

A SUMMER BIRD CENSUS IN MILLIS

by Brian E. Cassie, Millis

Eighteen miles southwest of Boston, in a corner of Norfolk County, lies the town of Millis. Roughly square in outline, the town comprises 7845 acres and is entirely within the Charles River watershed, the river itself forming the eastern and southern town boundaries. Table 1, from the 1973 "Millis Master Plan," shows existing land use in Millis. This will help the reader to understand just how much good bird habitat still remains; over three-fourths of the town land is unpopulated!

Table 1. Existing Land Use in Millis.

	ACRES	PERCENT OF TOTAL LAND
UPLANDS: Agriculture	877	11
Woodland	3100	40
Urbanized	1328	17
Open Space	345	4
 WATER SURFACE	 100	 1
WETLANDS: Charles River Floodplain and Tributaries	1085	14
Great Black Swamp	1010	13

The data presented in Table 2 are the result of seventy-seven hours of field work, carried out between 1 June and 9 July 1983. Counts were made on twenty-six mornings between 5:00 A.M. and 9:30 A.M., the time varying with the weather conditions. I divided the town into manageable sections and gave thorough enough coverage so that I was within hearing range of any bird breeding in the town. It was not possible to count accurately certain species because of their gregariousness and/or wandering natures. For these birds, I have presented estimates of their populations, based on counts made in this census and tempered by several years of field experience.

The categories in Table 2, Pairs, Males, Females, and Unsexed Adults, are not overlapping, and the numbers in each have been added to give the total number of territories held by the species. For example, pairs of House Wrens were found in thirty-nine areas; in forty-seven other spots, males only were recorded; and in a further three places, non-singing adults were present. This totals eighty-nine House Wren territories, each of which probably represents a breeding pair. Although the presence of females, singing males, or unsexed adults does not always indicate the presence of a

breeding pair, the fact that only a single coverage was afforded each area suggests that the totals presented here are conservative.

The bird species listed in Table 2 are all thought to be summer residents. Great Blue Heron, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Herring Gull, White-eyed Vireo, and Blackpoll and Mourning warblers were identified during the count period, but all were almost certainly migrants or fly-overs. A plus (+) in the column headed Young represents the presence of nestlings or fledged young.

Table 2. Species List of Summer Birds in Millis, 1983.

SPECIES	PAIRS	MALES	FEMALES	YOUNG	UNSEXED ADULTS	TOTAL NUMBER TERRITORIES
Green-backed Heron					5	5
Canada Goose	10					10
Wood Duck	3	1	2	+	3	6
American Black Duck	1					1
Mallard	1	5	5	+	1	6
Broad-winged Hawk					3	3
Red-tailed Hawk	3				2	5
American Kestrel	1	5	2	+	1	9
Ring-necked Pheasant		17	1	+		18
Ruffed Grouse					5	5
Northern Bobwhite	4	6				10
Killdeer	5			+	6	11
Upland Sandpiper					1 (+1)	1
American Woodcock		6				6
Rock Dove		(est. 160 adults) +				80
Mourning Dove		(est. 250 adults) +				125
Black-billed Cuckoo					13	13
Yellow-billed Cuckoo					10	10
Eastern Screech-Owl					1	1
Great Horned Owl					3	3
Chimney Swift		(est. 80 adults) +				40
Ruby-throated Hummingbird					1	1
Belted Kingfisher	2				4	6
Downy Woodpecker	24			+	50	74
Hairy Woodpecker	10			+	12	22
Northern Flicker	16			+	45	61
Eastern Wood-Pewee	1	50				51
Alder Flycatcher	1	1				2
Willow Flycatcher		3				3
Least Flycatcher	1	1				2
Eastern Phoebe	15			+	20	35
Great Crested Flyc.	3				30	33
Eastern Kingbird	72			+	9	81

Table 2. (continued)

