keehner Park. I visit Keehner a number of times each summer with my daughters and their friends to walk the creek and wander in the woods. Surely I

could carry along an atlas sheet and keep track of the birds? It's a large woodland, but heck, the understory is almost 100 percent bush honeysuckle. How many birds *could* there be in such a place? Unfortunately, I still don't know.

Add to existing bird surveying projects a summer schedule filled with my oldest daughter's baseball games every Saturday morning, an out-of-state vacation, and a few weekend trips home to northern Ohio, and the majority of my weekend dates—the only mornings I could possibly squeeze in atlas work—were simply gone before the project even began. My one “night out” a week, was already devoted to the VOA project. This put me in a real bind when it came to covering my blocks properly in year one.

Development within my blocks is relentless and fast-paced. Many of the areas that are left are ugly and unpleasant to visit. Finding decent habitat, aside from the “anchors” I mentioned above (and the sad story here is that even those sites are going to be surrounded by asphalt, concrete, Tyvek, and steel before OBBA II is completed), is a “Where's Waldo” exercise, involving winding drives through office and industrial parks, one after another after another. There's the frustration of lost areas that were oddly productive before OBBA II began. Places such as the “bulldozer wetlands” across from Lakota West High School in the booming commerce and industrial center of West Chester's Union Centre Boulevard at I-75; a site that had muskrat lodges, sedges, cattails, and breeding Spotted Sandpipers as recently as 2004. Next to this doomed, though accidental and man-made site, was a small, ersatz grassland, in which Killdeer, Grasshopper Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Horned Larks bred prior to OBBA II. Both these areas were finally developed in spring 2006.

Gilmore Ponds, which was a productive site in and around the time of the first Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, during which it was capably covered by Frank Renfrow, will be surrounded by four-lane roads before OBBA II is complete. What little “green” space exists around this 300-odd acre site will likely be “gray” by 2010. Blunder number two: sometimes it's hard to work up enthusiasm to atlas areas that seem to be doomed or under constant pressure. But it must be done, nonetheless.

Yet not everything is gloom-and-doom. Sharon Pawlowski and Eric Burgess ran a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) banding station at Gilmore Ponds in 2006, and they covered Gilmore Ponds as well or better than I could have. Their data will be added to the OBBA II record for this block, so that's a good thing. To figure out exactly where the boundaries of my blocks are, I created a “wall map” by taping together printouts of the maps of my blocks from the OBBA II website. This composite map has been useful



Gilmore Ponds - Butler County, Ohio©
Photo by Mike Busam

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Nesting Species Spotlight: Upland Sandpiper

by **Bill Whan**
Columbus, Ohio

Some birds—Bachman's Sparrow (last recorded in 1978) or Bewick's Wren (1995)—have recently disappeared from Ohio. Others—Loggerhead Shrike for

basins and in ancient stream valleys." He reported breeding in 76 of Ohio's 88 counties. By the 1980s its numbers had tumbled, with grasses bordering airports said to harbor fully three-quarters of the state's known breeding population.

Airport habitats, however, are increasingly being "beautified," altered in the name of security, and reduced in extent by extended runways and suburban encroachments. The possibility of strikes has caused them to be managed to discourage the presence of birds of any kind. These measures may have made Peterjohn's 1989 estimate of 100-200 pairs too optimistic.

Upland sandpipers should still be sought at any airport with grassy areas, of course (observant airport employees can be of great help in locating them, and arranging access to atlasers). The species has also been found nesting in substantial grassy margins of agricultural plantings, clover fields, and at non-agricultural sites like Big Island WA in Marion County and the Voice of America Park in Butler County. Areas in unglaciated western Ohio have been most productive, but there are consistent records from as far east as Ashtabula County in recent years.

