

Atlas Finished

The largest and most intense bird survey in Ohio's 281 year history completed it's field work this summer. 780 data points and 5 years later Dan Rice, Project Director of Ohio's Bird Atlas is looking forward to returning to his normal duties with Ohio's Department of Natural Resources: fish, reptilian, and amphibian surveys. Dan speaks with pride of the quality of the work accomplished: all 780 blocks were surveyed with a 90% coverage rate on each block. This means that 90% of the species expected or predicted to be present in each block were actually found. In the eastern blocks, 80 species were predicted while 70-80 species were expected in the western blocks. 90% coverage of the 80 species means 72 were actually found. A days census at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in June or July usually produces 70-80 species. At the rate of a day per block then it would take 780 days to do what Dan Rice's survey crew accomplished in 305 days (June, 30 days plus July, 31 days for five years).

He also openly admires the abilities of his survey crew birders who upon seeing certain habitat, know what birds should be there and then find them. They also have the knack of looking for the odd habitat within a block. He feels some birders just seem to have this innate ability to find birds.

Dan says the Atlas itself should be published in 2-3 years. He hopes to hold down the cost to \$20.00 per book. Vermont charges \$35.00, New York \$45.00 and Ontario \$53.00 for their books. Every species will have a map and a write up.

To date, roughly \$200,000 has been spent on the project. Dan believes that a minimum of 25 years and perhaps as much as 50 years should pass before the survey is repeated. After all, it has been about 52 years since the Ohio Biological Survey published the last survey (Hicks) of Ohio's breeding birds, which of course was much less extensive. The \$200,000 is quite an expense to justify and there should be some substantial time period over which change could occur. However, he feels local birders could repeat the survey for their county every 5 years or so to maintain current knowledge. The original data for each county will be stored at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and will be available upon request.

Dan frankly states he underestimated the amount of work the Atlas would require. This summer's goal alone was to visit 300 blocks which were deemed unacceptable in terms of percentage of species found versus expected. Tom Bartlett visited 59 of these himself in northwestern Ohio but Dan did 60.

The most difficult part of the last five years was finding enough volunteers to do the census work. 400-500 are necessary. In 1983, 250-300 volunteers started atlasing, but the number dropped precipitously each year afterwards. It was necessary to hire census workers the last three years. Dan felt that the various Ohio bird clubs would undertake the atlasing of their various counties and neighboring counties as a club project for the education and enjoyment of their members as well as a benefit to Ohio but few did. This was a disappointment to him. He also found that few volunteers birded above their level of ability. For example, few would learn bird songs in an effort to improve their location of species within their block.

He thought the individual birder would use this opportunity to improve his techniques.

Now that the data collection is over, Dan looks ahead to other projects that have been on his mind: establishing a network of observers to check on endangered or rare species now that some of their locations have been identified; and inventorying birds species quantitatively on Scenic Rivers and State Nature Preserves.

This summer, as with the last two, the Department of Natural Resources hired summer survey workers to atlas quads. Employed this summer were Vic Fazio, Mary Gustafson, Tom Bartlett, Rob Harlan, Larry Rosche, Steve McKee, and Bill Reiner. Generally, they worked the months of June and July for an hourly wage and travel expenses. Tom, for example, covered 59 blocks in western and northwestern Ohio often staying overnight in the general area. He generally spent one day in each block by birding it from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on one day and then from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on a second day. This allowed him to be in two blocks for two days alternating between them. His highlights included lark sparrows in three different locations in Auglaize County with a nesting pair at St. John's; a common barn-owl in Shelby County; sedge wrens in Van Wert and Sandusky counties, a Bell's vireo in Sandusky County; long-eared owls in Lucas and Seneca counties; a northern harrier in Van Wert County; and a confirmed nesting of a sharp-shinned Hawk in Shelby County. He found dickcissels in all the counties he visited and believes they are much more common than expected.

Other accounts of "How I Spent My Summer Vacation" are written below by two other workers.

Rob Harlan

"It is possible...that the species nest regularly somewhere in southern Ohio. Because of its preference for dense thickets, the superficial similarity of its song to that of the Louisiana waterthrush, and the dearth of resident ornithologists in this section of the State, the bird might easily have been overlooked." Although written in 1947 (Wilson Bulletin 59:211), these comments concerning Swainson's warbler by N. Bayard Green still hold true to day. In his article, Green relates his discovery and studies of a territorial male Swainson's warbler in Lawrence County during the spring and summer of 1947.

Prior to this May, when I was working for the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, this record has always seem archaic to me. Actually, while doing the atlas work on May 17 near Wellston in Jackson County, it had not even entered my mind. Instead, I was more concerned with a larger-sounding dog in the distance and having darkness fall while I was still a mile or so off the highway in a maze of old logging roads. Nonetheless, a bird singing somewhere in the impenetrable brush ahead kept my attention. It was a song I recognized, a loud, monotonous seeo seeo tu tu weeeo, but one that I couldn't definitely put a name to. I searched for as long as I cared to but couldn't pin the bird down and decided to try again the next morning. When I got back to camp I played Peterson's Eastern Bird Tape and quickly confirmed my

suspicions: the singer was a Swainson's warbler!

A return trip the next morning proved very fruitful. Upon approaching the site where the bird had been the day before, its now familiar song announced its continued presence. A short distance and a little bushwhacking later, I had the bird in sight. It sat 20 or 30 feet up in a dead pine tree, singing constantly. While the warbler's behavior indicated territoriality, I found no evidence of a female, although this possibly cannot be ruled out. Bruce Peterjohn and Mary Gustafson refound the bird a week later, thus confirming its territorial status. The Swainson's may not have been the most colorful or "fashionable" bird that I have ever found, but it was definitely one of the most satisfying.

