



Common Raven Photo: Mark Peck

Dear Atlasser,

This edition of the Atlas-3 newsletter will cover:

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- Atlas-2 book makes digital leap, supports Atlas-3 outreach
- In praise of Zooming – Susan Bryan
- Profile atlasser – Derek Armstrong, Manitoulin
- Reminders from Significant Species Committee
- New eBird information page
- Avian Flu

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 the Government of Ontario [website](#). Follow the links to the most current situation in the province.

Introduction: gearing up for year 2

With the birds now pouring back in, the excitement starts to build. By the end of May, almost every adult bird in the province (except perhaps in the far north!) will be on a breeding site and waiting for you to add it to the Atlas! Don't disappoint them. Get out there and enjoy the searching, the discoveries, the camaraderie, and the satisfaction of helping fill in gaps in Atlas results.

We had a good first year, and now we build on that. In some ways, it gets a little harder each year because the focus is shifting to finding the missing species and visiting the previously unsurveyed locations. But the enjoyment and satisfaction increases with each new checklist or point count in previously untrammelled Atlas territory, each new species for a square, and every time you increase breeding evidence for a species.

It may require more planning, especially in squares with data from year 1, but don't shirk. We're hoping that with fewer COVID restrictions in place, atlassers will be freer to move around the province and able to focus on filling holes in Atlas coverage. See the [Coverage Map](#) and talk to your Regional Coordinator, to see how you can help. There are going to be social atlassing events in many atlas regions this summer.

Year-2 Kickoff

The second year of the Atlas got off to a great start with our 2022 Kickoff event! If you missed the online portion of the weekend, you can watch the recordings on our [YouTube channel](#). We had several fun challenges in the weeks leading up to the event, and the results are in:

The Region with the most confirmed breeding evidence was Region 7 (Waterloo) with 17 confirmed records. Brent from Region 7 won the Confirmed Breeding Evidence challenge with the AE code (*adult Entering, occupying, or leaving a nest site or whose behavior suggests the presence of an occupied nest*) for an American Robin.

The North came out strong, winning two challenges: first, Pierre from Region 41 won our Owl Survey Challenge by conducting a Northern Hawk Owl survey. The Photo Submission Challenge was won by Angie in Region 42, her winning photo can be seen on the right.

Finally, our Sunday trivia prize goes to Elena from Region 24! Excellent work!



Extra incentive

As an extra incentive to encourage you to go atlassing in new or poorly covered squares, we are offering a prize of the hard copy book ***Atlas of the Breeding Birds Of Ontario 2001-2005*** for one lucky atlasser who adds 50 or more species with breeding evidence to a square in 2022. We'll draw a random name from those who qualify at the end of the summer. Good luck to all!

Square-bashes

Though the Grundy Lake event is full, there is still room for more participants on our [Square-bashes](#) at Mikisew and Halfway Lake Provincial Parks, and at the Block Party in northeastern Ontario in June. These events are a great way to learn more about atlassing, meet and work with some fellow atlassers, and to help fill in coverage in the “central” part of the province where help is much needed. Hoping you will join us – or do your own atlassing in the area. You should also check with your RC to see what local square-bashing events are planned in your region.

Big Atlas Weekend

Mark your calendar. As an additional fun incentive this year, we are joining with the other Atlases underway elsewhere in North America to do a **Big Atlas Weekend** on June 24-26, 2022. More details on this later, but we have been challenged to see if we can match the atlassing efforts in the other Atlases in the US and Newfoundland over that weekend. Can we show our American friends how it is done? We have a proud history of atlassing in this province – see Gregor's note below – but the gauntlet has been dropped!

Atlas Swag

You can now purchase almost anything (T-shirts, caps, mugs, tote bags, etc.) with an Atlas logo on it. To view the merchandise and make your purchases, click [here](#). Looking forward to seeing you stylishly sporting your Atlas gear!



Atlas stickers

Is your windshield in need of some beautification? Is your travel mug or laptop looking too plain? Well, you can help spruce up these items, identify yourself as an atlaser, and provide some low-key promotion for the Atlas by using Atlas stickers in prominent places such as these. The clear plastic stickers with the Atlas logo, see example to the right, are available from Regional Coordinators



Zoom point counts

We are encouraging atlasers to do point counts this year, both traditional and digital. See Susan Bryan's note below on her adventures as a Zoomer – we hope you'll be inspired to try it yourself.

Highlighting atlasers

And, finally, we are starting a new feature highlighting individual atlasers. The first of these, on Manitoulin Island's Derek Armstrong, is below. Thanks, Derek, for doing this. We're looking forward to profiling more atlasers in future issues.

