



Cedar Waxwings Photo: Mark Peck

Dear Atlasser,

Welcome to the new format for keeping you abreast of Atlas goings-on. Each month, we'll be sending out short newsletters so that we can provide timely updates to the atlassing community. We need your help naming these monthly reports - please head over to [the website](#) to vote for your favourite name!

Atlassing has come a long way since we chiseled our data onto stone tablets in Atlas-1, back in 1981-1985 (not really). Atlas-1 was a magnificent effort by the province's birding community, but we didn't have an app devoted to atlassing, or excellent, readily-available, learning resources, and smartphones that can help atlassers in so many ways. The technology has changed considerably from the written data entry from the first Atlas to the development of smartphone apps that can assist volunteers, however, the spirit of the Atlas remains the same - documenting the distribution and relative abundance of every species that breeds in Ontario. No matter how the technology has changed, the key factor to a successful atlas is you, the volunteer!

**COVID-19:** The Atlas team reminds all atlassers to be aware of the latest COVID-19 conditions in Ontario. Please follow all public health guidelines and restrictions, and check for updates frequently. Information on the latest conditions and public health guidance can be found on Government of Ontario [websites](#). Follow the links to the most current situation in the province.

June is the peak of the breeding season and atlassing activity. Almost every bird out there is involved in breeding activities, and are fair game for atlassers. If you haven't started atlassing yet, please don't hesitate any longer. It's an amazingly short season, and we only have 5 of them, so it really is time for the fun to begin. Things get noticeably quieter in early July and are largely done by the end of that month.

If you're already scouring the bushes, thanks very much and we hope it is going well. Here are a few statistics on where things currently stand...

- As of June 23, 928 participants have submitted over 27,000 checklists, and documented over 20,000 hours of atlassing. If you want to see for yourself how things are progressing, you can view the data on NatureCounts by clicking on Explore and the [Atlas Data Summary](#).
- Ottawa atlassers (Region 24 - known, justifiably perhaps, as "The mighty 24"!) are leading the pack in terms of numbers of checklists submitted (2,162 as of June 23), barely ahead of Peterborough (1,955), with Kingston (1,568) and Simcoe (1,546) close behind.
- We'll mention a couple of outstanding individual efforts for inspirational purposes... Don "look at him go" Sutherland has already submitted 643 checklists! And David and Reagan "what a team" Goodyear have put in 245 hours of atlassing! It's wonderful to see such fantastic efforts on behalf of the project.

## Atlassing Resources:

The **Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas** website ([www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org)) is where you'll find everything you need to know to participate in Atlas-3.

- **Guides:** The Atlas-3 manuals can be found on the [Instructions & Forms](#) page (for General Atlassing and Point Counts), or on the [Special Surveys](#) page (for those doing surveys on Owls, Nightjars, or Marshbirds). These manuals provide the instructions needed to participate in the Atlas. For quick lookup of some of the Coding Sheets in the manuals, the Atlas-3 website also has pages dedicated to [Breeding Codes](#), [Safe Breeding Dates](#), and Species [4-letter Codes](#).
- **Learning Resources:** The Atlas-3 website has gathered resources on the [Learning Resources](#) page, which may help those looking to improve their bird identification skills. Atlassers can also test their knowledge with the [Atlas-3 Quiz](#). Or, if Atlassers have any questions, they can use the [Discussion Forum](#) or reach out to their [Regional Coordinator](#).
- **Atlassing Articles:** The [Articles](#) provide important identification and breeding information for select species.

**NatureCounts** is the database where Atlas-3 data are collected and managed. The [NatureCounts web portal](#) is linked to the Atlas website, but contains resources and summaries that are specific to data collection.

- **Data Summaries:** The NatureCounts [Summary Statistics](#) allow users to view the number of hours, species, or checklists in a Region or Square. The [Coverage Map](#) presents a visual representation of the Summary Statistics – showing how many species, hours, and checklists have been completed. The Coverage Map also shows important location information, including region boundaries, and designated priority squares. The [Species Map](#) shows where species have been observed, along with the highest breeding evidence recorded.
- **Resources:** The [Square Resources](#) page of NatureCounts allows you to download the square map, geographic information (square boundary and point count locations), as well as the Square Summary sheet – which shows the highest breeding evidence of each species during Atlas-2 and Atlas-3 for that particular square. The [Atlas Resources](#) page contains important documents, including the Landowner permission letter (this page requires that you log in to NatureCounts).
- **NatureCounts app:** The newest version of the NatureCounts App has been responding much better than previous releases, and we have addressed several outstanding bugs and made improvements throughout. One major new feature is the ability to record precise locations for individual species records. Please use this feature for all significant species records. For more information on how this works, please watch this [YouTube walkthrough](#).
  - One outstanding issue (mainly in iOS, much more rarely in Android) is that the App will sometimes terminate while in the background. For instance, if you close your phone, you may come back and find that you need to reopen your app, and find your checklist in the drafts. This also terminates the GPS track, unfortunately. This is largely tied to the device trying to reduce your battery usage by shutting down the app while it collects your GPS track in the background. This may happen more frequently when the battery level gets depleted.
  - If you have any questions or comments regarding the app please fill out the NatureCounts App feedback form ([www.birdscanada.org/app-feedback](http://www.birdscanada.org/app-feedback)). As always, you can still record your data in your notebook and submit directly through the [web portal](#) or [import data from eBird](#).

