

BREEDING BIRD CODES - Maine Bird Atlas 2018-2022

The four underlined breeding categories listed below (Confirmed, Probable, Possible, No Evidence) are sorted in decreasing levels of evidence for breeding. Codes closer to the top of the page within each category have greater evidence of breeding than the codes lower down on the page. *Before using breeding codes in the Possible Breeding category (S, H), check the “Safe Dates” in the Volunteer Handbook to determine the dates when these codes can be used.* Use codes in the Probable Breeding category with caution, particularly outside of “Safe Dates”. Refer to the Acceptable Breeding Codes on the Maine Bird Atlas webpage to determine which breeding codes can be used for each species.

Confirmed Breeding

NY—Nest with Young: nest with young seen or heard. Presence of cowbird young confirms both the cowbird and the host species.

NE—Nest with Eggs: nest with eggs or eggshells on ground. Must be accurately identified by presence of an adult bird. If no birds are seen, use the “UN” code below. Presence of cowbird eggs confirms both the cowbird and the host species.

FS—Carrying Fecal Sac: adult carrying white fecal sacs away from the nest; only songbirds and woodpeckers produce fecal sacs.

FY—Feeding Young: adult feeding recently fledged young, but young are not yet independent. Code should not be used for raptors, terns, and other species where young can be fed by parents many miles from the nest site. Young birds that feed themselves (e.g., waterfowl) should be coded as “FL”.

CF—Carrying Food: adult repeatedly carrying food in the same direction for young (should not be used for corvids, raptors, terns, gulls, kingfishers, and other species where adults may forage many miles from the nest site). Use this code with caution as some adults carry food a long distance or may be engaged in courtship feeding.

FL—Recently Fledged Young: recently fledged or downy young observed while still dependent upon adults. The young are usually incapable of sustained flight, restricted to natal area by dependence on adults or limited mobility (e.g., baby grouse, baby geese, baby killdeer that cannot yet fly). Very short tail feathers are usually a good sign the young originated locally. Young cowbirds begging for food confirms both the cowbird and the host species.

ON—Occupied Nest: incubating adult directly observed or nest presumed through multiple observations such as adults entering or leaving an area in circumstances strongly indicating an occupied nest. Can be used for nests which are too high, enclosed, or the contents not visible for other reasons. Use for raptors aggressively diving at you because behavior strongly indicates nearby nest.

UN—Used Nest: previously used nest or eggshells present but no adult birds seen nearby. Use only if you are certain of the species and that nesting occurred during the atlas period. If you did not observe any individuals of the species that made the nest during your visit, then enter a “0” in the number field during data entry.

DD—Distraction Display: adult puts its life in danger and fakes injury to lead potential predator away. For example, Killdeer may give a “broken wing” display, and Common Yellowthroats, Ovenbirds, and sparrows may feign injury to distract from nest or young.

NB—Nest Building: nest building at the apparent nest-site (should not be used for wrens, woodpeckers, kingfishers, chickadees, titmice, and other species that build dummy nests or excavate roosting cavities)

CN—Carrying Nesting Material: adult carrying nesting material, such as sticks or other material but nest site not seen. For raptors, confirm the material is not incidental to prey transport. Do not use for species that build multiple dummy nests, such as wrens.

PE—Physiological Evidence: physiological evidence of breeding, usually a brood patch or egg in oviduct based on bird in hand. To be used by bird banders on local birds during the nesting season.

Probable Breeding

B—Woodpecker/Wren Nest Building: some species, including wrens, woodpeckers, kingfishers, chickadees, and titmice, may build dummy nests or excavate roosting cavities and nest building activity cannot be considered confirmation of breeding.

A—Agitated Behavior: agitated behavior or anxiety calls from adult(s) that indicate a nest or young are in the vicinity. This can occur between different species and both species can be coded as “A”. This excludes responses elicited by “pishing” or the result of playback recordings.

N—Visiting Probable Nest Site: visiting of probable nest site but without strong evidence to upgrade to Confirmed codes. Primarily used for hole nesters or shrub nesting species.

C—Courtship, Display, or Copulation: courtship, displays, or copulation observed. Courtship behaviors include transfer of food, displays, and grooming between a pair of birds. Use for Woodcock, Snipe, Swift, and Nighthawk “booming” aerial displays, Turkey displays, and Ruffed Grouse drumming. Code can be unreliable for ducks, swans, and geese.

T—Territorial Defense: use for fighting or chasing individuals of same species, or attacking a predator during its breeding season. Do not use for squabbling over a food resource or territorial singing. Code can be unreliable for ducks, swans, and geese.

P—Pair in Suitable Habitat: pair observed in suitable habitat during its breeding season. Confirm through behavioral cues that it is a mated pair. Do not use for a male and a female observed in the same general area. Instead use only if the birds are interacting in a way that suggests they are paired. Code can be unreliable for ducks, swans, and geese.

M—Multiple (7+) Singing Birds: 7 or more singing birds of a species detected in suitable nesting habitat in the *same* Atlas Block during its breeding season on one day.

S7—Singing Bird Spanning 7+ Days: singing bird (breeding vocalizations only) present at the same “general location” 7 or more days apart during its breeding season.

Possible Breeding

S—Singing Bird: singing bird(s) (breeding vocalizations only) present in suitable nesting habitat during its breeding season (*within “Safe Dates”*) on only one occasion. Code also used for owls and rails giving their primary vocalization during the breeding season. Use for Woodcock “peent” call without an aerial display, and for woodpecker drumming.

H—In Appropriate Habitat: adult or independent juvenile birds hatched in the current breeding season observed in suitable nesting habitat during its breeding season (*within “Safe Dates”*). Only use for colonial species if nesting is suspected in the block.

No Evidence of Breeding

F—Flyover: a species observed flying overhead, and never observed to interact with the habitat in the block.

No Breeding Code Entered (Observed Species): use if species observation does not fit any of the breeding codes listed above, or if observations coded as Possible Breeding (S, H) fall outside the “Safe Dates” for that species. This code should also be used for species observed any time of the year not in suitable nesting habitat (e.g., herons or egrets foraging with no indication of a nearby rookery, migrants, etc.). Any species entered into eBird without any other breeding code noted above is automatically placed in this category.