SPECIES	PAIRS	MALES	FEMALES	YOUNG	UNSEXED ADULTS	TOTAL NUMBER TERRITORIES
Tree Swallow	6				2	8
No. Rough-winged Sw.	1				1	2
Bank Swallow	223			+		223
Barn Swallow	40			+	10	50
Blue Jay			(est. 280 adults)	+		140
American Crow			(est. 130 adults)	+		65
Bl.-capped Chickadee	137			+	80	217
Tufted Titmouse	38			+	76	114
Wh.-breasted Nuthatch	16			+	39	55
Brown Creeper	12	7		+	2	21
House Wren	39	47		+	3	89
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1				1	2
Veery	12	63		+	19	94
Hermit Thrush		1				1
Wood Thrush	3	47			3	53
American Robin	95			+	68	163
Gray Catbird	113			+	121	234
Northern Mockingbird	30			+	26	56
Brown Thrasher	4				20	24
Cedar Waxwing			(est. 100 adults)	+		50
European Starling			(est. 1200 adults)	+		600
Yellow-throated Vireo		1				1
Warbling Vireo	3	13		+		16
Red-eyed Vireo	4	108		+		112
Blue-winged Warbler	3	43				46
Golden-winged Warbler			1			1
Yellow Warbler	28	95				123
Black-throated Green W.		2				2
Pine Warbler		1				1
Prairie Warbler	1	15				16
Black-and-white Warbler	3	37		+		40
American Redstart		11	(one-year-olds)			11
Ovenbird	5	97				102
Northern Waterthrush		16				16
Common Yellowthroat	21	402	1	+		424
Canada Warbler		2				2
Scarlet Tanager	8	50			3	61
Northern Cardinal	14	67	1	+		82
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5	31	1	+		37
Indigo Bunting	6	33		+		39
Rufous-sided Towhee	55	32		+	26	113
Chipping Sparrow	30	42		+	3	75
Field Sparrow	10	8				18
Song Sparrow	81	138		+		219
Swamp Sparrow	3	49			1	53
White-throated Sparrow	2			+		2

Table 2. (continued)

SPECIES	PAIRS	MALES	FEMALES	YOUNG	UNSEXED ADULTS	TOTAL NUMBER TERRITORIES
Bobolink	8	16		+		24
Red-winged Blackbird		(est. 400 adults)				200
Eastern Meadowlark	3	11		+	2	16
Common Grackle		(est. 600 adults)				300
Brown-headed Cowbird		(est. 80 adults)		+		(40)
Orchard Oriole		1				1
Northern Oriole	52	36		+		88
Purple Finch	1	5				6
House Finch	6	3		+	6	15
American Goldfinch		(est. 70 adults)				(35)
House Sparrow		(est. 250 adults)				125

Notes on Selected Species.

Ruffed Grouse. This was an off year for this species in Millis. Usually they are common.

Upland Sandpiper. Ken Winkler and I observed a bird in farmland on 21 June. The owner of the property saw one or two birds in July.

Eastern Screech-Owl. There was not enough time to conduct a worthwhile owl survey, but certainly this species is very common in Millis. I have found as many as thirty-nine in a single evening.

Brown Creeper. This bird was much more common than I had thought. The males continued to sing throughout June.

Golden-winged Warbler. One female was observed, giving distraction display from a roadside thicket. Ten feet away was a young Blue-winged Warbler, probably the offspring of this bird and a male Blue-winged. The male parent was not seen.

White-throated Sparrow. Two pairs, each with fledged young, were discovered in cut-over areas which had grown up with shrubs and small saplings. The males sang until early July.

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BRIAN E. CASSIE does most of his birdwatching in Millis, where he lives and runs a natural history book business (Ibis Books). Occasionally, he gets farther afield and has co-lead natural history tours to Mexico and the Great Smoky Mountains for Massachusetts Audubon Society. Brian says he works one day a week and spends the rest of his time with his family or looking for birds, shells, butterflies, and books. He is trying to figure out how he can work less often.