Upland sandpipers are colonial nesters. They often make their presence known by perching on hillocks, fence-posts, and utility wires in open country, as well as by several vocalizations, distinctive and easily studied via recordings. They call persistently in migration. High morning flights with hawk-like soaring are undertaken over the breeding grounds. Adults perform distraction displays for intruders, including perching in trees. They arrive in Ohio as early as the first week of April, and some courtship flights, calling, and

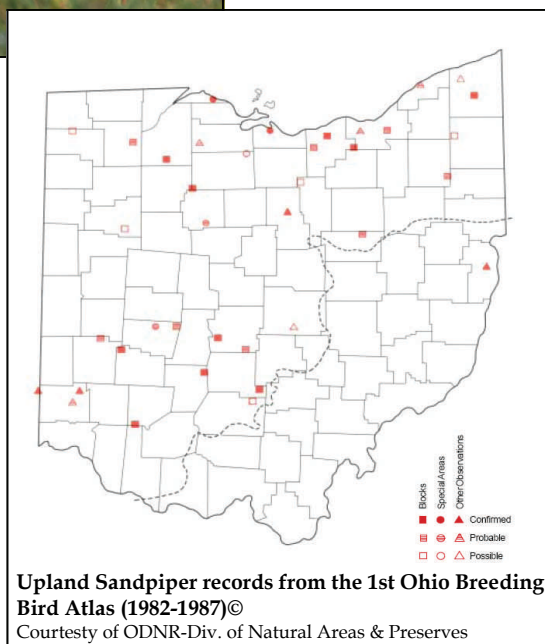
squabbles may be witnessed into May. Most eggs are laid 5-20 May, with most young out of the nest by 10 June. Local birds depart between mid-July and the first week of September.



Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)©
Photo by Robert Royse
www.roysephotos.com

example--seem poised to follow. Each has a core range elsewhere, with an outlying subspecies endemic to our region. Each made use of habitats Ohioans had altered, probably becoming more numerous than in pre-settlement times. Puzzlingly, a fair amount of the habitat they seemed to have preferred remains, but the birds are not using it.

Another species involved in such a trend is the Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*). In 1838 Kirtland reported only that it was "sometimes seen in the Scioto valley," but as Ohio farmers continued clearing forests for pasturelands, these birds became familiar. By 1882 Wheaton called the species "an abundant migrant and common summer resident." Flocks of several dozen birds were often seen. Hicks in 1935 called it "general and uncommon, except in 10 southwestern Ohio counties where it is unknown. Extremely local in much of the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, especially the counties bordering West Virginia. Most numerous in old swamp or lake



Synopsis of Atlas Effort in 2006

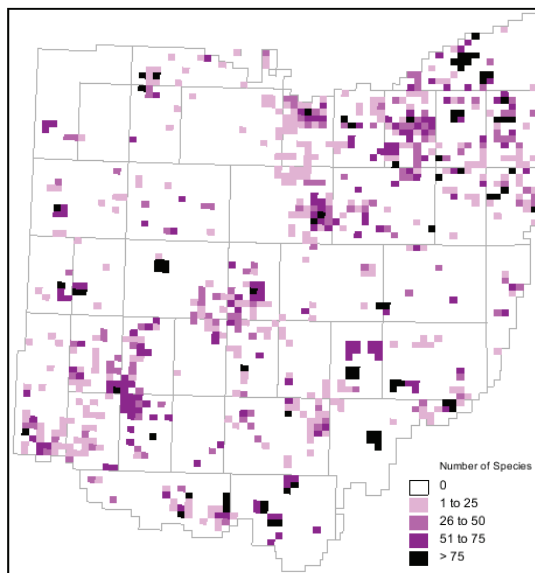
Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Ohio birding community, the first field season of Ohio's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas has produced nearly 48,000 breeding bird observations, which represent over 9,000 hours of survey effort. To record all of these observations, Atlas volunteers have driven more than 27,000 miles!

Much of the first year of atlasing was concentrated around the urban areas associated with Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. At a regional level, northeastern Ohio experienced the most hours of atlas effort with 40% of statewide effort; 39% of blocks with data occurred in this region. Northwestern and southeastern Ohio received lower levels of survey effort.

At the moment, nearly 800 atlas blocks have at least one reported observation (*figure at right*). These blocks have received an average of 13 hours of survey effort (anywhere from 15 minutes to 100+ hours). Thirty percent of surveyed blocks have received more than 15 hours of effort. This is a major accomplishment for the first year of this second atlas, especially considering that 764 blocks were surveyed during the entire first Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas.

