



Black-capped Chronicle



Issue 7

Newsletter of the Maine Bird Atlas

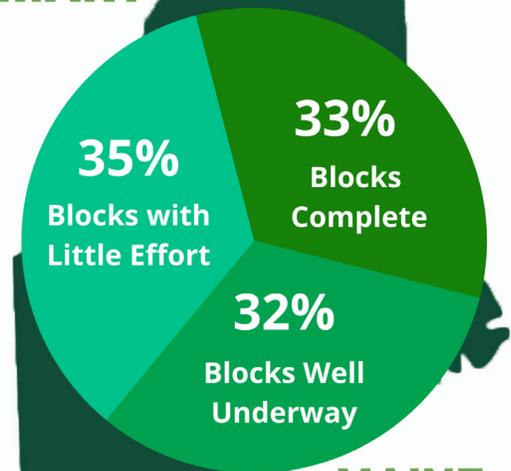
Winter 2020-21

ATLASING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

It has been over 40 years since the start of Maine’s first breeding bird atlas, and Maine has never completed a wintering bird atlas. Over those 40 years, we know that there have been huge changes in bird populations and distributions in New England and the Maritime Provinces. You may have heard about a recent study showing a loss of 3 billion breeding birds in the U.S. and Canada over the past 50 years. Have you ever wondered how biologists know that certain species are declining or their range is shifting over time? Atlases have become one of the most important tools to assess the status and distribution of birds across the globe. With geographically even coverage, atlases are designed to track species’ distribution over large areas and are essential for effective conservation. By running successive atlases in a region (the recommendation is 20-year intervals), it becomes possible to identify, at a roughly 3x3 mile resolution, where a species was retained between the atlas periods, where it was lost, and where it appeared for the first time.

The Maine Bird Atlas project (2018-2022) is important because it gives us a complete snapshot of the distribution and abundance of both breeding and wintering birds across the state, and sets a baseline for the future generation of Maine biologists. The atlas that we will be publishing at the end of this project will bring together in one place information on Maine breeding and wintering birds. By comparing our results to Maine’s first breeding bird atlas (1978-83),

SEASON 3 SUMMARY



MAINE BIRD ATLAS 2018-2022

2020 wraps up our third breeding season and we’ve met our goal of 30% priority blocks completed!

we can assess how much species have changed (i.e., losses, gains, or shifts in range) and help us predict how birds might respond to environmental change in the future. A lot of young people have been involved in the Maine Bird Atlas and they are going to be the future of birding in Maine. The way I like to think of it is all of us Maine Bird Atlas volunteers are working for the next generation of Maine biologists and helping to set down a baseline of current conditions so that they will be able to assess how things have changed in the future.

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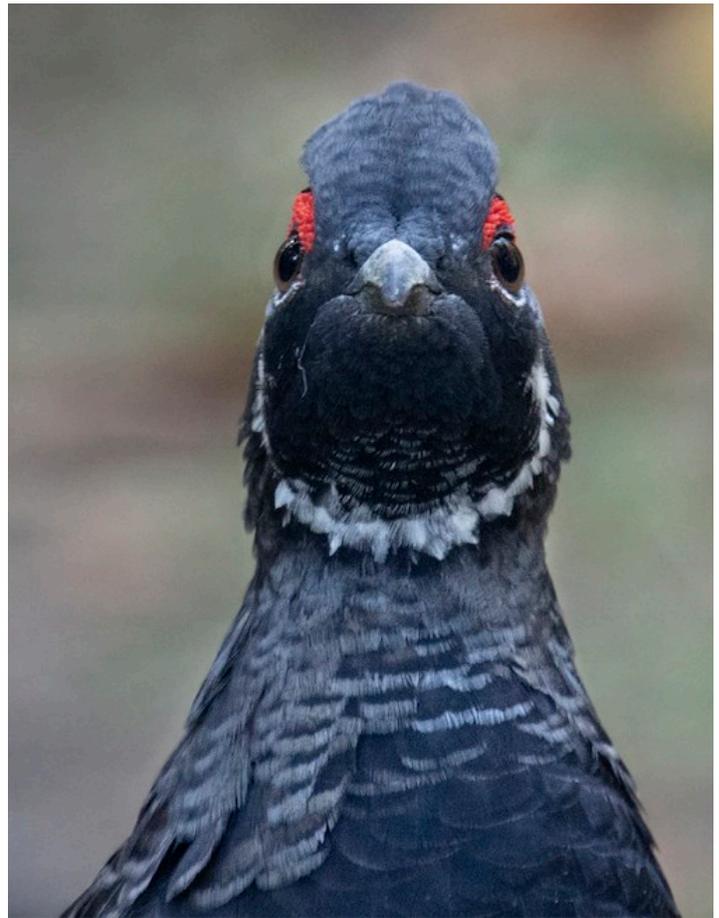
I want to give a huge thank you to the over 1,500 volunteers who have scoured all corners of Maine to document both breeding and wintering birds. Based on our last count, we now know that Maine has 210 confirmed breeding species and an additional 11 species we suspect are breeding but not yet confirmed. Of the 210 confirmed breeding species, 13 species are new confirmed breeders in Maine since the first breeding bird atlas. Ten other species confirmed breeding as part of the first Maine Atlas have not been documented yet during the current effort.

