



# Ontario Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey

## INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas  
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The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas is a partnership project of:



Ontario Ministry of  
Natural Resources and  
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Environment and  
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et  
Changement climatique Canada



Thank you very much to the [Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Supporters](#)

## Ontario Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey: Quick guide.

- Skill Level:** Minimum ability to identify Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet owl calls and a few similar sounding nocturnal species sometimes heard at night.
- Timing:** During 1 April – 30 April. Start later than 30-min after sunset and end before 30-min before sunrise.
- Duration:** Requires 3-4 hours to complete (up to 10 survey stations at 12 minutes each, plus travel between).
- Location:** Predominantly on the Canadian Shield, north of approximately 44.5 degree latitude and south of 47 degrees latitude (Atlas regions 8,9,12,13,14,16,18,19, 21-35).
- Atlas Square:*** Contact the Regional Coordinator for assignment to an available square.
- Survey stations:*** Use numbered Atlas point count stations - the 10 lowest numbered stations with suitable habitat.
- Considerations:**
- Weather:*** Survey on clear, calm nights with high visibility and little precipitation. Winds should be < 19 km/h (Beaufort 1-3) and temperatures > -15 degrees C.
- Equipment:*** A device capable of playing digital audio files in MP3 format (e.g. smartphone, or MP3 player) and amplifying sound (e.g. external speaker) are required. See detailed protocols for additional information.

A safety kit and wearing a high visibility safety vest is highly recommended.

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## Introduction

*Thank you for your interest in the Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey. Your contribution will aid in the understanding of Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl populations in Ontario.*

**The Ontario Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey is an excellent opportunity for everyone – from new to experienced birders.** While you do need good hearing, the required bird identification skill level is considered easy to intermediate. Participants need to know, or learn, the calls of Barred Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Boreal Owl and other owls that may be encountered in central Ontario (Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Barred Owl). Participants also need to know a few similar sounding nocturnal species sometimes heard at night, such as Mourning Dove, American Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe. **Wilson's Snipe can be readily miss-identified as Boreal Owl but Wilson's Snipe is far more likely to be detected in the survey region than Boreal Owls.** Boreal Owls are likely to occur only in the most northern extent of the Central owl survey region (Figure 1). Participants may also find the species identification easier if they become familiar with other nocturnal species such as Red Fox, Coyote, Chorus Frog and Spring Peeper.

The Ontario Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey is being undertaken as part of a larger project, the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 and will be ongoing from 2021 through 2025. For more information on the Atlas, see [www.birdsontario.org](http://www.birdsontario.org).

The Ontario Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey complements, but is not the same as, the Ontario Owl Survey coordinated by Birds Canada. The Ontario Owl Survey is a provincial program designed for the long-term monitoring of Owl populations within the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNRF) Area of the Undertaking (see [www.birdscanada.org/on Owls](http://www.birdscanada.org/on_Owls)). This program, and its existing routes, will continue to be surveyed during the period of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3, from 2021 through 2025. If you are interested in participating in the Ontario Owl Survey during the Atlas, please visit the owl route map available at [www.birdscanada.org/on owls](http://www.birdscanada.org/on_owls)) to see if there is an available route in your area. If a route is assigned to you, please follow all of the protocols outlined in the Ontario Owl Survey. If there are no Ontario Owl Survey routes available in your region and you still wish to survey owls, then please contact an Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Regional Coordinator to locate the nearest Atlas survey square that is available for owl surveys. Once a square has been assigned to you for an owl survey, then please follow the appropriate Ontario Atlas-3 Owl protocol to complete your surveys.

Owls represent a special challenge to monitor because they are difficult to survey. They breed early in the year, are secretive, primarily nocturnal and roost in concealed locations during the day. As a result, special surveys are required to better document the distribution and abundance of most of Ontario's owls. For Atlas-3, we have developed the following five protocols: Eastern Screech-Owl; Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl; Great Gray and Boreal Owl; Long-eared Owl; and Northern Hawk Owl. Figure 1 shows the part of the province where each survey should take place.

