

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Breeding Bird Survey
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Memorandum to Cooperators

SUMMER 2009

CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS —

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 — NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME | 3 — FREQUENT QUESTIONS |
| 2 — STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT | 4 — 2008 ROUTE COVERAGE |
| 2 — ROUTE PROBLEM EMAIL ADDRESS | 7 — PARTICIPANT AWARDS |
| 3 — RECENT MEETINGS & OUTREACH | 8 — NOTES FROM THE FIELD |
| 3 — COORDINATORS UPDATES | 10 — ACKNOWLEDGMENTS |

NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME

If this is your first year, thank you for joining the flock of thousands who make the BBS a success! Through your efforts and those of your peers, federal, state, and local conservation agencies have reliable bird population information on which to base sound conservation and management decisions. We want your BBS observer experience to be as enjoyable and meaningful as possible. In working towards this goal we provide many resources, conveniently located on our general web site, to assist you. For instance, through the "Data Entry" link on our home page, you can log into our online data entry system where you can take the methodology training, enter your bird data, and maintain stop location information for your route(s). You can also use this site to conveniently update your contact information in the future and to view and print your historical data. If you would like, we can additionally loan you bird song CD's and other resources to help you brush up on your identification skills during the winter months. You can find our contact information both online and at the close of this Memorandum and we are happy to accommodate requests whenever we can. If you have any questions or problems regarding the BBS, please do not hesitate to contact your state coordinator or us here at the national office.

Here are a few guidelines to follow to help ensure that your first year is as productive and enjoyable as it can be:

- 1) Log in to the online data entry system and complete the BBS Methodology Training program and the final review. We can not use your data if you do not.
- 2) Scout your route before the actual survey day to avoid unexpected delays.
- 3) Pay close attention to the instructions regarding survey timing and to the

- specific route start time indicated on your data form(s).
- 4) Submit your data electronically for faster feedback.
 - 5) Return your completed forms and maps in a timely manner at the end of each season.
 - 6) HAVE FUN

Thank you again for participating and we look forward to hearing about your adventures with the BBS.

STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT

In May 2009 Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, unveiled the first ever comprehensive report on bird populations in the United States. The watershed report is the result of an unprecedented partnership between government wildlife agencies and conservation groups, and BBS data featured prominently in the determination of the population trends and conservation status of the more than 800 bird species that occur regularly within the continental U.S. The report reveals troubling declines of bird populations during the past 40 years and indicates that nearly a third of the nation's 800 bird species are endangered, threatened or in significant decline due to habitat loss, invasive species, and other threats. However, the report depicts heartening evidence that strategic land management and conservation actions can reverse declines of birds. Given the prominent role of the BBS in providing data underlying these conclusions, this is yet another excellent example of the overwhelmingly positive contribution that BBS observers are making each year! A series of web pages describing *The State of the Birds* key findings, including a special thank you to BBS Volunteers, and the complete pdf version of the report are available via a link in the "What's New" section of the BBS web page, or directly at:

<http://www.stateofthebirds.org>

ROUTE PROBLEM EMAIL ADDRESS

As the degree of urbanization has steadily increased over the past decade, not surprisingly, so too has the number of route problem requests that the BBS receives annually. Safety is the highest priority in the BBS, and the staff would like to maintain a safe as well as fun experience for all observers. As might be imagined, we receive a large volume of requests each year and, though time and staff is severely limited, we do our best to resolve route problems before the upcoming field season. Observers can send hazard related issues directly to us using our route problem email address (bbsrouteproblems@usgs.gov) or, if submitting data online, via the route problems section of the comments page.

We strongly appeal to observers to consider before submitting route problem requests that, while routes with dwindling natural habitat are certainly less appealing than those in more pristine areas, progressively urbanizing routes are critical to the survey's ability to measure the landscape level change that birds are experiencing. Even so, there are situations where routes become too challenging to hear on or suffer from other problems, such as very heavy traffic, road closures, and safety hazards. In these cases, please first consider that many problems can be solved simply by shifting a stop by the permitted .10 of a mile or by running the route as 'Sunday only', a day when traffic is usually significantly less. In cases where significant safety hazards are imminent and immediate, please cease sampling at that location and call the BBS office directly (301-497-5753) for an immediate route solution.