Despite all of these impressive results, we still need your help in documenting both breeding and wintering birds in Maine for two more years. In those two years, we will need to complete breeding surveys in many priority atlas blocks (more about that in the Spring issue of the Atlas Newsletter).

Our plea for this coming winter is for everyone to get out and record some wintering birds. **Birding can be a great way to get some exercise this winter while staying socially distanced from others. Do it as a gift for Maine's next generation of Biologists.**

For suggestions on where we are particularly keen to get some winter bird records, send an email to mainebirdatlas@gmail.com along with the general area where you are willing to travel, and we will send you some areas to check out.

By Glen Mittelhauser, Atlas Coordinator/ Maine Natural History Observatory



We're looking at you, much like this Spruce Grouse is, for help completing the atlas. Do it as a gift for Maine's next generation of Biologists. Photo by Reed Robinson.

Winter Results So Far

Thanks to over 1,500 volunteers, we exceeded our goal of completing a third of our priority atlas blocks by the end of year three. With the breeding season behind us now though, it's time to gear up for winter atlasing (everyone's favorite time of year, right?!), because there really is a lot to look forward to. From seaducks to southern Maine specialties like Eastern Bluebird and Yellow-rumped Warbler, to Snowy Owls and irruptive finch species from further north like Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks, results from winter atlasing thus far have documented a total of 191 species in the state.

