



The Bird Atlas Gazette

*The newsletter of the
Breeding Bird Atlas of Alberta: Update
Project*

*A project sponsored by the
Federation of Alberta Naturalists*

Number 1

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In 1992, after six years of hard work by many dedicated volunteers, the Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) published the first Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta. This book represented a significant advance in our knowledge of the bird life in Alberta.

In the ten years since the publication of that first atlas, the population of Alberta has increased, environmental disturbances have intensified and interest in the natural ecology of the province has grown.

To determine how bird populations have responded to these changes, and to satisfy the growing interest in the natural grandeur of Alberta, FAN has decided that the time is right to produce a second bird atlas. To that end, FAN launched the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta: Update Project in 2000, with the first full season of bird surveys completed during 2001.

The Update Atlas Project has four main goals:

- to increase our understanding of the distribution

and abundance of all the bird species which breed in Alberta.

- to increase public awareness and understanding of Alberta's natural history.
- to ascertain if there have been any changes in the distribution of breeding bird species over the past decade.
- to produce a detailed and extensive database on the bird populations in Alberta for use in wildlife management plans, environmental impact assessments and ecological research.

These goals will be achieved largely through the coordinated efforts of a large network of volunteer bird watchers (atlassers) systematically surveying the breeding birds throughout Alberta during the period of 2001 to 2005, with a revised atlas to be published after 2005.

It has long been said that "people do not value that which they do not understand, nor protect that which they do not value". By increasing our knowledge of the birds of Alberta, we can help guarantee that not only are they valued but also protected. This project

is, at its most fundamental, an investment in the future of wildlife in Alberta.

This is the first newsletter for the Update Atlas Project and we are using it to tell you about the many aspects of this Project: its purpose, the objectives we hope to accomplish over the next several years, how the project is run and what will be included in the resulting Atlas book.

Although the Atlas book will be the most visible

product to arise from this Project, it will be just one of many products which together, will form a powerful legacy for the natural environment of Alberta.

So please read on to find out how you can be a part of this important and exciting endeavour.

Greg Wagner

Breeding Bird Atlas Project Coordinator

How to become involved

If this kind of investment in the future of wildlife in Alberta is important to you, there are many ways in which you can become involved with this exciting and important environmental project:

- become a volunteer atlasser
- serve on a committee.
- become a zone coordinator, or assist the coordinator for your region.
- enter records into an electronic database.
- recruit friends and family to become involved with the project.
- provide donations in terms of money, equipment, or resources.
- instruct a bird identification course.

Atlas Products

There are a number of products which will form the legacy of this Atlas project, including:

- a soft cover atlas containing updated distribution maps, and information on the relationship between each bird species (its distribution and abundance) and habitat types and land use activities. The atlas will be published after 2005.
- predictive habitat-based statistical models for use by academic and industry researchers.
- scientific and popular publications.
- an interactive, web-based Atlas database for use by the public through user-friendly data presentation and retrieval software.



Just what is a bird atlas?

Quite simply, a bird atlas is a snapshot of all the birds in a specific region during a specific time period. Because it involves an extensive effort by a large number of people, an atlas becomes a detailed description of the bird population of that region. As such, it can describe several factors about that bird population.

Most importantly, bird atlases provide information on the distribution of bird populations, including their

current and historic ranges, long-term and short-term changes in those ranges and the occurrence of disjunct populations.

Atlas projects also document species abundance, bird biodiversity in a given area or habitat and population changes over time.

The purpose of atlas projects

The basic objectives of all bird atlas projects include:

- to produce a comprehensive picture of bird distribution and abundance in a specific area within a specific time frame.
- to mobilize volunteer bird watchers to collect data on the distribution and abundance of birds in a scientifically acceptable manner.
- repeated over time, bird atlases can identify changes in bird abundance and distribution.
- to determine if changes in bird populations are related to changes in environmental conditions (either natural or human induced).
- to increase the understanding of the ecology of a region.
- to use as a monitoring tool for conservation and population management purposes.
- to use as a component of wildlife management plans, eg., the Canadian Landbird Monitoring Strategy.

A brief review of first atlas project

For the initial Bird Atlas, survey data was collected during the February-August period over five field seasons (1987 to 1991) by 943 volunteer atlasers. These volunteers spent about 40,000 hours in the field, collecting 122,400 records of bird breeding activity.

