

The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas Project is a five year effort to learn more about the distribution of Iowa's breeding birds. The project is cosponsored by the IOU and the Department of Natural Resources. Breeding bird atlases are being done throughout North America. Nine states and two Canadian provinces have already completed projects and eighteen states and four provinces are currently collecting data. The intent is to produce a publication which will have maps showing the distribution of breeding birds across the state. Iowa's project has been underway for two years. So far, only about 125 blocks have been worked on. Coordinators are still needed for forty counties. Clearly a greater effort is needed to complete this project.

Iowa has been divided into 860 blocks, each nine square miles in area. On each block, a species can be listed as observed, possible, probable, or confirmed. This code, which was established by a national committee, is the same used by all states which are involved in the breeding bird project. All of the categories are based on easily observable activities such as singing males or carrying nesting material, etc. Generally about 20-25 hours will be spent in a block spread out over several months.

The atlas is a worthwhile project, but it's also a lot of fun. It's a great way to pass the summer birding doldrums. Many people find that atlasing has taught them to watch birds, not just identify them. A whole new area of birding can be opened up while sharpening one's observation

skills. Many novice birders feel that their birding skills are not adequate for this project. This is not the case. Probably they have been frustrated while trying to observe little flitting birds during migration. Atlasing can be a more leisurely birding activity. Breeding birds will be in an area for a longer period of time allowing repeated observations to be made. If identification is still a problem, then the coordinators will get a more experienced birder to go out in the field.

Atlasing can be a good club activity as well. "Blockbusting" field trips can be arranged by local clubs or nature centers to stimulate interest or for hard to cover blocks. Another possibility for trips would be to look for specific species such as owls and or hawks. This letter is being sent to all the state bird clubs in the hope that your club will agree to be involved in some fashion or another. Even if you only promote the atlas to your members we will be grateful.

A new steering committee has been formed and we hope to stimulate renewed interest and enthusiasm for the atlas. For more information contact one of the atlas committee members. We will be glad to give a talk to your local club on the atlas project. Contact one of the atlas committee members in your area.

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