



# Black-capped Chronicle



Issue 2

Newsletter of the Maine Bird Atlas

Spring/Summer 2018

## Maine Bird Atlas Update

We are grateful for all of the effort that has gone into the Maine Breeding Bird Atlas during the first half of this first season. Thanks to the over 600 volunteer atlasers who have contributed to project thus far, we are learning more about Maine's breeding birds.

As of this printing, 621 Atlas blocks have been adopted, and 253 of these adopted blocks were designated for priority surveying. This is a great start for the first year of the Atlas.

So, here are some numbers. We have confirmed breeding records for 169 species in the state, plus possible or probable breeding records for an additional 48 species. Some of these may be wintering or migrating species that were coded incorrectly, and we will get them sorted out this coming fall. Among those confirmed are nine species not reported as breeding in Maine's first atlas (1979-1983): Manx Shearwater, Great Egret, Sandhill Crane, American Oystercatcher, Common Murre, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Merlin, Fish Crow, and Carolina Wren. A Chuck-will's-widow, not yet confirmed as a breeder, has been present for much of June in Orland and is also an important find.

Confirming breeding birds during July and August can be very rewarding. Nests are usually hidden from predators and very difficult to find for many species. Codes like ON (Occupied Nest), NY (Nest with Young) and NE (Nest with

Eggs) are uncommon for most songbirds. It is extremely difficult to follow an adult bird and find the nest, but much easier to observe an adult carrying food (CF), feeding young (FY) or find a fledgling (FL), and July and August is the perfect time to watch for these behaviors. Once nestlings fledge the nest, the young can be noisy when they are bugging their parents for a meal, making them easier to spot. Here are some tips for atlasing in July and August in Maine.

- 1) Before heading out into your block, review the list of species that have been listed as probable or possible breeders but have not been confirmed in the Atlas Block. To see a compiled list of species and breeding codes for an atlas block, use the "explore" tab and "explore a region" in eBird and enter the atlas block name.
- 2) Time your visits - early mornings and late evenings are generally when birds are most active, although adults and juveniles can be active just about any time of day, particularly in areas with dense understory or food sources.
- 3) Observe: Stand still and watch; follow an individual bird for 5 or 10 minutes to see what it is up to; be alert for any chipping noises or more than 2 birds in the same tree.
- 4) If you are puzzled by the identification of a young bird, wait for the parents to show up.

And above all, spend some time paying attention to what the birds are doing in July and August. It usually pays off! Often birds like Vireos, who tend to stay fairly high in the canopy in the spring, will spend more time in the lower canopy or even the shrub layer when they are feeding fledglings who are not yet capable of strong flight in July and August. This gives us a better chance of seeing them carrying food or feeding young.

**- Glen Mittelhauser, Project Coordinator, Maine Natural History Observatory**

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## Backyard Atlasing: connect with nature and contribute to the atlas, all without leaving home

We've said it before and we'll say it again, "Anyone can help contribute to the Maine Bird Atlas!" even if you never leave your yard.

You don't have to adopt a survey block or go out birding (although both would be terrific!). You don't even have to be able to identify lots of bird species. All you have to do is take a little time and watch what is going on around you.

One of the main goals of the Breeding Bird Atlas is to confirm breeding for as many species, in as many of the 4,000 survey blocks as we can. There are breeding "codes" that are used to indicate how likely it is that a species is breeding in an area. These range from just observing a bird in suitable habitat, to observing an occupied nest, and everything in between. You certainly don't need to find nests to confirm breeding! You might observe an adult bird carrying nesting material or carrying food. Or you might observe an adult feeding recently fledged young. All indicate breeding without having to find a nest.

I just wanted to provide some examples of how easy it is to contribute to the Maine Breeding Bird Atlas. The block in which my house is located currently has 11 confirmed breeding species. I have contributed 10 of those, all (with a few exceptions) from my backyard! You can even contribute if you don't have a yard. There are many species of birds that breed in urban or semi-urban settings such as Northern Cardinal, Eastern Phoebe, Gray Catbird, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Song Sparrow, just to name a few. If you pay attention, you can get breeding confirmation on many of them, while you are doing other things like gardening or playing with your dog. Sometimes, you don't even have to leave the house! As an example, earlier this year I was at my kitchen sink, looked through the window, and saw a Tufted Titmouse with a big chunk of my dog's hair in its mouth. Bingo! Carrying nesting material!