Of the 6623 atlas squares in Alberta, 2206 (33%) received adequate survey coverage. The survey intensity was highest in the grasslands of the prairie region where 70% of the squares were surveyed. The lowest level of surveys were in the Canadian Shield region of northeastern Alberta (at 9%) and the northern Boreal Forests (at 20%), mainly because of the difficulty of access in these two regions.

The first Atlas did produce some interesting records, such as the first confirmed breeding record of the Sage Thrasher near the Cypress Hills.

Objectives of the Update

Atlas Project

The specific objectives of the current Atlas Project include:

- involving the community in a province-wide environmental project.
- publishing an update to the original Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta.
- making the updated atlas data easily accessible to both the public and private sectors.
- comparing the results to those found with the initial Atlas.
- filling the holes in the database from the initial Atlas.
- using the atlas as a tool for monitoring and managing bird populations.

Unfortunately, it also confirmed the extirpation of two species from the province: the Greater Prairie Chicken and the Lewis's Woodpecker. And no breeding evidence was found for either the Nashville Warbler or the Gray-cheeked Thrush, species previously thought to breed in Alberta.

On the plus side, the historical ranges of twelve species were expanded by the newly acquired records. These species included:

Pied-billed Grebe
Sandhill Crane
American Coot
Yellow Rail
Caspian Tern
Forester's Tern
Common Tern
Calliope Hummingbird
Great Crested Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Black-throated Green Warbler
Magnolia Warbler

In addition, the Atlas was able to produce many interesting results, some of which are shown below:

Top Ten Atlas squares in terms of number of species.

Area	No. of species recorded*
Beaverhill Lake	227
Old Man River	212
Taber Provincial Park	199
Cold Lake	197
Cooking Lake	190
Bullshead (near Medicine Hat)	172
Spotted Lake	167
Taber Lake	167
Fort McMurray	161
Lac Ste. Anne	160

* - includes observed but non-breeding species.

Most commonly encountered breeding species.

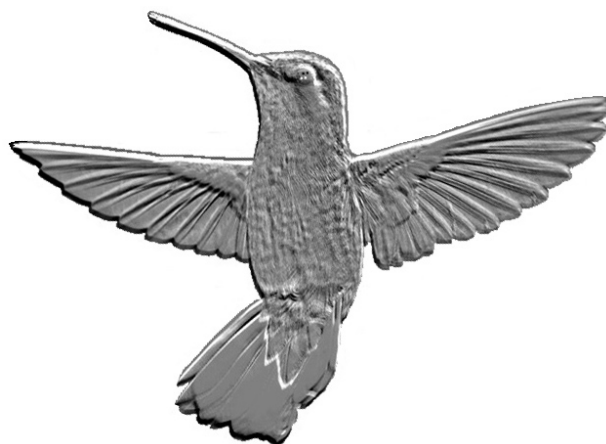
Species	Percentage of surveyed squares*
American Robin	53
Barn Swallow	49
Red-winged Blackbird	49
Mallard	46
Killdeer	42
Clay-colored Sparrow	41
American Crow	40
Yellow Warbler	40
Red-tailed Hawk	40
Chipping Sparrow	39

*Percentage of all squares in which each species was recorded breeding.

Top Ten Atlas squares in terms of number of breeding species.

Area	No. of species recorded*
Fork Lake	139
Cooking Lake	136
Lac Ste. Anne	135
Cold Lake	133
Beaverhill Lake	132
Winagami Lake Provincial Park	129
Water Valley	122
Elk Island National Park	120
Cold Lake	120
Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park	120

* - includes only breeding species



Why an update project is needed

Perhaps the greatest value of the Atlas Update Project is the contribution it will make to wildlife conservation; it is essentially a conservation project which can identify areas of high bird diversity which are worth protecting.

When compared to data from the first atlas project, the updated Atlas can provide valuable insights into changes in the distribution and abundance of birds in the province, and the causes of such changes. This was the case in Great Britain and Ireland, where an Atlas Update Project highlighted many changes in the populations of breeding birds over a twenty-year period.

The information from the Update Atlas will also provide further information on the distribution of endangered species and their habitat requirements, and will identify “hot spots” used by a large number of breeding or migrating species. This information can be used by resource management agencies and conservation biologists to develop management and conservation plans, and to identify areas crucial for protecting birds and their habitats (eg., the Important Bird Areas Program).

