



Pied-billed Grebe Photo: Scott Leslie

Dear Atlasser,

We hope your first year of atlassing is going well. Although the point count season is behind us (it ended on July 10), there's still lots of great atlassing to be done, with some suggestions below! Keep reading for some incredible year one highlights - there will be more to come!

## Long-eared Owl survey

The new Long-eared Owl survey runs from July 1 through August 14 and is an enjoyable and productive way to spend a summer night when most other atlas field work is over for the year. It's an excellent survey for newer atlassers since it's very straightforward and requires the identification of only one species. The Instruction Manual for these surveys can be found [here](#), but in a nutshell, the protocol is similar to the other special surveys. It involves going out at night to pre-selected locations in a square and simply listening for the begging calls of the young owls, which are quite vocal in encouraging their parents to hurry up with some food. Click [here](#) to listen to the begging call of the young.

If you are interested in doing the survey, don't forget to let your Regional Coordinator (RC) know and good luck! It is our hope that this unique survey (we don't know of any other extensive surveys of this kind, for this species) will provide us with an unprecedented understanding of this mysterious and elusive bird.

## Late season atlassing

July is a great time to focus your efforts on upgrading breeding evidence to probable and confirmed for many species. Check adult birds to see if they are carrying food for young, or a fecal sac, and watch for newly fledged youngsters fluttering around the underbrush. Some late breeders such as American Goldfinch and Cedar Waxwing are nesting now, and many other species can be on second or third nests by this time. With any luck you'll come across some new species for the square while on an upgrading mission.

Because birds are wrapping up the nesting season and starting to move around, especially later this month, be careful when recording breeding evidence and be sure that any young of the year are incapable of sustained flight

**COVID-19:** *The Atlas team reminds all atlassers to be aware of the latest COVID-19 conditions in Ontario. Please follow all public health guidelines and restrictions, and check for updates frequently. Information on the latest conditions and public health guidance can be found on the [Government of Ontario website](#). Follow the links to the most current situation in the province.*

before recording them as FY. Some birds such as northern-nesting shorebirds are already starting to move south, and should be recorded as X, unless you have good evidence they are nesting on-site. Check the [Safe Date Charts](#) for guidance on this. If the species isn't listed on a particular chart, then there's very little likelihood that the bird is nesting in that area.

By the end of July, you can pretty much wrap up atlassing for the year, other than recording any incidental observations of breeding evidence that you come upon, and, of course, the Long-eared Owl survey.

If you did get permission to enter private property to do some atlassing, this might be a good time to write a thank-you note to the landowner. It would be much appreciated and may help you or others get back onto the property in future years.

## Atlas data due by August 31

Please submit your Atlas data into NatureCounts as soon as possible. The deadline for year one data submissions is August 31, 2021. Having the data in-hand will help considerably in the review process and in planning for 2022 and beyond. It's also good practice to get your data entered while it is still fresh in your mind!

We're really looking forward to summarizing the atlas effort and results from year one and laying out the plan for the rest of the project.

## Thanks for your efforts so far

Data from 2021 continues to pour in. As of July 18, 1,003 participants have submitted over 38,000 checklists, and reported over 7,500 point counts. 287 people have done at least 1 traditional point count, and 15 have done more than 100 each! 239 people have already logged 20 or more hours of peak season effort.

With the COVID-19 restrictions, this has been a very different first season for the atlas and we're hopeful for a more normal year of atlassing in 2022. Fingers crossed that we'll be able to gather indoors and on birding adventures together to share the atlassing experience.

## Some 2021 highlights

There have already been some noteworthy reports to Atlas-3 from our first year of data collection. Such as the following, by Mike Burrell.....

### Prairie wormhole spits out Sprague's Pipit and Lark Bunting!

On the morning of June 15 2021, Peter Hogenbirk and Geoff Carpentier were atlassing in region 40 (Rainy River) north of the town of Pinewood (about halfway between Emo and the town of Rainy River) when Peter heard the [distinctive song of a Sprague's Pipit](#). They observed the bird displaying for the next fifteen minutes. This bird was very difficult to observe as it displayed very high in the air and disappeared on the ground in a pasture. Peter and Geoff observed it again the next morning and Ethan Quinton, Glenn Coady, and myself observed it again on June 18 and made a [recording](#). It was reported again on June 20 and 21.