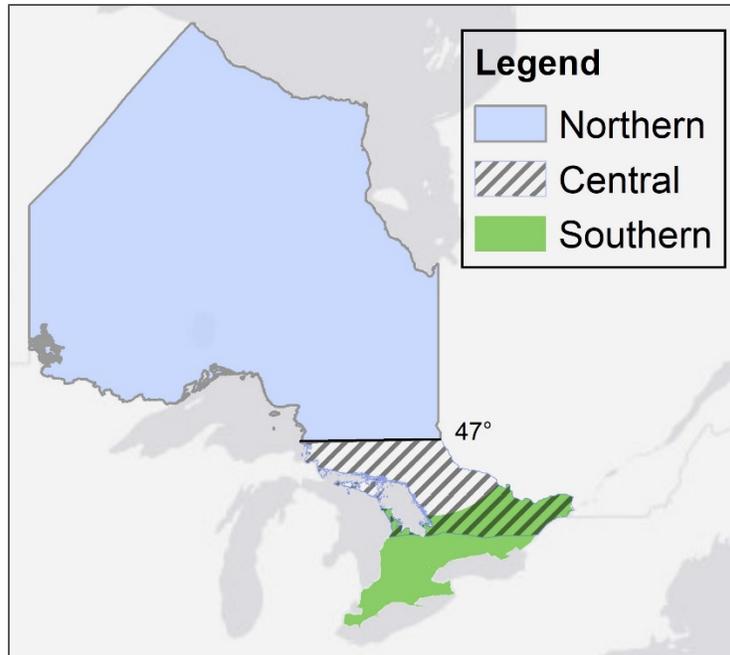


Figure 1. The Great Gray Owl-Boreal Owl survey and the Northern Hawk Owl survey should be run in the “North” section; the Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet survey should be run in the “Central” section; and the Eastern Screech-Owl survey should be run in the “Southern” section. The Long-eared Owl survey can be run in any section.

Most of these surveys involve using playback. Playback of recorded songs is a useful technique for surveying many owl species. Due to their territorial behaviour, songs broadcast within an owl's territory may elicit a vocal or visual response by the resident owl in an attempt to defend its territory against an intruder. The higher response rate elicited by playback will enhance our ability to detect owls and will increase our knowledge of the distribution, status and conservation needs of these mysterious creatures of the night.

The Great Horned Owl (GHOW) occurs throughout Ontario, and although we encourage participants to seek them out they are not included on this broadcast. They do not consistently respond to playback and use a wide variety of habitat, so aren't well suited to a focused survey. Nevertheless, they call at night and could be heard during any of the Atlas's standard owl surveys. We will use the GHOW data collected in this manner, together with data from regular nocturnal owling for the atlas, and any other GHOW data provided (they can be seen quite readily on nests before the leaves emerge, for example) to map GHOW relative abundance.

Draft results from the Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey, and the other owl surveys, will be posted on the Atlas project website. Maps of Barred Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls relative abundance and breeding distribution will be created based on the survey results and other atlas data and used in the final atlas website and/or book.

*Thank you for contributing to the survey!*

# Ontario Barred (BDOW) and Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) Survey Guidelines

## Preparing for your survey

### Training

The survey playback is in a downloadable MP3 file called **Central Ontario Owl broadcast** at: [here](#). The Central Ontario Owl broadcast file is 12 minutes long and consists of two minutes of passive listening (divided by quiet beeps into one-minute intervals), one set of Boreal Owl calls, and four sets of Barred Owl calls. This is the same broadcast used for the Central Ontario Owl Survey (called central broadcast), which is being used to maintain consistency across programs. See Playback protocol ([below](#)) for complete information on the playback file's contents. Please ensure that you use only this standard MP3 file and that you play it in its entirety. If you are unable to retrieve it contact the Atlas office for support.

***Note - owl broadcast files always start with silence, this allows all North American Owl surveys to be compared.***

Before surveying, familiarize yourself with the calls of the Barred Owl (See training MP3 files at [here](#), and see [Appendix A](#)), the Northern Saw-whet Owl, the Boreal Owl, Wilson's Snipe, and other owl species that are found in smaller numbers in central Ontario (Long-eared Owl, Eastern Screech Owl) as well as other similar sounding species including birds such as American Woodcock, Mourning Dove, Ruffed Grouse, a few frogs (Spring Peeper, Woodfrog, Chorus Frog, Gray Treefrog) and mammals (Red Fox and Coyote). These bird sounds are also available on [Dendroica](#) and [Xeno-canto](#), and phone apps such as Merlin.

### Equipment

Make sure you have all the required equipment before heading out. Note that although an app for running owl surveys is under consideration, it will not be ready for the 2021 owl survey season.

- This manual, either in hard copy or on your phone
- A map of the 10-km square you are to survey showing the survey stations. Either a hard copy map, or the map on the Atlas app.
- The BDOW and NSWO survey data form
- Time-keeping device (watch or phone)
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Clipboard
- Compass
- Portable MP3 player, boom box, or smartphone and amplified speaker. Note that amplified speakers have their own power source. Contact your Atlas Regional Coordinators if you need to borrow a broadcast speaker for Atlas owl surveys.
- The MP3 file "Central Ontario Owl broadcast file"
- Road map or GPS
- Spare batteries and/or power bank with charging cord
- Pen or pencil (and spares)
- A towel to place under the player and speaker

## Survey area

For the purpose of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl surveys should be conducted south of 47 degrees latitude, in the area marked as Central in Figure 1. Both Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl may also occur south of the Central region and along the southern portion of Northwestern Ontario. If you wish to conduct the survey outside of the Central region, please contact your Regional Coordinator.