Benefits of an updated Bird Atlas

The many benefits which will result from this Project include:

- determining the current distribution and abundance of all breeding bird species.
- serving as a method for documenting trends in breeding bird populations over time.
- facilitating the development of predictive models which relate bird distribution and abundance to habitats and land use patterns.
- aiding the development of environmental impact assessments, resource management plans and conservation plans for wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- helping make all project-related information and data models readily accessible to the public and resource industries.
- providing better information for environmental assessments, resource development projects, etc..
- providing information to naturalists interested in observing wildlife.
- providing data to scientists conducting ecological research.
- identifying Biologically Significant Areas (i.e., Important Bird Areas).
- encouraging Albertans to participate in nature-related activities.
- contributing to an increased understanding of Alberta’s natural heritage.

Project Administration

The success of the Atlas Update Project is dependent on a large network of volunteers working under the leadership of a strong administrative framework. For this reason, administration of the Project has been divided between two main bodies: Project Management and Scientific Advisory Committees. Working together, these two groups provide the strength and leadership to ensure that the Atlas Project is moved smoothly forward to completion.

Project Management

The overall management of the project is accomplished by five groups of people, all of them working towards a single goal: to obtain the necessary

field data and move that data from the hands of the volunteer atlassers through the analytical process, and into the published Atlas.

Management Committee

The Management Committee is responsible for the overall management of the Update Atlas Project. It deals with such things as project structure, interagency cooperation, funding, staffing, budgeting, and project development.

Project Coordinator

The Project Coordinator is responsible for the overall coordination of the project. This includes an incredible variety of duties, including:

- overseeing the smooth day-to-day functioning of the Atlas Project by maintaining regular communications between the Management Committee, the Regional Coordinators and the Scientific Advisory Bodies.
- working with the Regional Coordinators to ensure that field data is collected accurately and submitted to the Database Administrator in a timely manner.
- providing support for the various Scientific Advisory Committees.
- maintaining publicity for the Atlas Project, in both the popular media and the birding community in Alberta.
- acting as a facilitator for the countless details which arise in a project of this scope and magnitude.
- ensuring that the Project is well financed and the budget is wisely spent.

The Project Coordinator is **Greg Wagner**, a resident of High River (for a short biography of Greg, see page 13).

Assistant Project Coordinators

To support the Project Coordinator in his daunting task, he is ably assisted by two Assistant Project Coordinators, one covering southern Alberta (Regions 1-5) and one covering northern Alberta (Regions 6-10). These two people are responsible for a number of tasks including Project publicity, conducting seminars about the Atlas Project and the Personal Birdlist software program and tending to the myriad of details which crop up on a daily basis.

The Assistant Coordinator for northern Alberta is **Philip Penner**, while southern Alberta is covered by **Fiona Boulet** (see back page for contact information).

Database Administrator

All atlas records are included in FAN's Natural History Database, which houses bird records for the province. It is this database which will be analyzed to produce the maps and information necessary to publish the Update Atlas. Because of its central role in this Project, a Database Administrator is responsible for looking after this vital information source. All of the atlas field records will pass through the hands of the database administrator, whose duties include:

- managing the FAN bird database.
- data handling – this includes data entry and verification of data accuracy.
- flagging records that are out of date or out of range for further review.
- transferring data for review to the Regional Coordinators.
- maintaining and updating the Personal Birdlist software.
- technical and computer support to FAN staff and atlasers, and
- fulfilling data requests.

Regional Coordinators

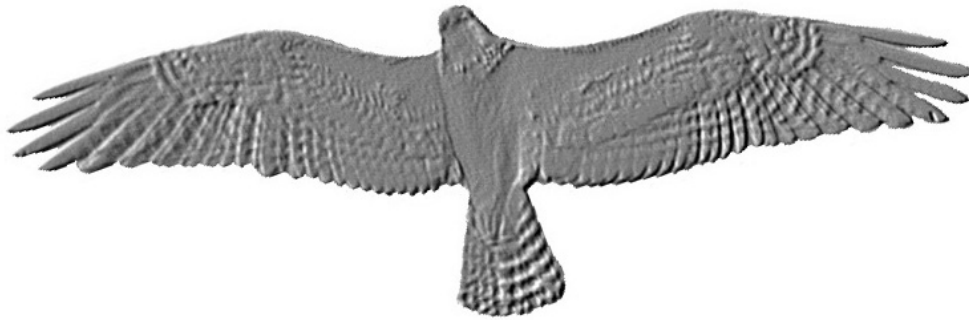
The management of a project of this magnitude is only possible by having someone coordinating the atlasing activities within specific regions of the province. For that reason, the province has been divided into ten atlas regions (see map on page 9), with one or more people responsible for coordinating all atlasing activities within each region.

