



Black-capped Chronicle



Issue 6

Newsletter of the Maine Bird Atlas

Spring 2020

Kicking off the Third Year of the Atlas during COVID-19

As I write this, love is in season for my yardbirds, and recent sparrow arrivals are staking claim to territories through song. Elsewhere in Maine, bluebird pairs have been visiting nest boxes and Woodcock entertain with their peents and courtship displays. By the time you read this, spring migration will be well underway, and even more birdsong will fill the air. Nature carries on.

These days, we find ourselves thrust into an occurrence that will surely go down in history as one of societies greatest challenges. But, we needn't be defined by these events. We are more than that. The world is far more than that, and nature remains. While now is a time to keep our distance from others, we are still being encouraged to get outside. Whether you feel like you're going a bit stir crazy or routinely enjoy the outdoors, fresh air and immersion in nature now seem more important than ever.

I can't claim to have any great advice in keeping one's wits about them in these troubling times, but I know it's important to practice gratitude. I'm grateful for nature; Grateful for the birds; Grateful for the binoculars in my bag and the literal clarity they bring; Grateful for spring, which carries the promise of new life in the coming months; Grateful I have this project to encourage me to get out more and bird with purpose; Grateful for being able to share this project with the people of Maine.

I'm grateful that the temporary safety restrictions will not heavily affect birding, but social distancing should be maintained. If you see a line of cars at a trail head, go to more

Photo by Fyn Kynd



remote locations. Thankfully in Maine, there are always more remote locations. That being said, please, make smart decisions. If you do not have experience venturing into remote areas of the state or wilderness, now is not the time to experiment with adventuring. Lack of preparation or experience can easily turn into situations that can stress rescue and medical personnel and increase chances of exposure across communities.

In general, I also find less foot traffic when the weather is imperfect, in town or afield. But, don't underestimate what could also be right outside your door. Watching birds from your window, porch, yard, or garden may just be the best show in town right now. Imagine what an amazing data set we could build if everyone just reported breeding bird observations from their own property!

Every spring, I am grateful for the return of many more birds, but the feeling is especially strong this year. Doubtless, the coming months will be marked by tragedy, but nature will go on and we are a part of that nature. I encourage you to embrace that. Sometimes it's hard for me to believe we are embarking on Year 3 of the Atlas. We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. Please read on for ways you can most effectively contribute to the project this year, whether from your own yard or afield, and encourage your neighbors to do the same!

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It's times like these, you learn to live again.
It's times like these, you give and give again.
It's times like these, you learn to love again.
It's times like these, time and time again.
Foo Fighters

By Adrienne Leppold, Ph. D., Project Director/Department Songbird Specialist

Atlas Borealis

Most of the birding in Maine happens where most of the birders are. Much of the atlas exploration is happening there, too. There's not a lot of mystery to bird-finding in southern and coastal Maine, where good birding spots are well-documented. It's a different story in the western and northern regions of the state. Vast forests are seldom visited, and rarely surveyed. What a pity.

Birding in Maine's working forest is mesmerizing. It's not just the quality, it's the quantity of birds. A magnolia warbler is enjoyable anywhere, but imagine what it's like walking a logging road, where there's one after another, almost obscuring the quieter Bay-breasted Warblers.

Now add in the other northern forest species. Walk that same logging road and discover a yellow-bellied flycatcher. And then another, and so on. There's an olive-sided flycatcher trying to distract you from your counting, but you've got him tallied, too. Another hundred yards farther down, there's a mixed swarm of chickadees, both black-capped and boreal. Hey - did I just hear a black-backed woodpecker?



Black-backed Woodpecker. Photo by Bob Duchesne

On a good morning walk, the sheer volume of the songbird chorus is astonishing. It's a huge forest, with a lot of birds. There are so many opportunities, and it might be the first time your selected road has ever been birded by anyone! So why don't more people go there? Because it's not just a walk in the park. It's distant. It's daunting. It takes understanding and preparation.

Let's talk hardcore remote birding – defined for our purposes as the forests above Route 2 in the west and Route 9 in the east. For extra credit, let's get excited about the woods north of Millinocket. It's millions of acres of untapped adventure. Much of the area is accessed by logging roads. These roads have rules, mostly unwritten.

Logging trucks have the right-of-way in all directions. Move over and stop. This gives the oncoming driver predictability about your actions. It also gives you a chance to survive the

blinding dust that likely follows. Never park in the road, on bridges, or around corners. Have a full tank of gas and at least one good spare tire. Bring a spare spare if you've got one. Don't expect the cellphone to work. Main roads are generally firm and safe, but be cautious about side roads. Never drive down a side road farther than you are willing to walk back out.