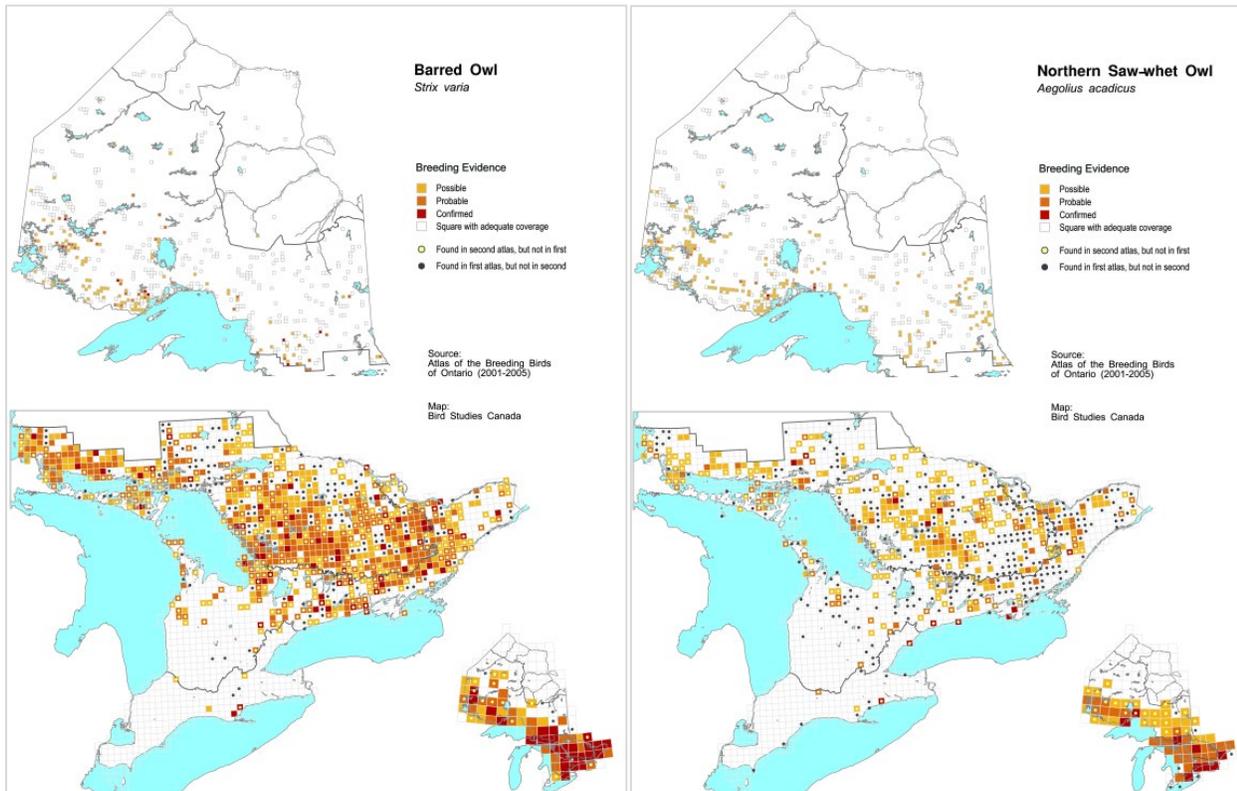


Figure 2. The Barred Owl (left) and Northern Saw-whet Owl (right) survey should be run predominantly on the Canadian Shield, north of approximately 44.5 degree latitude and south of 47 degrees latitude. These maps are from Atlas-2 and shows the breeding evidence for the species by 10-km square.

## Which squares to cover?

We would like BDOW and NSWO surveys to be undertaken in as many of the 10-km squares in the central survey area (Figure 1), as possible. For the first two years of the Atlas (2021-2022), we will not be targeting specific 10-km squares - surveys can be run in any square. After that, we will assess coverage needs and start to pick specific squares to fill in gaps in coverage. A map of 10-km squares is available [here](#).

We encourage you to do as many of these squares as you like. **Please inform your [Regional Coordinator](#) of which square(s) you plan to cover** to avoid duplicating effort with other

participants or the long-term Ontario Owl Survey. Or ask your Regional Coordinator if there are squares needing to be surveyed.

## **Planning your survey**

### **Survey timing**

You should complete your survey between April 1<sup>st</sup> and April 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Time of day**

We recommend that surveys begin about one half hour after sunset, but they can be run anytime between a half hour after sunset and a half hour before dawn.

### **Weather conditions**

Weather has a great influence on our ability to hear owls; calm conditions are best. Wind and precipitation critically reduce owl calling and impact your ability to hear. Surveys should be conducted on nights with wind less than 19 km/hr (i.e., 3 or less on the Beaufort Scale, which is enough to constantly move twigs and to extend a small flag.). Extremely cold temperatures can also decrease owl calling. Surveys should be run on nights that are calm and not too cold (warmer than -15°C). There is little point in attempting or continuing a survey if the wind exceeds force 3 or if there is persistent snow or rain. If you have started a survey and weather conditions worsen during the survey to a point where they are unsuitable, simply stop the survey and finish it another night.

