

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Breeding Bird Survey
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Memorandum to Cooperators

WINTER 2005/06

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NEW BBS DATABASE

The long-awaited overhaul of the BBS database and its web interface has finally begun to reach fruition. After more than two years of design and development we recently started the first phase of implementation, Beta testing the observer web entry portal. This is an intensive and important step wherein we locate and work out program glitches and streamline the web pages for most intuitive presentation.

The finished product will be available for public use in early May, well in time for observers to use the system to report their 2006 survey results. We encourage all observers to use this new web entry portal to enter the coming year's data since this eliminates the tremendously costly and time consuming step of scanning data sheets in the office, an especially important consideration given the increasing demands on our staff of two.

Future phases will include the refinement and completion of the coordinator web interface (mid-Aug) and then the release of a stand alone data entry program (Jan 07). This latter feature will enable off-line data entry and require just one quick connection to the BBS web site for transmittal of completed data files. We look forward to these and other technological advances in the BBS and are confident that they will improve the quality of your BBS experience and enjoyment of the program.

NEW PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

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, there you can find and download previous years' species lists for your route, see where neighboring routes are located in the state, map the location of species found in the region using the NBII mapping application, and view trend maps for particular species. If you would like, we can also 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. And remember, 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) 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.
- 6) HAVE FUN -- take a friend, take pictures, or mentor a fledgling birder.

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

COORDINATOR UPDATES

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Bob Reid, Jr., observer since the program's inception and long time coordinator for Alabama. We mourn the loss of Bob and extend our deepest sympathies to his family. Bob would be pleased to know that state biologist Eric Soehren has stepped in to fill the big shoes that he's left behind.

Steve Wagner has retired from his position as South Carolina's BBS coordinator leaving the duties to Laurel Moore. In Florida, Jennifer Swan passed the coordinator hat to Karen Whitney. We thank Steve and Jennifer for their generous service and wish them the best in their future endeavors. We also welcome Laurel, Karen, and Eric to the flock of state coordinators and look forward to long and productive relationships with them.

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Current state coordinator contact information is available on the BBS web page via the "Contact Us" link.

RECENT MEETINGS & PLANNING

1) BBS International Strategic Planning Meeting - *USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center - November 15-16, 2005*. Workshop to evaluate and prioritize the BBS goals and needs established in the 2000 Peer Review report.

2) Joint meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Society and Association of Field Ornithologists – *Beltsville, MD*

- BBS Coordinators' Workshop – *April 21, 2005* – Workshop to address route stop description/coordinate needs, observer recruitment/retention issues, training/certification/assessment considerations, and species detectability issues.
- BBS Symposium - *April 22, 2005* – A series of presentations oriented towards sampling effort and statistical considerations followed by a facilitated discussion.

3) The Wildlife Society 12th Annual Conference – *Madison, WI – September 25-29, 2005*. Scientific poster presentation of BBS observer qualifications and long-term observer trends.

Comprehensive meeting minutes and lists of other products from these events can be found at: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/bbsnews/MeetingProducts/index.html>