This represents the fourth year at least one Sprague's Pipit has been seen displaying in the Rainy River area (1980, 1990, 1998). Another male displayed during the first year of Atlas-2 near Hudson Bay, 76 kilometers east of Peawanuck.

If getting Sprague's Pipit for the atlas wasn't good enough, Ethan Quinton and I managed to get it on a nearby point count! And if THAT wasn't good enough, just down the road we found a singing male Lark Bunting – another bird of the prairies! It really felt like we had been sucked through a wormhole and ended up in southern Saskatchewan.





*Lark Bunting* © Mike Burrell

- Mike Burrell, Regional Coordinator for Region 43

And this from Glenn Coady:

The highlight of year one in Region 12 (Toronto) was the nest of a Prothonotary Warbler in the Humber Marshes, found by Owen Strickland on June 1. This is only the second nesting record for the entire GTA, the last occurrence being a nest in Castlederg in Peel Region during Atlas-2.



*Prothonotary Warbler* © Glenn Coady

- Glenn Coady, Regional Coordinator for Region 46

In other highlight news... For those of us who remember back to Atlas-1, reports of a territorial Henslow's Sparrow and a Western Meadowlark in southwestern Ontario bring back fond memories of when these birds were considerably more common.

We'll provide a more complete picture of the year one highlights once all results are in and tallied.

## Atlasser chip notes

I moved to Ontario as the province launched Atlas-2, but I was just starting a family so time in the field was limited. Now, for Atlas-3, I'm a principal atlasser in a county square. I've always been a "slow" birder, making frequent stops and taking the time to watch bird behaviour, so atlassing suits my birding style. When not in "my" square I'm close to home watching and photographing the birds around me. The "Powerline Trail" is one such local hotspot, that I only came to appreciate as a rewarding birding route fairly recently. Part of the attraction is that it passes through a good variety of habitat in a relatively short distance. Walking along the Powerline Trail takes one through scrubby successional habitat (which is terrific for fall sparrows), mature woodlots, a marsh, and some agricultural fields. It was along the edge on one of those fields that someone had once placed a plastic owl decoy, presumably as a deterrent to crop-hungry birds.

On June 12 I took an evening stroll to bird the trail. Heading north, I had passed the owl without noticing anything unusual but on the return leg I saw a House Wren protruding from the north side of the decoy. As I approached, the wren left the cavity and flew a short distance to shelter. I was then able to see clear evidence of a nest inside the body of the owl. The wren later flew to a nearby fence post, heading back towards the nest. House Wrens don't excavate their own nest sites so presumably this pair took advantage of an existing hole in the side of the owl. Perhaps an ignominious fate for an owl, plastic or otherwise, but a nice example of the versatility of wren nesting behaviour and just one of many tales that I'm sure we are all collecting while out looking for breeding birds.





*House Wren and nest* © Andrew Bendall  
- Andrew Bendall, Atlasser in Region 47

If you have an interesting discovery or fun story to share from your atlassing that you'd like to share, please send it to [atlas@birdsontario.org](mailto:atlas@birdsontario.org)

That's owl for now!

- The Atlas-3 Team

**The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 thanks the following for their financial support:**

Environment and Climate Change Canada	Natural Resource Solutions Inc.,	RBC Foundation
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Vortex	Baillie Fund	(Canada Summer Jobs)

**The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 thanks the following for their in-kind support:**

Boreal Avian Modelling Project	Royal Ontario Museum	WildTrax
Natural Resources Canada	Sustainable Forestry Initiative	Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry
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This email was sent by Birds Canada on behalf of the [Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas](#) partners (Birds Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ontario Field Ornithologists, Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ontario Nature).

Charitable Registration No. 11902-4313-RR0001

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