**Video Resources:** The [Atlas-3 YouTube channel](#) has many useful video resources. This is where the recordings from [Sappy Hours](#) can be found, as well as the recordings from the [Atlas-3 Virtual Launch event](#). In addition to event

recordings, the Atlas-3 YouTube channel has many [tutorial videos](#), including how to submit data, how to conduct digital point counts, and more.

## Beyond the Basics:

**Point Count** season is underway. Point Counts are the primary means we will use to map the relative abundance of the birds. They can be conducted starting May 24 in the south and June 1 in the north and run until July 10. See the [Instructions for Point Counts](#) for details of methodologies. For those who don't like to read (☺), videos at the following links explain various aspects of point counts:

- [Data entry using the app](#) (Basic protocol)
- [Data entry on the website](#) (Basic protocol)
- [Data entry on the website](#) (Advanced protocol)
- [How to do Digital point counts](#)
- [How to upload Digital point counts](#)

**Special Surveys** are also underway. The [Marshbird Survey](#) has the same season as point counts, and the [Nightjar Survey](#) runs from June 15 to July 15. Both surveys will provide a wealth of new information on the status and distribution of groups of birds that are of great conservation interest but not well covered by traditional bird surveys. Marshbird surveys can only be run by those able to ID birds by their calls whereas the Nightjar Survey is well suited to newer birders (though enjoyable for all).

## Atlasser Chip Notes

This is where we provide a short note from an atlasser on an atlas-related topic. This month's entry is from Roxane Filion describing her first attempts to use the Zooms H2N recorder to record a point count:

We all know how important the Boreal Forest is for breeding birds but monitoring changes in abundance for the species that rely on it to breed is a challenge. Not only due to the vastness of it, but the low population density also means fewer volunteer birders for collecting valuable data. When the Zoom H2n recording unit was presented to atlassers as a means to record digital point counts in squares that wouldn't get the traditional point count coverage, I was interested; but found myself quickly intimidated by the instruction manual and the settings; technology is not my cup of tea! But this device offers the potential to increase coverage and help create accurate relative abundance maps for species in Northern Ontario – a goal that is dear to my heart; I had to give it a try!

After reading the instructions and watching the tutorial video, I set my alarm; it was time to find out if someone who still struggles with a tv remote could successfully operate one of these units. I headed for the nearest trail for a test. It was very easy to set up, at ear level, on a branch, a trunk, or a tripod. On my very first test, when it came time to record my info, I wasn't ready: I forgot my square number, and the date, and I was scrambling with my map and phone to find the coordinates, but none of that mattered since I forgot to hit the record button before enunciating my info. But hey, that's what practice is for, right? Since I went through the whole process once, the rest went smoothly. When I got home, I listened to the recordings with earphones (ouch!) I thought I was being quiet but some of the noise I made hurt my eardrums; I felt bad for the people analysing these recordings. Next time, no nylon wind jacket, no moving my feet, no looking in my pocket for a pen, and no holding a sheet of paper.

The next morning, I was ready! I went out early (Just before sunrise = the optimal time to start Point Counts) I recorded 9 digital point counts before 8:45 am when I stopped since the songs slowed down quite a bit. At one point I noticed the "surround" settings had shifted so I had to reset it (using the sheet). Once I got home, I downloaded the files to my computer and transferred them to Wildtrax's Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas folder using FileZilla.

Overall, this unit is easier to use than it looks and the protocol to follow is straightforward. If you live anywhere in the province but especially north of Gravenhurst, and you are interested in recording digital point counts with these units during a few mornings, contact your Regional Coordinator. Your RC will let you know if there are

squares in need of point counts in your region and can lend you one of these handy little devices.

My top 7 tips:

1. Watch the YouTube Tutorial on Recording Digital Point Counts.
2. Print the little one-page "cheat sheet" guide (and bring it with you to check the settings a few times in the field!)
3. Set all the Zoom H2n settings at home, including the date and time, microphone settings, etc.
4. Have your info handy before speaking it: Name + Month, day, year + Time & Time zone + Square # & point # (or square # and UTM or Lat-Long for off-road Point Counts).
5. Do a practice recording first and listen to it with earphones to make sure you are being as quiet as a sleeping Great Gray Owl.
6. Wear cotton or wool or any comfy 'quiet' clothes that will permit you to lift your arm to remove the mosquito on your cheek without hurting the analyst's eardrum.
7. Bring extra batteries, be safe and enjoy the morning!

It's a great opportunity to contribute valuable data to the Atlas without having to identify all the birds you hear! And later on, when you look at the relative abundance maps for your favourite warbler, you know you'll have played a little role in creating them while enjoying the morning chorus.

Stay safe,  
Your Atlas-3 Team

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