



The Bird Atlas Gazette

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

*A project sponsored by the
Federation of Alberta Naturalists*

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Welcome to the fourth season of the Breeding Bird Atlas Update Project. It's a good time for the Atlas Project as many of the disparate parts of the project are starting to come together quite nicely.

The project now has a good base of support among several different communities. The scientific community is involved through the Remote Areas Project and various industry members are providing active support for the field surveys. The Rare Bird Committees have started their work in earnest in various regions of the province and both the Management and Technical Committees have started considering what the format of the second edition of the Breeding Bird Atlas will look like.

And on top of it all, the project has a good base of support within the birding community of Alberta. The size of the bird atlas surveyor community continues to increase, as does the number of submitted records and the number of areas being covered by the breeding bird surveys.

This issue of the Bird Atlas Gazette will review what has been accomplished so far and as you will see, it's a

pretty impressive list of accomplishments. But there is still much more work to do before we can place that second edition of the Breeding Bird Atlas into your hands.

Nonetheless, much of the journey now lies behind us. It's a nice thought to ponder as we head out the door this spring, binoculars and atlas cards in hand. Happy birding!

Andre Legris
Editor

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News & Notes

Atlas materials

There are a variety of survey materials that atlasers can use for doing their Bird Atlas surveys, including bird checklists, atlas survey handbooks, newsletters, the Birdlist software program, owl monitoring materials, etc. If you do not have these materials, or you are running short of some things, please contact the Regional Coordinator for your region and they will make sure you get all the materials you need. (Contact information for the Regional Coordinators can be found on page 16).

Vermilion River Naturalist Club

The Vermilion River Naturalist Club will be hosting a Bird Identification/Atlas Workshop on May 8 & 9, 2004 in Vermilion. The workshop leader will be Richard Klauke. May 8 will feature an introduction to birding, bird identification and equipment. May 9 will be devoted to an all day field trip in the Vermilion area and north to Whitney Lakes Provincial Park.

The Vermilion River Naturalist Club will also be conducting an Atlas Square Busting Day on May 29, 2004. The area to be covered includes the square at VQ 70, which is west of Vermilion.

For more information on both of these events, please contact Iris Davies (by phone at 780-847-2677 or e-mail: ridavies@telusplanet.net).

Bird Atlas Photo Gallery

A big Thank-You to the people who have contributed photos to the photo gallery. You can view their photos on the FAN website. If you have bird photos you would like to share with the birding community, please submit them along with the photographer's name and a short description of the photo to the FAN office.

Funding for 2004

The Bird Atlas has received financial support from several organizations for the 2004 field survey season, including the Alberta Conservation Association, Ainsworth Lumber, Alberta Ecotrust, Baillie Bird Fund, North American Waterfowl

Management Plan, and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Regional Coordinator changes

Three of our volunteers have stepped down from their positions as Regional Coordinators: **Tanja Biener** (Calgary-Banff Region), **Jack Shier** (Lethbridge-Waterton Region) and **Grant Henry** (Northeastern Alberta). Many thanks to both of them for their hard work on the Atlas Project.

We would like to welcome two new Regional Coordinators to the Atlas Project: **Don Stiles** (Calgary-Banff Region) and **Robert Grey** (Northeastern Alberta). The Assistant Project Coordinator, Philip Penner, will coordinate activities in the Lethbridge-Waterton Region until another volunteer is found to take over those duties.

If you would like to participate in the Atlas Project as the Regional Coordinator for the Lethbridge-Waterton Region, please contact Philip Penner at the FAN office.

Management Committee Chair

The Management Committee has elected Gerry McKeating as its new Chair. Gerry was a bird biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service for many years until his recent retirement. His many accomplishments include work on endangered species in Ontario, Bald Eagle re-introductions to the Great Lakes region, and he was a member of the Arctic Goose Joint Venture (of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan). He is currently the Canadian delegation head of the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna Working Group (under the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy) and also the Past-Chair of the Board of Directors for Bird Studies Canada.

A few reminders...

Atlasser Registration

All volunteer atlasers involved with the Bird Atlas Project are being asked to officially register themselves with the Project, for several reasons:

- it will help the Project administration keep track of the many volunteers located throughout the province.

- registered atlasers will qualify for tax receipts on all expenses related to Bird Atlas activities.
- all registered atlasers will be automatically entered into a draw for prizes as part of the Atlasser Recognition Program.

Application for Atlasser Tax Receipt

FAN is both a non-profit group and is registered as a charitable organization, so it can provide tax receipts for donations. Volunteer atlasers can take advantage of FAN's status by applying for tax receipts for the expenses they incur while completing surveys for the

Bird Atlas Project.

Atlasser Recognition Program

The Bird Atlas Project would like to show its appreciation to all the atlasers who devote so much of their time recording bird survey information. To show its gratitude, the Atlas will randomly select names of atlasers throughout 2004 for a draw for prizes such as binoculars, birdhouses and field guides. In order to qualify for the draw, an atlasser must submit checklists electronically or by mail.

Regional Rare Bird Committees

The Regional Rare Bird Committees are now up and running. Comprised of experienced birders, these groups are responsible for reviewing any records of rare or unusual bird species throughout the province. Their job is to determine the validity of each record which involves a species not often recorded in Alberta. By carefully reviewing these records, they are helping to maintain the integrity of the Bird Atlas database. The members of the Rare Bird Committees within each region are as follows.