By serving as a liaison between the volunteer atlasers and the atlas administration, these Regional Coordinators perform a variety of duties:

- recruiting, coordinating, training and encouraging volunteer atlasers.

- assigning atlas squares to volunteer surveyors.
- ensuring optimum survey coverage for the region, as well as adequate coverage within each atlas square.
- reviewing data to ensure accuracy of the records and pin-point any potential errors.

These are the people you contact to obtain survey materials and any information needed to complete the surveys. They are also good sources of information on all things related to birds. Please feel free to contact them.



Volunteer atlassers

Volunteer atlassers form the backbone of this project. They are the ones who will ensure the success of the Update Atlas by collecting atlas data throughout the province.

Each year, an atlasser is assigned a survey square (or

squares) in which they record all bird species and the level of breeding activity of each species. The atlas squares are 10 km X 10 km in size and the breeding bird data is recorded on specific atlas forms. It doesn't require a huge effort in terms of time as studies have found that bird watchers with moderate experience are able to find 75% of breeding birds in an area after 16 to 20 hours of active birding. Since most birders easily spend much more time than that pursuing their hobby, completing an atlas survey is a relatively easy accomplishment.

Each atlasser is supervised by a Regional Coordinator, who supplies the atlasser with maps, checklists, atlasing handbooks, birding software and as much birding advice as the atlasser needs.

The birding community which already exists in Alberta will be relied upon quite heavily for the duration of the project, and it is hoped that by the time the project is complete, that community will have many more active members than it currently

has. In fact, many of the participants in the Update Atlas Project got their first taste of birding during the initial atlas project, and are still active birdwatchers as a result.

To assist the volunteer atlassers, FAN and the Regional Coordinators are ready to provide support in terms of workshops, seminars and bird identification courses.

Remote area atlassers

These atlassers will be working under the auspices of the Remote Area Program (please see page 9).

Scientific Advisory Committees

There are two Scientific Advisory Committees whose goals are to guarantee that atlas surveys and data analyses are done according to acceptable scientific standards, and to safeguard the integrity of the atlas data.

Technical Committee on Birds

This committee is responsible for developing correct methods of data collection and supervising the data analysis procedures. The specific duties of this committee include:

- developing data collection methods.
- determining acceptable levels of observer effort.
- establishing protocols for the collection of:
 - abundance data
 - data for nocturnal and colonial nesting species.
- overseeing data analysis and review.

The committee currently has nine members drawn from universities, provincial and federal government agencies and environmental organizations. The current chair of the committee is Dr. Jocelyn Hudon, Curator of Ornithology at the Provincial Museum of Alberta.

Regional Rare Bird Committee

This group is responsible for reviewing all records of rare or unusual species. Each time a rare species is recorded, this committee will examine the record to ensure that there is no possibility the atlasser who sighted the bird made an error in identification. It is an important committee in that it acts as a gatekeeper in upholding the accuracy of unusual records in the Birdlist database. Five Regional Rare Bird Committees have been established for various regions of the province.

For extremely rare birds, or those recorded for the first time in Alberta, the atlas records will be forwarded to the Alberta Bird Record Committee for review.



Related websites

There are many websites devoted to birds and birding. Below are a handful of interesting websites which are of relevance to the atlas project, bird biology and/or the natural history of Alberta.

Edmonton Bird Club
www.ebc.fanweb.ca

Edmonton Natural History Club
www.enhc.com

Calgary Field Naturalist's Society
www.cadvision.com/cfns/

Lac La Biche Birding Society
www.llbbirding.fanweb.ca

Beaverhill Bird Observatory
www.fanweb.ca/fa03003.htm

Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory
www.lslbo.org

The Official List of the Birds of Alberta
The Provincial Museum of Alberta website has the official list of birds which are known to occur in Alberta, as evaluated by the Alberta Birds Record Committee. Go to www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca/natural/birds/birdlist/ and choose *Natural History*, then *Ornithology*.