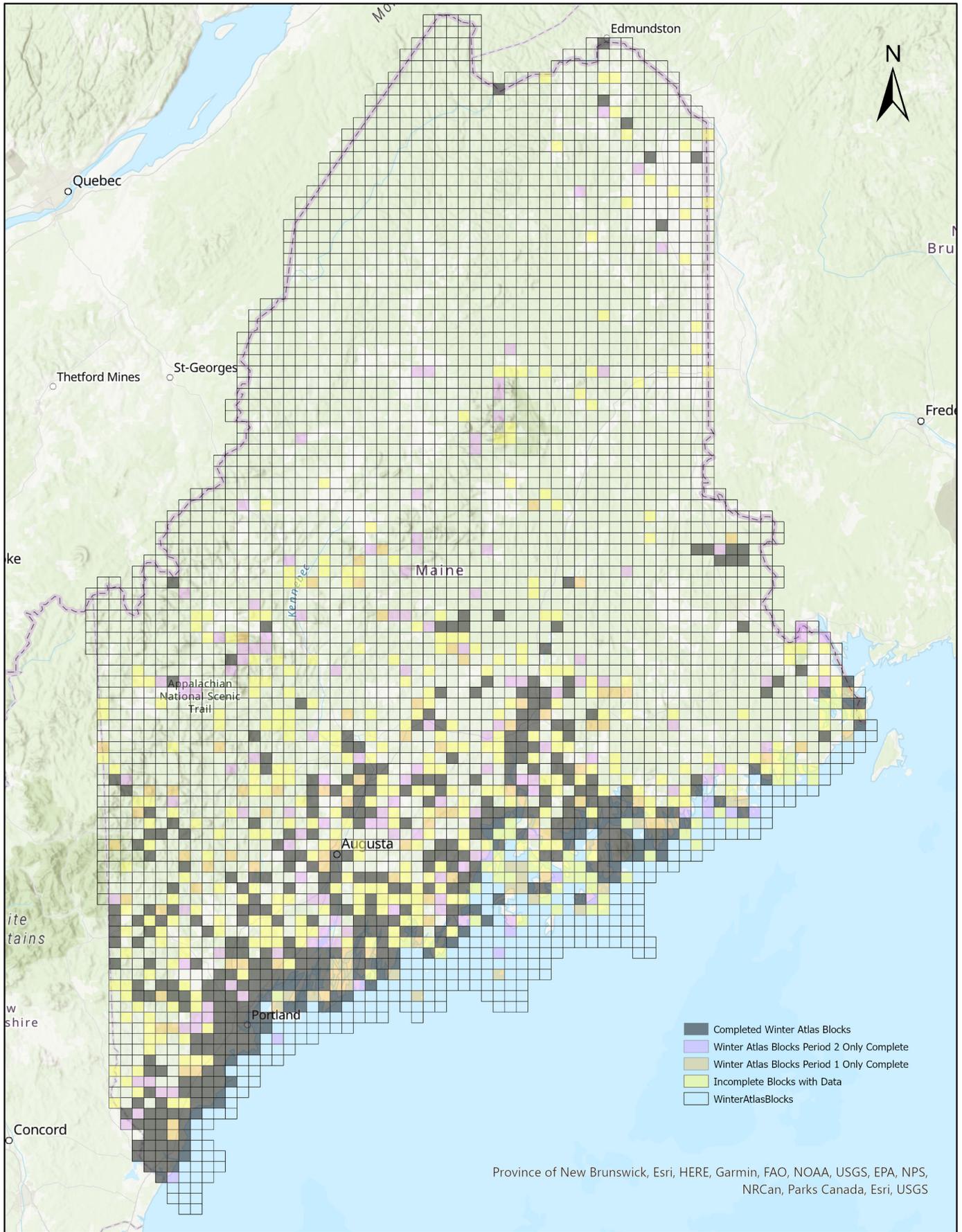
The winter season runs from 14 December – 15 March and is split into an early and late winter period. Surprisingly, species diversity is comparable between the two periods. Black-capped Chickadee, Crow, Herring Gull, Goldfinch, and Blue Jay are the top five reported winter species with Three-toed Woodpecker being among the rarest.

There are still many regions of the state with no wintering bird records, however, not even a chickadee or blue jay. So, look for an incomplete block near you or somewhere that you can safely access this winter to help us get more dispersed coverage (See winter effort map, p.3, updated weekly at ["Winter Atlas Results"](#) button on maine.gov/birdatlas).

That being said, don't be discouraged if you live in a "completed" block or prefer to enjoy winter from the comfort of your own home. Given that local weather conditions and changes in food availability throughout the season affects bird distribution and abundance around the state, every observation is value added! The 2020-2021 winter is predicted to be an especially good year in Maine for northern seed eating species forced south due to poor seed crops in the north. Large flocks of Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and even the rarer Evening Grosbeak are already being reported in record numbers throughout the state.

Tracking changes in occurrence and abundance of winter species provides a critical piece of knowledge for full annual cycle monitoring to manage widespread and persistent threats to bird populations. So, keep your feeders cleaned, stocked, and binoculars handy! Contribute to the first ever comprehensive, state-wide winter bird survey in Maine. Winter Atlas season is here!

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



The winter atlas runs from December 14th through March 15th and is broken into two periods. Period 1 spans December 14th to January 31st. Period 2 spans February 1st to March 15th. We need at least three hours of effort spent in different habitat types within each block and in both periods for a block to be considered complete. This map will be updated weekly at ["Winter Atlas Results"](#) button on maine.gov/birdatlas.

Adventures in Winter Atlasing

Not everyone would want to drive a couple hundred miles over remote Maine roads to find winter finches in as many places as possible, but birders don't always have the same idea of fun as the general population. To me, it sounds like a great adventure. There's a sense of discovery locating birds in places and seasons where few others have looked. It turns out that there's a lot more trucks with snowmobile trailers than cars with birders in the north woods (by about 200 to 1) but that's OK. It's their loss not being able to hear the trills of White-winged Crossbills through their helmets.