Southern Region- Zones 1 and 2

Dennis Baresco
Lloyd Bennett
Linda Cerney
Teresa Dolman
David McIntyre

Calgary Region- Zones 3 and 4

Reid Barclay
Greg Wagner
Brian Ritchie

Edmonton Region - Zones 5, 6, and 7

Jack Park
Richard Knapton
Fred Whiley
Gerald Romanchuk
Richard Klauke

Northern Region - Zone 8, 9 and 10

Ken Lumbis
Reg Arbuckle
Gavin Craig
Margot Hervieux
Joan Kerr
Richard Klauke
Ted Hindmarch



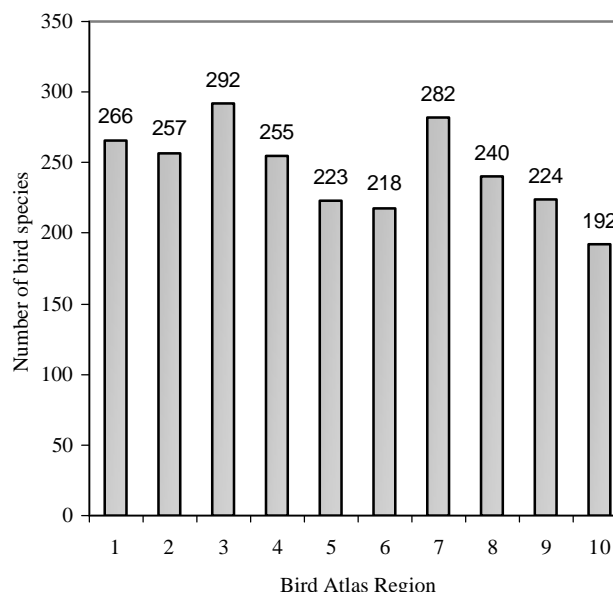
Atlas Project - Progress Report

Philip Penner (the Assistant Project Coordinator) has been working hard over the winter to get the Atlas Project in good shape for the upcoming spring and summer seasons. Among his countless duties, he has put together a quick snapshot of the current state of the Bird Atlas Project. He reports that by the end of the 2003 field season:

- atlasers had surveyed a total of 674 atlas squares, and
- 4,220 bird checklists have been submitted.

So far, the number of bird species in Alberta for which possible breeding information has been recorded (which is defined as “species observed, or breeding calls heard in suitable nesting habitat”) stands at 282. An additional thirty-three species have been recorded in the province but no indications of breeding activity for these species has yet been found.

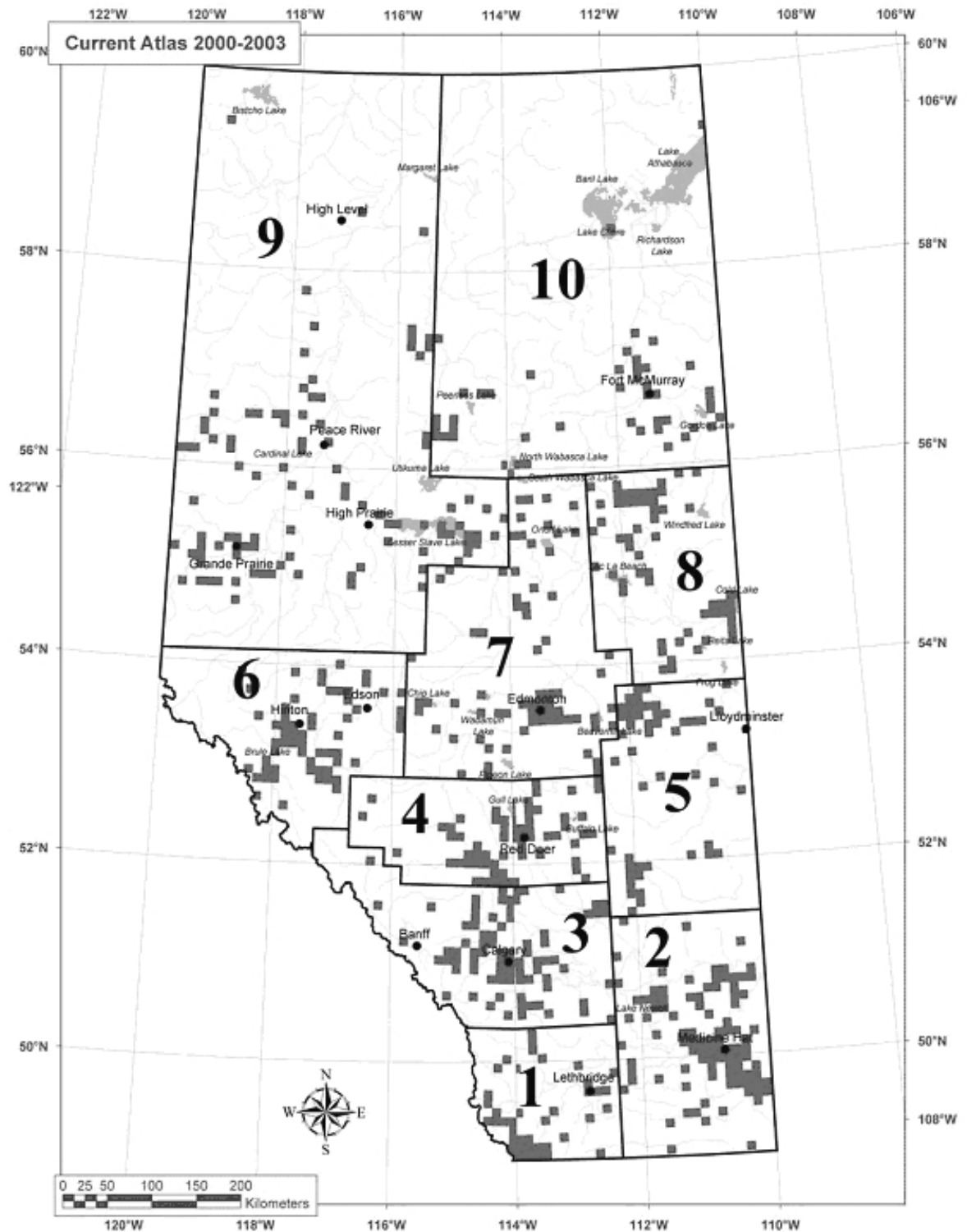
Number of recorded bird species by atlas region