One of the goals of surveying a block is to provide a

minimum of 25 hours of survey coverage, and this first year shows that nearly a quarter of all blocks surveyed qualify for potential block completion status. This amount of effort in an inaugural year of any major undertaking, like a breeding bird atlas, is a great achievement. Since this is likely the first time that many volun-

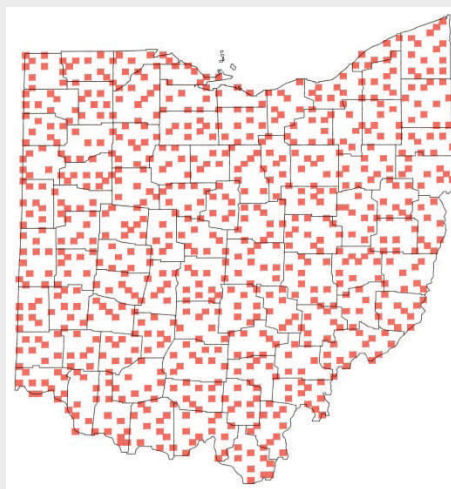


teers have participated in a breeding bird atlas (or the first time since 1987), much of the activities undertaken during this first year may have involved becoming accustomed to atlas protocol and exploring approaches that will enable efficient survey coverage of atlas blocks. As the atlas years progress and the popularity of atlasing increases (which we are confident will definitely be the case!), increases in yearly block coverage will likely follow.

This first year of the atlas has offered a taste of what is in store for the remainder of the project.

Breeding bird atlases certainly attest to the incredible amount of useful information that can result from the dedication of hundreds of individuals who are united in "citizen science" efforts. The amount of breeding bird data that will result from Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas volunteers will be unprecedented in this state.

What in the World is Blockbusting?



You may have heard the term "blockbusting" in reference to Ohio's first breeding bird atlas. You may have scratched your head. Is this just a corny birding term applied to normal atlasing activities? Actually, blockbusting refers to a group of birders gathering together in a specific area to thoroughly cover as many blocks as possible, usually in just 2 or 3 days. Often, this method of intensive birding is used to provide survey coverage for those blocks belonging to "neglected" regions of the state. Since bouts of blockbusting usually take place over a weekend, the birding is intensive in order to cover as much ground as possible. We've heard stories of blockbusting parties sleeping in old barns during the first Atlas in order to maximize survey coverage. Fun stuff! However it's done, the birding camaraderie is bound to make for an exciting and enjoyable birding experience.

Does the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II plan on using blockbusting? Certainly! When, you ask? Well, at the moment a few birding groups are starting to organize events in 2007. If you're interested in blockbusting, let us know! This would be a fun event that any birding, Audubon, or nature club could organize at the local level or anywhere else of interest. Think of the possibilities! You may even be able to put a competitive spin on the event and raise money for your organization by taking pledges for each species recorded per block. So, pass on the word and let the blockbusting begin! For blockbusting options in your area, contact us at (614) 247-6458 or obba2@osu.edu.

Ohio's New Nesters - continued from page 3

of Swainson's Warbler breeding sites in the Appalachians is Catawba Rosebay (*R. catawbiense*), which isn't in Ohio.

The other Appalachian habitat occurs here more prolifically. Swainson's will utilize mesic (moist soil) mountain coves dominated by Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), Red and White Oak, (*Quercus rubra* and *Q. alba*), and maples, primarily Sugar Maple, (*Acer saccharum*). The understory is dominated by shrubs like Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and large tangles of Greenbrier (*Smilax* ssp.). Still, other important Appalachian components of this plant community don't quite make it this far north, and Ohio representatives of this habitat may not be suitable for Swainson's Warbler.

Most if not all of the territorial males that have appeared in Ohio occupied a much more common habitat – overgrown logging clearcuts on steep slopes. This habitat is superficially similar to the latter two habitats described above, at least in density of vegetation. Such places are certainly suboptimal and are unproven to successfully support breeding Swainson's, but birders should still be on the lookout for them in such places in unglaciated southeastern Ohio. Swainson's Warbler sounds remarkably similar to Louisiana Waterthrush, and waterthrush-like songs coming from clearcut habitats should be investigated.

Eurasian Collared-Dove. The invasion that never materialized – yet. And it may not. There have been few documented records, including two birds shot in Crawford County in 2001 and a bird that was photographed in Licking County in 2006. Other reports lacked compelling documentation, but were likely correct. Care must be taken in identifying this species because of possible confusion with Ringed Turtle-Dove; at least one Eurasian Collared-Dove report proved to be that species.

Eurasian Collared-Dove, which is native to Europe and Asia, was released into the Bahamas in the 1970's and has spread over much of North America, at least locally. It is most common in southern states, becoming increasingly scarce northward, at least for now. Even though the Crawford County record was in a very rural locale, this species would most likely turn up in urban sites.