Bring a group of atlasers and complete a block in one blockbuster effort! Photo by Bob Duchesne

Plan. For purposes of doing accurate atlas work, it's important to know exactly where you are and where you're going. Roads look alike, and there are no way-finding signs. Worse, it can be very difficult to know where a block begins and ends. Use the maps and aerial photos provided on the Maine Bird Atlas web site. Identify physical features on them that approximate the boundaries of your adopted block, so that you'll know on the ground where to start and finish. Streams and road intersections are handy landmarks. Print a block photo, and tuck it in your pocket.

Choose priority blocks. Due to difficulty of access in remote areas, putting your effort in a priority block is even more important, and planning is essential. When considering a block, I look at aerial photos and choose a block that appears to have a lot of habitat variability. The dark shades of conifers and the lighter hues of deciduous trees are apparent. Boggy areas are obvious. The more habitat variation there is within the block, the bigger the bird variety, and the more exciting my adventure.

Bust a block. The biggest challenge in surveying the northern forest is that it is so distant from most of Maine's residents. Make a multi-day adventure out of it by camping, or staying in local inns and sporting camps. Better yet, bring friends and do a blockbuster. It can be tough to spend enough time by yourself on a block in order to finish it according to the protocols, but breaking it up among multiple birders can accomplish the goal in a fraction of the time. My wife, Sandi, is the regional coordinator for the Jackman area. Last year, she organized a small group to bust
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several remote blocks east of Jackman. Each day ended with a celebratory beer. I coordinate the Greenville area and I'm stealing her blockbuster idea for this year.

You can contact your regional coordinator about blockbusting opportunities too! The coordinators, their regions, and contact information are all listed on Page 12 in the Breeding Bird Atlas Volunteer Handbook, available on the [Resources and Materials page](#) of the atlas website: maine.gov/birdatlas (Many group efforts will not happen in 2020 due to COVID-19, see page 8 for guidelines.)



Bob's favorite boreal road. Photo by Bob Duchesne

Leapfrog. Bring two sets of car keys. Drop one birder off at the beginning of the block, then drive yourself to the middle, and start walking to the end of the block. Your partner should reach the car just in time to come pick you up.

Get familiar with the eBird app. There's no WIFI out there. The app makes it quick and painless to log your sightings, while it automatically maps your walk. Upload all of your saved checklists once you return to civilization.

Start planning now. Pick a block. Pick a time. Go.

*By Bob Duchesne, Greenville Regional Coordinator /
Maine Birding Trail*



Remote Travel Grants

Is paddling the Allagash Wilderness Waterway scanning for waterfowl, wading birds, songbirds, and inland gulls on your birding bucket list? Have you dreamed about heading out with friends for a few days of exploring the North Maine Woods looking to add boreal birds like American Three-toed Woodpeckers, Spruce Grouse, and Boreal Chickadees to your life list? Maybe you have always wanted to hike sections of the Appalachian Trail listening for the alpine songs of Bicknell's Thrush and Blackpoll Warbler? We can help make your birding expedition a reality through an exciting new grant opportunity for Maine Bird Atlas volunteers.

The Maine Bird Atlas is currently accepting proposals from adventure-seeking birders who are interested in adopting and surveying atlas blocks in remote regions of the state during the 2020 breeding season. Grants will be awarded to volunteers to help cover the expenses associated with traveling to these remote areas. To apply for a grant, volunteers must complete and submit the [2020 Grant Application](#). Grant proposals should be submitted to Glen Mittelhauser, Coordinator of the Maine Bird Atlas as soon as possible to be considered for the 2020 breeding season.

Read more at: mainenaturalhistory.org/travelgrant



Regional Coordinator Spotlight - Sandi Duchesne



Sandi spends most of her time in central Maine but can also be found in places like Costa Rica's caribbean slope, complete with Emerald Toucanet and waterfalls.

DH: *How did you get into birding, or "why birds"?*

SD: My husband Bob was already an avid birder when I met him. He drew me deeper into the world of birds, and helped me develop my observational skills. But even as a child, I liked to call out the names of the backyard feeder birds and try to figure out what I was seeing in the fields and woods. I've always felt the urge to get to know the place I'm in – the common flora and fauna, the geography, the geology, the climate, the natural and human-influenced history. Birding allows me to learn about places in so many ways: which birds prefer which habitats, how the changing climate affects the range and long-term survivability of certain species, the foods different birds eat and what eats them, when bird species typically come and go, when their chicks fledge, and so on.