The table below shows the ten most commonly recorded species in the Update Atlas project (from data collected during 2000-03), according to the number of atlas squares in which they have been reported, along with a comparison to the most common species recorded during the first Alberta Breeding Bird Atlas.

Rank	Species – Update Atlas Project	No. Atlas Squares	Species – Initial Atlas Project
1	American Robin	446	American Robin
2	Mallard	365	Barn Swallow
3	Black-capped Chickadee	364	Red-winged Blackbird
4	Yellow-rumped Warbler	356	Mallard
5	Common Raven	355	Killdeer
6	Chipping Sparrow	353	Clay-colored Sparrow
7	Red-winged Blackbird	342	American Crow
8	Canada Goose	336	Yellow Warbler
9	Yellow Warbler	329	Red-tailed Hawk
10	White-throated Sparrow	318	Chipping Sparrow

The following map shows the current distribution of Bird Atlas squares for which bird observation have been submitted for each region of the province.



The 50 Hour Club

The following atlasers have contributed in excess of 50 hours of field observations:

Elizabeth Anderson	Andrew Gustavson	Don Mills	Shelley Skrepnek
Linda Ball	Robert Hall	Bob Morgan	Andrew Slater
Judy Boyd	Ted Hindmarch	Linda Morgan	Simon Slater
Julia Burger	Geoff Holroyd	Grace Norgard	Cyndi Smith
Lois Burkinshaw	Cecilia Hourabielle	Michael O'Shea	Mira Snyder
David Bywater	Robert Hughes	Chet Olson	Milton Spitzer
Linda Cerney	Brent Johner	Rick Palindat	Kathy St. Laurent
Jane Chesebrough	Jessie Kinley	David Penner	Dave Stepnisky
Allan Cole	Wayne Kinsella	Gretchen Peterson	Alan Taylor
Lynnette Dagenais	Dwight Knapik	Jerry Pilny	Greg Wagner
Shirley Deneka	Jim Lange	Delanie Player	Don Weidl
Doug Dolman	Aaron Lehman	David Prescott	Romana Windsteig
Teresa Dolman	Sharon Livingston	Blair Rippin	Janet Woolgar
Margaret Ellis	Marg Lomow	Sabrina Romanchuk	Amy Woton
Roy Fairweather	Beth MacCallum	Jeanne Roy	Jack Wright
Eileen Ford	Terri MacKinnon	Shirley Sillito	Gustave Yaki
Steve Glendinning	Joyce Mann	Gary Simpson	Karen Yamazaki
Stan Gosche	Florence McQuid	Nell Simpson	
Robert Grey	Caroline Miller	Cathy Sinclair	

These people have set the bar pretty high. It may take some work to get to the 50 hour point but just think how enjoyable those 50 hours would be.

The 50 Checklist Club

The following atlasers have submitted at least 50 Breeding Bird Atlas survey checklists:



Linda Ball
Lois Burkinshaw
Allan Cole
Robert Hughes
Aaron Lehman
Sharon Livingston
Terri MacKinnon
Joyce Mann
Florence McQuid
Michael O'Shea
Andrew Slater
Milton Spitzer
Alan Taylor
Greg Wagner
Gustave Yaki

Atlasser Recognition Program

During the 2003 field season, each time an atlasser submitted a checklist via mail or through the Birdlist software program, their name was entered into a lottery system for Bird Atlas prizes. Six names were randomly selected and the following people are the winners of the Atlasser Prize Draws for 2003.

1st Draw: Pentax 8x24 Binoculars.

Donated by: Mountain Equipment Co-op (Edmonton)

Winner: **Aaron Lehman** (Slave Lake)

2nd Draw: \$50.00 gift certificate.

Donated by: The Wild Bird Store (Calgary)

Winner: **Joyce Fraser** (Fort McMurray, Alberta)

3rd Draw: Hopper/feeder with suet holders, birdseed and two suet blocks.

Donated by: The Wild Bird Store (Calgary)

Winner: **Clint Nissen** (Innisfail)

4th Draw: Bird house/ Nest Box.

Donated by: Birds In Your Garden
(Cochrane)

Winner: **Linda Morgan** (Brule)

5th Draw: The Birds of BritishColumbia.
Volume 4: Passerines, Wood-Warblers
through Old World Sparrows.

Donated by: The Wildbird GeneralStore
(Edmonton)

Winner: **Andrew Slater** (Calgary)

6th Draw: The Atlas of Breeding Birdsof
Alberta. Donated by: The Federation of
Alberta Naturalists

Winner: **Sharon Livingston**
(Edmonton)

7th Draw: Field Guide to Alberta Birds.