The much-needed second iteration of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas is going to generate many new and valuable data sets about our state's nesting avifauna. Over the five years of the project, all of those eyes and ears afield will undoubtedly turn up some fascinating new records; maybe even some of the above.

Please be an active participant in OBBA II, and put your birding skills to work for science!

SW Ohio Atlasing Report - continued from page 4

for looking at aerial photos on websites such as Google as well as topo maps in order to see potentially interesting areas that I might be overlooking—and I've realized I've overlooked a number of such sites. So there is much yet to discover and cover in this area. It's just going to take a little initiative, and perhaps a few cold calls to different land owners and businesses to see about getting access to some of the out-of-the-way properties in my blocks.

There is also the potential to find new breeding records of locally unusual species. Blue Grosbeak is a good example from my atlas area. In recent years, Blue Grosbeaks seem to be on the increase in the Cincinnati region, and are often found around gravel pits and other similarly abused sites. There are plenty of such sites in my atlas blocks, and after the atlasing period was concluded, I discovered singing male Blue Grosbeaks in two locations that I managed to cover last summer. I also received a late report of a Blue Grosbeak along an abandoned gravel pit at Gilmore Ponds. Trawling around gravel pits and construction sites in industrial parks and along highway edges is a little more pleasant if a possible reward is a Blue Grosbeak—hopefully two or more!

After a little retrofitting of data collected during projects I took on prior to OBBA II, the 2006 atlasing season will not have been a complete loss, as far as my blocks are concerned. But I look forward to doing better. I'm juggling my schedule, looking at my maps, paying more attention to those tiny riparian corridors and industrial park "waste" fields and wetlands I drive past while taking my daughters to soccer games or the grocery store, and hoping that with a little luck, there'll be something hanging on in these spots—a few birds, at least, breeding successfully and making a go of it, despite all the challenges they face and the many seemingly unstoppable forces moving against them.



Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*)
Courtesy of ODNR-Division of Wildlife

EARLY SEASON ATLASING

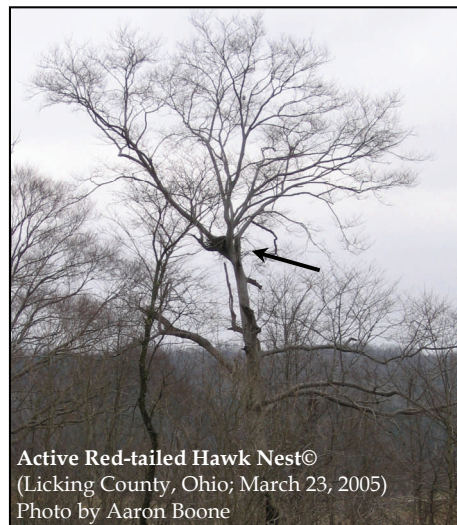
Nesting Birds in Early-Spring?

Remember, not all atlasing activities need to take place during the late-spring and summer months. Yes, the majority of Ohio's breeding bird species are actively engaged in peak nesting activity from late-May to July, but there are a variety of bird species that typically nest much earlier in the year. When one considers these species, the breeding bird atlas field season encompasses 7 to 8 months out of the year!

Twelve species have safe dates beginning before April 1st. Thirteen species have safe dates that begin in April. Keep in mind, though, that safe dates DO NOT define a species' breeding season. Safe dates are in place to keep observations of local breeders from being confused with observations of birds migrating through the area or dispersing from distant breeding areas (*for more on safe dates, please see page 25 of the Atlas Volunteer Handbook*). Simply hearing a Great Horned Owl calling on your property on the night of February 1st counts and should be reported to the Atlas! In fact, Great Horned Owl nesting activities have been documented in Ohio as early as late-January.

Some species of raptors, like Red-tailed Hawks, are commonly sitting on eggs before there is any noticeable leaf-out in the surrounding landscape. However, Red-tailed Hawks are also highly migratory and are often moving through the state well into the spring. This explains the May 1st initiation of safe dates for this hawk. By all means, safe date ranges should not postpone active searching for local breeding pairs. If you notice a hawk that faithfully hunts from a particular perch day in and day out, a quick scan

of nearby trees area could reveal a nest. It is definitely worth paying additional attention to what certain birds are doing because you may come up with a Probable or Confirmed breeding observation, regardless of what the safe dates indicate.