Although the Swainson's warbler was found in Jackson County in southern Ohio, most of my time was spent in the southwestern and west-central counties: Butler, Warren, Preble, Miami, and Shelby. I also spent a week each in Ashtabula and Morgan counties, as well as participating in a Williams County blockbusting weekend. The Butler county/southern Preble county area seemed to be the most productive, with Hueston Woods State Park standing out. College Corner block (encompassing the northern extremities of Hueston Woods) harbored a species count in the middle 90's, featuring a black vulture nest, veery, common moorhen, and a pair of black-crowned night-herons, seemingly interested in nesting.

Concerning individual species, dickcissels could be found in most Butler County blocks, as well as smaller numbers in Preble, Montgomery, Clark, and Miami counties. Other sightings of interest include two colonies of cliff swallows near Leon in Ashtabula County, sedge wren near Piqua in Miami County, three sedge wrens near Pioneer in Williams County and pine siskin near Oxford in Butler County. A recently fledged pine siskin in Brecksville, Cuyahoga County, provided evidence of an unusual successful Ohio nesting of this species. Rose-breasted grosbeaks and savannah sparrows continued to push southward and grasshopper sparrows were found in most areas where proper habitat was present. Henslow's sparrows, far from being difficult to locate, proved abundant in some areas of Jackson and Morgan counties, locally, in Butler, Montgomery and Warren counties and present in smaller numbers in Ashtabula County.

When the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas is finally completed and published, it will undoubtedly reaffirm many of our ideas regarding Ohio's breeding bird distribution. However it will also provide many surprises. I consider myself privileged for the opportunity of taking part in the project and to add to our knowledge of Ohio's avifauna.

Larry Rosche

My 1987 Atlas project included all or parts of 37 blocks in east central Ohio. The time period was from June 6 to July 19. I worked mainly in Columbiana, Harrison, Portage, and Wayne counties and to a lesser extent parts of Carroll, Cuyahoga, Stark, Summit and Tuscarawas counties.

Knowing that I would be in areas of high numbers of warblers and grass

land species I decided to try to census the species of particular interest to me. (See census chart at the end of this article.) The census was by no means complete and indeed quite inadequate for the blocks that I only spent a few hours atlasing. I had to keep my atlas objective in mind and search the necessary habitats to find overlooked species. I had originally planned to include the grasshopper sparrow in the census but in some blocks this species was so numerous that an accurate guesstimate could not be made. I did not locate rarities like the sedge wrens I found in Trumbull County in 1986 but I did encounter many birds. Indeed, Columbiana County is certainly an area to deserve more study. The most surprising finds included least flycatchers in West Point, alder flycatchers as far south as Bolivar and Stone Creek. Veery was of interest in New Pittsburg and Orrville blocks. I was also surprised to find out just how isolated the colony of pine warblers at Lake Rockwell (Portage County) is from the rest of their species. Atlasing large pinelands in Carroll and Harrison County did not produce this species.

All in all, the three years I have worked for Natural Areas and Preserves has provided me a wealth of knowledge and given me some of my most rewarding birding in Ohio.

COUNTIES	COLUMBIANA			TUSCARAWAS			STARK		WAYNE			MEDINA			PORTAGE			CARROLL		HARRISON			SUMMIT						
CITIES	W. Point	Hanoverton	Lisbon	E. Liverpool	Elkton	Straasburg	Stone Creek	Mineral City	Navarre	Bolivar	New Pittsburg	Creston	Rittman	Orrville	Madsworth	Kent	Attwater	Windham	Mantua	L. Rockwell	Dellroy	Jewett	Deererville	Smithfield	Bowerston	Akron east	Va. Kendall		
<u>VIREOS</u>																													
Solitary																													
Yel.-throat.	12	1	3	11	3	3	4		4		4	4		5	1	2	6	4	8	5		4	7	5	9	1	8		
<u>WARBLERS</u>																													
Blue-wing.	15	1	3	1	7	5	4	2	2	7		2	2	10	6	3	2	5	8	2		1	7		1		1	5	
N. Parula	1			3																									
Yellow	12	14	10	5	14	1	8	2	18	11	21	13	12	11	26	30	17	20	10	26	8	1	10	4	5	20	8		
Chest.-side.															1				4										
BT Green	2			1																			2						1
Yel.-throat.	5		2	1																									
Pine																				4									
Prairie	1					3															10	2	1		1				
Cerulean	16	1	7	17	3		2		1		13	4	2	1			8		6	2		9	7	2	4	1	8		
Black & whil.	5		2	1																		1	1						
Am. Redstart	1	2	1	3					2		2	2	1	3		1	2	2	12								1	1	
Prothonotary									1							1			4										
Worm-eating	1		1																										
Ovenbird	3	1	1	8			2													1			8		7		16		
La. Water.	3		5	1							2	2					1					2							4
Kentucky	20		9	12	1	2	4		1	5	4	4	2								2	6	13	1	5				
Yellowthro	30	28	15	7	17	3	11	4	26	22	14	14	20	13	34	30	15	24	22	35	13	13	23	30	13	15	10		
Hooded	10	3	3	7			5		1		8		1			1	6		18	1		8	6	2					28
Chat	6		1	5		2	6	4	1	9	1	1	1	2	6		1	2				2	6	6					

Warblers and vireos of east central Ohio, compiled June-July 1987 by Larry Rosche.