Another time, I was out in the back yard playing with my dog and observed two Gray Catbirds repeatedly going to a shrub and ripping some of the dead vegetation from it and carrying it off to some shrubs in my neighbor's yard. Another confirmed breeding record!

Earlier this spring, I noticed a Northern Flicker repeatedly flying to the same dead tree in my neighbor's yard. A sure indication that something was up, so I just paid attention every time I saw the bird and observed the male excavating a cavity in the tree. I have since seen both birds repeatedly entering and exiting that cavity all summer long. That indicates an occupied nest and is another confirmed breeding record.

On another day, I walked over to help my neighbor by bringing in his mail, and I observed a Chipping Sparrow carrying some food, so I stopped and watched where it went



*Male Northern Flicker excavating the cavity. Several times I saw the female poke her head into the cavity and then leave. A few minutes later, I would see the male return and start excavating some more. I imagined that she kept telling him that it still wasn't good enough! Photos by Amy Meehan.*

and determined that it was nesting in the shrubs near his house. Chalk up another record!

A few days ago, I was taking my dog out to the back yard and happened to see two woodpeckers fly into a tree near my door. It being unusual to see two of them together like that, I decided to watch them for a while and see what was going on. They flew over to my neighbor's yard and I ran in to get my binoculars. Sure enough, it turned out to be an adult male Hairy Woodpecker who was being followed by a fledgling and I watched him feed it several times. I was



*Adult Male Hairy Woodpecker feeding one of his fledglings. Fledgling birds will be fed by the adults for several weeks after they leave the nest. Photo by Amy Meehan.*

## Backyard Atlasing (continued from previous page)



*House Wren entering a neighbor's nest box (left) and removing a fecal sac from the nest box (right). Photos by Amy Meehan.*

lucky and they even stayed in that spot long enough for me to run back inside and grab my camera!

And just this morning, I was moseying down the street with my dog and heard some unusual sounds coming from a neighbor's yard. It sounded like baby birds. By paying

attention to where the sound was coming from, I was able to see two House Wrens carrying food and going in and out of a nest box near the neighbor's front porch. And another confirmed breeding record, just like that!

So, do you have a Blue Jay nesting in your garage? Have you heard a Barred Owl outside your house? Is there a Phoebe nesting on your drainpipe? We would like to know! As you have seen from my examples, it doesn't take a lot of effort to help contribute records to the Maine Bird Atlas. We hope as you are enjoying the weather in Maine this summer, whether you are vacationing or just out enjoying the sun, you will take a moment to notice some of the birds around you and particularly take a few moments to notice what they are doing. It truly is enjoyable to watch the birds with whom we share our neighborhoods and to learn more about their behavior. And you can make a valuable contribution to help in the management and conservation of Maine's birds in the process!