Active Red-tailed Hawk Nest©
(Licking County, Ohio; March 23, 2005)
Photo by Aaron Boone

Raptor nests are often bulky structures and can be very conspicuous, even at great distances. Walking or driving along a rural road before the leaves emerge can be especially productive. A dark 'blob' in the crown of a tree may not always turn out to be an active raptor nest, but you may be surprised at how often you notice that a bird is actually hun-

ked down inside. For distant nests, a spotting scope could come in handy for determining nesting activity but isn't always necessary, especially if permission from the landowner (if found on private land) is obtained.* Even if a nest does not appear to be active, it never hurts to mark down the location of the nest and revisit it at a later date when activity may be more obvious.

Finally, keep track of those tapping sounds coming from the woods! Red-bellied, Hairy,

Downy, and Pileated Woodpeckers can begin nest cavity excavation as early as March. Hairy Woodpeckers, in particular, can become difficult to detect once their territorial boundaries are established and nesting activities are in full swing.

The fact that there are several early-season nesters works to the advantage of the atlas volunteer. Stratified nesting periods of Ohio's breeding birds help to break up the atlas field season instead of cramming all atlasing activity into just a couple of summer months. And remember, birds aren't scheduling nesting activities according to Atlas safe dates. Have fun out there!

**Please keep in mind, that active nests should be disturbed as little as possible.*

EARLY-SEASON NESTING SPECIES WITH SAFE DATES

Ruffed Grouse	- 4/1 to 7/31
American Woodcock	- 4/10 to 6/30
Great Horned Owl	- 2/1 to 7/31
Barred Owl	- 2/1 to 7/31
Eastern Screech Owl	- 4/1 to 7/31
Belted Kingfisher	- 4/15 to 7/15
Downy Woodpecker	- 3/15 to 7/31
Hairy Woodpecker	- 3/15 to 7/31
Red-bellied Woodpecker	- 3/15 to 7/31
Pileated Woodpecker	- 3/15 to 7/31
Horned Lark	- 4/20 to 7/31
Carolina Chickadee	- 3/15 to 8/15
Tufted Titmouse	- 3/15 to 8/15
Northern Cardinal	- 3/15 to 8/15
Rock Pigeon	- all year!
House Sparrow	- 2/1 to 9/15



Great Horned Owl Fledglings at Nest ©
Photo courtesy of ODNR-Division of Wildlife

PLEASE REMEMBER: Submit Your 2006 Data Soon!

So far, tens of thousands of individual breeding bird observations from the 2006 field season have flooded into the OBBA II offices. This is phenomenal and observations continue to trickle our way. In fact, there are already observations for the 2007 season!

Please keep in mind that the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II is an all-inclusive project. Even if you have only a passing interest in birds or birding, you can contribute valuable information to the project. In this age of computers, cell phones, and WI-FI internet access, Ohio's breeding bird atlas incorporates many new technologies that simply weren't available during the 80's when the first breeding bird atlas was conducted. Participants relied upon hard-copy field checklists and the U.S. postal service to get their valuable data into the hands of Atlas coordinators.

Now, volunteers have the option to submit observations *via* the versatile website created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's skilled Information Science team. This equates to instantaneous data acquisition with the useful outcome of having publicly accessible atlas data that are available in real-time reports. Many Ohio birders may have witnessed the power involved in combining the internet and birding when the Cornell team tracked observations of over *10 million birds* in just 4 days of nation-wide counting during the Great Backyard Bird Count!!! These same capabilities are incorporated into the OBBA II website and will help us quickly and successfully put the breeding birds of Ohio on the map.