A great place to find extensive information on all things related to birds in Canada is the Bird Studies Canada website.
www.bsc-eoc.org

For those of you who want more information on bird migration in Alberta, check out the report *Trends in numbers of migrant landbirds at Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory (1994-1999), Beaverhill Bird Observatory (1992-1999) and Inglewood Bird Sanctuary (1995-1999)*. The report can be downloaded at www.bsc-eoc.org/abtrends.html

Birding in Canada
A web site with all kinds of things related to birds and

birding in Canada, including Canadian Birding Events, Bird checklists, birding groups/societies, etc..
www.web-nat.com/bic/

The North American Ornithological Atlas Committee (NORAC) website includes the Handbook for Atlassing North American Breeding Birds (published in 1990 but still a relevant publication). It can be viewed at www.americanbirding.org/norac/

Remote Areas Program

To increase our understanding of bird populations in the northern regions of Alberta, a Remote Areas Program has been implemented. Led by researchers from the University of Alberta, the program will

intensively survey specific atlas squares with the goal of analyzing the relationships between bird distribution and abundance, and associated habitats and landscape patterns.

For more information on the Remote Area Program, contact David Stepnisky (780) 722-2584.

A handful of fascinating facts about birds

Tallest bird: Ostrich at 2.7 m (9 ft)
Smallest bird: Bee Hummingbird at 5.7 cm (2.24 in)

Fastest bird: diving Peregrine Falcon at 188 km/h (117 mph); possibly up to 240 km/hr (150 mph)
Fastest level flight: Red-breasted Merganser at 161 km/h (100 mph)

Greatest number of feathers: Whistling Swan – 25,216
Lowest number of feathers: Ruby-throated Hummingbird – 940

Longest two-way annual migration: Arctic Tern at 40,200 km (25,000 mi)

Largest recorded nesting bird colony: Passenger Pigeon colony with 136 million nests covering 1942 sq. km. (750 sq. mi.)

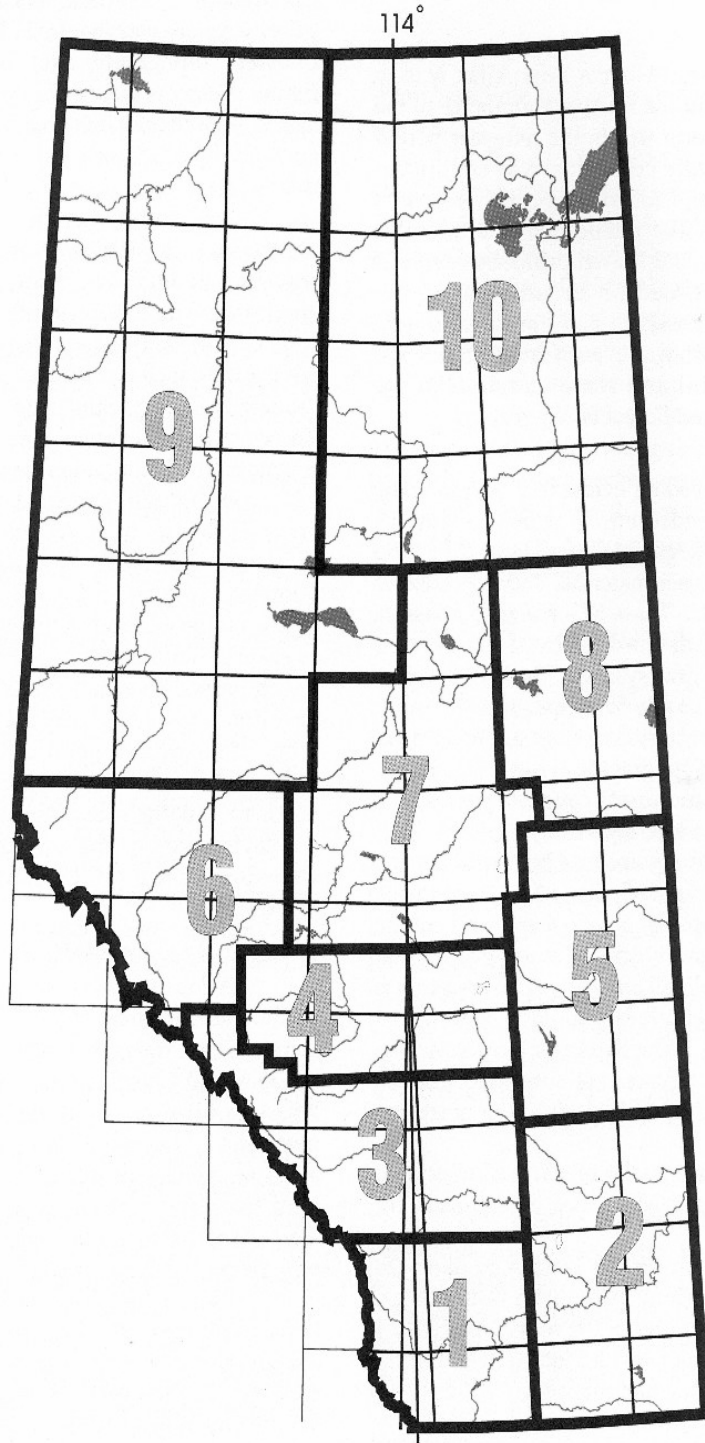
Greatest bird mimic: Marsh Warbler with up to 84 songs