RECENT MEETINGS & OUTREACH

- 1) National Public Radio ‘*All Things Considered*’ Interview – *Laurel, MD – March 19, 2009.*
 - BBS Biologist Dave Ziolkowski led NPR’s Elizabeth Shogren into the field to discuss the Department of Interior’s watershed *State of the Birds Report*.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102119617>
- 2) N.A. Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference – *Washington D.C. – March 16–20, 2009.*
 - Keith Pardieck represented the BBS during the PIF, Shorebird, Waterbird Working Group meeting discussions, and participated in several workshops and symposia.
- 3) D.C. Public Radio ‘*Kojo Nnamdi Show*’ Interview – *Washington D.C. – April 2, 2009.*
 - Dave Ziolkowski addressed questions about migration, courtship, and other diverse bird related topics on this popular live radio program.
<http://wamu.org/programs/kn/09/04/02.php>

COORDINATOR UPDATES & HELP NEEDED

We welcome Dick Baxter to his new role as Arkansas state coordinator. While we will miss his predecessor, Kenny Nichols, after many years of generous service, we are pleased to see that Dick has agreed to carry the torch and we look forward to working with him into the future.

We are also seeking state coordinators for both Delaware and North Carolina. Having just 10 routes in a region with some of the mid-Atlantic’s most dedicated and enthusiastic birders, Delaware represents a great opportunity for someone looking to contribute to the birding community in a new role. Similarly, North Carolina with its 89 routes and ever growing team of dedicated BBS observers holds a vital position in the southeast and represents a fine opportunity for a conservation minded birder to play a more active role in the Southeastern Bird Conservation scene. Additionally, the BBS is seeking suggestions for a new co-coordinator for northern and western areas of New York who will lend assistance to Charlie Smith, who has been single-handedly managing all of New York for many years. A complete list of current state coordinators and their contact information is available from the BBS web page via the “Contact Us” link.

TOP 2 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF 2008

* *I Recorded (a new species) On My Route Last Year – So Why Isn’t It On My Forms This Year?*

This is by far, in its various iterations, one of the most frequent and consistently asked questions received from observers. The answer comes down to a relatively straight-forward space-per-page trade-off that, as described in previous memorandum, has implications for both how observers record their field data and how BBS staff print and mail materials in the office. At 12 pages long, a route’s set of scan forms can be a cumbersome pile of pages to manage at home, and that’s not mentioning the bulk of paper required for printing or the postage needed for mailing. So in striking a balance between having a minimum number of pages and fonts large enough to read, we are limited to printing just the 65 most frequently encountered and numerous species recently recorded from a route (leaving 9 empty spaces for write-ins). That said, until a

species is encountered with enough frequency or in great enough abundance to edge out one of the more common species already on the list, it will not appear on a route's printed scan forms.

** I Updated My Stop Descriptions Online Last Year, So Why Didn't I Receive A Copy In My Packet This Year?*

When the BBS first started in the mid 1960's, observers were asked to attach a written account of their stop descriptions to the back of the USGS quadrangle maps that illustrated their assigned route(s). Contemporary electronic computing methods, something we take for granted today, wasn't available until many years later though, so the program has amassed a large set of paper maps and corresponding stop descriptions over the years. Two years ago we developed a portion of the observer data entry system to allow observers to create, update, and print their route's stop descriptions, and these descriptions are saved permanently in the database for future observers to work with too. However, due to the large volume of work required to digitize all of our existing paper materials, the BBS staff is not able to switch to fully electronic operations at this time and so isn't able to monitor and print electronic descriptions automatically. That said, we strongly encourage all observers to enter and maintain their stop descriptions online; and we ask that when new stops are created or updated, that observers please print two copies to send in along with their maps to the BBS office. In the future this will not be necessary but, in the mean time, one of these copies is stapled to the observer's map and the other is archived to ensure that our paper records are kept up to date.