2005 ROUTE COVERAGE

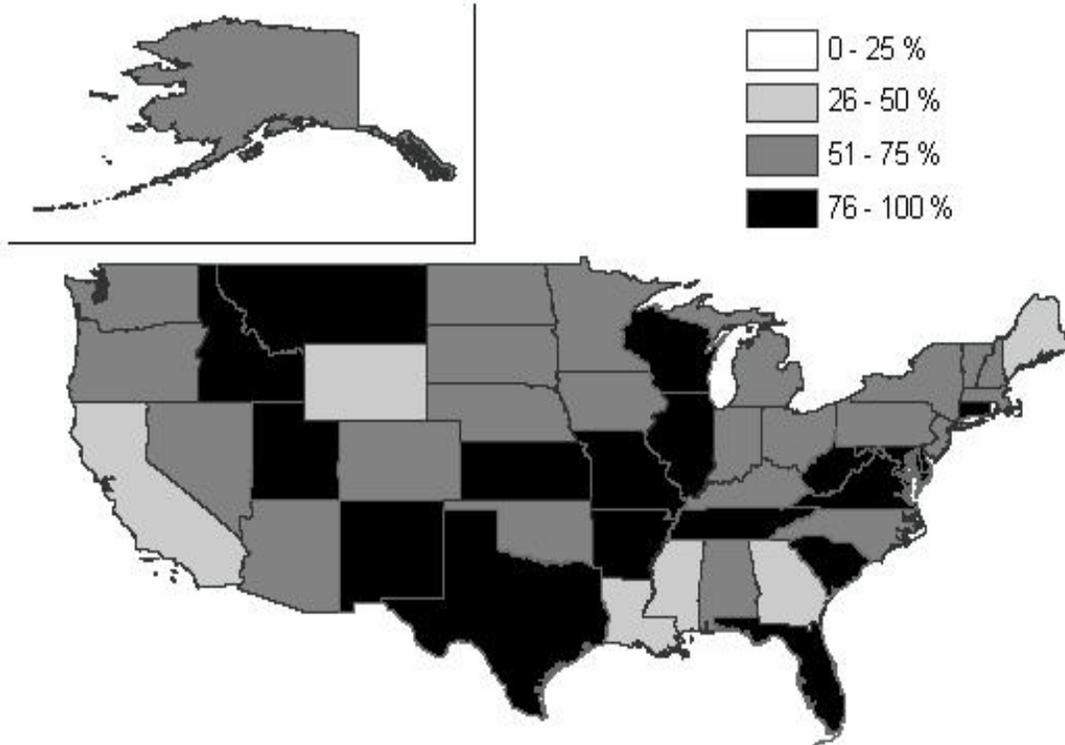
Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2005 BBS season! Data for 2844 routes have been submitted to the national office so far (Table 1, page 4). This year, six states experienced an increase in route coverage by five or more routes. They were Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Nevada, Texas, and Georgia. Especially notable were Georgia and Texas who increased coverage by 10 and 16 routes respectively, and Connecticut who doubled their coverage from the previous year. Those accomplishments earned Connecticut and Texas a place alongside South Carolina as the only three states to move up to the highest coverage bracket this year, 76-100% of all routes covered (Figure 1, page 5). Unfortunately, this bracket became more exclusive as six states fell from their previous benchmarks to the next lowest bracket, 51-75% of routes covered.

While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2005 data has yet to arrive), Table 1 provides a good indication of what your state's route coverage situation looks like. Sixteen states witnessed their coverage decrease by five or more routes this year. Check and see if your state was one of them by comparing the "sampled in" columns from years 2004 and 2005 in Table 1.

Six states are in special need of assistance for their sampling effort. Rhode Island, Mississippi, Maine, Louisiana, Georgia, and California had half or fewer of their available routes sampled in 2005 (figure 1). If you nest in any of these states, or one of the 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. 2005 U.S. BBS Route Coverage. Percentage of available routes sampled in 2005 by state. Lighter coloration indicates a greater number of vacant routes and the need for more participants.



RETURN MAPS AND CAUTION SIGNS

Please return your route maps and caution signs each year! Many observers believe they are doing us a favor by keeping their maps since they intend to run the route again. We certainly appreciate this consideration, however, we do not have the resources to track who has kept the materials intentionally and so must err on the side of caution by resending a full packet of materials to all observers. Over 500 maps were not returned after the 2005 BBS season, causing weeks of wasted effort in copying new maps and re-highlighting route paths in preparation for the 2006 season. In order to prepare for the next BBS season and update our permanent map records we need you to return the maps with your data in a timely manner each year! We thank you for your cooperation.