DH: *What motivated you to become a Regional Coordinator for the atlas?*

SD: I was asked by the organizers to take it on, and it's hard for me to say no to such things! Also, I love meeting and talking with potential volunteers (either online or in person) who share my love of birding in the wilder and more remote parts of the state.

DH: *Can you share any fun facts about the Jackman Region or interesting birds breeding there?*

SD: It's got just about every possible Maine habitat except ocean and salt-marsh, yet very few use it for recreational birding. You'll find mountains, rivers with floodplains, eskers, lakes, bogs, kettle-holes. Here in Maine's vast interior industrial woodlands, the forests also run the gamut: towering deciduous stands, shorelines lined with pines and cedars, boreal spruce-fir darkwoods, clear-cuts and barrens in various stages of regeneration, low bushy conifers with undergrowth so dense you can't push through it. There are miles and miles of gravel logging roads, snowmobile/ATV trails, and skidder tracks, offering relatively easy access to great birding. Developed areas range in size from Jackman,

the biggest town in the area at 723 residents, down to remote, off-the-grid camps and homesteads. There are a number of traditional sporting camps, and the Passamaquoddy Tribe owns and manages large tracts of tribal trust land northeast and southwest of Jackman. State-owned public reserve lands are located along Route 201 near the Canadian border, around Seboomook Lake, and along the route of the classic Moose River Bow Trip between Attean Pond and Holeb Pond. The primary Québec border crossing lies just sixteen miles north of Jackman on Route 201, and the Jackman region abuts the international borderline along its northern and western boundaries. It's not unusual to get stopped by a border patrol officer or a forest worker to ask what you're doing out there in the willy-wags. When you tell them you are birding, they are likely to share their own memorable birding encounters with you.

I must confess that I have only scratched the surface in my own birding explorations of the Jackman region. I'm looking forward to spending a lot more time there this year. It's full of boreal breeding species that southern Maine birders might only get to see during migration, if at all.

DH: *You organized a block busting trip last year in Jackman. Can you share any highlights from that trip? Was it successful?*

SD: It was quite successful, and I'll give most of the credit to Doug Boyd, a birder from Greene who owns a seasonal camp west of Jackman. Doug originally contacted me because he wanted to talk about adopting the block around his camp. He said he wished he knew other good birders in Jackman who'd be interested in doing some breeding bird surveys with him, but so far he hadn't met any. That's when I asked if it would be OK to base a block-busting party at the camp, so we could help him bird his adopted block while also knocking off a few priority blocks in the area. Doug enthusiastically agreed, and he proved to be an excellent host as well as a fun birding buddy. Our team of four – Doug, Bob, me, and our good friend Linda Powell – busted one priority block and partially completed several other blocks, both priority and non-priority, between June 27 and July 1. Best of all, Doug has invited us back for another block-busting party at Camp Boyd this summer! (COVID-19 protocols permitting, of course.)

For 2020 and/or 2021, I'd also like to organize at least one birding-by-boat expedition. Some of the priority blocks in the Jackman region are mostly water with adjacent wetlands, while others contain parcels of land that can only be reached via water. This is a good way to spread the word: I'm looking for volunteers who enjoy paddling almost as much as they enjoy birding. I know you're out there! (Contact information for Regional Coordinators is available on Page 12 in the Breeding Bird Atlas Volunteer Handbook, available on the [Resources and Materials page](#) of the atlas website: maine.gov/birdatlas. Many group efforts will not happen in 2020 due to COVID-19, see page 8 for guidelines) (Continued on page 5)

DH: *Beyond binoculars, a field guide, and datasheets (or the eBird app), what is your most useful tool while out atlasing?*

SD: There's little to no data connectivity across most of the region, and just a few public Wi-Fi hotspots in the village center of Jackman. So before the trip, I printed out multiple copies of the topo maps and corresponding Google Earth images, for all participants to use in the field for reference and orientation. The big DeLorme atlas was a valuable reference, too. Cross-checking between all those maps helped us identify field marks at or near the block boundaries, so we wouldn't accidentally log birds in an adjacent block. Then we used the maps to identify all the different habitats within the priority block, and the best access routes to reach them. Finally, we used the maps to develop efficient strategies for individual walking routes, with vehicle drop-off, leap-frogging, and meet-up points for each. Doug used the GPS unit in his truck to help confirm the boundaries, and Bob brought along a hand-held unit. I'd like to borrow another unit to take out on next year's forays. eBird has a built-in GPS that tracks your movements even when you are recording the data offline (as you will need to do almost

everywhere in the Jackman region), but it only recently added block boundaries, so you may also want to use identifiable field marks on a map with GPS confirmation to make sure you are not recording data from outside the block you are trying to complete.

