

S W I B B A N

The SouthWest Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter rides again! (Brought to you once more by Barbara Wilson, Rt. 1, Box 41, Hastings, Iowa, 51540.)

THIS IS OUR LAST YEAR

The breeding bird atlas project is an attempt to map the distribution of Iowa's breeding birds. Field work is scheduled to last five years, and this is the last year. We volunteers in southwest Iowa have completed about a quarter of our survey blocks, more than any other large group in the state, but some blocks remain unvisited, while we know interesting birds have gone undetected in others. Please help us complete the project in our area, and if you have time consider visiting blocks outside our corner of the state.

COMMITTEE MEETING

The steering committee for this project met March 19 at the Wildlife Research Station in Boone, Iowa. There was good news and there was bad news.

Good news: More people than ever attended the meeting. As you recall, the project is cosponsored by the DNR and the Iowa Ornithologists Union. Despite Doug Reeve's departure, the Non-game Office of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources remains strongly behind the atlas - four members of their tiny staff attended. We also heard from a DNR data management person about how atlas data is handled on the computer.

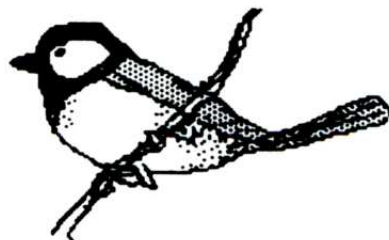
More good news: Volunteer Carol Thompson and the staff of the non-game office spent hours this winter entering our data into the computer, and now the atlas records are up to date.

Still more: Carol Thompson contacted the press at U of Iowa while Jim Dinsmore contacted ISU's press. Both publishers are willing to publish the atlas, at no cost to us -- once we go through the time and expense of writing it and getting it all ready for publication.

However: Only 10% of the 800+ blocks in the state are officially finished at this point. We agreed that the standards used to identify a "completed" block are too rigorous, however, so we will accept the advice of the field worker who reports that a block is done. (More of our southwest Iowa blocks are done than they knew.)

Also: Several counties in the state have absolutely no birds reported! Others have just one block barely begun, so there is a lot of work to do this summer, Audubon and Adair counties are the two closest to us that lack any reports.

All in all, it was a good meeting.



OUR 1988 WORK

Several people helped with the atlas in our area last year.

Marie Miller provided information for the Coin NE block (826) in Page County.

Mindy Rosenbaum copied her census sheets at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, Harrison County.

Doug Rose helped with various blocks in the loess hills: Folsom Lake (709), Pony Creek (732), and Waubonsie Creek (751) in Mills County, and Forney's Lake (779), Thurman (805), and Waubonsie State Park (823) in Fremont County. He also provided information on the Fisher Creek block (825) and completed the Mill Creek block (846) in Fremont County.

Claire Mace provided more records from the Findley block (589) in Harrison County.

Jerry Abma provided records from the Lake of Three Fires block in Taylor County.

Loren Pierce found a Great Horned Owl nest in the Pierce Creek block in Page County.

Marietta Peterson birded in the Marne East and Jim Branch blocks in Cass County.

Rebecca and Kevin Reagan sent reports from the Viking Lake block and provided records essentially finished the Red Oak block in Montgomery County.

Stan Bernasek provided information from the Upper Lake Icaria block (714) in Adams County.

Marie Spears, Ruth Phipps, and Jean Braley sent in observations largely completing the West Tarkio Creek block east of Shenandoah in Page County.