Have you ever been to the Wytovitlock or Macwahoc? Not many people have in the winter, or summer for that matter. With birding friends Cheryl Ring and Weston Barker, we decided this would be a fun (though admittedly long) day trip to search for crossbills and other birds last winter. After leaving Augusta, we started our winter bird atlasing with Weston noticing a Northern Shrike along the highway in Old Town. We had our first of many Pine Siskins along the road in West Enfield. Seeing some bird activity a little further down the road, we got out and heard ravens. Then we heard sticks breaking and we looked in a nearby poplar tree to see one of the ravens breaking off branches and flying them into a grove of white pines for nesting material.

I love everything about crossbills; their unusual adaptation to feeding on conifer cones; parrot-like acrobatics gathering cones and seeds from spruce trees; ability to breed in the winter; their nomadic wanderings in search of food. We found our first groups of crossbills in Burlington, working our way, the long way, toward Lincoln. It was great to see and hear both Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills here, along with the Red-breasted Nuthatches and that little tree climbing mouse that we call the Brown Creeper. The White-winged Crossbills were likely breeding there, as Weston noticed a male feeding a female as we were driving away.



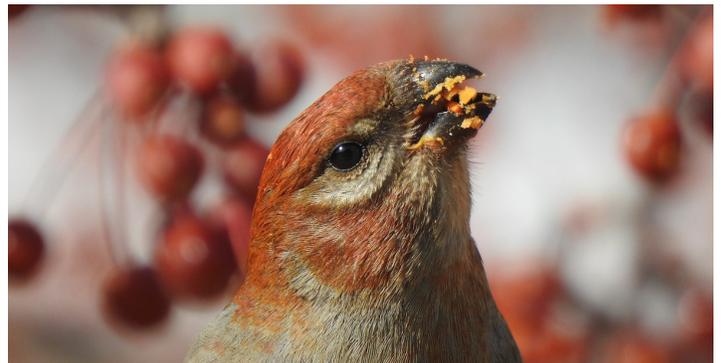
*A female White-winged Crossbill, typically known for feeding on cones, here uses its unique bill to pry open Maple buds.
Photo by Glenn Hodgkins*



*No wonder how these birds got their names! This young male Red Crossbill is showing off the crossed mandible tips here.
Photo by Glenn Hodgkins*

Birders aren't known for their speed in getting places, as bird related stops are frequent. By noon we had only made it to Lincoln and weren't yet to our main area for the day. A little ways further, Weston had spotted our second shrike and we continued adding to the locations with crossbills. One effective winter-birding strategy is to drive slowly on secondary roads with windows partially open and stop wherever there are birds. We found many birds this way. It's not as cold as you might imagine, since you're bundled up anyway. By the time we had traveled through Bancroft, Wytovitlock, Reed, Macwahoc, and Kingman, we had seen and recorded crossbills and siskins in many locations and were just about running out of light. I think we got back to Augusta at about 7 pm. It had been a full and exhilarating day of birding. We had seen about 20 species and entered winter atlas data for 32 locations, many of them in blocks with no previous data.

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*You might question the etymology of "grosbeak" from this Pine Grosbeak's gross beak, but the name comes from the French "gros" meaning "large."
Photo by Glenn Hodgkins*

As fun as this day was, it might be a little much for some birders. I had many other adventures the last two winters with my daughter Anna, with friends, and by myself that were of varied length and type. I found a surprising amount and diversity of birds snowshoeing in Mt. Blue State Park. We had great looks at Boreal Chickadees and Canada Jays in the Rangeley area. We had memorable blizzard-like conditions in Grafton Notch as the surrounding lowlands had a nice sunny winter day. It's fun checking out open water