(The Federation of Alberta Naturalists)

Donated by: The Federation of Alberta Naturalists

Winner: **Chris and Rosemary Homister** (Carstairs)



Atlasser Prize Draws will take place again at the end of the 2004 field season, so make sure you keep sending in your Bird Atlas checklists (either by mail or using the Birdlist software program). Congratulations to all winners of the 2003 Bird Atlas prize draws!

The Remote Areas Project - Evolution and Future

The Remote Areas Project (RAP), headed by Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow and Dr. Steve Cumming, is a collaborative project with the Breeding Bird Atlas Update Project. The RAP began field surveys in the summer of 2001 and has continued through three breeding seasons surveying the boreal songbirds, and two winter surveys of resident bird species, in northern Alberta.

The project's objectives are to:

- collect information on bird distribution, abundance and habitat associations in less accessible boreal regions, especially those areas that were poorly sampled in the first Breeding Bird Atlas;
- determine the impacts of industrial development, particularly by the forestry and energy sectors, on abundances of forest birds, especially old-forest songbirds;
- identify species at risk;
- develop habitat-based models of species abundances and distributions (and define related threshold levels) for use in resource management planning and policy making; and
- develop sampling methods to be used for future biodiversity monitoring projects.

The RAP samples 10,000ha landscape units, which are the size of townships, i.e., Breeding Bird Atlas squares. The site selection criteria for 2001 included the amount of old forest habitat, an index of habitat configuration (or spatial arrangement) and two measures of industrial development: how much forest had already been harvested and the number of oil or natural gas wells. Within each landscape unit, field crews surveyed a 9 km triangular transect, placed so that it sampled representative amounts of the dominant habitat types. The field crews also did dawn point-count surveys at 24 stations within patches of old forest and other habitat types. These surveys were

conducted in the wee morning hours of the breeding season, from the end of May until early July.

Survey methods in 2002 were modified slightly. There were two 4.5 km triangular transects through each landscape unit of representative habitat (much easier than a single 9 km triangle!) and two grids of 12 point count stations, each located in a large patch of old mixedwood forest (dominated by aspen or white spruce). During the summer field season, pre-recorded chickadee mobbing calls were played at alternate point count stations, after the regular survey was completed.



Chickadees “mob” by aggregating and vocalizing vigorously in an attempt to ward off a potential nest predator. Collective mobbing, including species in addition to the chickadees, serves both to control potential nest threats and it may also be used to teach young birds to recognize and identify the various sources of threats. Playbacks of these calls can draw in birds from the surrounding community that would not normally be observed during the other surveys (i.e. females, fledglings and non-singing males).

In 2003, the RAP targeted 20 landscapes in the Peace region, where cattle grazing leases are common.

The impacts of grazing on boreal birds are not known but may include:

- decreased abundance of ground-nesting species

- through direct destruction of nests (trampling);
- disturbance of breeding patterns; and
- changes in vegetation structure, thereby either reducing the habitat quality for some species or increasing susceptibility to nest predation.

Grazing intensity in the boreal region may increase in the future, so the RAP modified the 2002 sample design to learn more about it. Some surveyed landscapes had large areas within grazing leases, while others had little or none. Point count surveys were conducted within active grazing leases and in patches of similar habitat in areas which had no grazing.

In the first three years of breeding season sampling, the RAP surveyed a total of 116 landscapes across northern Alberta (see map on next page), and collected 38,400 bird records. The five species most commonly encountered were the Tennessee Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Ovenbird and White-throated Sparrow. Collectively, these species accounted for 30% of all observations.

There were a few surprises. The Black-throated Green Warbler (BGNW) was the 4th or 5th most abundant species of neotropical migrant in patches of old mixedwood forest. This species was uncommon in the first Breeding Bird Atlas for northeastern Alberta, ranking 29th out of 37 species of neotropical migrants. It is also very uncommon in the Breeding Bird Survey data from this region.

Preliminary analysis of the first two years of point count data shows that the patch-level abundance of many old-forest songbirds is significantly related to both the amount and spatial distribution of older forest within the surrounding landscape. The total amount of habitat is important, but so are the size,

shape and spatial arrangement of habitat patches across the landscape.

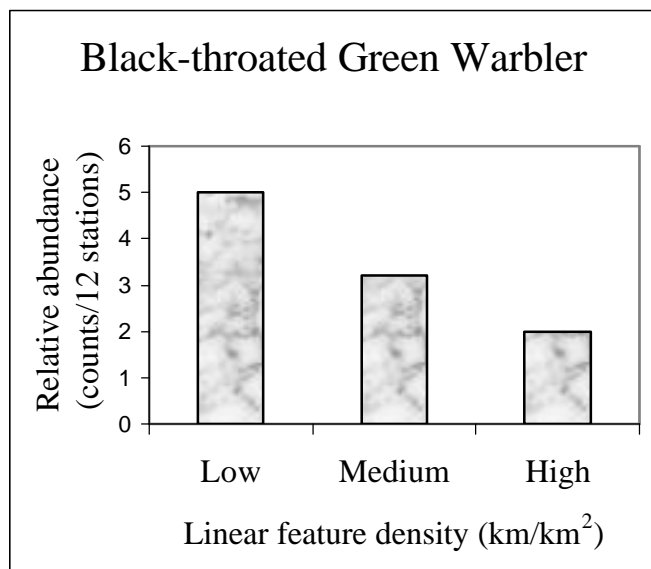
The abundances of some species are also very sensitive to the amount of industrial development on the landscape, or the size of the “industrial footprint,” as measured by the densities of linear disturbances such as roads and pipelines. As the density of roads and pipelines within a landscape goes up, the abundance of species such as the Black-throated Green Warbler goes down, even in patches of their favoured habitat (see figure on this page).