PARTICIPANT AWARDS

With the completion of the 2005 BBS season, 137 participants have earned the following BBS awards:

Recipient's appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category

10-years (Commemorative lapel pin) — 66 recipients:

Marilyn Ailes, Greg Anderson, Frederick Atwood, Robert Bastarache, Tom Becker, Sandy Berger, Mary Blackmore, Robert Boekelheide, Samuel Bowman, Robin Byers, Dennis Carter, Tom Clark, Barbara Combs, Bernie Daniel, Keith Day, Charles Delmas, Mark Delwiche, Robert Domagalski, Heyward Douglass, Steve Dubois, Tom Easterly, Carole Elder, Jeanne Fair, Stephen Fettig, Robert Fiehweg, Earl Gann, Robin Garwood, Frank Greenland, Bryan Hale, Robert Heagle, Tom Hodgman, Laura Hubers, Larry Igl, Mark Korducki, Mike Lundstrom, Robert MacDonald, Steve McConnell, Chris McGrath, Gretchen Mehmel, Doreen Miller, Don Munson, Perry Nugent, Susan Olcott, Jerry Oldenettel, Brian Parker, Royce Pendergast, Galen Pittman, Jonathan Plissner, Tim Reeves, Ray Robertson, Jon Roti Roti, Pelham Rowan, Terry Sadler, Bruce Seppi, Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, James Simmons, James Sipiora, Beth Siverhus, Eric Soehren, Carolyn Snow, Stuart Stewart, Clark Talkington, Cathy Taylor, William Truesdell, Marilyn Westphal, Russell Young, Elizabeth Zimmerman, and Tara Zimmerman.

20-years (Commemorative key chain) — 39 recipients:

Margaret Brittingham, Daniel Brauning, Robin Carter, George Cole, James Campbell, Lynn Davidson, William D'Anna, James Evans, Thomas Fox, Charles Geanangel, Leroy Harrison, Carl Haynie, Jeffrey Harding, Douglas Harr, Hugh Kingery, James Lawrence, Steven Millard, Joseph Merchak, Nancy Martin, Chet McGaugh, Brent Ortego, Mark Oberle, John Peplinski, Frederick Pratt, J V Remsen, Terrell Rich, Thomas Shane, Hart Schwarz, Christopher Smith, David Stage, Susan Staats, Jim Story, Voni Strasser, Karen Stutzman, Nancy Herbert, Lydia Thompson, Steve West, Steven Wagner, and Susan Wise-Eagle,

30-years (BBS cap) — 11 recipients:

Dale Birkenholz, Gilbert Blankespoor, Dennis Forsythe, Daniel Hatch, Steven Hedges, Daniel Martin, Bill Opengari, Lambertus Princen, Stephen Stedman, James Thompson, and Bill Tweit.

40-years (award to be announced) — 6 recipients:

Danny Bystrak, Ralph Bell, Samuel Dyke, Chandler Robbins, Robert Reid Jr., and Daryl Tessen.

50 Routes sampled (autographed *Birds of North America* guide) — 15 recipients:

James Baughman, Walter Ellison, Keith Evans, John Fussell, Ron Gerstenberg, Frank Howe, Wendy Howes, Terry McEneaney, Lynn McKeown, Craig Miller, Lance Peacock, Lee Pfannmuller, J V Remsen, Hart Schwarz, and Herb Wilson.

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

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Since our last memorandum, many observers have commented that they found Don Varner's advice (printed Summer 2005 memorandum) to be very helpful. Don suggested running BBS routes on Sunday mornings to help reduce the risk of having roadside noise interfering with your count. We whole-heartedly agree with Don as this is also the first line of advice that we offer to observers with concerns about increasing traffic noise. It pleases us to see that so many observers are proactively taking measures to work around this issue. Increasing traffic noise is an inevitable consequence of the high rate of development that many areas of the country are experiencing. Though some observers may interpret these changes as making their route(s) less desirable for birding, the information gained from these routes is critical in building an accurate picture of what our birdlife is actually experiencing out there.

