



Patuxent Wildlife Research Center  
North American Breeding Bird Survey  
12100 Beech Forest Road  
Laurel, MD 20708-4038  
www.pwrc.usgs.gov



## North American Breeding Bird Survey MEMORANDUM TO COOPERATORS

### SUMMER 2016

---

#### CONTENTS BY PAGE:

1 — NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME	4 — ROUTE PROBLEMS
2 — 2015 ROUTE COVERAGE	4 — PARTICIPANT MILESTONES
4 — COORDINATOR UPDATES	5 — NOTES FROM THE FIELD

#### NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME

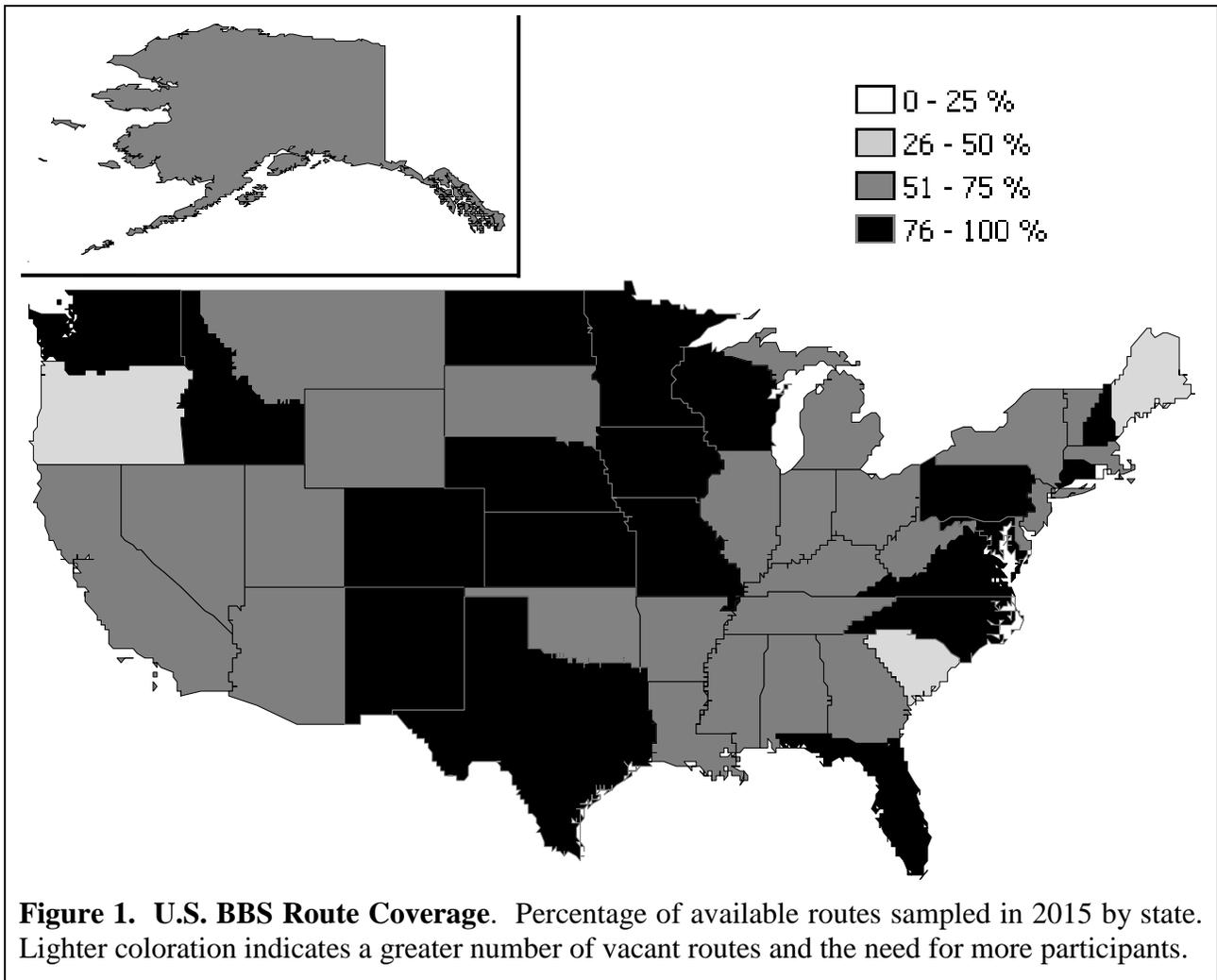
If this is your first year, thank you for joining the flock of thousands who make the BBS a success! Through your efforts and those of your peers, federal, state, and local conservation agencies have reliable bird population information on which to base sound conservation and management decisions. We 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 ([www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs)). For instance, via 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 easily update your contact information and to view and print your historical data. The comprehensive online *Dendroica* bird sound reference tool is available year-round via the “Learning Tools” link and is especially handy for brushing up on identification skills throughout the winter and spring. If you have any questions or problems regarding the BBS, please do not hesitate to contact your state coordinator or us at the national office. You can find our contact information both online and at the close of this memorandum, and we are always happy to hear from you.