DH: *If you could find one nesting bird, new or one you see all the time already, which would you like to see?*

SD: The northern goshawk is my favorite raptor, and that rare moment when you find a pair of goshawks on or near their nest is both exhilarating and terrifying. If you get too close, they will scream and strafe you, with talons out! I've yet to ever see one in the Jackman Region, although I have found them a couple of times in the Carrabassett Valley. I'd love to be the lucky observer who can put this species on the "confirmed breeder" list for Jackman.

Sandi McRae Duchesne has been an active member of Maine Audubon and its Penobscot Valley Chapter (PVC) since 1987. She has served on the PVC Board of Directors for nearly 30 years, including two three-year terms as Chapter President. She was re-elected to the Maine Audubon Board of Trustees in 2017, and previously served as Trustee from 1994 to 2000. Sandi has led numerous birding trips throughout Maine, as well as longer trips to New Hampshire, New Brunswick, Québec, and Florida. She volunteers annually as a birding guide for the annual Down East Spring Birding Festival and the Wings, Waves & Woods Festival, and also guides professionally for Road Scholars.

Sandi is a retired transportation engineer and planner. She served as an intelligence officer in the US Navy Reserve for 21 years, retiring in 2008 with the rank of Commander (O-5). In addition to birding, some of her favorite leisure activities include travel, camping, bicycling, and just about anything that can be done in, on, or near water. Sandi lives with her husband Bob in a little log cabin on Pushaw Lake in Hudson.

Questions by Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator



Make Sure Your Effort Counts! Track Your Volunteer Time

Did you know that this project wouldn't be possible without you? Literally! Everyone hopefully knows by now how valuable your bird observations are, but it's also your time and mileage contributions to this project that are enabling us to fund it. As a Department project, we have an allotment of federal funds for use, but those dollars come with a catch. They require matching \$\$\$. Fortunately, we are allowed to use volunteer time and mileage contributions as match, because IF&W doesn't have a half-million dollars lying around at its disposal. Now, for some Q & A:

What time and miles should I be counting?

Any work you do for the project counts, aside from incidental submissions, including: travel time to and from a field site, miles of travel to and from field sites, time preparing

for field surveys, attendance at training/informational events, time entering data, etc. We just need the total amount of time and miles contributed to the project on any given day.

OK, How do I get this information to you?

We'll need you to sign up as an official volunteer for the project through the Department's new Citizen Science portal (ifw.citizenscience.maine.gov). Click on the Bird Atlas and read through the instructions to Register as a User.

For more on this, see the opening article of [Issue 4](#), available on the Resources and Materials page of the atlas website, maine.gov/birdatlas, listed under Communication/Outreach.

Atlasing Strategy for 2020: Focus on Priority Atlas Blocks for Breeding Birds

I am asked frequently by volunteers about how they can most efficiently help the Maine Bird Atlas reach its goal of finishing its data collection phase by the end of 2022. The answer until now has been simple – “complete atlas blocks”, but starting this year the answer has changed to, “complete **priority** Atlas blocks”. Fully understanding this change and why it is important requires some explanation. So, sit back and enjoy a beverage of your choice while we go over some information about atlas blocks, priority blocks, and this new 2020 atlasing strategy.

Atlas blocks are directly related to the 721 USGS Topographic Quadrangle maps, or Quads, that span Maine. Following the standard protocol for similar atlases, we divided each Maine Quad map into six equal blocks, resulting in 4,081 atlas blocks. We know that Maine doesn't have enough active birders to get complete bird records from all 4,081 atlas blocks, so the priority block system was designed to ensure that a subset of blocks spanning the entire state receives a minimum amount of effort, even in areas with few birds or birders. The northwestern-most block in each Quad Map was designated for priority surveying. Some exceptions were made for blocks with little to no land or access issues and we also added in some additional blocks based on historical records of breeding birds of particular interest. This resulted in a total of 975 atlas blocks, covering nearly one-quarter of the state, being designated for priority surveying during the 2018-22 breeding seasons.