Most northerly nesting bird: Ivory Gull, at the edge of permanent pack ice north of the Arctic Circle

Longest-lived wild bird: Royal Albatross at over 58 years

Bird Atlas Regions

To facilitate administration of the Project, the province has been divided into ten separate Atlas Zones. The locations of each zone are illustrated below, along with the list of the Coordinators for each region and their contact information.



Zone 1 (Lethbridge-Waterton)

Jack Shier (403) 395-3744

Email: shier@telusplanet.net

Zone 2 (Medicine Hat – Taber)

Michael O'Shea (403) 504-1662

Email: birdman@telusplanet.net

Zone 3 (Calgary-Banff)

Fiona Boulet (403) 249-7348

Email: fionab@shaw.ca

Zone 4 (Red Deer)

Greg Wagner (403) 601-3893

Email: elkman@telusplanet.net

Judy Boyd (403) 342-4150

Email: judyboyd@home.com

Zone 5 (Wainwright- Hanna)

Iris Davies (780) 847-2677

Email: ridavies@telusplanet.net

Zone 6 (Jasper-Hinton)

Beth McCallum (780) 865-3390

Email: ovis@telusplanet.net

Zone 7 (Edmonton)

Andre Legris (780) 352-5950

Email: alegris@incentre.net

Zone 8 (LacLaBiche)

Jennifer Gammon (780) 623-7247

Email: jenegammon@hotmail.com

Richard Klauke (780) 614-9085

Zone 9 (Northwestern Alberta)

Philip Penner (780) 427-8124

Email: philipp@fanweb.ca

Margot Hervieux (780) 539-6102

Email: hervieux@telusplanet.net

Zone 10 (Northeastern Alberta)

Grant Henry (780) 791-2736

Email: grant.henry@keyanoc.ab.ca

Atlas Surveys

Collecting and recording field data for the atlas is really quite easy, and can be done in one of two ways: systematic surveys of a specific atlas square or casual surveys.

Atlas square surveys

Once they are assigned an atlas square, the atlaser will visit the square during the breeding season and record the highest evidence of breeding, as well as the number of individuals, for all bird species encountered.

To maximize the number of breeding species observed, atlasers should visit each square several times throughout the breeding season (which in Alberta is from March through to mid-August) and try to visit all habitats present within the square.

Studies have shown that by spending at least sixteen to twenty hours in each square over the breeding season, atlasers will find breeding evidence for at least 75% of the species expected to occur in that square.

Casual Observations

Any and all bird observations made in the province during the breeding season will be of value to the atlas project. Atlasers (and birders in general) are encouraged to report casual bird observations made while en route to a survey square or while traveling elsewhere in the province. Casual observations can be reported using Alberta Birdlist checklists or electronically, using the Personal Birdlist software

A detailed description of how the atlas surveys are done can be found in the Atlaser's Handbook, which is available from the FAN office or your Regional Coordinator. The handbook can also be downloaded from FAN's website (www.fanweb.ca).



What is FAN?

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists (FAN) has been an umbrella organization for twenty-five natural history clubs in Alberta since 1970. Part of its mandate is to oversee programs relating to the natural history of the province, such as the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Alberta (published in 1992) and now the Atlas Update Project. In addition to its quarterly publication, The Alberta Naturalist, FAN also maintains the Alberta Bird Atlas Database (which contains over 100,000 records) and oversees the Alberta Birdlist Program.

FAN's main objectives include:

- encouraging an increase of the knowledge of

natural history and understanding of ecological processes in Alberta.

- promoting an increase in the exchange of information and views between natural history organizations in Alberta.
- assisting in the formation of additional natural history clubs and societies in Alberta.
- promoting the establishment of natural areas and nature reserves to conserve and protect species, natural communities and other natural features of interest.