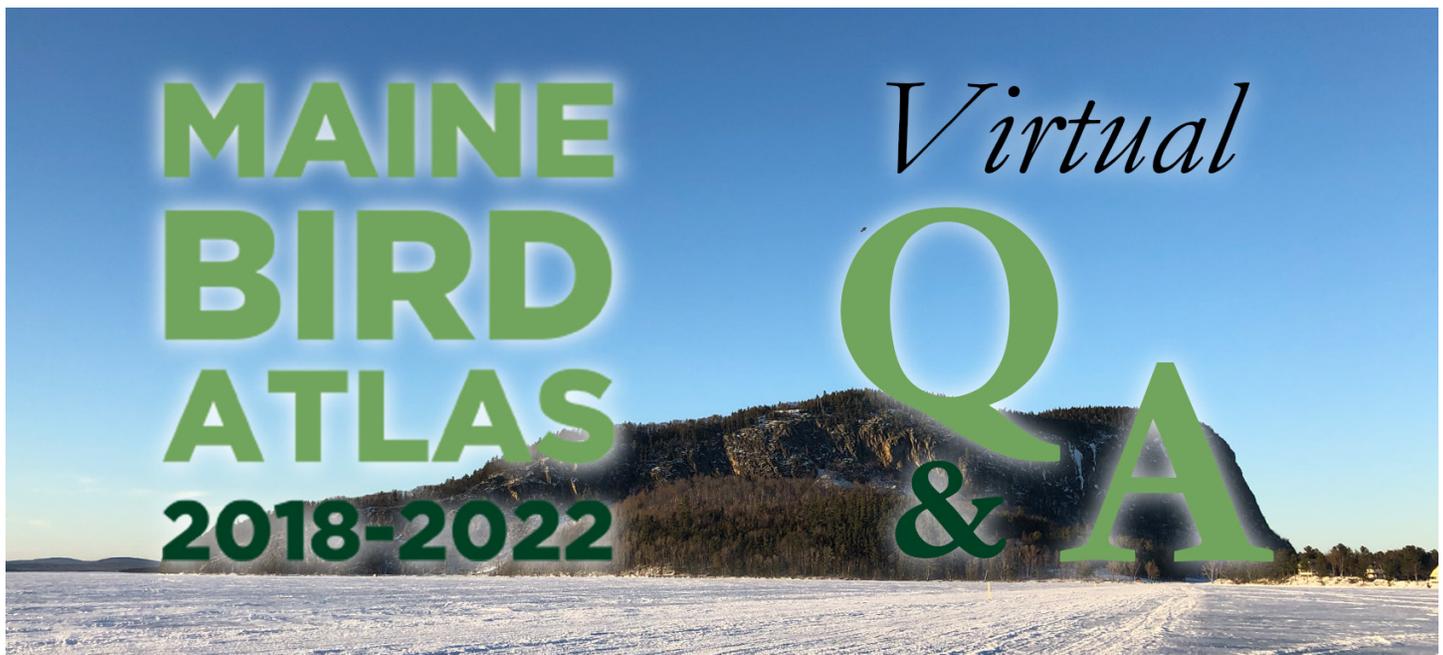
Even in February you can find open water in Skowhegan, where you can study ducks and look for things like this Mallard x American Black Duck hybrid (left) Photo by Glenn Hodgkins

on rivers where there can be a lot of ducks and the chance of a rare duck among the Mallards and Black Ducks. Who knew there were so many ducks in Skowhegan in the winter, or Common Mergansers on an inlet stream to Moosehead Lake? Active farm fields often have Snow Buntings and maybe Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs. Rough-legged hawks can be sometimes found over open fields. Some of you may have spotted the one that's been perched along the highway in Richmond the last couple of years (70 mph birding).

Half or full-day birding adventures are possible from anywhere in Maine to parts of Maine still not well covered for the Winter Bird Atlas. You may find unusual or rare birds and you're guaranteed to see at least some of our interesting and hardy winter birds. This winter I'm excited to see how many places I can find Pine Grosbeaks, Evening Grosbeaks, and Common Redpolls. Maybe I'll even find that Hoary Redpoll or Northern Goshawk that have so far eluded me.

by Glenn Hodgkins, Atlas Volunteer

Winter Atlas Kickoff and the Return of Weekly Q&As



This summer we began hosting weekly discussions on Zoom as an opportunity to answer questions and talk about anything birds and atlas related. Thanks to the positive feedback from participants, we are continuing these Zoom Q&A sessions through the winter!

This is a great opportunity to talk with Atlas staff about any questions you have, from the birds in your backyard, to data entry or eBird problems, or even where to best spend your time atlasing, we've got the answers!

Join us every Wednesday night at 6:30PM beginning on December 9th!

<https://maine.zoom.us/j/82025547252>

Check the [Maine Bird Atlas Facebook page](#) or our Event Calendar on maine.gov/birdatlas for updates to this schedule.