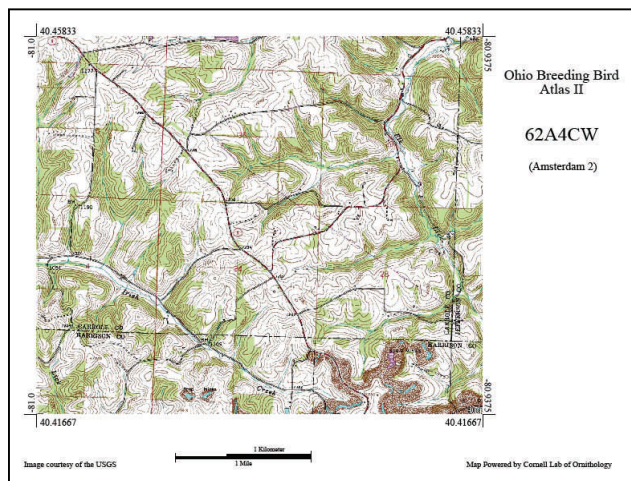
However, please keep in mind that **the internet is not a required component of Atlas participation**. Hardcopy checklists are just as welcome as electronic checklists. In fact, the success of the Atlas will depend upon checklist submissions! If you would like additional copies of the field checklists or observation field cards, please contact us and we'll send them right out.

In the mean time, be sure to submit your 2006 breeding bird observations. Our goal is to have the 2006 breeding bird observations submitted either electronically or through the mail **by June 1, 2007**. If you have any questions about the data submission process, please contact us at obba2@osu.edu or by phone at (614) 247-6458. Many thanks in advance for your help in making the 2006 field season a phenomenal success!

New Atlas Block Maps!

What would atlasing be like without a good map? It wouldn't be very easy. Knowing your atlasing location is one of the most important steps in participating in a breeding bird atlas. The OBBA II employs several great tools to help you know exactly where you're recording breeding birds.

Since atlas blocks are smaller divisions of the USGS topographical quadrangle maps, the *DeLorme Ohio Atlas & Gazetteer* is a perfect tool to help the atlaser orient within the enormous Atlas block grid. The DeLorme's pages are based on topographic maps so this resource has easily been incorporated into the Atlas (*for more about how atlas blocks are defined and labeled, please see the Atlas Volunteer Handbook*.) However, the DeLorme can only provide us with so much information about what the landscape in a block is actually like.



This brings us back to the topographic maps. "Topo" maps define the lay of the land as well as a 2-dimensional resource can possibly accomplish. Contour lines represent elevation change, while other symbols and color schemes shed light on land cover and uses. Topo maps are fantastic for planning your atlasing activities. Unfortunately, full sized topo maps are very large and not always convenient to carry with you in the field. The Atlas' answer to this was to create separate block maps from the original topos. These maps are available to all, and a map of every block in the state can be downloaded from our website. As an added bonus, each map is also available in aerial photo format. For those GPS users out there, the latitude and longitude coordinates of the block boundaries are printed in the margins in decimal degrees. If you don't have computer access or if you're having trouble downloading the maps, feel free to contact us, and we'll mail you copies of whatever you need (614-247-6458 or obba2@osu.edu).

this knowledge. To do so, the OBBA II seeks to accomplish 6 major goals:

Goal #1. First and foremost, OBBA II will document the current distribution of breeding birds across Ohio. Think of a breeding bird atlas as a five-year “snapshot” of where each species is nesting.

Goal #2. OBBA II will assess changes in statewide distributions of breeding birds over the last 20 years. Breeding bird atlases do not address changes within each 5-year atlas period but instead, can be used to address changes between atlas periods. Ohio is now in a unique position to detect recent changes in the distribution of nesting birds.

Goal #3. OBBA II will provide measures of statewide abundance for many breeding species. Historically, atlases have not collected data on how abundant each species is within a block. Beginning in 2007, a small crew of highly trained field technicians will be employed to conduct point count survey routes. These data will be used to create invaluable

maps of relative abundance and statewide population estimates.

Goal #4. Through a 6-fold increase in survey coverage, OBBA II will identify specific areas that support high bird diversity and concentrations of species of concern.

Goal #5. OBBA II will specifically target species that are difficult to survey, such as owls, nightjars, and wetland birds. Special survey protocols will be designed to direct each volunteer to appropriate habitats in order to maximize species detections. Stay tuned for more details about these surveys!

Goal #6. It is our sincere hope that OBBA II will engage bird enthusiasts of ALL experience levels.

This is your Atlas and its success will hinge on extensive volunteer participation. If you're not already involved, please consider contribution to this valuable “citizen science” project. Remember, atlas projects only come along every 20 years. We hope to see you in the field soon!



Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*)©
Photo by Aaron Boone

****Inquiries concerning the submission of articles or photographs for publication in this newsletter should be directed to Aaron Boone, Project Coordinator.**

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Atlas Staff Directory

The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II is a joint project of The Ohio State University, School of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ohio Department 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.