**- Amy Meehan, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife**

## Your Time Matters! Tracking Non-survey Hours

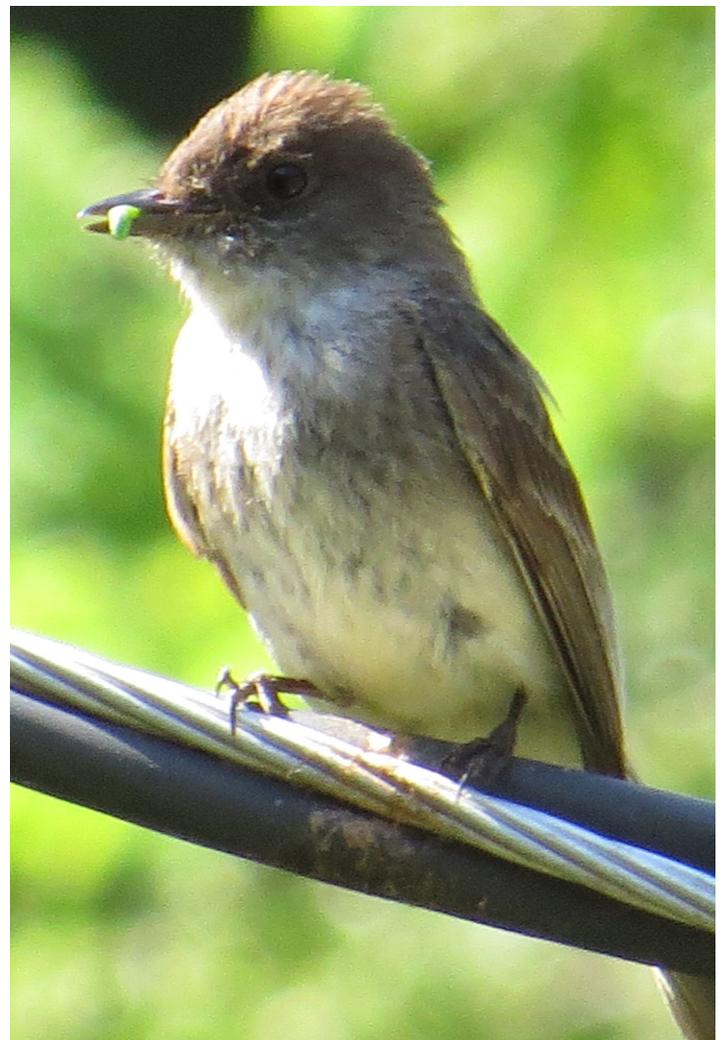
As volunteers for the Maine Bird Atlas, your time is important to us. Not only the time that you spending looking for birds and their breeding activities but your non-survey hours are also valuable. We can leverage your hours against matching grants necessary for the completion of this project.

We are able to see your survey hours based on the checklists you submit to eBird. This is important in tracking towards our goal of at least 20 hours of survey effort for a block to be complete. However, planning a day out birding and the time it takes to get there can count for the project as well. Your non-survey hours can include prep time at home, driving to and from your survey location, atlas meetings or trainings you attend, and even time spent entering data.

The miles you drive while volunteering should also be tracked. Don't worry if you forget to reset your odometer before birding, you can always use sites like Google Maps to measure the distance between your starting and ending points.

We've provided a form for tracking your hours and miles in the Volunteer Handbook, located in Appendix 2 (page 17). By the end of the summer we will have an online entry point for you to track these hours but we don't want you to lose this information!

**- Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator, Maine Audubon**



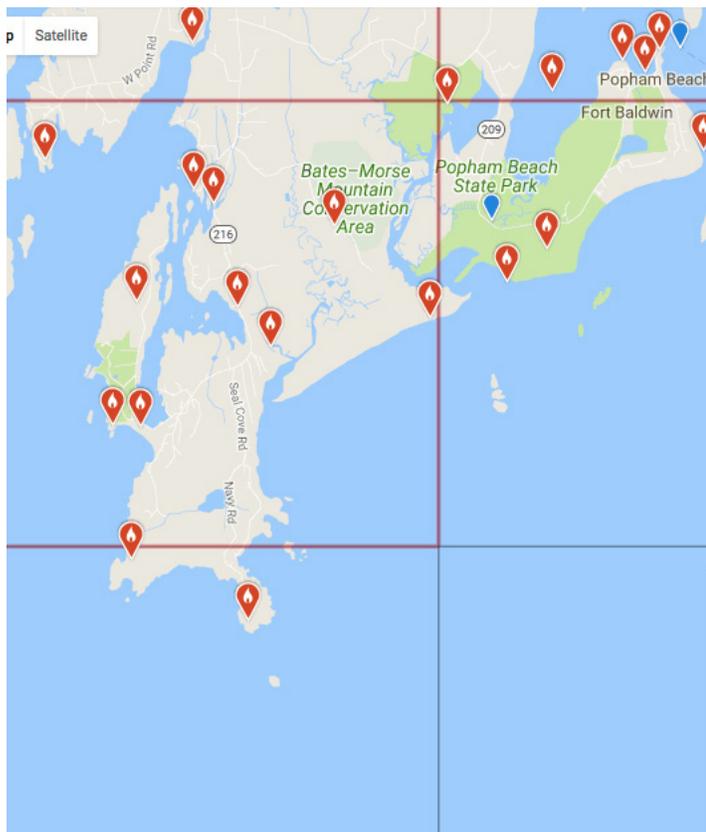
*Eastern Phoebe carrying food to feed nestlings. Photo by Amy Meehan.*