Seeking Photos for the Maine Bird Atlas

The Maine Bird Atlas is looking for submissions of exceptional bird photos to feature on each species page of the published atlas. Please consider sending us your best bird photos (featuring only species that breed or winter in Maine) to be considered for inclusion in the published Atlas. Final selections will be made by committee closer to the publish date (2023-2024). If selected, your photos will be credited to you and you will retain the copyright.

To have your photos considered for inclusion in the Atlas, send your best photos that were *taken in Maine* to mebirdatlas.photos@gmail.com. Rename each photo with the bird's common name followed by your first and last name (e.g. American Robin John Doe). Send unedited photos at the size and quality that your camera produces. This will ensure that the image is high enough quality for consideration. We will contact you for final permission if your photos are selected to appear in the Atlas. We will request locality and date (month) information for selected photos. Your photos will not be used for any other purposes. Once we have an initial collection of photos, we will send out a request for particular species that we still need photos for.

You can also submit photos by mailing a disc or USB drive to Tom Aversa, 115 Fisher Rd., Unity ME 04988 or sharing photos to the email listed above via DropBox or Google Drive.

FAQs:

Q: Why are you collecting photos?

A: The published Atlas will feature a bird photo taken in Maine on each species page and at other places throughout the atlas. We are beginning the process of curating a library of Maine bird photos for potential use so that we can get a clear picture of any gaps we may have moving forward.

Q: Is there a list of photos you specifically need?

A: Right now, we are interested in any publication-quality photos featuring birds that breed or winter in Maine. At a later stage, we will release a more targeted list of our remaining photo needs.



**WE ARE SEEKING
PHOTOS FOR THE
MAINE BIRD ATLAS**

Send original, unedited images to
mebirdatlas.photos@gmail.com
Final selection for publication
will be by committee.

MEBIRDATLAS.PHOTOS@GMAIL.COM

Photo by Logan Parker

Q: Who decides which photos are included in the Atlas?

A: The decision of which photos to include in the Atlas will be made by committee.

Q: When will I hear if my photos have been selected for the Atlas?

A: The published Atlas is still many years out, but we expect to start assessing photos in the next year or two and make some final decisions in 2023.

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By submitting photos that are not already cropped, it allows us to use extra canvas that may be needed to fit properly in the final publication. For example, this extra long branch (with Olive-sided Flycatcher on it) nicely fills two columns! Photo by Doug Hitchcox.

Photos (continued from previous page)

Q: How will photographers be compensated?

A: Photographers will gain increased exposure for their work and the knowledge that they are contributing to a good cause. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide monetary compensation for the use of photos. All photo contributors will be credited.

Q: Is my copyright being protected?

A: All photographers with photos published in the atlas will retain full copyright of their work. Photographers will be contacted for final permission if their photos are selected for inclusion in the Atlas. Photos can be removed from consideration at any time upon request.



We need photos of all Maine birds, not just the colorful warblers. Even drab Winter Wrens can strike a pose! Photo by Fyn Kynd.

Q: Will my photos be used for anything else?

A: No. We are only collecting photos to be considered for the final, published Atlas. Photos will not be used for promotional purposes or distributed to anyone other than Atlas staff (for curation purposes) and the selection committee.

Q: I crop and watermark all my photos. Is that OK?

A: Please send unedited (e.g., no crops, watermarks, etc.), full-sized digital copies of your photographs as size and framing may play a role in which images we are able to use.

Q: What are the resolution requirements for photos?

A: Please send the original file from your camera. If the photo is at its original, unedited resolution, that will give us the most flexibility in determining if it can be used in the published atlas.

Q: How should I name my image files?

A: The name of the file should start with the common name of the species and end with your first and last name, (e.g. American Robin John Doe). If you send more than one photo of a single species, use a unique two-digit number after your name, (e.g. American Robin John Doe 01) for each image.

Three Years Down, Two to Go, Hundreds of Species Still Available

Do you or someone you know have a favorite species? Say it with a sponsor! Give the gift of conservation this year with a species sponsorship (and maybe an atlas Tshirt too).