Sadly, another consequence of increased traffic is a greater number of wildlife/auto accidents. On his "Manitowoc" Wisconsin route, James Knickelbine spotted a Great-horned Owl sitting along a fence that runs adjacent to the corner of two highways. James approached the bird (an awesome experience to be sure) and noticed that it was unable to fly. After a quick call to a local rehabilitator, the rehabber picked up the owl and confirmed that it had suffered a broken wing.

On a positive note, it's a rare day when a wildlife biologist hears of birds, and especially game birds, doing 'too' well. We thank Ty Baumann for passing along the sentiments of one fellow along his "Casco" Wisconsin route - "tell the government that there are too many turkeys (100+) and that they're damaging my corn crop". Duly noted.

Two birders came close to crossing the "using a method of coaxing" line on Maryland routes this year. Fran Pope was especially concerned after she noticed that individuals of a species that she doesn't usually record, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, buzzed her on separate occasions on two of her routes. The suspected object of attraction - Fran's new neon pink clip board! Similarly, as he was wrapping up at a stop on his "Van Bibber" route, Dave Webb heard a slight scratching on his car window. He wheeled around to find a brilliant male Prothonotary Warbler in a heated territorial dispute with its own reflection. Dave took a minute to appreciate "the closest view of an out-of-hand warbler that one could ever ask for", and then "dutifully, but reluctantly" drove away to his next stop. Guess we'll have to file both of these under, "gray area".

Another incredible warbler sighting was made by Nathan Kuhnert on his "Big Cedar" Oklahoma route. For the second year in a row Nathan detected Black-throated Green Warblers during his survey, but this time he returned to the site to make the first confirmation of breeding for the species in the state. Some extra searching by Nathan on the same mountain later yielded 4 more individuals. Kudos to Nathan!

John Fedak was treated to a new sighting along his "Rasselas" Pennsylvania route this year; 4 Red Fox kits welcomed him at his very first stop. A Brown Bear on Kristine Sowl's "Cold Bay" Alaska route was not so welcoming as it delayed her progress until it was good and ready to move off-road. Joseph Lynch had bears of a different sort on his "Milltail Creek" North Carolina route; Black Bears - three of them. He felt even they were trumped though by a fresh set of Red Wolf tracks he discovered.

Speaking of mammals, between her seven routes in Idaho, Colleen Sweeney has accumulated one of the most impressive route lists of mammals we've heard of (even including a previous Wolverine sighting!). However, it was the "miles of color and variety of plants that bloomed"

that Colleen drew our attention to this year. Many other observers also commented on the amazing displays of wildflowers that the abundant spring rains brought to some previously drought ridden areas of the west.

As we so often point out here in the national office, your personal safety should always be of primary concern when conducting BBS routes. You probably won't get any argument from Jeremy Roberts though that we may have taken this message a bit too far and wide. This year it appeared that nearly everyone along his "Glen" Montana route was equally concerned about his personal safety. But then, can you really argue with a guy who's had to convince an ambulance full of paramedics that, despite the 911 calls of passing motorists, he was indeed not slumped over having a heart attack ten minutes before at a previous stop!

Even so, it seems that no matter how careful we are in the field, it's inevitable that even the safest of us gets into a bind every now and then. Such was the case with James Olson on his "Timber" Oregon route this year. James reported that, "when I drove up to stop 38 I pulled over onto a shoulder that was not solid and I nearly slid (read rolled) 400' to the bottom of a canyon". Scary enough in itself but then James was faced with the nerve racking task of extricating himself from the vehicle, not knowing if (or when) the shifting of his weight would cause the vehicle to plummet downward. James did, however, find an active Red-breasted Sapsucker nest in the hour and a half wait for a tow truck (small consolation for a guy already recovering from back surgery - but hey, if that isn't making lemonade what is?).

Thanks to all those who submitted notes from the field this year (...we wish we could publish them all) and we look forward to your stories in 2006!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides the thousands of you in the field, we would also like to thank Naoko Griffin, Heather Seebach, Alan Hedin, and Jessica Zelt for their outstanding help in the BBS office during the 2005 season.

Good luck & good birding in 2006!

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