### **Time required**

It takes approximately 3-4 hours to run the full 10-station survey. Ideally, survey all stations on the same night. If you are unable to complete the survey on a single night (e.g., due to poor weather conditions), simply complete the remaining stations (to make a total of 10 stations surveyed) on another night and use a separate data form/app submission to record your results.

## **Completing your survey**

### **Locating designated survey stations**

There are 40 randomly selected, designated roadside survey stations located within each square. These are marked on the map of each 10-km square, and their UTM Coordinates are shown on the right side of the map. Maps of each 10-km square as well as survey station coordinates are available [here](#), and on the NatureCounts app. Point Count stations can also be downloaded from the Atlas website: (Coming Soon). See [Appendix B](#) for information on how to navigate to the point count stations.

To select stations for your surveys, start with designated survey station number 1 and check each designated station on the map sequentially (1, then 2, then 3, etc.), until you have selected the first 10 designated survey stations that have suitable habitat for BDOW and NSWOW. See [below](#) for a definition of suitable habitat for BDOW and NSWOW. Ensure that all survey stations are at least 2.0 km apart. It can be helpful to line up a few extra “backup”

designated stations in case you need to switch stations during the survey, e.g., if traffic is too heavy at a pre-selected station.

**We recommend that you go into the field during daylight hours to locate each station and to assess habitat suitability.** This makes it easier to find the station when you go back after dark.

If you arrive at a station and realize that it is not suitable, you should reject this station and find a new one among the designated stations using the same rules as above (first check number 11, then 12, etc.). The 10 stations can be surveyed in the most convenient order (not necessarily sequentially 1-10). If you cannot find 10 suitable survey stations in your square using the rules above, please do as many points as you can.

Once you arrive at the designated station do the survey as close as possible to the designated coordinates. For more information on reading UTM's from GPS units or smart phone see [Appendix B](#).

**“No owls” is very important data! Please follow the protocol, run the full playback of the broadcast file and complete the requested app data or data form for each station, whether or not you actually detect owls.**

### **Determining “suitable” stations**

Suitable stations are those that are:

- physically accessible at the time of year of the survey
- legally accessible (no trespassing)
- near a safe parking spot
- in a quiet location with little traffic
- not directly in front of a house
- designated stations should be within 100 m of suitable habitat
- more than 2.0 km from any other BDOW and NSOW survey station

### **Suitable BDOW and NSWO habitat**

Familiarize yourself with the species range and habitat of these three owls, *BDOW*, *NSWO*, and *Boreal Owl (BOOW)* as they are the main targets of this survey.

**Barred Owl:** Widely distributed across North America. In Ontario, is a permanent resident of coniferous or mixed woodland primarily of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest region. Barred Owls are rare as breeding birds in southern Ontario. They primarily occur in partial to dense moist forest (often mixed), especially near lakes, streams, and swamps. They tend to occur in large, unfragmented blocks of mature forest, possibly because old woodlands support a higher diversity of prey and are more likely to have large tree cavities suitable for nesting. Their preferred habitats range from swamps to stream sides to uplands, and may contain hemlock, maple, oak, hickory, beech, aspen, white spruce, quaking aspen, or balsam poplar.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl:** Breeds throughout Ontario. Breeding habitat varies geographically, but in Ontario favours a variety of forest types, especially coniferous and northern mixed

woods. They seem to prefer mature forest with an open understory for foraging, deciduous trees for nesting, dense conifers for roosting, and riverside habitat nearby. But they can nest in a wide range of wooded habitats, including coniferous swamps, disturbed deciduous woods, savannahs, riverside forest, and shrub-steppe habitat so long as adequate nesting cavities are available. They also nest in boxes placed in coastal scrub, sand dune meadows, and poplar plantations.

**Boreal Owl:** Permanent resident in boreal forests across Eurasia and North America. In Ontario, its summer breeding range is primarily constrained between the 47th parallel and the northern edge of the tree line. Boreal owls are found mainly in areas of extensive mature coniferous forest intermixed with small openings and patches of younger forest. In the winter, they forage in spruce-fir forests where uncrusted snow under the trees facilitates access to prey. In spring, they often forage in clearcuts and agricultural fields where small mammals are easier to locate.

**Wilson's Snipe:** Is found in wetlands with soft organic soils and scattered, low vegetation. Frequents various types of peatlands, freshwater marshes, bogs, fens, moist meadows, swamps, and alder or willow swales along water bodies. This species prefers lookouts 1m high or more. Breeds throughout Ontario, but is scarce in extreme southwestern regions.

### **Playback protocol**

See [Appendix C](#) for information for specifications about broadcast units suitable for the survey.

Use the Central Ontario Owl Broadcast playback MP3 file [here](#) to perform your surveys. At each station, put the portable player on the roof of the vehicle, push the play button and move at least 20 metres away from your vehicle. This will reduce noise interference from the engine as it cools and will enable you to hear the owls.