Other species are also negatively affected by the amount of forest recently harvested. The reasons for this are not known, but some species may be considered as “forest-interior” species, who require large tracts of contiguous forest. Because of these results, the RAP sampling designs have evolved to include direct measurements of linear feature density, in addition to well density and forest area harvested.

The upcoming 2004 breeding season survey promises to be the most exciting and challenging yet. Results to date (such as those illustrated in Figure 2) suggest that the RAP may have been sampling areas where populations of some species have already declined

significantly. That is because almost all of the RAP landscapes to date have experienced at least some level of industrial development.

To determine potential bird abundances in undeveloped mixedwood forests, the RAP plans to survey truly remote, “pristine” areas in northeastern Alberta. Pristine areas have been defined as landscapes with at least 20% of old upland deciduous or mixedwood forest, where the energy sector has never ventured (based on well-site densities, as of 1999) or where there has been no oil and gas activity since



1980. Some potential sites have been identified in the Athabasca and Clearwater River valleys, along the slopes of the Birch Mountains, and in the area south of Muskwa Lake (Figure 1). Access to these sites is possible only by helicopter, floatplane or watercraft. Within these sites, field survey techniques will likely be similar to those used in 2002 and 2003.

Each year of the Remote Areas Project has led to significant new findings and new methodologies that have shaped the future and focus of the project. With the continued support of its sponsors, the RAP will continue to yield valuable information for the Atlas Update Project, and for the resource managers responsible for protecting Alberta's biodiversity.

Sponsors and supporters of this project have included

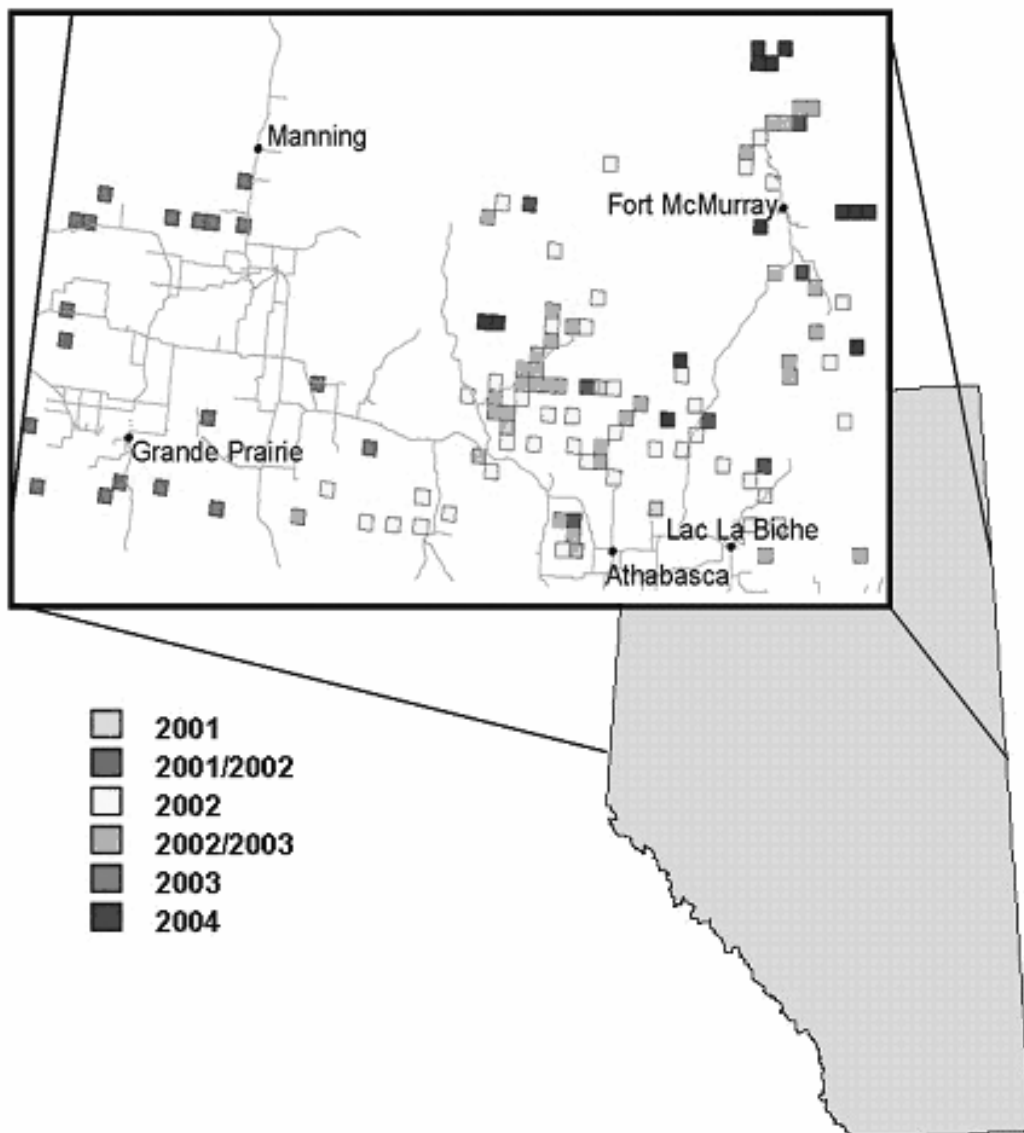
Alberta Pacific Forest Industries Inc., The Adaptive Management Experiment Team, Ducks Unlimited, Alberta Sustainable Resource

Development, Slave Lake Pulp Co., The Sustainable Forest Management Network, the University of Alberta, Sundance Forest Industries, Weyerhaeuser Company and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists.