## Atlas Tips for eBirders: Birding on Borders

The Maine Bird Atlas portal adds great new features that let you explore atlas specific information, including Breeding Range Maps and the ability to explore data on the block level. These pages are updated in real-time, as you submit your checklists with breeding codes to the atlas portal, allowing for instant feedback and review of what birds are breeding in the state. In order for these breeding maps and explore features to be accurate, you may need to change a few of your regular eBirding behaviors, particularly when using hotspots.

For the Maine Bird Atlas we are encouraging everyone to report locations of birds as accurately as possible so that each species is in the correct block. This is the same general rule as regular 'eBirding' where recommendations are: "Shorter distance checklists are strongly preferred, ideally 1 kilometer or less, but do your best to keep it under 7 kilometers." The biggest concern needing extra care with the precision of sightings is if people are crossing multiple block boundaries within a single checklist. Each block is approximately 3 miles square with boundaries that may bisect larger birding areas, especially hotspots. Before birding a large area, we recommend checking on the boundaries of a block to make sure you properly plot your breeding birds. Here are just a couple examples:

In the map below to the left you can see the hotspots indicated by the large red pins. While most of them fall safely within the boundaries of the blocks, there are a few that are split (some multiple times) by block boundaries. Spirit Pond Preserve, located near the top middle of this map has

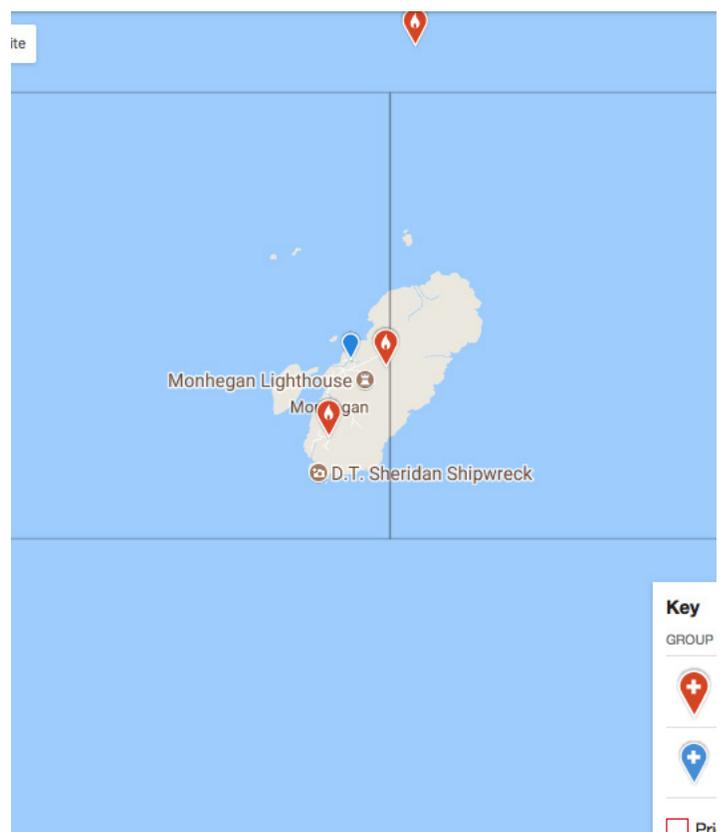


its hotspot plotted in a block that captures a small fraction of the preserve. In this case we wouldn't want observers submitting breeding birds to the hotspot (unless they are in that small parcel) and should instead create personal locations to accurately plot where the birds are. You can also see the Seawall Beach, Phippsburg hotspot near the center of the map – many of the beach nesting species here are found east of the hotspot pin, near the spit which actually falls in the next block over. Again, creating a personal hotspot where you actually see those birds nesting is preferred method for eBirding those breeding birds.