Atlas-2 Book Supports Outreach and Engagement Goals for Atlas-3

Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001 – 2005, Makes Digital Leap!

Toward the conclusion of the fieldwork phase of the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas project (Atlas-2), the Atlas partners and staff, together with scores of dedicated volunteer contributors, reviewers, editors, and photographers, began work on the book publication which was the culmination of the project. Completed in late fall 2007, and launched officially in early 2008, the *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001 – 2005*, was extremely well received with a successful print run of 4,500 copies.

The Atlas-2 book spans 728 information-packed pages, with detailed accounts for the 286 bird species documented through the project by 3,417 volunteers, making it the province's most authoritative resource on birds and bird distribution at the time. The book's detailed text is supported by more than 900 maps (including both breeding evidence and relative abundance) and over 400 photographs, with additional chapters on topics including changes in bird populations and distribution, results highlights, biogeography, and more.

Margaret Atwood and the late Graeme Gibson called the Atlas publication "a monumental achievement... presented with a remarkable clarity and style. Invaluable for the thoroughness of its science, the Atlas is also a wonderful book to simply browse.... This book is a must for everyone interested in birds, Ontario, and the natural world." Prof. Daniel Mennill, University of Windsor, writing in *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology*, noted "[the Atlas] is a monumental achievement and sets a new standard for breeding bird atlases."

Now, 15 years later, the Atlas-2 book is very nearly out of print, marking the successful completion of its print publication – but, the book will continue to contribute to bird conservation in Ontario and will live on in new and exciting ways! The Atlas team always hoped that the project and resulting publication would contribute not only to our understanding of bird biology, populations and conservation, but also serve as a vehicle for outreach, awareness and education. To help further these goals, some remaining copies of the book are being used to support outreach and engagement with Indigenous communities and youth for the Atlas-3 project. In this way, the Atlas-2 book and proceeds from its sale are helping to bridge the two projects and support expanding outreach efforts – a heartening and valuable connection that will benefit birds, conservation, and community.

While a few dozen hard copies of the Atlas-2 book can still be [purchased through Ontario Nature](#), we are very excited to announce that the entire "*Atlas of Breeding Birds of Ontario, 2001-2005*" is now available digitally on the [Atlas website](#). The Atlas has been formatted for easy reading and browsing in digital format and will provide ongoing access to the book for countless new and eager readers.

The linkages and connections from one Atlas to the next, and the opportunity for the Atlas-2 project to support the goals and outcomes for Atlas-3, is a particularly fitting and positive outcome. Whether you continue browsing the Atlas-2 book in hard copy, online, or in both formats, we hope that you enjoy this exciting contribution to the understanding and conservation of birds in Ontario.

Gregor Beck

Senior Strategist, Birds Canada

Management Committee Chair, Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

Atlas-3 discussion board gets a makeover; an Atlas-3 Discord server

After limited uptake in year one, the Atlas has changed direction on the discussion board and replaced it with a space on Discord. A free online service, Discord lets people form their own “servers” as a place where their members can talk and share information. The main benefit of using Discord is that it has a dedicated mobile app so it’s easy to quickly open it up and ask a short question, even when you’re in the field. We hope this is a good tool for atlasers to ask questions, share stories, stay up to date on announcements, learn from and connect with each other.

If you want to just read the Discord discussion, then you can continue viewing it all on the Atlas-3 website. The new discussion board is found under the “Get Involved” menu or by direct link at www.birdsontario.org/discussion

If you’d like to participate, then you’ll have to first create an account with Discord, then you can join the Atlas-3 server using this invite link: <https://discord.gg/JCfgr3egG>

We have structured the discussion board with basically the same major subjects (or channels, as they are called in Discord) as we had on “the original” Atlas-3 discussion board, and done our best to copy the discussion board content over to Discord.

For a tutorial on joining the discord server see: <https://youtu.be/YPWgY0pXfSs>

In Praise of Zooming

The word “**Zoomer**” has two interpretations:

Zoomer (modern slang) – a member of Generation Z, a person born after 1996 (that makes the oldest member 26 now).

Zoomer (as celebrated by “Zoomer” magazine) – an especially active baby boomer with a positive vision of aging.

I am definitely in the latter group, being over 70 with failing hearing (especially at higher pitches), but otherwise physically able and keen to participate in bird atlassing. The acoustic point count recorders (Zoom devices) provided by the Atlas were perfect.

I used to enjoy point counts. I covered many remote squares in northern Ontario for the second OBBA and also did a Breeding Bird Survey route each year. But that was 20 years ago. By the time the third atlas began, my hearing was just too far gone – I could see the Blackburnian Warbler sitting on a branch above me, his mouth open, his chest pumping, but I heard absolutely nothing. My atlassing days seemed to be over. Even though I am fit enough and willing to visit remote locations, another volunteer with good hearing would always have to accompany me, or even worse, go on a separate trip to complete my inadequate Square coverage. This was not a good use of limited Atlas resources or volunteer time. It also made me feel inadequate.