Kathy St. Laurent, Remote Areas Programme, Dept of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta.

Steve Cumming, Boreal Ecosystems Research Ltd.

Fiona K.A. Schmiegelow, Associate Professor, Dept of Renewable Resources, University of Alberta.



This map shows the RAP sampling locations for 2001-2003, along with the proposed field survey locations for 2004.

Fascinating Facts About Birds Around the World

Birds are a never-ending source of amazement, due in large part to their remarkable diversity. Here are a few fascinating facts about birds around the world.

In the air

Fastest wingbeat: Hummingbirds (e.g., Amethyst Woodstar - 90 beats/sec.

Slowest wingbeat: Vultures - 1 beat/sec.

Most aerial bird: Sooty Terns - 3 to 10 years without landing.

Most aerial landbird: Common Swift - 3 years without landing.

Highest flying bird: Ruppell's Griffon Vulture - 11,274 m (7 miles).

In the water

Most aquatic bird: Penguins - 75% of their lives are spent in the sea.

Fastest underwater swimming bird: Gentoo Penguin - 36 km/h (22.3 mph).

Deepest dive for non-flying bird: Emperor Penguin - 540m (1,772 ft).

Deepest dive for a flying bird: Thick-billed Murre - 210 m (689 ft).

Deepest dive for a flying bird under 210 g: Peruvian Diving Petrel at 83 m (272 ft).

Longest time submerged: Emperor Penguin - 18 minutes.

On the nest

Largest ground nest: Dusky Scrubfowl nest - 11m (36 ft) wide, 4.9m (16 ft) high with over 2,700 kg (300 tons) of forest floor litter.

Largest tree nest: Bald Eagle nest in Florida - 6.1m (20 ft) deep, 2.9m (9.5 ft) wide, and weighing 2,722 kg.

Largest social nest: African Social Weavers - a 100-chamber nest structure 8.2 m (27 ft) in length and 1.8 m (6 ft) high.

Largest roofed nest: Hamerkop nest - 2m (6.5 ft) wide and 2m (6.5 ft) deep.

Longest nest burrow: Rhinoceros Auklet - 8m (26 ft).

Highest tree nest: Marbled Murrelet - 45m (148 ft) above the ground.

Smallest nest: Cuban Bee Hummingbird, Vervain Hummingbird - 1.98cm (0.78 in) in breadth and 1.98-3.0 cm (0.78-1.2 in) deep.

Parenthood

Largest average clutch size: 15-19 - Gray Partridge.

Smallest clutch size: 1 egg laid every two years by Albatrosses.

Fastest to breeding maturity: Common Quail at 5 weeks of age.

Slowest to breeding maturity: Royal and Wandering Albatrosses, at 6-10 years of age.



Yak, yak, yak

Most talkative bird: African Gray Parrot, with a vocabulary of 800 words.

Greatest bird mimic: Marsh Warbler – up to 84 different songs.

Most songs sung per unit time: Red-eyed Vireo - 22,197 songs in 10 hours.

Most intelligent birds: African Gray Parrot, Crows, Green and Striated Herons.

Hot and cold

Coldest average temperature regularly endured by a bird: -45.6 °C - Emperor Penguin.

Coldest temperature endured by a bird: -62.5 °C - Snowy Owl.
Warmest temperature regularly endured by a bird: 44-45 degrees °C by Larks and Wheatears.

Misc tidbits

Highest daily frequency of pecking: Black Woodpecker - 12,000 times per day.
Most abundant bird: Red-Billed Quelea - up to 10 billion.
Longest-lived wild bird: Royal Albatross - over 58 years.

Longest-lived captive bird: Sulfur-crested Cockatoo - over 80 years.



The Natural History Database

Information being collected for the Bird Atlas is already being used for a variety of purposes. Here are a few organizations who are putting Bird Atlas data to good use.

The **Canadian Wildlife Service** is using Bird Atlas data to guide their efforts in targeting areas for monitoring populations of Loggerhead Shrikes. The National Recovery Team for the Western Loggerhead Shrike is compiling information regarding nesting records of this species throughout the prairie region of Canada.

The **Alberta Conservation Association** is using data about bird species records in the Milk River Basin Project Area to help identify key wildlife areas in that region. This information will be used to better focus bird conservation efforts.

The **Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre** is using Bird Atlas data to verify nesting records for Caspian Terns on Lake Athabasca.

Aspen Ecological Consulting requested Bird Atlas data to determine the presence of owl species within the Slave Lake - Wabasca region and within the boreal

Source: *The Bird Almanac*. by David M. Bird.



Drawing by Annie Legris

foothills region of west-central Alberta.

P & E Environmental Services Ltd. requested data about the bird species recorded in the Hanna region and in the vicinity of Dead Fish Creek.