The Central Owl Survey broadcast consists of two minutes of passive listening, one set of Boreal Owl calls, and four sets of Barred Owl calls. The Ontario Owl Survey has shown that Northern Saw-whet Owls respond to Boreal Owl calls so the Boreal Owl call is used to maintain consistency among surveys.

The entire recording is 12 minutes long and consists of two minutes of passive listening (divided by quiet beeps into one-minute intervals), one set of Boreal Owl calls, and four sets of Barred Owl calls. The playback starts with a double beep, followed by one minute of silence\*; a double beep, a second minute of silence; 20 seconds of Boreal Owl calls; 60 seconds of silence; 20 seconds of Barred Owl calls; 2 minutes of silence; 20 seconds of Barred Owl calls; 2 minutes of silence; 20 seconds of Barred Owl calls; 2 minutes of silence; 20 seconds of Barred Owl calls; 2 minutes of silence; ending with a double beep.

### **Data collection**

We recommend doing all 10 survey stations in one evening, but the 10 stations can be done over more than one evening should that be necessary or more convenient. Fill in a data sheet even if you recorded no owl species. Negative data are as important as owl detections – they help us gain insight into the relative abundance of owls across the province. See [Appendix E](#) for how to complete the data form.

## Safety issues

See [Appendix D](#). Please have fun but make sure you are safe. Carry a cell-phone and have a friend accompany you on owling outings. They provide a safety factor, and can help with the survey – juggling the playback machine, map, GPS, flashlight and data forms can be challenging for one person. It's a good idea to let someone know where you plan to be travelling, and when you expect to return. Double-check the survey in advance and during daylight to ensure the roads are accessible at the time of your survey. Dress warmly and wear highly visible clothing, a safety vest is recommended. *Please be careful when standing on roadsides at night and while driving on wintery roads.* Be careful to ensure your car is pulled completely off the road and, on snowy roads, be careful when pulling off the road as it is easy to slide one or two wheels into the ditch. Carry a shovel just in case. Do not overuse your electric system in your car. Experienced owl surveyors will tell you that your modern car's alternator cannot keep up with the energy needed to charge equipment AND use your GPS AND heat seats AND heat the car AND keep the lights on AND start your engine.

Be sure to test your playback equipment before heading into the field. Play the playback at the maximum volume that does not cause distortion. If possible, test the equipment on a still night and indicate on your data form how far away you can hear the call. To do this, play the recording on a straight, reasonably flat road and stop at 100 m intervals to listen.

***Call broadcasts are effective in locating and studying owls but should not be used indiscriminately.*** Responding birds may continue to vocalize for some time after the playback ends, and therefore may be more easily located by predators. In addition, frequent and persistent playbacks may affect the normal activities of the owl. Enjoy the experience but please keep disturbance to a minimum. Remember that the health and welfare of each bird is our utmost priority.

**Once you have surveyed the 10 stations and entered the data (see below), you have completed the minimum requirement for the survey in that square. Congratulations, and thank you!**

**If you were not able to complete all 10 stations,** please try to complete the remaining stations on another night. Simply fill out a second data form and submit both forms. If you are unable to complete the remaining stations on another night, submit the results for the stations you were able to complete. This information will still be usable in the final analysis.

**If you completed 10 stations and would like to do additional surveys,** please select another square to survey. Please check with your Regional Coordinator to find a square needing coverage and avoid duplicating effort.

## **Entering BDOW and NSWOW survey data**

In the future, you may be able to enter the data for your survey via an BDOW and NSWOW survey app while in the field. That option is not available for 2021. Please print off and complete the hard copy data form in the field then enter the data via the Atlas website.

## Completing the Owl Survey Data Form

Use dark pencil or pen. You will be entering your data to the computer, so make sure the form is legible. See the sample completed form in [Appendix E](#).

**Missed fields:** Don't miss fields on the forms as missing information may cause a data entry error that prevents you from submitting your data.

**Square ID:** Fill in the 7 digit number, e.g., 17TNU61

**Name:** Fill in your full name.

**Date:** Record the year, month and day of your survey. If you have done the survey on more than one night, use a new data form for each night.

**Maximum Distance** at which playback can be heard. This information is optional, but useful for data analysis. It can help ensure that future surveys set their equipment to about the same volume level, which will increase standardization. Record if you can hear your broadcast at 100 m, 250 m or 500m. In the example on page 19, the broadcast could be heard at a distance of 500 m.

**Comments:** Fill in any pertinent information about that night's survey.

**Station # (Point Count #):** Fill in the number of the point count station where you did your survey.

**Time:** Record the time you start the survey at that station. Use the 24-hour clock: 7:30 p.m. is 19:30.

**Survey Data:** Each line in this table is used to record data on each individual owl reported at each survey station, i.e., one line for every bird. In the example provided, at this one station (#1), four owls were heard: two Barred Owls, one Northern Saw-Whet Owl and one Great Horned Owl, and each is recorded on a separate line. Note there is space at the bottom of the form for any additional owls you record.