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

- 1) Log into the online data entry system and complete the BBS Methodology Training program and the final review. We cannot use your data if you do not.
- 2) Pay close attention to survey instructions (especially regarding observer requirements, survey timing, and specific route start time as shown on data forms).
- 3) Scout your route before the actual survey day to avoid unexpected delays.
- 4) Submit your data electronically for faster feedback.
- 5) Return your maps and paper data in a timely manner at the end of each season.
- 6) HAVE FUN!

## 2015 ROUTE COVERAGE

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2015 BBS season! Data for 3085 routes have been received by the national office so far. While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2015 data have yet to arrive), both Figure 1 and Table 1 below provide good indication of how route coverage in each state played out. As always, please encourage your qualified birder friends to migrate over to your state coordinator to lend a wing. Coordinator contact information for all states is conveniently located on our web site at the “Contact Us” link.



***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!



## **COORDINATOR UPDATES**

We welcome Amy Tegeler to her new role as **South Carolina** state coordinator. While we will miss her predecessor, Bryan Glover, for his generous service, we are pleased to see that Amy has agreed to carry the torch and look forward to working with her into the future.

Likewise, Mike Ward has agreed to take the helm in the great state of **Illinois**. We are excited both to welcome Mike into this new role and also to wish Matt McKim-Louder, who had previously served in this post, the best of success in his new research endeavors.

## **ROUTE PROBLEMS**

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](mailto:bbsrouteproblems@usgs.gov) or, if submitting data online, via the route problems section of the comments page.

We strongly entreat 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 birds 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 (301-497-5803) for an immediate route solution.

## **PARTICIPANT MILESTONES**

With the completion of the 2015 BBS season, 132 participants have achieved the following BBS milestones (*recipients appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category*):

### **10-years — 62 participants:**

Maryanne Adams, Alicia Bailey, Gregory Bennett, Gregory Birrer, John Bissell, Byron Bossenbroek, Ryan Brady, Wayne Brininger, Steve Byrd, Angelo Capparella, William Carlisle, Michael Carlson, David Clark, Robert Claypole, Shilo Comeau, John Drummond, Bonita Dundas, James Dunn, Daniel Erdely, Vanessa Fields, John Froeschauer, C.J. Grimes, Homer Hansen, John Harville, Donata Henry, Peter Hoeger, Derek Huebner, John Hughes, Lois Inskip, Jarod Jebousek, John Jensen, Andy Jones, Jeanie Joppru, Edwin Juarez, Kay Kavanagh, Sandra Keller, Esther Key, Maryanne Kraynanski, David Larson, Frank Lospalluto, Patrick Magee, Kristina Mayo, Penny Miller, Mark Morrisette, Barb Pitman, Thomas Prestby, Ronald Rambo, Brian Rapoza, Tim Rodenkirk, Chuck Saleeby, Bonnie Sample, Thomas Saunders, Mike Stoakes, Sarah

Stock, Thomas Sudol, Wendy Ward, Greg Waters, Mark Watson, Fred Wilhelm, Tom Williams, Nick Winstead, Quentin Yoerger

**20-years — 42 participants:**

Fred Atwood, Beverly Baker, Robert Bastarache, Sandy Berger, Mary Blackmore, Robert Boekelheide, Samuel Bowman, Barbara Combs, Keith Day, Charles Delmas, Mark Delwiche, Karan Fairchild, David Felley, Robin Garwood, Walter Hackney, Joey Herron, William Hoppes, Laura Hubers, Larry Igl, Mark Korducki, David Lockman, Gretchen Mehmel, Susan Olcott, Jerry Oldenettel, Brian Parker, Galen Pittman, Jonathan Plissner, William Portlock, Ray Robertson, Judith Ross, Jon Roti Roti, James Simmons, James Sipiora, Beth Siverhus, Donald Skaar, Beverly Skinner, Teri Slatauski, Eric Soehren, Stuart Stewart, Clark Talkington, William Truesdell, Marilyn Westphal