Athene Environmental Ltd. was able to use Bird Atlas data for a biophysical inventory project in the Bow Island area of south-eastern Alberta.

Alberta birders

Not all data requests come from environmental consultants or government researchers. Many recreational birders throughout the province have accessed the Bird Atlas database to learn more about various bird species.

FAN's Natural History Database (NHDB) contains many different types of bird observation records, not just those associated with the Bird Atlas Project. If you are interested in obtaining bird records for Alberta bird species, basic data searches of the NHDB can be easily done on-line through the FAN web site (www.fanweb.ca).

You can also request detailed or complex data searches, which are done by the Database Administrator. For more information on database searches, please contact FAN through the website listed above.

Birding with kids

The arrival of a baby entails many lifestyle changes for new parents. Sleepless nights are in; early morning bird trips are out. The sight of endless diapers has now replaced the sight of endless shorebird flocks. But fear not, there is definitely birding after baby, it's just different than what you are used to.

Certainly, before your child learns how to walk, it's difficult to get much free time for something as "frivolous" as birding. But once your fledgling starts to show signs of wanting to slip outside of the nest, it's a perfect time to introduce them to the wonderful world of those mysterious things that fly over the house.

Getting started

Getting started is really quite easy. All you need is a view out a window. Kids are fascinated by things that fly because, well, they can't do it and it looks like fun.

One of the best ways to introduce kids to birdwatching is to bring the birds to you. Install a feeder that is easily visible from a window, preferably away from bushes or other "cat cover". Leave a pair of small binoculars near the window, along with a bird book and the child's very own life list. Kids love to add new species to their list, even if you have to find each new bird for them.

Other ways to get kids interested in birds include:

- have them make bird houses or feeders. There are many easy-to-make plans on the internet or at nature stores, as well as easy-to-assemble kits.
- take them to the local museum. Seeing the bird displays up close will give them a better appreciation of just what they are looking at in the field.
- if it's lousy weather outside, you could watch nature videos about birds and wildlife. And more computer programs are becoming available which combine learning tools with fun games about animals.

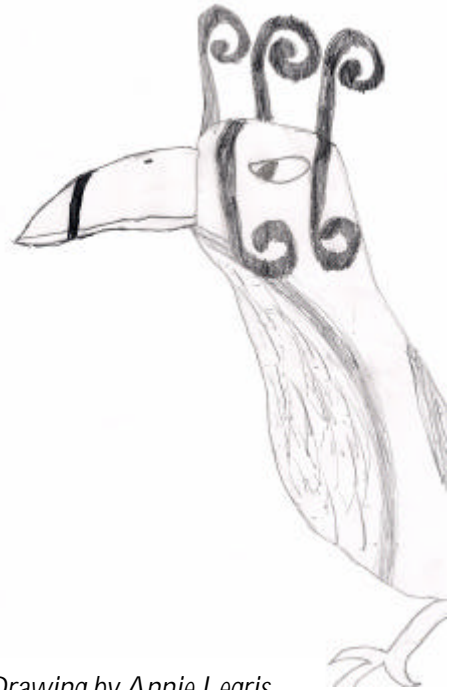
Give the child a field guide. It thrills them to have their very own "big person" book, and kids will flip through the book, looking at bird pictures for hours. (This also works very well when they are sitting in the car).

One thing to keep in mind: as an experienced birder, you may only get truly excited about rare birds, but young kids can get excited about anything in the natural world, including those scrawny-looking House Sparrows on the sidewalk.

Binoculars

Plastic binoculars are great for young toddlers but they just don't cut it for older children. There is nothing more frustrating for a child than having mom or dad get all excited about a bird but not being able to see it themselves because their \$10 techno-colour, super-spy binoculars are better designed for saving the world than for actually focusing on birds.

A good pair of child-sized binoculars can be surprisingly inexpensive. Besides which, it will save you the stress of watching your six-year-old swing your \$1500 Leica's wildly around while walking through a deep puddle.



Drawing by Annie Legris

Learning to take good care of their binoculars also helps teach young children about taking responsibility for their own, and other people's, field equipment.

Where to birdwatch

Birding with kids can start anywhere: from the couch by the window, while playing in the backyard, or even while sitting in the car, watching gulls fight over a dropped PBJ sandwich.

In the car

- keep a few bird books, and other nature books, in the car so they have something to leaf through while traveling.
- on long drives with kids: make frequent stops. It makes for a slower trip, but a much more relaxing one.
- one other tip: take activities the kids enjoy (puzzles, dolls, toys, etc.) so that they don't become bored on the long drive to those really good sewage lagoons.



Drawing by Christine Legris

In the field

In addition to birding equipment, kids will need two other things: non-birding stuff and snacks.

The non-birding stuff includes things which kids need to explore their world, like bug nets, paper bags to hold neat plants and cool rocks, collecting jars (to hold the mad hornet really close to mommy's nose), a bucket to hold lots of other bugs, etc.

The list can get pretty long. But you certainly don't need all of these things for each trip. The great thing about young children (and many older ones) is that they will find a thousand fascinating things to

examine within twenty metres of the car.

Which brings up another point; you will need to adjust your expectations. Long walks through dense bush and clouds of mosquitoes don't work with children, no matter the destination. However, sitting still in one area and watching small birds flitter by is often a great way to learn how to "see" animals in the wild.

When a child gets bored with birds (and they will reach this point, usually much sooner than you hope), keep them interested by showing them *everything*. To a child, everything is interesting. Especially if they get to touch it.