FAN's Natural History Database

Data from the atlas surveys will be added to a large database which contains records from the first Breeding Bird Atlas project, from individual naturalists, the May Species Counts and all other data submitted through the Alberta Birdlist program. This database will become an interactive web-based database and will provide users access to bird data collected as part of the Bird Atlas Project. All of this data will be available for use by naturalists, government agencies, non-government organizations, academic researchers, environmental consultants, industry, and the general public.

BirdList software

After the completion of the initial Alberta Breeding Bird Atlas Project, FAN was approached by individuals and organizations who wished to continue contributing their birding data to a provincial database. The result was the Birdlist Program, a casual records scheme that allows birders to contribute their

bird records to a provincial database on an ongoing basis.

To facilitate the process, the BirdList software program was produced. It allows birders to digitize their records for inclusion into the Birdlist database as well as for personal use. The Birdlist software allows you to:

- keeps track of your bird records.
- search and sort your own bird records.
- produce reports using your bird records.
- map your bird sightings.
- print or send files of reports/maps.
- automatically emails bird records for inclusion into FAN's Natural History (Birdlist) Database.

For more information on this program, or to obtain a free copy of the BirdList software (either by download or CD) check the FAN website: www.fanweb.ca.

Preliminary highlites of the 2001 season

Fieldwork on the Atlas Update Project has resulted in approximately 300 atlas squares surveyed by the end of 2001. This includes 44 squares surveyed in northern Alberta by four crews working under the supervision of the Remote Areas Program. This may not seem like much of an accomplishment, especially considering that there are 6600 atlas squares in the province, however more squares have been surveyed in the first two years of the Atlas Update Project than were surveyed during the first two years of the original atlas project.

Bird atlas projects outside Alberta
Alberta is not the only place where bird atlas projects are being done. Alberta's Breeding Bird Atlas is part of a much larger effort to survey the birds of North America and the world. For a web site devoted to atlas projects around North America go to www.americanbirding.org/norac/.

You will find information on the six current atlas projects in Canada, 29 in the USA and similar projects in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Australia.

Bird Blitz

A Bird Blitz is a opportunity for birders to come together as a group to survey as many atlas squares in a particular area during a short time period, usually a weekend. Both expert and novice birders are encouraged to participate in what is both a scientific and a social activity. If you are interested in participating in one of the Bird Blitzes currently being planned, please contact one of the people listed below. For additional information on Bird Blitzes which may be planned for your zone, please contact your Regional Coordinator.

Jasper Bird Blitz
June 8 and 9, 2002

Contacts:

Beth MacCallum (Hinton) (780-865-3390) or
Philip Penner (Edmonton) (780-427-8124).

Grande Cache Bird Blitz
June 15 and 16, 2002

Contacts:

Karen Stroebe (780-827-4127) or
Beth MacCallum (780-865-3390).

Grid System for the Atlas

In order to accurately map bird distribution for an atlas, a precise mapping system must be used. Like most atlas projects in North America, the Alberta Breeding Bird Atlas uses the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) grid. This international mapping standard divides the province into north-south strips which are useful for topographic maps and also for further dividing the province into precisely located 10 km X 10 km squares. For this reason, the UTM squares form the basic unit for bird atlas surveys and for mapping bird distribution in Alberta.

There are 6623 UTM squares in the province. Because of the expense and time required, it would be impossible to survey each of these squares over the five-year survey period. For this reason we have adopted the use of priority squares.

The overall goal of the first atlas project was to survey 25% of the survey squares in the settled area of the province and 10% of the squares in the more remote areas. To accomplish this goal, priority squares were identified throughout the province which represented the full range of habitat and land-use types occurring in Alberta. The goal of the Atlas Update Project is to survey not only more squares than were surveyed in the initial Atlas but to ensure that all priority squares identified in the first atlas are also surveyed. This will not only increase the amount of information for the entire province but will also facilitate comparisons between the two atlases.



Meet Greg Wagner, the Project Coordinator

Greg has been a birder and professional biologist for the past 25 years. His interest in birding and natural history was fostered through his early involvement with the Calgary Field Naturalists' Society and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists. He helped form the High River Naturalists' Society, a small but active group in the High River area in the late 1970's. Over his career, he has worked for government agencies, academic researchers, environmental organizations, and environmental consulting firms in B.C., the Canadian Arctic and throughout Alberta. His work experience includes environmental assessments, wildlife research and the development of wildlife habitat conservation plans, such as the Northern River Basins Study and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Greg grew up in the Calgary region and currently resides in High River. In addition to his involvement with the Atlas Update Project, Greg is currently pursuing graduate studies at the University of Calgary and operates a small environmental consulting firm. He enjoys traveling, and always incorporates birding into trips across western Canada and Ontario. In his words "my work is my hobby". He also enjoys skiing, hiking, and backpacking.