**30-years — 19 participants:**

Lorraine Bartlett, Daniel Brauning, Margaret Brittingham, Thomas Crabtree, Lynn Davidson, Thomas Fox, Douglas Harr, Leroy Harrison, Jr., Hugh Kingery, Nancy Martin, Joseph Merchak, Mark Oberle, Brent Ortego, James Remsen, Terrell Rich, David Stage, Steven Wagner, Steve West, Susan Wise-Eagle

**40-years — 3 participants:**

Daniel Hatch, Stephen Stedman, Bill Tweit

**50 Routes sampled — 6 participants:**

William Busby, Nancy Cox, Janet Hewitt, Wayne Meyer, Janine Polk, Robert Spahn

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. We value and appreciate contributions made by assistants on routes but, because our database only stores observer numbers, we are unable to calculate their years of service. If you work with an assistant that has participated in the BBS for any of the milestone 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 adventure from recent runs on BBS routes. As in previous years, this past season we received a wealth of stories ranging from funny tales of judgmental moose and terrifying skunk encounters to the more serious side of what the birds are experiencing along our routes. Here we have whittled away at the pile and share some of our favorites.

Jeff Walters seems to have found a recipe for success on his Happy Valley, Alaska route and, like so many beloved birding recipes, this one includes a sprinkling of old world charm:

“2 Bluethroats in 2 days – on 2 different surveys – was fun!”

We bet it was ... hey Jeff, any chance you'd be willing to take along about, oh, 2,000 or so yearning "assistants" from the lower 48 on your next survey? Meanwhile, down at the other end of the country, on the Happy Jack, Arizona route, Cecelia Overby was watching a more new world pair of "blue throats" as they negotiated a little domestic dispute:

"We watched a female western bluebird being buzzed and harassed by a violet-green swallow while she was perched just outside of a cavity. After a bit, she went into the cavity and shortly thereafter, a male western bluebird emerged. He wasn't spared from aggressive harassment from the swallow either! What a treat to see."

Reading that, we can only imagine the colorful scene that had played out at that stop. Not to snub the other senses though ... Mark Minner-Lee wrote about a narrowly averted, ughh, aromatic experience on his Adams, Colorado route:

"It isn't just birds that are encountered - I literally ran into a family of skunks (not with my vehicle) and almost brought a disastrous end to my first survey. Fortunately the skunks anticipated my presence and veered away from me with no consequences otherwise. I'll never get a closer look at 2 adults and 5 young ever again. Talk about a close call!"

Thank goodness for small miracles because, after all the fuss we've made about folks being sure to send in their data sheets, had Mark been sprayed, that would have put a whole new spin on 'making a stink about data sheets' here in the national office! But as Pepe Le Pew is keen to remind, the scent of roses is in the nose of the beholder – and who knows what wildlife think when they smell a birder coming. Maybe that explains William Good's experience while out scouting on the Brunzell Slough, Montana route?:

"The most fun in setting up the route happened when taking the pictures. I was into the routine of stopping the car and quickly taking the four photographs when I realized in the middle of one frame was a young moose with ears in the high alert position looking right at me. I guess we birders get used to strange looks from other people, but that moose had as curious a stare as any I have seen."

Hmm, it's not like that moose could have visually identified the relatively rare form of human known as "the birder", right? But Ryan Slack's experience from the Belmont, Indiana route suggests that this might not be as difficult a feat as we're apt to think, even when we're donning attire that covers up our field marks:

"A couple was headed to church that morning and we were parked near a closed road with 'road closed' signs and they pegged us as *not* being with the highway crew even though we had orange vests on. They even thought we looked like birdwatchers. We explained the BBS process and they were fascinated. Introduced themselves by full name and wanted to know if the road was truly closed or not. Having scouted the weekend before, we knew that the road was actually open, so we were a big help to them."

Thanks Ryan, you were a fine ambassador for the birding community and for the BBS! People are naturally curious about our flock's interests and our passion for birds. And now, of course, there's new technology out there that curious folks can use to further explore the elusive life history of "the birder", as Grace Kiltie recently found out on her Belmore, Florida route:

"We were discovered in the early morning bird-chorus hours of the count (also in the part of the route that is the most isolated from human habitation and the related noise-causing

activities) by an extremely noisy, small, unmanned aircraft (a drone?) that pestered us relentlessly from Stop 10 through Stop 16. It was clearly tracking us and once it found us as we moved from stop to stop, which never took it very long, it stayed above us circling, diving, twisting, and turning, all the while emitting an obnoxious and surprisingly loud noise.... At Stop 17 it showed up again but it did not stay..... Maybe a big sign for the top of the car--birding by ear in progress.”