One more example is the popular birding hotspot, Monhegan Island. As you can see in the map below to the right, the block boundary almost perfectly bisects the island. The hotspot pin falls in the western half of the island, fortunately where many birders spend most of their time. If your atlas efforts do take you north to Cathedral Woods (looking for Winter Wrens, Black-throated Green Warblers, or Swainson's Thrushes) or east to the ocean-side cliffs (because Herring Gull chicks are pretty adorable) then it is best to create a personal location and make sure your breeding observations fall inside the correct block.

There are many more examples like this across the state. The important take-away is that we encourage you to create a new personal location for breeding birds to ensure they are plotted in the correct blocks.

**- Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator, Maine Audubon**



## Data entry: Sending Breeding Bird Records to the Atlas

Your bird sightings are valuable pieces of information and we would appreciate you taking a moment to submit your observations to the Maine Bird Atlas project by following these simple steps:

### 1) Go to: [ebird.org/atlasme](http://ebird.org/atlasme)

If this is your first time on eBird you will need to create an account before proceeding to step 2.

### 2) Click on “Submit” at the top of the page.

This might be in a collapsed menu at the top right of the page if you are on a phone or tablet.

### 3) Use the “Find it on a Map” option.

You can type the county (or “Maine”) into the search bar to then see a map of that area.

### 4) Plot your location on the “Where did you bird?” page.

Please zoom in on the map to make sure you plot your location accurately.

### 5) Enter the date and time of your observation.

### 6) Indicate the species and breeding codes you observed.

Type the number of individuals you saw then select the breeding code you observed, using the breeding code that corresponds to the greatest evidence of breeding you observed for the species. Not sure what the correct breeding code is? You can reference our helpful list of breeding codes and explanations of each in the Volunteer Handbook ([www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html](http://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html)).

### 7) Click Submit and you are done!

If you find the data entry process too complex for your liking, you can access paper data forms on the Maine Bird Atlas webpage ([www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html](http://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html)) and mail in paper copies of your bird records.

- **Doug Hitchcox, Outreach Coordinator, Maine Audubon**



## What's Your Favorite Bird? Say it with a Sponsor

Have you been stumped by what birthday gift to get the avid birder in your life? Do you want to support species conservation in your own backyard but didn't know how? Sponsoring a species with the Maine Bird Atlas may be the answer. Maine's 224 breeding bird species have been divided into six price tiers so you can choose the sponsorship level that works for your wallet. You can sponsor a species for one, several, or all five years of the project. You may choose one species to sponsor or many. Whatever you choose, you will be directly assisting research that will protect that species and many others in the State of Maine for generations to come. 100% of the money raised goes to funding the Maine Bird Atlas and is tax deductible.

The money from Sponsor a Species will primarily be used to hire specially trained field technicians and also be available

as small grants for volunteers to complete remote priority blocks. Hired field technicians are trained to recognize confusing or rare species' and systematically visit the most remote areas of Maine throughout the breeding season. Their work ensures that data collection will be consistent throughout all of Maine's most remote locations. Funds will also be available as grants for volunteers who need help paying for transportation for birding trips to less accessible areas of the state (more information on that soon).

In addition to knowing that you are contributing to this watershed project, your tax-deductible donation will be recognized online and in the published Atlas, and you will receive an electronic Sponsorship Certificate that you can print and display or send as a gift.

For more information and to start sponsoring a species, go to [www.mainenaturalhistory.org](http://www.mainenaturalhistory.org) and click “Bird Atlas”.

- **Celeste Mittelhauser, Maine Natural History Observatory**

## “Liquid silver voices” Maine’s nocturnal and crepuscular birds

The night was clear and still. The moon hung high above, shining a muted, yellow glow over the surrounding barrens. Voices rang out from every direction. Three Eastern Whip-poor-wills sang ceaselessly from the barrens in competition with one another. High above in the darkness, nighthawks darted to and fro, calling and diving earthward with a “boom”. A pair of Barred Owls noisily caterwauled from within a small pine grove towering over the scrubland below. This lunar choir was everything one seeking to observe nocturnal birds could hope for.