If no birds are heard at a station, record the Date, Time, "# cars" and Noise, and leave the other columns blank. Write in the comments "no owls heard".

### Species Codes:

BDOW – Barred Owl (Note: BDOW is used to separate it from Barn Owl, BNOW)

NSWO – Northern Saw-whet Owl

BOOW - Boreal Owl

**If you come across other owl species, you should also record them on your data form.**

Some other owls that you might come across while doing your surveys are:

EASO – Eastern Screech-owl

LEOW – Long-eared Owl

GHOW – Great Horned Owl

## SEOW – Short-eared Owl

**Recording Observations:** Observations are to be recorded in 12 one minute intervals during the 12-minute broadcast:

- Record the species name in the column labeled “Species Code,” then place an "X" in the column(s) corresponding to when that owl was heard (e.g., if an owl is heard calling during the second silent listening period, place an “X” in the column titled, “2nd minute.”
- If the owl is heard during every listening period, place an “X” in every column.
- If you see an owl, put an "S" in the appropriate column.
- If the owl was both seen and heard, use “XS”. Use a separate line for each individual owl.
- Also, we are not interested in how many times an owl calls during a particular listening period. Use only one “X” to denote that an owl called during that minute, regardless of whether it called once, or 20 times. If known, add the highest appropriate breeding evidence code under the field Breeding Code.
- Only owls heard or seen between the start and end of the Central Ontario Owl broadcast file should be tallied.

In the example, at station #1 there are four owls. Barred Owl #1 was heard immediately upon the start of the survey, then became quiet for two minutes and then started calling again after the first Barred Owl broadcast. At the 3rd Barred Owl broadcast Barred Owl#1 flew into a nearby tree where he could be seen. A Northern Saw-Whet Owl began calling after the first Boreal Owl broadcast but became silent when the Barred Owl broadcast began. Barred Owl #2 started to call after the second Barred Owl broadcast and continued to call for the remainder of the survey. The final owl, a Great Howed Owl, called during the last two survey minutes.

**Direction:** Record the one- or two-letter code to indicate the **direction** at which the bird was **first** heard or seen. Direction: N – North; NE – North-east; E – East; SE – South-east; S – South; SW – South-west; W – West; NW – North-west. In the example, Barred Owl #1 was North-east of the survey station when first heard. The Northern Saw-whet Owl is to the west, the first Great Horned Owl was east of the survey station, and the second Barred Owl was Southwest when first heard.

**Distance:** Put an “X” in the appropriate box to indicate the distance category in which the bird was first heard: (<200 m, 200-500 m, 500-1000 m or 1000+ m). In the example, the Barred Owl #1 was less than 100 metres from the survey station. The three additional owls were spaced out at further distances (NSWO 200-500m, Barred Owl #2 500-1000m, Great Horned Owl 1000+ m).

**Traffic count (# cars):** Record the number of vehicles that passed by that station during the survey period. In the example, 2 cars passed the survey station during the survey.

**Noise:** Record number 1 to 4 based on the following scale:

1. None or slight: relatively quiet, little interference.
2. Moderate: some interference with broadcast and/or listening.
3. High: substantial interference with broadcast and/or listening.
4. Excessive noise: extreme interference with broadcast or listening.

If there is excessive noise or too much traffic at one station to survey properly, we recommend stopping the survey, erasing any data that you may have recorded from that station, and selecting a different station using the procedure described on pages 8-9.

In the example, there was moderate noise level during the survey.

**Remarks:** Record comments such as what caused the noise, whether or not you saw the owl, probable breeding evidence (such as duetting), or what type of call was made by the owl.

**Evidence of breeding:** Enter the highest (furthest down the list) 1- or 2-letter breeding code that best describes the situation. The full set of Atlas breeding codes and definitions are provided [here](#). The most likely codes during an owl survey are:

**Code Definition**

- H Species observed in its breeding season in suitable nesting habitat.
- S Singing male(s) present, or breeding calls heard, in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season. In addition to owl calls this would include peenting American Woodcock Males, drumming Ruffed Grouse or winnowing Wilson’s Snipe.
- M At least 7 individuals singing or producing other sounds associated with breeding (e.g., calls or drumming), heard during the same visit to a single square and in suitable nesting habitat during the species' breeding season.
- P Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in nesting season.

*Unknown owl species: If you hear an owl (or what seems to be an owl) but can't identify it, enter "UNKO" as the 4 letter species code and enter the rest of the data. In the comments section, please describe what you heard in as much detail as possible and we will try to ID it. If you can do so, please provide a recording of the vocalization taken in the field.*

**Submitting your data**

*Data you enter on the NatureCounts website [here](#). Please enter your data **within 2 weeks of completing your survey, or, at the latest by May 15<sup>th</sup>** each year. You can review and correct your data using the app or the Atlas website, you can correct the data as long as your region's data reviewer (your RC) has not finalized the submission.*

***Please remember that Ontario Owls receive a lot of attention but, under eBird definitions, the majority are not considered sensitive species. Due to the detailed station information we ask that you do not submit your owl survey results to eBird.***

You can print BDOW and NSW data forms from the Owl Survey web page here: <https://www.birdsontario.org/owl-nightjar-surveys/>

If you have any questions, please email [atlas@birdsontario.org](mailto:atlas@birdsontario.org).