Project Supporters

A project of this magnitude would not be possible without the financial and in-kind support of a variety of companies and organizations. The following organizations are currently supporting the Breeding Bird Atlas Update Project:



Ainsworth



**George Cedric
Metcalf Charitable
Foundation**



**CHARLES IVEY
FOUNDATION**



In addition, the Sustainable Forest Management Network, Alberta Pacific Forest Industries and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development have contributed funds to Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow (at the University of Alberta) for the Remote Areas Program.

Disturbances to Breeding Birds

It is important that atlas surveys not interfere with a bird's ability to successfully complete its breeding cycle. For this reason, all atlasers should follow some basic procedures when dealing with breeding birds. The following guidelines are taken from the American Birding Association's **Principles of Birding Ethics**.

- Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger. Exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording or filming.
- Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites.
- Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.
- Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.
- Before advertising the presence of a rare bird, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird and its surroundings.
- Stay on roads, trails and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.
- Do not enter private property without the owner's explicit permission.
- Follow all laws, rules and regulations governing the use of roads and public areas.

Bird groups

Have you ever tried to point out a group of birds but couldn't find any way to describe it other than as "a flock"? Yup, it's the same tired, old term used by everyone else. Well, there's hope for those of you who want to stand out from the crowd; an official list of specific names for groups of different bird species. Memorize these terms and in no time, you'll be able to impress your friends, amaze your family and confuse small children.

Bitterns - *Siege*
Bobolink - *Chain*
Coots - *Covert*
Cormorants - *Gulp*
Cranes - *Siege, Herd*
Crows - *Murder* or *Horde*
Curlew - *Herd*
Doves - *Flight* or *Pitinousness*
Ducks (in flight) - *Team*
Ducks (on water) - *Bunch, Paddling* or *Raft*
Dunlins - *Fling*
Eagles - *Convocation* or *Jubilee*
Finches - *Charm* or *Trembling*
Geese (in flight) - *Skein, Team* or *Wedge*
Geese (on ground) - *Gaggle*
Grouse - *Covey* or *Pack*

Gulls - *Colony*
Hawk - *Aerie, Cast*
Hawk (in flight) - *Boil*
Hérons - *Siege*
Hummingbird - *Charm*
Jay - *Band* or *Scold*
Lapwings - *Deceit* or *Desert*
Larks - *Bey* or *Exhaltation*
Magpies - *Tidings* or *Tittering*
Mallard - *Sord* or *Sute*
Martins - *Richness*
Nightingales - *Watch*
Owls - *Parliament*
Partridge - *Covey*
Peacocks - *Ostentation* or *Muster*
Penguins - *Rookery*
Pheasants - *Boquet* or *BraIce* (when dead)
Pigeons (in flight) - *Kit*

Plovers - *Congregation* or *Wing*
Ptarmigan - *Covey*
Quail - *Bey* or *Drift*
Ravens - *Unkindness*
Snipe - *Walk* or *Whisper*
Sparrows - *Host* or *Quarrel*
Starlings - *Murmuration*
Swallows - *Flight*
Swans (in flight) - *Wedge*
Teal - *Spring*
Thrushes - *Mutation*
Vulture - *Colony*
Waterfowl - *Bunch* or *Knob*
Widgeon - *Company* or *Trip*
Wildfowl - *Plump* or *Trip*
Woodpecker - *Descent*
Wrens - *Herd*
Birdwatchers - *Flock*

Contacts

There are a variety of people you can contact to either volunteer for the Bird Atlas Update Project or to simply obtain more information. We suggest that you start with the Regional Coordinator for your area. Other organizations or people you can contact include the following:

The Federation of Alberta Naturalists

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The Bird Atlas Gazette

If there is anything you would like to see included in upcoming issues of this newsletter, such as news, planned events or other items of interest, please contact the newsletter editor.

Submissions about your bird atlas experiences, tips on how to become a better birder or stories about birds and birders in Alberta are always welcome.

Andre Legris (780) 352-5950
Editor, The Bird Atlas Gazette
Email: alegris@incentre.net



**The Federation
of Alberta Naturalists**