This was an extraordinary year for the Maine Nightjar and Crepuscular Bird Monitoring Project. Through partnership with the Maine Bird Atlas (a project of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife), we were able to exponentially expand our spatial and temporal coverage of the areas that we monitored. We also expanded the effort to collect observations, not just of nightjars, but of owls, thrushes, woodcocks, snipes, and all other birds active during the sunset and moonrise. A team of two volunteers (special thanks to Steve Dunham of Baxter State Park!) covering six routes during 2017 was expanded to a crew of nearly 20 volunteers covering 24 routes during 2018. I am immensely grateful for our collaboration with the Maine Bird Atlas and its volunteers. Together, we have made this year a great success. You will find below, a few reflections from this year’s efforts to observe some of Maine’s most elusive bird species under some very unique survey conditions.

The period around the setting sun and rising moon can be a captivating time to observe nature. While the ocular senses

are suppressed, our sensitivity to all things auditory are intensified. Fortunately for us night-bird seekers, many of the birds we listen for are very vocal. This is a good thing too as finding these silently-flying and cryptically-plumed birds in the dimming light of dusk would be a great challenge. The few remaining visual stimuli, such as the deep purples and reds of the sunset, the brilliance of the fully illuminated moon, or the vast ceiling of starlight, are a breathtaking backdrop for the accompanying choruses.

The transitory twilight period as day shifts to night is one with a large cast. During this period we were just as likely to hear the songs of warblers such as the Common Yellowthroat or Black-throated Blue Warbler, as we were to hear the song of a nightjar such as the Eastern Whip-poor-will. This period proved to be an excellent time to listen for the ethereal songs of the thrush family. This grouping includes the Hermit Thrush, Veery, and Wood Thrush. If you were within an area of conifer forest, at a slightly northern latitude, and/or at a higher elevation, you may well hear the song of the Swainson’s Thrush during this period as well. Another thrush, the ever familiar, American Robin, also sings heartily in waning sunlight.

There are two “peent”-ers regularly heard in the dusk chorus (“peent” being a characterization of their call). One “peent” is given from the ground by the American Woodcock, an inland shorebird, while the second is given in flight by the Common Nighthawk, an aerial insectivorous nightjar. While their calls sound similar, these two birds perform opposing courtship displays. The American Woodcock ascends into the skies in a great circle before spiraling down to earth while its feathers produce a twittering sound. The Common Nighthawk, by contrast, flies high above barrens, cities, wetlands, forest clearings, and other habitats, occasionally diving straight downward. The dive produces a loud, rushing sound described as a boom. Keeping a log of all the activity during dusk can be a challenge given the great range of species that may be encountered. Other great twilight bird observations included Sora, Virginia Rail, and American Bittern from roadside wetlands.

As day gave way to night and the moon rose high into the sky, the changing of the guard was more complete. Most of the evening voices would drop off, while a few others joined in. On clear, moonlit nights Eastern Whip-poor-will sang their onomatopoeic songs across the state. William Faulkner described their voices as like “liquid silver”. When you have heard a chorus of 3 or more birds singing ceaselessly together under the full moon, it is hard to contest this quality. Barred Owls, Saw-whet Owls, and even a few Long-eared Owls were reported to have called during this later survey window. The Ovenbird, a ground-nesting warbler species, also was regularly reported as singing after the moonrise. They were not singing their regular refrain of “teacher, teacher, teacher”, but rather gave a complex and



*Veery, often heard during dusk. Photo by Logan Parker.*

## “Liquid silver voices” (continued from previous page)



*Eastern Whip-poor-will, with their nocturnal voices described as “liquid silver”. Photo by John Winze.*

garbled-sounding song with maybe one or two “teachers” thrown in just so you were sure who was responsible. Some points were devoid of birdsong, but rich with the calls of Spring Peepers, Wood Frogs, and American Toads in May and Gray Tree Frogs, Green Frogs, and American Bullfrogs in June. Lately fireflies have teemed along the roadsides and hung over the wetlands like will-o-the-wisps while the occasional Luna Moth floats by, illuminated by the moonlight. These sights and sounds make it hard to ever feel disappointed, even if you don’t hear any birds.