This image shows a section of the Interactive Block Map from the maine.gov/birdatlas site, centered around Augusta. Blocks with a pink overlay have been completed, the hashed overlay means they are adopted (remember: that doesn't exclude you from atlasing there), and the blue overlay denotes Priority Blocks. There are 36 priority just around the state capital that still need to be completed!

Since most of the priority atlas blocks are systematically distributed across all portions of the state, some priority blocks may not have many unique breeding birds in them. We also know there are areas with very interesting birds that don't fall within priority blocks. But remember that the goal of the Maine Bird Atlas is not to get good coverage of just the best birding sites in Maine. The goal is to get even coverage across all areas of the state regardless of whether the site has any unique species breeding there. Documenting where birds aren't is just as important as knowing where they are.

In order to complete the Atlas, we need complete coverage of all priority blocks. Starting in 2020, if you can choose between atlasing in a priority block or a non-priority block during the breeding season, choose the priority block, particularly one that doesn't have many breeding bird records yet. This doesn't mean that observations in non-priority atlas blocks are not valuable. All observations are of great value to the Atlas. I spend a lot of time along woods roads in my neighbourhood that span 3 atlas blocks, and none of them are designated as priority blocks. All the bird observations from my walks will be used to improve the overall data quality of the Atlas, so the records are extremely valuable. However, I will also be looking to wander farther from my usual birding haunts in the coming years to areas designated as priority blocks and hope others will do the same.

You can get the latest information about the birds that have been reported in any atlas block by going to the Maine Bird Atlas eBird effort map (ebird.org/atlasme/effortmap) and, by zooming in on the map, you can click on any priority block of interest. Priority blocks are outlined in black on the map and the observations for each block can be explored by clicking 'View all block data'. Volunteers can help the Atlas effort by signing up to adopt a priority atlas block to ensure that the block will be adequately covered by the end of the project. You can look up which priority blocks have not yet been adopted by going to www.maine.gov/birdatlas and clicking on the 'Interactive Block Map'. If you are having any trouble adopting a block, email the Project Coordinator (mainebirdatlas@gmail.com). Remember that even if a block is adopted, anyone can submit records of any birds from that block.

So, adopt a priority block or make a special trip to a priority block and put in a few hours of birding. It is vital that we focus our efforts on priority blocks so we stay on track for finishing the Atlas by 2022. Doing so will ensure that we collect adequate records across the whole state.

by Glen Mittelhauser, Atlas Coordinator

Volunteers Needed for Special Species Projects

Want to spend a moonlit evening listening for singing whip-poor-wills and booming nighthawks? How would you like to paddle into a marsh to observe secretive wetland birds like bitterns, rails, and grebes? Perhaps you would rather provision your backyard with nest boxes for bluebirds and swallows and watch for breeding activity from home? If any (or all) of these activities appeal to you, the Maine Bird Atlas' Special Species Projects are just the thing for you. In addition to our larger atlasing effort, we have developed a number of specialized projects targeting bird species that are harder to detect through conventional means. Whether a beginning or advanced birder, there are opportunities for you to contribute to these important projects and help make the Maine Bird Atlas one of the most comprehensive atlas efforts to date!



Sora, a target marsh species. Photo by Logan Parker

Marsh Bird Monitoring: Two hundred marshes have been identified for formal surveys as part of the atlas and many are still up for adoption. Marsh adopters will visit and conduct playback surveys of wetland birds three times between mid-May to late June. While some marshes are accessible from the road, others may require a hike or a paddle. The level of adventure is up to you! We have prepared training materials to help volunteers identify the project's 9 target species by sight and sound: Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Green Heron, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Coot, Common Gallinule, and Sedge Wren. A map of available marshes can be found at: www.maine-natural-history.org/mebirdatlas-marshbirds-surveys.

Nightjar Monitoring: The Atlas is partnering with the Maine Nightjar Monitoring Project to collect observations of Eastern Whip-poor-wills and Common Nighthawks - two nightjar species undergoing widespread decline throughout their breeding ranges. The extent of decline in Maine is unknown and requires specialized monitoring protocols to collect data. We are seeking volunteers to adopt and survey a road-based route once at sunset and again on a moonlit summer night. Volunteers must be able to identify Maine's

nightjars by sound. An ability to identify Maine's owls and other crepuscular/nocturnal birds by ear is a big plus. A map of available routes can be found on the project website: www.mainenightjar.com/routes.