Snacks – these are important. The success of many birding trips can be guaranteed just by having a good supply of snacks and drinks. Especially if it's something you can all nibble on as you're traveling or while stopping at some nice place during your walk.

There are good bugs and bad bugs. For the bad bugs, you should bring a child-safe insect repellent and a good hat. For the good bugs, you have the bug net and collecting jars. Even if you take nothing home with you, it's really cool for a child to hold a jar with a real, live bug in it.

Better yet, let your child hold the bug in their hands. Children develop their bug and animal phobias from the

behaviour of adults. If they see you holding a spider without freaking out, chances are they will want to hold it as well. And kids love to have grasshoppers take a ride on their nose.

Kid-carrier backpacks are wonderful. When trying one out at the store (preferably with a child in it), remember that you will sometimes want to tip your head back. This is easier to do in some styles of backpacks than in others. And it should be adjustable so that the child can look over your shoulder and not just at the back of your head.

Don't forget the sunhat and sunscreen. And good shoes. Actually, several pairs of shoes. And rubber boots. (And wet wipes, for all the mud that isn't on the rubber boots).

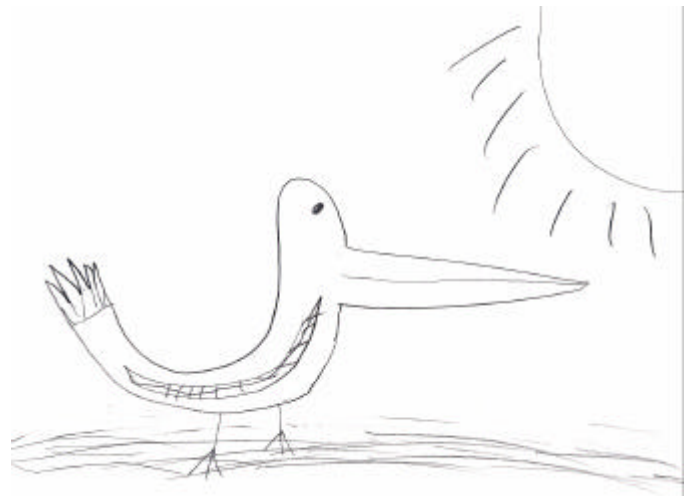
Give the kids their own notebook, for making lists, drawing pictures, pressing flowers, etc. Encourage them to draw what they see. A handful of coloured pens and pencils are always welcome.

Some misc bits of advice

Remember to keep it pretty simple. This is not the time to demonstrate your vast knowledge of the taxonomy of passerine subspecies. Basic descriptions and information are more than enough at this stage.

Keep the trips short enough so that they don't get overly tired or bored.

Show a keen interest in any good birds they find (those birds being anything they think is a good bird). Let them pick the birding location, even if it just happens to have a playground nearby. The key is to focus on the outing itself; the birds are often just an extra bonus.



Drawing by Christine Legris

You probably won't see any of the more secretive birds, as kids and silence don't always come in the same package. But if you let them fully enjoy the birds they don't scare away, the memory of those birds will stay with them for a very long time.

For younger children, birdwatching is less an activity on its own and more a single part of a larger experience. Allow them to pursue other interests while out birdwatching; obsessive birding is a trait reserved for adults.

And remember to be nice to your kids: they are the ones who will choose your nursing home.

Nocturnal Owl Monitoring

Looking for a way of "jazzing-up" your birding trips while learning some new identification skills? Then you should consider doing owl surveys.

While most of us are tucked securely into bed after dark, the late night hours are given over to the nocturnal beasts, the two most eclectic of which are the owls and the owl surveyors. If you have a hankering to hang out with both groups, then we encourage you to participate in the Nocturnal Owl Monitoring Program (NOMP).

Began in 1999, the NOMP is designed to study the owl populations of North America, providing data on the distribution, abundance and population trends of many different owl species. In 2001, the Ontario Nocturnal Owl Survey had 172 participants conduct surveys on 275 different survey routes. Manitoba's Nocturnal Owl survey involved 91 surveyors on 57 routes. And Alberta's program has run two pilot years of surveys, with 25 volunteers working on 30 different survey routes.

Other regions in Canada which have also initiated very successful owl survey programs in the past few years include British Columbia, New Brunswick and the Yukon.

The big advantage of the NOMP is that it is designed so that data collected during these surveys can also be incorporated in the Bird Atlas database. As such, you can contribute to two separate bird conservation programs with just one late-night session of hooting into the darkness.

If you are interested in participating in the Nocturnal Owl Monitoring Project please contact Lisa Priestley in the Bird Studies Canada office. Lisa can be reached at:

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Project Supporters

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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.

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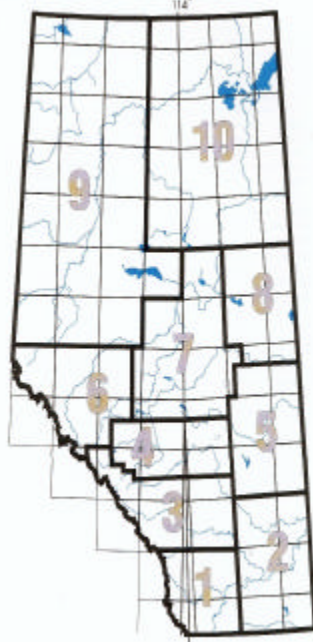
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of Alberta Naturalists**