



Press Release

Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas Project

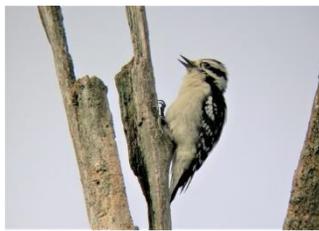
Are Dorchester and Talbot Birds in Decline?

Last September, scientists reported a 29% bird decline in North American bird populations over the last 50 years, headlining the report with a “3 billion birds lost” claim. The researchers were able to mine the information from numerous data sets, collected mostly by citizen birders. Birds are one component of the natural world where local citizens can and do contribute valuable scientific data. Watching birds has become a major pastime in this country, and much of the information ordinary citizens collect from their feeders and nature walks is now recorded in data bases available to scientists and citizens alike.

While the recent headline received national attention, the results were more complex, and not all bad. Parts of the study were disturbing as certain groups of birds saw major population losses; Eastern forest birds declined by 17%, shorebirds numbers dropped 37%, and more than half of our grassland birds have disappeared since 1970. Less reported was the good news; populations of waterfowl, woodpeckers, and raptors all increased during the 50-year period, a testament to the benefits of our many conservation efforts. With climate change and rising sea level, our birds are being put under additional levels of stress, and we need to survey our bird species locally to see how they are being affected. Conservation projects are making a significant difference, but these need to be based on current data that are specific to the area in question. In addition to their obvious aesthetic quality, birds play a critical role in our ecosystems as predators and prey, as they help pollinate plants, disperse seeds, and control pests.



Northern Cardinal



Downy Woodpecker



House Finch

Beginning this year, the birding communities of Maryland and the District of Columbia, led by the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS), are beginning a major survey of this region’s breeding bird species. While our area provides critically important habitats for wintering birds, especially waterfowl, and serves as an important stopover location for many migrant species, the Maryland/DC Breeding Bird Atlas will focus only on the breeding birds in every area of the region over the next 5 years. Every 3x3-mile block will be covered thoroughly by volunteers. This study, as did the two prior Atlas Projects in 1983 – 1987 and 2002 – 2006, will need the

help of local landowners and interested citizens, including those throughout Dorchester and Talbot Counties. Both the Talbot Bird Club and Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge are aiding efforts to conduct this major survey, but local citizens will be the source of the data.

To participate, birding experience is not required, just a willingness to observe and report the data. Prior information can indicate the small number of species that breed in a specific block (a 3-mile square area), usually about 70 species for a rural area and 40 for an urban area. Observers do not actually have to find nests, often well-hidden and subject to being disturbed. Observing simple behaviors can either confirm breeding for a species or indicate a probable breeding status. For example, a bird continually calling over a week period or a pair of birds seen together during breeding season are evidence enough that breeding is probably occurring. In addition to finding a bird on a nest, either seeing a bird carrying nesting material or carrying food (to its young) confirms breeding. Observers need not be able to identify every species seen as more experienced birders will be available to assist with identification.

The results of the study will be extremely valuable as a comparison to the past two Atlas projects as results will help detect changes in abundance and breeding range. While the increase in species such as Bald Eagles, Wild Turkeys, and Great Blue Herons has been a real conservation success, ironically some of the more common species seem to be declining; many birdwatchers can attest to declining numbers at their bird feeders. We can see that our once common quail, the Northern Bobwhite, is in serious decline as are many of our marsh birds. There was a day when every child knew the “bob-white” call of the Bobwhite, but that is now a rare summer sound. With development and changes due to rising sea level putting stress on many species, our past successes lead us to believe that conservation measures can minimize negative effects. We need your help to get the observations needed to evaluate species in our area at this moment in time. Every citizen lives in one of the 130 or so blocks that need to be covered in Dorchester and Talbot Counties.

Simple observations can be reported by anyone; school children were a major source of data in the previous Atlas here on the Eastern Shore. A person could contribute valuable data without even having to leave their property, but opportunities exist for nature enthusiasts wanting to cover larger areas. Data can be submitted several ways: online, by a simple phone app, or by paper checklist for those more comfortable with that method. While we tend to think of breeding as happening in late spring or summer, Great Horned Owls, Barred Owls and Bald Eagles are mating and nesting now.

To familiarize citizens with the methods of the project, 2 local meetings are being held, and citizens can attend either one:

Weds, March 11, 7 PM at the **Dorchester County** Public Library Meeting Room in Cambridge (303 Gay Street but enter from Spring Street).

Mon, April 6, 5:30 PM at the **Talbot County** Public Library in Easton (100 W. Dover St.)

At each meeting the entire, the simple atlasing process will be outlined, materials will be available, methods of simple data entry will be demonstrated, and atlas blocks can be assigned. The entire MD/DC Breeding Bird Atlas Project can be viewed online at [**ebird.org/atlasmdc/about**](http://ebird.org/atlasmdc/about).

For further information, contact: county Atlas Coordinators:

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Talbot – Ron Ketter. [**talbot@mdbirds.org**](mailto:talbot@mdbirds.org)