Eastern Whip-poor-will. Photo by Logan Parker

Nest Box Monitoring: The Maine Nest Box Monitoring Program was initiated to improve nesting opportunities and gather valuable breeding information for Maine's cavity nesting birds. After a successful first season focused on Eastern Bluebirds, American Kestrels, and Northern Saw-whet Owl, we are expanding the project to include some of Maine's swallow species. This spring, we will have a limited number of Tree Swallow boxes and artificial Cliff Swallow nests available for free while supplies last. For handbooks on building and monitoring nesting structures visit: <https://www.maine-natural-history.org/nestbox>.



Tree Swallow pair exchanging nesting material. Photo by Logan Parker

Additional guidance for observing birds in priority habitats can be found on the Special Species page of the Atlas website: www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/special-species.html.

To take part in any of these exciting projects, contact logan@hereinthewild.com with the project title included in the subject line.

By Logan Parker, Special Species and Habitat Technician

eBird Mobile 2.0

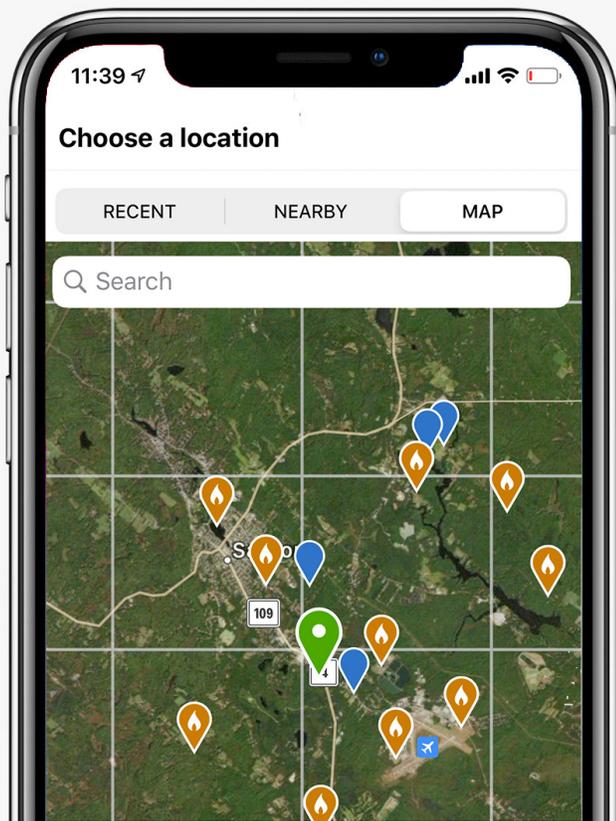
In February, eBird released the 2.0 update for their mobile app to iOS devices (Android users had earlier access). For those of you who haven't used the app since the last field season, you should be aware of a few major changes:

New Look - To make data entry easier and quicker, when you open the app you are immediately prompted to start a list. This will even auto-select your location, which you refine before submitting.

Packs - Packs are lists of birds you are likely to see in a given region. By installing a pack, you can use a species list of birds tailored for your area regardless of cellular or internet connection. We recommend downloading these before you go out atlasing.

Coming Soon - Blocks on maps! Atlasers rejoice! Finally we have an easy way to view atlas block boundaries right in the mapping tools on the eBird app. These will only be visible when you have the Maine Bird Atlas portal selected in your settings. As of this writing, in early April, this is being beta tested but we hope that it will be available for everyone by the time the breeding seasons ramps up, maybe even by the time you read this.

by Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator



The new mapping feature of eBird Mobile 2.0 will show you atlas block overlays when you are selecting the area that you are atlasing in.

Atlasing during COVID-19

Here are a few reminders on how you can get some fresh air while being smart, staying safe, and sticking close to home.

Go where they aren't (AKA how to avoid crowds!)

- Visit a lesser-known spot and explore places close to home. Consider visiting a nearby Wildlife Management Area, or less visited state park, public land or local land trust.
- Have a plan B (and C). If your first destination has a busy parking lot, go to the next spot on your list!
- Get outside earlier or later in the day to avoid peak times, and please keep your visits brief.
- Recharge in your backyard and neighborhood!
- Know before you go

If you are exhibiting symptoms related to COVID-19, or if you have recently been exposed to COVID-19, please stay home. Follow CDC guidelines on proper social distancing.

Guidelines for Atlasing during COVID-19 are available on the Atlas homepage and blog, or directly at: www1.maine.gov/wordpress/ifwbirdatlas/2020/04/24/atlasing-during-covid-19-instructions-for-maine-bird-atlas-volunteers/

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