Many other exciting observations have been made around the state this season outside of the survey effort as well. Maine had its second sighting of a Chuck-will’s-widow this year. I made a foray up to Orland to hear the bird for myself. I joined a handful of other birders in the field where we enjoyed the songs, calls, and displays of three nightjars at once, for Eastern Whip-poor-will and Common Nighthawk were also present. Others have shared stories of close encounters with courting whip-poor-will, booming nighthawks, and insight into new potential hotspots. The 2018 field season for these efforts is ending. I’m making my best effort to enjoy each survey and relish in these night

songs before they fade into silence until next year. In the meantime, I will work up the data, adjust current routes, and work to make new routes based upon incidental reports from around the state.

While the survey effort is ending for the year, there is still time to collect observations of these birds in July and early August. Thrushes will continue to sing in the evenings, Barred Owls will continue to call and caterwaul, and on moonlit nights, you may yet hear a whip-poor-will sing. July is a great time to keep an eye out for fledged birds of all kinds. Should you like to join in on these efforts next year, either through participating in the roadside survey or submitting incidental reports to the Maine Bird Atlas, do not hesitate to reach out. The greater coverage we have, the best understanding we will have of these bird species, some of whom are undergoing declines. We would love to have you on board.

**- Logan Parker, Maine Natural History Observatory**

## Tips for Atlasing in Adopted Blocks

\* Before heading out in the field, study the maps and consider the important habitats to survey. No need to survey every spot within your atlas block. No need to visit all private lands within your atlas block. Only consider requesting access to private lands that may have important habitat not present elsewhere in your block.

\* Feel free to design your own system of driving, hiking or stationary birding within your adopted block that works for you.

\* Although it is helpful if you complete your atlas block in a year, don't worry. You technically have until the end of the five-year project (2022) to complete your block surveys. But finishing one will help us direct efforts to others that are not finished.

\* Don't get discouraged. May and June are great months for building out your species lists, but confirming breeding for over half of the species in an atlas block is challenging during these months. July and August are great months for observing recently fledged young or adults carrying food, and these are the best months for building out your species lists with confirmed breeders.

\* Even if you have adopted an atlas block, you can submit checklists or incidental observations for any block in Maine at any time over the next 5 years.

\* It is important to understand the rough boundaries of your atlas block and plot the locations of your checklists precisely. Be careful when using existing eBird hotspots as locations for your checklists because sometimes hotspots cross block boundaries. If you atlas along a trail or road and you cross into another atlas block, start a new checklist.

\* Consider teaming up with other birders to survey your adopted atlas block. The Maine Bird Atlas is definitely a team effort. Consider inviting less experienced volunteers along with you during your surveys.

\* One of the goals of the Maine Bird Atlas is to help engage volunteers with Maine birds and the outdoors. So relax and have some fun. Atlasing is an excuse to slow down and focus on observing bird behaviors.

\* If you have any questions or suggestions, send an email to [mainebirdatlas@gmail.com](mailto:mainebirdatlas@gmail.com) and we will get back to you soon.

- **Glen Mittelhauser, Maine Natural History Observatory**

## What's Next?

Change is our way to never stop improving. Here are a few things to keep an eye out for in the coming weeks and months:

**Volunteer Time is \$\$\$\$.** Please keep track of all of the hours, including travel, that you put into the Maine Bird Atlas. We will convert your hours into match for grants supporting this project. Details coming soon!

**Switching back to the traditional Maine eBird page.** Once the breeding season wraps up for many species in August and September, it is time to remember to switch your data entry back to the traditional Maine eBird portal. Not sure when the breeding season is over? Safe dates sorted by end date can help, available online at [www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html](http://www.maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas/resources-materials.html).

**Maine Winter Bird Atlas.** During the winter of 2018-19, we will be developing and field testing protocols for producing a winter bird atlas. In the meantime, you can help out by entering your winter bird records (December through March) directly into the traditional Maine eBird portal.

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