2008 ROUTE COVERAGE

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2008 BBS season! Data for 2885 routes have been received by the national office so far. While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2008 data has yet to arrive), Table 1 below provides a good indication of how route coverage in each state shaped up. Only five states experienced notable increases in route coverage relative to this time last year with Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and New Hampshire earning a leg up to the 76-100% bracket and Maine making the leap to the 51-75% bracket. Once again Louisiana observers picked up 13 more routes than they had in the previous year – astounding considering that this is the state's third year of coverage growth! State coordinator, Gary Lester, deserves special recognition for getting the state up to 93% coverage, especially considering that all of this growth has occurred in the wake of 2005's devastating storms, thereby well cementing the base line from which to measure future avian response to the area habitat recovery. Brainard Palmer-Ball and Kentucky's hard working observers also deserve special mention for achieving consecutive years of growth with 4 additional routes covered in 2008. Maintaining consistent growth over multiple years is a task more difficult than it at first appears; the vagaries of weather and unforeseen time conflicts test observers' persistence and measures the adaptability of a coordinator's ability to quickly fill vacancies when they suddenly occur.

Top accolades also go to the observers in Arkansas, Idaho, and Pennsylvania and their coordinators (Kenny Nichols, Rex Sallabanks, and Dan Brauning, respectively) for their herculean efforts in again achieving 90% or greater coverage in their states. It is especially noteworthy that Delaware observers achieved 100% coverage, and they haven't had a coordinator for two years (Remind us again why someone hasn't jumped to work with this great team yet?). Finally, what can you even say about Sandy Williams and the observers in NM...yet again they've set the bar with another repeat performance of 100% coverage – go team go!

If it's true that into each life a little rain must fall, then 2008 was a wet year for the BBS. Twenty-one states experienced a coverage loss of more than five routes. Check and see if your state was one of them by comparing the "sampled in" columns from 2007 and 2008 in Table 1. Four states dropped from their previous benchmarks in the 76-100% coverage bracket to the next lower 51-75% bracket and three dropped from the 51-75% to the 26-50%. Observers are sorely needed in California, Nevada, and Rhode Island where fewer than 50% of routes were covered in 2008 (see figure 1 below), leaving plenty of room for qualified observers wishing to make a difference in those states. Georgia, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Oregon are also in special need of additional observer assistance since recent coverage losses have reduced the sampling efforts of these states precariously close to the 50% mark. If you roost in any of these states, or one of the many other states experiencing reduced coverage, please encourage your qualified birder friends to migrate over to your state coordinator to lend a wing with the BBS. As always, coordinator contact information is conveniently located on our web site.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER - Do you have BBS data from previous years that were never sent in? Remember, it is never too late. Whether they are from last year or a decade ago, we can still use them. While we don't wish to promote late data submission, don't throw them out just because they are old; send them to us!

Figure 1. 2008 U.S. BBS Route Coverage. Percentage of available routes sampled in 2008 by state. Lighter coloration indicates a greater number of vacant routes and the need for more participants.