With a species sponsorship, **your name will be in print (along with anyone you choose to sponsor in honor of) in the final Maine Bird Atlas publication.** Each of Maine's breeding and wintering bird species have been divided into sponsorship levels ranging from \$30-\$2,000 and are available to sponsor for each year of the project. You can sponsor a species for one, several, or all five years.

Maine Bird Atlas 2018-22

Black-capped Chickadee <i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	
<p>This is an example of a species page layout as it will appear in the final publication upon completion of the project and data analysis. We've just edited the space here for the purpose of the newsletter. In the final publication, this space will contain species specific statuses in the state, distribution results, and abundance estimates. Sponsorships will appear under the respective species image on each page as in the example to the right (yellow circle).</p>	<p>Sponsored by Glen Mittelhauser, in memory of Beanie, Adrienne Leppold, & Evan Adams, dedicated to all the birders everywhere.</p>
<p>Breeding Distribution 2018-22</p>	<p>Breeding Density 2018-22 based on state-wide point counts</p>

Sample species account for Black-capped Chickadee with Sponsor a Species example circled in yellow.



See what species are still available at:

www.mainenaturalhistory.org/sponsor-a-species

As for Maine Bird Atlas logo merchandise, shop around and place orders at:

www.teepublic.com/user/mainebirdatlas

All proceeds from product sales and species sponsorships will help fund travel grants to support birders going to remote, isolated regions of the state. Remote northern and western blocks in the state are still in desperate need of attention.

Important Reminders for Winter Atlasing!

As we head into another Winter Atlasing season, here are a few helpful reminders for volunteers. If this is your first winter atlasing, please read through the [Volunteer Handbook for Winter Atlasing](#), available on the Resources and Materials page of maine.gov/birdatlas before heading out.

Watch for Block Boundaries

Our survey blocks are the same as during the breeding season, and the same rules apply for only submitting birds you see within each block. Winter birding typically involves less trail walking or traveling over long distances, but make sure you start and stop your lists within a single block.

Which Period is it?

The winter atlas runs from December 14th through March 15th and is broken into two periods. Period 1 spans December 14th to January 31st and Period 2 spans February 1st to March 15th. We need at least three hours of effort for each block, in both periods.

Winter Atlas Season



Use the Proper Portal

While working on the Winter Atlas, it will be very rare to encounter any breeding behavior, so your lists should be entered into Maine eBird Portal (ebird.org/me). On the rare occasion you observe breeding behavior during the winter atlas season, enter your entire list into the Maine Bird Atlas Portal (ebird.org/atlasme).

Check for Updates

Our [Maine Wintering Bird Atlas Results page](#) will be updated weekly this winter, so be sure to check often and see which blocks are already complete in the first or second period, or which have no data at all! Using this tool is the best way to make sure your time is spent where it is needed the most.

Be Safe!

Safety of all atlas volunteers is a high priority. Always put your safety first! Do not enter an area that looks unsafe, for any reason. Be careful and vigilant around ice. Working in pairs or teams is strongly encouraged, particularly in remote areas.

Have you signed up as an official volunteer yet?

Just a reminder, even if you have already contributed observations to the project through eBird, make sure you sign up as an official project volunteer. This is where we need you to enter your volunteer time (inc. travel, data entry, etc.) for us to count towards the required match funding. After doing so, you can also choose to benefit from state health insurance coverage while participating in any atlas activities. Go to <https://ifw.citizenscience.maine.gov/programs/maineBirdAtlas> and click 'Register'.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

CONTRIBUTE OBSERVATIONS TO THE



**MAINE
BIRD
ATLAS**
2018-2022



For More Information: maine.gov/birdatlas
All Experience Levels Welcome!

Maine Bird Atlas Team

Atlas Director

Adrienne Leppold
Maine Dept of Inland Fish & Wildlife
Adrienne.J.Leppold@maine.gov

Atlas Coordinator

Glen Mittelhauser
Maine Natural History Observatory
mainebirdatlas@gmail.com

Outreach Coordinators

Doug Hitchcox
Laura Minich Zitske
Maine Audubon
dhitchcox@maineaudubon.org
lzitske@maineaudubon.org

Spatial Analysis and Mapping

Amy Meehan
Maine Dept of Inland Fish & Wildlife
Amy.Meehan@maine.gov

Ecological Modeler

Evan Adams
Biodiversity Research Institute
Evan.Adams@briloon.org