Wonderful idea on the rooftop sign! But can we suggest a giant flyswatter? (Kidding, of course – please don’t swat down the drone :). Sign of the times I guess; things are always changing. But that’s why we do this each year – the monitoring – right? A point made clear by Jackie Augustine on her Botkins, Ohio route:

“The remarkable thing about this route is what I missed - when I started 5 years ago, I saw numerous Dickcissels, Grasshopper Sparrows, and ducks along this route. Since then, CRP has been plowed under, the ditches and buffer strips have been mowed, and the one little wetland has been drained. The other route I observe every year is heavily urbanized. But I believe in the mission of the BBS, and I will continue to monitor the absence of certain bird species if I cannot monitor their presence.”

This might seem a sad state for that locality, and it truly is in many respects, but at the same time it’s also an important part of a bigger picture. One that involves decision-makers who are trying to balance many diverse interests and who don’t always know the uniqueness and fragility of natural systems until they see it documented in data sets like the BBS – as Jackie is doing. There is a lot to lose, but also a lot to know, and a sentiment from Joseph Neal on the Compton, Arkansas route captures the relationship between these two things well:

“This BBS route covers the upper regions of the Buffalo National River in Arkansas. Data collected over the years has been useful for documenting biological diversity of this region, which is helpful, since as in many places in North America, the habitat is under a lot of development pressure, and bird data over time helps to demonstrate part of what is at stake.”

The BBS dataset offers much knowledge for present day conservationists and researchers alike, and its value will only increase as the years accrue, but one thing it won’t ever accomplish is conveying the feelings that we experience while we are surveying our routes, in nature, doing the things we love. In fact, there isn’t enough space in any database to capture all that ... but there just happens to be about a paragraph’s worth of space below here that we could use to give you an idea of what that might look like, were it to happen. Thanks to Celeste Andresen for signing us off here with this, the last of our 2015 stories, a most eloquently expressed image of what it’s like to do the Cutter 2, Arizona route:

“Jim and I camped nearby the route starting point, since the drive to the route is about 2.5 hours from our home. The evening was glorious and cool, and when the wind kicked up we were grateful that the insects were beaten down, but concerned about what the breeze would become in the morning. Night jars were seen and heard for a few hours after sunset, and Jim was amazed at the calls from both Common Nighthawks and Lesser Nighthawks. To add to the thrilling night music, a couple of coyotes began calling from only a few meters of our camp. We enjoyed the complex repertoire of the local Mockingbird. The stars were so numerous that we remarked to seeing no space between them. The Milky Way looked like a wave floating above our faces, and for a couple of hours we watched the Big

Dipper Spin slowly as the Earth progressed towards dawn. The temperature was about 60F when we bedded down, dropping to about 50F during the night, perfect in every respect. The time to rise came on quickly, and our sweet little alarm sound, chosen specifically to be a pleasant accompaniment to the bird songs we'd soon hear, did nothing to dispense our need for more sleep. Gratefully, Jim loves his morning coffee, especially in the desert while camping, so he was up before I had groggily found my way to turn off the alarm. Coffee brewed, handfuls of nuts and dried fruit stuffed in our cheeks, my driver-recorder-best friend-husband got behind the wheel of my big old Dodge Ram work truck, and we trucked down to the starting point. Imagine the hush of pre-dawn, gravel crunching under tires, low rumble of a large-truck engine, soft scent of night moisture and spring desert-lemon. The blessed wind from the night before had dropped to nothing, and the morning was splendid, clear, calm, with the songs of night jays still with us, and a cacophony of other birds coming our way from the riparian. Our Cutter BBS route thus began.”

Thanks to everyone who submitted notes from the field this year – as always, we wish we could have published them all. We look forward to your stories in 2016!

*Good luck & good birding in 2016!*

**David Ziolkowski Jr.**  
**Program Ornithologist**  
**dziolkowski@usgs.gov**  
**301-497-5753**

**Mikey Lutmerding**  
**BBS Biologist**  
**mlutmerding@usgs.gov**  
**301-497-5803**

**Keith Pardieck**  
**BBS National Coordinator**  
**kpardieck@usgs.gov**  
**301-497-5843**