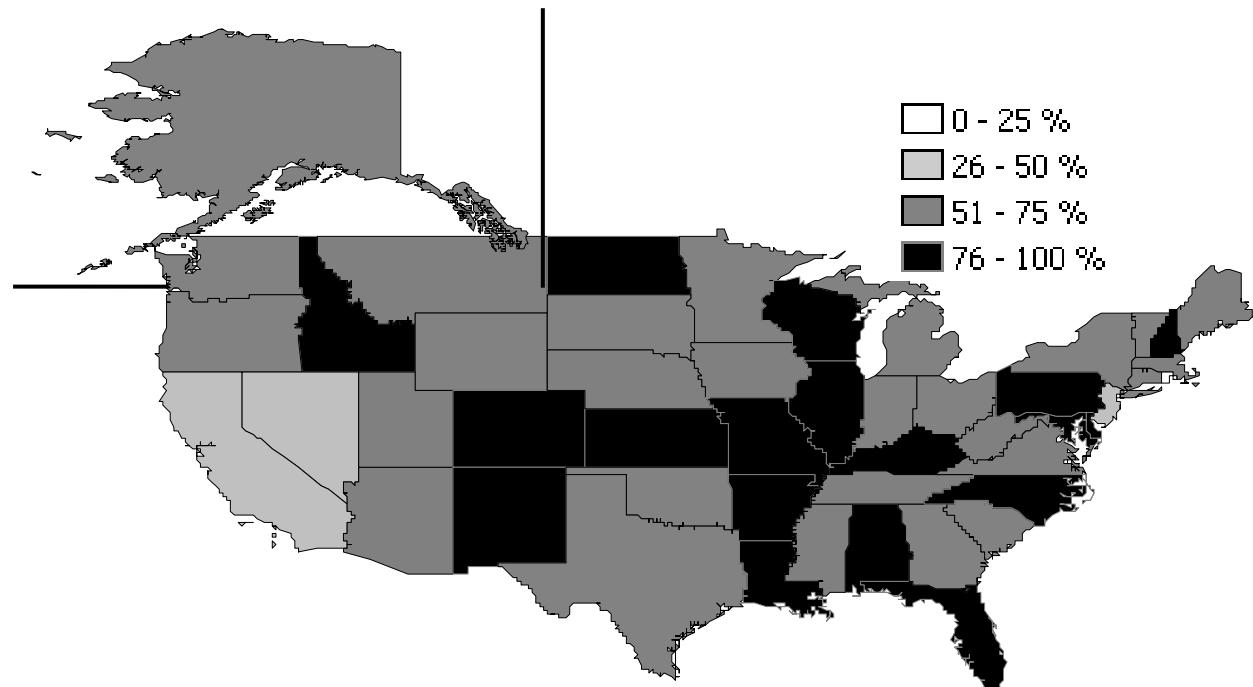


Table 1. 2007-2008 Route Coverage Summary

UNITED STATES							
State/Prov	Number of Routes			State/Prov	Number of Routes		
	Existing in 2008	Sampled in 2007	Sampled in 2008		Existing In 2008	Sampled In 2007	Sampled in 2008
AL	91	80	71	PR	0	0	0
AK	104	66	74	RI	5	1	1
AZ	65	50	45	SC	34	27	22
AR	32	29	30	SD	61	36	35
CA	230	124	107	TN	47	35	35
CO	136	114	108	TX	198	147	140
CT	16	12	9	UT	101	71	66
DE	10	9	10	VT	23	15	17
FL	90	75	73	VA	70	58	44
GA	96	53	49	WA	92	67	59
ID	58	57	52	WV	55	47	36
IL	101	85	77	WI	92	89	74
IN	61	35	39	WY	108	59	61
IA	33	26	22	Totals		3486	2565
KS	61	52	48				2409
KY	47	35	39	CANADA			
LA	68	50	63	AB	180	97	94
ME	70	36	39	BC	134	68	66
MD	56	48	44	NWT	13	9	8
MA	24	21	15	MB	75	61	61
MI	88	60	60	NB	31	22	18
MN	85	64	59	NF/LB	31	20	21
MS	50	30	34	NU	4	0	0
MO	53	48	46	NS	28	20	19
MT	65	47	48	ON	187	99	91
NE	46	35	27	PEI	4	4	2
NV	41	23	16	PQ	155	73	63
NH	23	21	20	SK	87	22	25
NJ	28	21	14	YT	40	14	8
NM	62	62	62	Totals		969	509
NY	112	74	72				476
NC	89	71	69	PROGRAM-WIDE			
ND	44	34	36	BBS	4455	3074	2885
OH	68	54	43				
OK	65	44	35				
OR	124	78	67				
PA	108	90	97				

PARTICIPANT AWARDS

With the completion of the 2008 BBS season, 124 participants have earned the following BBS awards:

Recipients appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category

10-years — 68 recipients:

Amal Ajmi, Susan Anderson, Bill Anderson, Brad Andres, George Armbrust, Eric Bollinger, Gerry Boltz, Brad Bond, Michael Bowers, Roger Breedlove, Rick Brigham, Sharon Browder, Jim Brown, Scott Comings, Skip Conant, Randy Cox, Erica Craig, Bradley Crompton, Nancy Dewitt, Barny Dunning, Daniel Edelstein, David Elwonger, Thomas Flowers, Rick Fox, Bernard Foy, Brenda Garman, Michael Gephart, Rita Goranson, Kevin Griffith, Roger Hedge, Chuck Heikkinen, Jim Hengeveld, Geoffrey Hill, Sharon Hines, Craig Hohenberger, Helen Hughson, Austin Johnson, Glen Juergens, John Kanter, Phil Kelly, Dan Kirk, Paul Koehler, Richard Koval, James Loveless, Susan Martin, Larry Mays, Florence McGuire, Pamalla Moes, Kathleen Munthe, Larry Parker, Glenn Perrigo, Joseph Robb, Peter Robinson, Roger Rose, Jean Ruhser, Steven Schmitt, Tim Shelmerdine, Gary Siegrist, Thomas Sopoci, Peter Stoel, Karen Viste-Sparkman, Todd Warren, David Webb, Laura White, Cathy Wise, Fred Wooley, Tim Woolley, Brenda Wright

20-years — 35 recipients:

Michael Austin, Dana Base, Bill Bertrand, Dan Casey, Allen Chartier, Sam Fitton, Cynthia Ford, Georgia Frazier, Lawrence Gardella, Howard Gratz, Elizabeth Hardesty, Ronald Harrell, John Imhof, Robert Jacobs, Kyle Jones, Alice Kenitz, Ron Lambeth, Gloria Lawrence, Karl Legler, Gary Lester, Keith McMullen, Gerald Morsello, Allan Mueller, Doug Overacker, John Parrish, James Phillips, Kenneth Rosenberg, Steven Schon, Michael Scuderi, Jerry Smith, Daniel Stephens, Cliff Stogner, Eileen Stukel, Donald Watts, Sue Wiedenfeld

30-years — 10 recipients:

H. Thomas Bartlett, David Bradshaw, Keith Evans, William Friday, Joseph Grzybowski, George Robbins, Stephen Ross, Dorothy Silsby, Charles Trost, George Webb

50 Routes sampled — 11 recipients:

Charles Dorchester, Daniel Hatch, Timothy Price, Stephanie Jones, Bobby Reed, Steven Wagner, Bob Rasa, Christopher Smith, Kevin Spencer, Frances Pope, Thomas Skaling

Years-of-service calculations are based on the actual number of years that observers returned data for one or more of their assigned BBS routes. While we value and appreciate contributions made by assistants on routes, we are unfortunately unable to perform such calculations for them given the limitations of our strictly relational database based on observer numbers. If you work with an assistant that has participated in the BBS for any of the award time periods above and feel that they should be recognized for their service, please contact us in writing; include your assistant's name and address in the correspondence and we will gladly commend them for their outstanding service as well.

Congratulations to all and thank you again for your commitment to the BBS!

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

At the end of each field season the national office receives hundreds of notes detailing fascinating sightings, unusual occurrences, and outright tales of adventures from recent runs on BBS routes. This year we ran across a number of succinctly written stories that immediately called to mind several familiar and well-worn idioms that we thought might be fun to share. In a format that's a bit of a departure from our normal style, we include below these stories in their entirety. Thanks to all who submitted notes from the field this year and, as always, we wish we could publish them all. We look forward to your stories in 2009 - and in the mean time, pay homage to the idiom...

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

...near stop 26 we tried to get a gopher snake off the road before a car flattened it. It didn't appreciate the help, curled up like a rattler, then proceeded to go under the car and up into the transmission area. We couldn't get it out so we ended up driving to 2 more stops before it came out from underneath the car. It cruised up the embankment and, hopefully, to good hunting grounds. I feel badly for displacing this snake and will never do it again!!!!

Deedee Delorenzo – Oatman, Arizona

All In A Day's Work

Dodging the 6 bull elk in the road about 1/2 hour before the start is always invigorating! Also had 32 elk, 38 pronghorn and 3 mule deer while on the count itself (new high totals for me). Maybe I should advertise as "Dave's Big Game Safari and Birding Extravaganza."