*Thanks very much for doing owl surveys. We hope you enjoy them!*

## Appendix A - MP3 Owl training resources

**Owl training.** The owl training MP3 files can be obtained using separate links for each MP3 file available [here](#). It includes recordings of other birds and common frogs you might hear while out owling. Included are: Great Gray Owl; Long-eared Owl; Great Horned Owl; Barred Owl; Northern Saw-whet Owl; Boreal Owl; Northern Hawk Owl; Short-eared Owl; Eastern Screech-Owl. Wilson's Snipe; American Woodcock; Ruffed Grouse; Mourning Dove; Wood Frog; Spring Peeper; and Chorus Frog. This is the same training recording used by the Ontario Owl Survey.

## Appendix B – Navigating to survey stations

The Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) grid system is the location system used for the Ontario Barred and Northern Saw-whet Owl Survey and Ontario Atlas-3.

### **Finding stations using the 10-km square map**

The locations of the numbered Atlas Point Count Station are shown on the Atlas 10-km square map, and the UTM coordinates of each are listed on the right side of the map. You can use a hard copy printed map to navigate to the station. Use the UTM on a GPS or other device (see below) to find the precise coordinates of the station and run the survey as close as possible to the designated coordinates.

### **Finding stations using downloaded Point Count locations**

Coming soon when Atlas-3 point count locations are available for download.

### **Finding stations using the NatureCounts app**

Coming soon when Atlas-3 point count locations are available on the NatureCounts app.

### **Using a GPS unit to determine UTM location**

If you have a GPS unit, set the device to NAD83. Check all 6 digits of the Easting and all 7 digits of Northing. (If your GPS unit gives you 7 digits for Easting, ignore the initial “0”).

### **Using a Smart Phone**

#### **iPhone**

On an iPhone you can use the built in Maps app or Compass app or you can download a mapping app such as Google Maps. iPhone defaults to latitude longitude so you will need to set your defaults to UTM.

#### **Android Smart Phone**

Unlike the iPhone, the Android system doesn't have a default, built-in GPS coordinate utility to show you the information that the phone already has, so you have to find an Android app that can provide this functionality. See the google play store for available apps or review your options online. One good review is available at <https://www.androidauthority.com/best-gps-app-and-navigation-app-for-android-357870/>. Remember to set your default to UTM or you will need to convert your coordinates later.

## Appendix C - Choosing a Bird Call Broadcast Unit

Below are recommendations/guidelines for selecting a bird call broadcast unit.

### **Broadcast device**

Many devices will work including a smartphone, tablet, or some sort of mp3 player. When selecting your device consider the following:

- **Battery life:** your device should have large enough battery capacity to run for several hours to ensure it will last the entire survey. Keep in mind batteries will drain more quickly in the cold and when in constant use. If you can, bring spare batteries. Do not rely on charging it as you go or running it through your car – the small drain may drain your car’s battery!
- **Ease of use:** make sure you’re familiar with using the broadcast unit. If possible, turn off all other notifications so as to not interrupt playback once it begins. If using a phone, it helps to put it into “airplane mode” to prevent interruptions and conserve battery power.
- **Lock system:** it’s helpful to use a device that can be locked so as to not accidentally interrupt the playback (for example, a pocket-dial).

### **Speaker**

**Volume:** The most important consideration of the playback setup is to choose an amplified speaker that is loud enough. You must choose a device that you can clearly hear from at least 400 m away. We strongly encourage participants to test their speakers with the most quiet recording before the survey begins. If you cannot test the unit in the field, you can measure the volume output with a phone app or other device; it should produce sound of at least 90 decibels. You will also want to ensure that as you increase the volume on your unit that the quality of the calls is not distorted.

There are now many very good, portable (and rugged/waterproof) speakers that work well for owl surveys. Here are two options:

[JBL Clip 3 Portable Waterproof Wireless Bluetooth](#) speaker. Atlas Regional Coordinators will be provided with this speaker which they can loan out to atlasers:

[Pyle-Pro Pwma60ub 50-Watts](#) - this unit in combination with a USB drive replaces both the speaker and the broadcast device leaving your mobile device free for other purposes.