Then the option of a “Zoom” point count recorder was offered. It sounded good, but I am not a technophile. Would I be able to deal with the technology? After a little practice, I took the portable unit on holidays with me throughout June and July, recording point counts whenever and wherever I could. This included a family vacation to the Bruce Peninsula, a boat expedition to Michipicoten Island in the middle of Lake Superior, at my cottage on Lake Superior south of Thunder Bay, and while covering squares in Kenora District. The recorder worked well, was easy to truck along in a boat or a knapsack, and rugged enough to stand up to some challenging travels in remote locations.

How did it go? The recordings were successfully interpreted by experts over the winter and the data will be uploaded to NatureCounts in the next few weeks. Atlas staff assure me that this will happen more quickly now that the system has been worked out. I listened to several of the recordings with another (younger) birder with good hearing who was impressed with the sound quality, and I'm looking forward to seeing the data in the system. And I did learn that I am again fully functional, thanks to the new technology!

If you try the acoustic recorder this summer I really recommend spending some time getting used to the device at home. The instructions that come with the unit are comprehensive, but it takes a bit of time to get comfortable with the technology.

Noise interference created some challenges for our recordings. One of the pre-set point counts in Sioux Lookout was located at the edge of town next to the airport. We checked it out in advance – all quiet the evening before. However, the next morning at 5:45 am there were endless airplanes taking off from the airport, trains shunting on nearby tracks, convoys of pulp trucks passing, machinery with backup alarms ringing at a nearby construction site. Where had all these people come from at 5:45 in the morning? It was like point-counting at a heavy industrial site during peak operations. Obviously the pace of life in this small northern town has picked up significantly since point counts were done there 20 years earlier.

We also encountered some amusing “natural” noise interference. Soon after recording started at a wilderness wetland site (west of Silver Dollar, Kenora District) a pair of screaming Greater Yellowlegs started endless flyover assaults. The continuous tew-tew-tew-tew-tew of the pair drowned out every other fainter call in the background. The recording was useless for identifying any species other than Greater Yellowlegs.

Thanks to the new technology, I no longer feel like an inadequate birder – I can now do the full job because I am a “Zoomer”. This summer I am off “Square bashing” with my Zoom recorder on a three day camping trip to remote Lake Superior islands. I've also planned another trip out to Michipicoten Island, and further square bashing in Kenora District. Who knows where else my Zoom and I may go?

I certainly encourage anyone interested in being fully involved with the Atlas work to use the Zoom units on offer (ask your Regional Coordinator). Whether you need a digital recorder because of decreased hearing, or simply because you are not strong at identifying birds by song, the units can allow you to capably collect the data needed by the Atlas. The units are simple to use, portable, and free. You too can be a Zoomer !!!!

Susan Bryan, Thunder Bay.

Atlasser profile: Derek Armstrong, Manitoulin Region

Hi. My name is Derek Armstrong. I am a very amateur birder and have been involved in the BBA for just over a year. I'll explain how I got involved, but first a little bit about myself.

I live with my family on a small rural property in the south end of Sudbury. I am a recently retired geologist, with a 30 plus year career that exposed me to lots of nature (especially mosquitos!!), in many locations across the province.



Derek on the Severn River in Northwestern Ontario

These experiences and our rural setting have stimulated my general interest in nature and inspired me to join iNaturalist and various nature-based Facebook groups. My birding experience was largely restricted to watching those that came to our winter feeders and birds we heard and saw on our daily dog walks in the woods near our place.

How did you come to be involved in the atlas?

I was invited to participate in the BBA by one of our local Regional Coordinators, possibly based on my numerous submissions to iNaturalist. It certainly wasn't because of my birding expertise, because I have very little.

In what ways have you participated?

My first experience atlassing was to help out with an owl survey last year. It's a relatively easy survey for beginners, made even easier for me because we didn't hear any(!). I did though hear my first ever Wilson's Snipe. I was hooked!

I then offered to be responsible for the BBA square that we live in, thinking it best to start with familiar geography and birds. Point counts I knew would be my biggest challenge, as they require a high degree of bird song identification ability. Coincidentally, I discovered the Bird ID and BirdSong ID workshops that the University of Guelph's Arboretum started to deliver online due to the Covid pandemic. Chris Earley did a wonderful job teaching these workshops! Despite this, I still didn't feel confident enough to do my own Point Counts, so took advantage of the digital audio recording devices being offered by BBA for this purpose. These recording devices made it easy to complete the required number of point counts for my square. The recordings were also a good way to review bird songs and practice identifications.