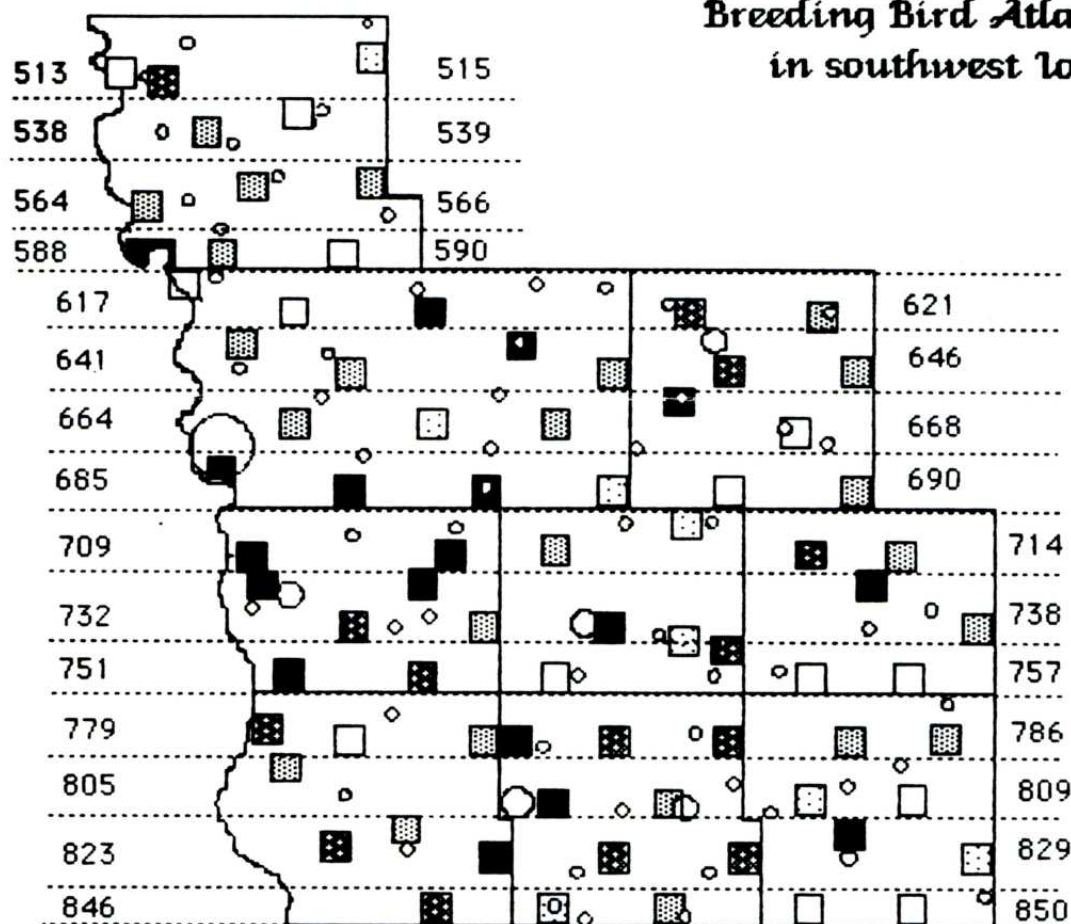
Marie Spears also sent in data from the Fisher Creek block in Fremont County.

Patti Johns sent in records from Lake of Three Fires and Wilson Lake in Taylor Counties.

Jamie Green sent in information largely finishing the Lake Icaria block in Adams County.

Steve Dinsmore was working in southwest Iowa last year and sent in information from eight of our blocks.

**Identification numbers of blocks
Breeding Bird Atlas
in southwest Iowa**



Blocks are numbered right to left in the rows indicated. Use the numbers when asking about a block.

- Atlas block with 100% or more of the expected bird species; essentially complete
- ▣ Atlas block with 90 to 99% of expected species
- ▤ Atlas block with 50 to 89% of expected species; could use more work
- ▥ Atlas block with 1 to 49% of expected species; much work needed!
- Atlas block with NO BIRDS REPORTED; needs much work!
- Town or city

STATUS OF OUR ATLAS BLOCKS

The status of each block is shown on the accompanying map. We're doing well, but you can see where more work is needed.

If you would like to know exactly which species have been reported from any block, please let me know.

WHERE TO HELP IN SOUTHWEST IOWA

Please feel free to help with the atlas in any block, but a few blocks just cry out for more study.

The most obvious is Wilson Island State Park, where exactly one Warbling Vireo has been reported. That's the only bird in the whole block, as far as we know.

Also, Deer Island (#513) and Willow Lake (#539) blocks in Harrison County sound interesting, but nobody has reported a bird from either one.

In Montgomery County, birds are under-reported from Viking Lake State Park (# 754, 29 species) and Pilot Grove (#712, 20 species).