## Appendix D - How to stay safe while conducting owl and crepuscular surveys

**Surveyors, not just birds, are important!** For nocturnal surveys in high traffic areas, in remote locations, or on narrow snowy roads, we cannot overemphasize how important it is to consider YOUR safety and that of other drivers. Please use these tips to help ensure you have a fun enjoyable and SAFE evening:

- Take a Friend, Tell another friend your survey plans and be sure to check in
- Bring a cell phone, know if you have service where you survey
- Keep your eyes on the road while driving – stop and pull over before you survey
- While driving only the passenger should handle tech (gps locations, texts, calls etc.)
- Is your car ready? Is it in good condition, do you have/need snow tires or chains, is your gas tank full, does your battery charge correctly.
- Check the roads IN DAYLIGHT to ensure they are safe to drive and that people can safely pass you when you stop. Consider snow, mud, ruts, bridges, washouts etc.
- Will others be able to see you? Check the forecast for road conditions and for visibility and avoid poor driving conditions
- Wear your reflective Safety Vest!
- Take a flashlight or headlamp and extra batteries
- If you don't like listening to your caution lights leave your headlights on but watch and ensure your alternator is charging your battery
- What else will drain your batteries? Your headlights, stereo system, cell phone, broadcast unit, seat warmers and starting the car every six minutes. You will need to choose what equipment you need and what you don't.
- If there is no snow, check for ticks and/or stay out of the tall grass
- Consider carrying the following particularly for more remote routes:
  - shovel, shovelling is far better than a long walk
  - bring your winter roadside emergency kit. If you aren't sure what goes in an emergency kit, check out [here](#) or [here](#);
  - a blanket or sleeping bag for every participant
  - bring your first aid kit, make sure you know where it is and that it is up to date
  - make sure you have a spare tire and a jack or a tire repair kit. Refresh your memory on how to use this equipment
  - and take more food and water than you think you need;
- For further information on safety while atlassing [click here](#)

Taking little ones along? What a great idea! Take lots of fun snacks, bring ear protectors, dress them in light-reflective colours and ensure children remain off the road. As you will be looking up a lot (and not at your child) make sure there is another adult with you to specifically keep an eye on them. **If an owl calls - remember to take their ear protectors off so they can enjoy the moment as well. Above all else, remember that people are important too and if for any reason you are concerned for your safety or the safety of others, please stop your survey! There will always be another day and another year to collect data.**

# Appendix E - Sample data form

## Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas – 3: Barred Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl Data Form

Please ensure the data is submitted online at [www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/onatlas](http://www.birdscanada.org/birdmon/onatlas)

Square id : \_\_\_\_\_ Atlasser Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Assistant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year : \_\_\_\_ Month : \_\_\_\_ Day : \_\_\_\_ Comments \_\_\_\_\_

**Broadcast Test** ; Please circle the furthest distance that you heard each call.      **Boreal Owl call** : 100m 250m 500m      **Barred Owl Call** : 100m 250m 500m

**Species Codes**  
 BDOW - Barred Owl      BOOW - Boreal Owl      EASO - Eastern Screech-Owl      GGOW - Great Gray Owl      GHOW - Great Horned Owl      LEOW - Long-eared Owl  
 NSWO - Northern Saw-whet Owl      SEOW - Short-eared Owl      NHOW - Northern Hawk Owl      AMWO – American Woodcock      WISN – Wilson Snipe      RUGR – Ruffed Grouse

**Noise Codes**: How does the ambient noise, natural (e.g. frogs) or man-made (e.g. traffic, power lines) noise impact your ability to survey.  
 1: None or slight, relatively quiet, little interference with broadcast and/or listening.  
 2: Moderate, some interference with broadcast and/or listening  
 3: High, substantial interference with broadcast and/or listening  
 4: Excessive noise, extreme interference with broadcast and/or listening.

**Breeding Codes** (from lowest to highest evidence):  
**H**: Species observed in its breeding season in suitable nesting habitat;  
**S**: Singing male(s) present, or breeding calls heard, in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season;  
**M**: At least 7 individuals singing/producing other breeding sounds (e.g., calls or drumming), heard during the same visit, in suitable nesting habitat, and during the species' breeding season;  
**P**: Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in nesting season.

Stn #	Time (24 hr)	Species	Please identify minute by minute observations. Mark "X" if heard, "S" if seen; "XS" if both							Breeding Code	Direction and Distance (m) to each owl when first heard				Conditions and Comments		
			1st Min	2nd Min	After BOOW	After 1st BDOW	After 2nd BDOW	After 3rd BDOW	After 4th BDOW		Direction	<200	200-500	500-1000	1000+	Traffic Count (# cars)	Noise Level (1-4)
Example Location																	
1	22:12	BDOW	X		X	X	XS	S	S		NE	X				2	1
		NSWO			X	X					W		X				BDOW duet (S), GHOW was
		BDOW					X	X	X		SW			X			distant
		GHOW						X	X		E				X		

Additional Owls																	

Other species (record any species that are uncommon or unusual to hear on diurnal point counts)												
Stn #	Species	Total Count	Breeding Evidence	Stn #	Species	Total Count	Breeding Evidence	Stn #	Species	Total Count	Breeding Evidence	