I also did a Nightjar Survey for my square. We commonly hear Eastern Whip-poor-wills around here, so this was an easy survey to do.

What do you like the most about atlassing?

Atlassing provided focus and extra incentive for my bird watching. It inspired me to go out to find birds, not just sit at home and watch what came to our feeders.

Doing point counts got me out early in the mornings during breeding season, to places I might not otherwise get to, and discover birds I would have otherwise missed. Highlights from my first year atlassing include hearing the very weird mating call of the male American Bittern and discovering a Great Blue Heron rookery.

What have you learned?

Atlassing inspired me to learn more about birds that I wouldn't otherwise have come across. And learning bird songs helped me realize how many more birds are out there than I previously realized.

What do you think of the atlas (it's importance, etc)?

I think we take a lot for granted when we look at species range maps and other information in field guides. And when data is compared over the years, from atlas to atlas, differences can be seen: some species recovering, others declining, or moving in response to factors like climate change. It's very cool to take part in gathering the sort of data that goes into producing those maps, guides and more in-depth analysis.

What advice would you have for beginner birders?

Don't be afraid of your own limitations, perceived or real. You may not consider yourself a "real" bird watcher (I don't!), but don't worry, not all atlassing activities require professional birding skills. Getting involved at any level in the Atlas can provide you with the opportunity and incentive to develop and hone your skills.

In addition to your trusted field guide, you should check out smart phone apps like Merlin and eBird. They are great for helping to ID birds (including their songs and calls!) and keep track of your observations. And you should check out online birding communities, like local or provincial Facebook birding or naturalist groups. These are great resources to learn what birds are being seen in your area, share your observations and get help with your IDs from more experienced birders.

Mostly though, get out there and have fun!

Significant Species Committee reminders

Atlassing outside of peak season

Don't forget to refer to the breeding charts at www.birdsontario.org/safe-dates whenever you're atlassing outside of peak atlassing season (May 24 to July 10). Exercise caution when using "lower" breeding codes during this time, especially outside of a species' safe dates (when migrants/non-breeders may display similar behaviours).

Significant species

All flagged records get reviewed first by Regional Coordinators and then a secondary review by the significant species committee.

In general, we encourage atlassers to focus on increasing the quality of details provided (**and especially on [pinning locations](#)**) for significant species records.

Don't forget that depending on the flag, we're looking for different information:

Symbol	Name	Explanation	Details requested
[rare]	eBird flag	If a species is rare for the date and location according to the eBird filter, you will be required to add details.	Details about how you identified the species.
†	Provincially rare	Provincially rare breeding species. Will be flagged if you enter breeding evidence.	How did you identify the species? Explanation of breeding evidence. "Pin" the exact location(s).
‡	Regionally rare	Regionally rare breeding species. Will be flagged if you enter breeding evidence.	How did you identify the species? Explanation of breeding evidence. "Pin" the exact location(s).
§	Species of interest	Species of interest. Widespread species at risk or colonial species. Will be flagged if you enter confirmed-level breeding evidence.	"Pin" the exact location(s) and for colonial species, details about the size and status of the colony.

New information page for eBirders

Do you eBird? We have put together a dedicated page of information for atlassers who also eBird. We hope it will answer all of your questions related to eBird and the Atlas. Check it out at <https://www.birdsontario.org/ebird/>. Still have questions? Then head over to the [Atlas-3 discussion forum](#).

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

As you are likely already aware, on March 21, 2022, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) reported highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), subtype H5N1, in a sample taken from a red-tailed hawk that was found in the Region of Waterloo. To date, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has been confirmed in multiple wild bird species including gulls, waterfowl, raptors and corvids. The HPAI situation in Ontario is evolving rapidly and it is

likely that Ontario will see more confirmed cases over the coming weeks and months.

As you prepare for a busy atlassing field season, we wanted to reach out and provide you with some general information and additional links to resources regarding highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds.

The key message for atlassers at this time is: If you encounter any dead, injured or sick birds, they should not be touched and if possible, should be immediately reported to the **Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative by phone (866-673-4781) or report online (<https://cwhc.wildlifesubmissions.org>)**.

The Canada Food Inspection Agency just released a [tremendous tool](#) for the wild bird community to track and see what birds have been reported, where, how many, when and so many more details. For information on how to use this tool, [click here](#).

For more information on HPAI, see [this link](#).

Happy Atlassing!

- The Atlas-3 Team

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Sustainable Forestry Initiative

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This email was sent by [Birds Canada](#) on behalf of the [Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas](#) partners (Birds Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ontario Nature).

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