David Krueper – Fence Lake, New Mexico

All Hell Broke Loose

Stop 17 a pack of coyotes was howling. Stop 19 - we were counting and there was a crashing about 30 feet behind us as a Coyote came racing down the hill, onto the road and seeing us veered away from us down the road. It was followed 2 seconds later by a Wolf at top speed, but when the Wolf saw us it ran straight across the road, smashing through the willows, out of sight and splashing across Nine Mile Creek.

Terry Toppins – Ninemile, Montana

It's Not The Size Of The Dog In The Fight, It's The Size Of The Fight in the Dog

While conducting my count at stop 37, a pair of Cassin's Kingbirds were duly chasing a Common Raven out of their turf. The raven was flying low and slow and one of the Cassin's was pulling at the feathers at the nape of the raven's neck, and as I watched, the Cassin's landed on the back of the raven, continuing to pull on the feathers. The ride lasted only a couple of seconds, but I couldn't help but imagine a hummingbird riding the back of a goose.

Homer Hasen – Sunizona, Arizona

Scattered To The Four Winds

First time in 50 years of birding that I've ever been strafed on purpose--by a crop duster who dumped a load of herbicide on my Federal van. Law enforcement was notified and 10x50's came through with a sharp image of the plane's lettering.

Robert Russell – Chokio, Minnesota

Many A Slip Twixt Cup And Lip

The sky was clear with no wind at all...dead calm, almost spooky! The end temperature was 92°F. The birds were not in full song this year, even they thought it was too hot to sing! At stop number 23 I discovered my stop watch missing...it was not in my car, so I had to backtrack 10 minutes around a detour to stop # 22 thinking I dropped it on the ground, only to find it on the back seat under my binocular case. Then back to stop number 24 to continue along. I had a bottle of Coke with me in my cooler, at stop number 30 I opened it up and it exploded all over everything...so the rest of the route was hot, sticky and sweaty! I was glad to end it at stop 50!

Dale Monette – Ware River, Massachusetts

Like A Cat That Got The Cream

I was especially thrilled to see 2 river otters in a pond half way along my route. What a joy to watch otters while tallying up red-winged blackbirds. I would love to know how these otters found this pond out in grassland and blue oak country and how far they traveled from area streams.

Barbara Peck – Ono, California

Feast Today, Famine Tomorrow

...the summer rains started this week and yesterday my route was hit with several inches of rain. At one stop adjacent to an ephemeral pond, my ability to hear singing birds was limited due to the chorus of calling squirrel tree frogs. They were impressive. At another stop where the road ran between a pond and a patch of woods were dozens on frogs that had left the pond and were going back to the woods. Unfortunately, overnight cars had squashed dozens, if not hundreds. At least they had passed on their DNA the night before.

Michael Meisenburg – Mt. Olive, Florida

Arrow In The Quiver

I use a simple oven timer to count the three minute time span, it is clipped to the visor. At each stop I grab the tally sheet/clip board, touch the timer once (as it has already been set for three minutes from the previous stop), step out and conduct the survey until I hear the timer go off, as I enter the vehicle I reset the timer for three minutes, drive to the next stop, then repeat the procedure. It works really slick when working by yourself.

Robert Keiffer – Laytonville, California

A Day Short And A Dollar Late

Stop 33 at Cochran's Mill is my favorite stop on this route because we ALWAYS get Cerulean Warblers and Yellow-throated Warbler here but not this year. Interestingly enough, we stopped again on the way home after we ran the route. Sure enough, two Ceruleans and one Yellow-throated Warbler were singing as well as a White-eyed Vireo which we did not get anywhere on the route. Sometimes, it's just the wrong three minutes!

Margaret Higbee – Shelocta, Pennsylvania

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides the thousands of you in the field, we would also like to thank Tiffanie Powell-Kommeren and Alan Hedin for their outstanding help in the BBS office during the 2008 season.

Good luck & good birding in 2009!

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