Let's make these five blocks high priorities for 1989.

Also, lets try to report at least a Robin or Red-wing from each of our unvisited blocks.

THE DNR'S PRIORITIES

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources would like us to concentrate on certain blocks. I consider several on their list to be complete, but the following still need some work:

County	Block #	Name	Comment
Adams	714	Upper Lake Icaria	49 species found
Cass	621	Lake Anita State Park	50 species, but there should be a few more
Fremont	779	Forney Lake	64 species; should be more in wet year
Fremont	805	Thurman South	52 species found; loess hills
Fremont	823	Waubonsie State Park	64 species found; loess hills
Fremont	824	Riverton W. M. A.	59 species; should be more in wet year
Harrison	513	Deer Island	NO OBSERVATIONS AT ALL!
Harrison	514	Gleason-Hubbell Area	65 species found; loess hills
Harrison	539	Willow Lake	NO OBSERVATIONS AT ALL!
Harrison	564	Horseshoe Lake	48 species found; marsh
Montgomery	712	Pilot Grove Co. Park	20 species found
Montgomery	754	Viking Lake State Park	29 species found
Montgomery	755	Hacklebarney Woods	54 species found
Pottawattamie	617	Wilson Island S. P.	ONLY ONE SPECIES REPORTED
Pottawattamie	641	Crescent Ski Area	60 species found loess hills
Taylor	786	Wilson Lake Park	38 species found

ELSEWHERE IN THE STATE

The enclosed state map provides shows which blocks are started or finished in the rest of the state. If you will be travelling, please contact me or the Non-game Biologist (Wildlife Research Station, Rt. 1, Boone, Iowa) for maps of atlas blocks. At least do keep records of birds seen in the state parks and other major county or state natural areas and turn those records in.

HOW TO HELP

Just visit a block (a 3 x 3 mile area on your map) and look for birds. Report any species you see, recording any evidence that they are really breeding. Turn in the observations on a report card (only one block reported on a card) or by writing me a letter.

It would help if you would report the date a species is seen, at least for uncommon species. This helps distinguish breeders from migrants.

Also, if a species has an asterisk on your report form, please write down what the bird looked like and what evidence of breeding you saw. This will help us prove to doubters in Des Moines that we really have found certain hard-to-identify birds and certain species that are rare in the state.



WHAT NESTS IN APRIL?

Not too many species are nesting yet, but a few have started. Great Horned Owls nested in January and are feeding young now. They nest in holes in trees, hold hawk or crow nests, or sometimes in haylofts. Barred and Screech Owls are beginning to nest, too, in cavities. The rare true Barn Owl may be nesting too.

Horned Larks are nesting on the ground in open, cultivated fields. The nest is virtually impossible to locate, but sometimes lucky birders can flush the birds off the road while driving. They look like largish sparrows, brown above and very white below. (The wing linings are white like the belly, making them look whiter below than any sparrows.) The

short tail is black. Unlike sparrows, larks do not land in bushes or fences; they either fly out into the field or circle back to land on the road again. At this time of year (or in March, for that matter, two larks flushed together from the road can be considered a pair. The song is a high-pitched, tinkling, bell-like jumble of notes, rather quiet, given from the ground or while the bird flies high in the air.

Rock Doves (Pigeons) nest any time of year. House Sparrows are getting interested in cavities and each other, and will nest soon.

Put up Bluebird and Wren boxes now if you are going to do it this year; the bluebirds are back and will soon nest. Chickadees are checking out boxes and other possible nest sites now too.

Several of our birds, from Cardinals and Robins to Pheasants, have begun to sing, and the Robins at least will be nesting by the end of the month.

A number of species are beginning to sing and set up territories.

Remember that winter visitors are still present while migrants have begun to arrive. Try to avoid marking migrants down as breeders for the atlas. To help me sort out migrants from residents, please put record a date when the species was in an atlas block.

WELCOME!

Several new people have volunteered (or in a few cases been volunteered by others) to help complete the atlas. Welcome! We need your aid!

Also, I'm happy to welcome back the volunteers who have helped with the atlas in past years!

