

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Breeding Bird Survey
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Memorandum to Cooperators

SUMMER 2010

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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). 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. The online *Dendroica* bird sound reference tool (see page 2, below) is available throughout the year and is handy for following up on vexing vocalizations or brushing up on identification skills during the winter months. 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. 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 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.

NEW!! *DENDROICA* – ONLINE SONG AND CALL LIBRARY

It is with great excitement that we announce the launch of *DENDROICA*, a new online reference tool that includes songs, calls, and photographs of all birds occurring within the BBS coverage area: Canada, the United States, and Mexico. BBS observers have earned a deserved reputation amongst their peers for their exceptionally high level of bird sound identification skill. Recognizing that about 80% of birds detected during surveys are detected by ear, coordinators have long sought to provide participants a convenient and comprehensive bird sound reference tool that can help maintain and build upon those skills.

Dendroica fills that niche and, although a few gaps in species coverage might still exist, the online tool is now open for use and can be easily accessed using the link on the BBS home page (or directly at www.natureinstruct.org/dendroica/). We hope to fill the remaining coverage gaps in the months ahead as more people use the site since the online library allows participants to add to our collective knowledge by contributing their own photographs and sound recordings. In this way the reference tool will only continue to improve over time!

Anyone can use the site but visitors should register and sign-in if they wish to make full use of the site's personalizable features. These include the ability to select and save lists of species for focused study, such as all of the breeding (or non-breeding) species in a particular region, or species having a particular song type or belonging to a particular taxonomic group. This also includes quiz settings that allow the site to randomly select songs, calls, and/or photos from your own predetermined list of species. The quizzes are particularly useful for learning bird songs because, with multiple recordings for most species, you won't always get the same recording for any particular species. Give it a try...we're betting you'll find it fun and informative!

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) 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 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 (301-497-5753) for an immediate route solution.

RECENT MEETINGS & OUTREACH

Riderwood Science and Technology Lecture Series – *Beltsville, MD – May 6, 2010.*

- Keith Pardieck presented “The Scientific Foundation of Land Bird Conservation in North America: the Breeding Bird Survey”, a presentation offering a broad overview of the BBS program, its history, and its place in the greater bird conservation world.

COORDINATOR UPDATES & HELP NEEDED

We welcome Colleen Mouton to her new role as Idaho state coordinator. Rex Sallabanks leaves big shoes to fill in that state but, in addition to looking back in appreciation of his generous service, we’re excited to look ahead towards a long and prosperous relationship with Colleen. In North Carolina, Ricky Davis heeded the call and stepped up to the plate to fill that state’s coordinator vacancy. It’s just the beginning of the first inning and Ricky’s already full in the swing of it, filling the state’s route roster and rounding the bases to ensure that many of the older routes still check out. Welcome aboard Ricky and thanks for volunteering! Many states are large enough or have so many routes and observers that coordinators can make great gains by pairing up with a co-coordinator. Such is the case in Michigan where Katie Koch has teamed up with Ray Adams, who previously managed that state’s BBS program single-handedly. We are well aware of how having more hands makes light work so we’re excited for Katie and Ray, and we look forward to working with this team throughout the coming years.

We are still seeking a state coordinator for Delaware. 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. 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 2009

- * *My survey ran later than usual this year because I had to speak with several people along the route, is this a problem?*

In a nutshell, Yes. To fully understand why though, it’s helpful to think about it in terms of an analogy described by Bridget Stutchbury in her book, “Silence of the Songbirds”. It involves imagining that, with our aim of monitoring bird populations, the BBS is similar to trying to monitor how many people live in a city. Getting an exact head count within any particular city is a difficult task that requires a tremendous amount of man-power and other resources. An alternative, however, is to find a major thoroughfare leading into the city and then count the number of people in the cars going by, thus providing an index of the number of people in the city. But what happens when those counts are taken at rush-hour in one year, and then three hours later the next? Granted, rarely would a BBS observer find him/herself three hours behind on a route, but bird activity does drop precipitously throughout the day so it is vitally important for

observers to strive to keep on pace. The average route can be completed in 5 to 5½ hours and the data are most representative when stops are visited at roughly the same time from year to year.

** What do most observers say when they are stopped by curious locals – I want to keep moving but I also want to make sure that I don't put them off?*

Surely the overwhelming majority of BBS participants reading this are thinking, “welcome to the club”; in other words, you’re in good company! Whether it be local landowners, watchful passerby’s, or concerned police officers, many people are excited both to learn about the survey and to have an opportunity to share some of their own bird observations. We have found that the best way to be brief without seeming curt is to assertively mention that you are performing a timed survey but that the Breeding Bird Survey website provides more information, including a complete description of the program, methods, and uses of the data. To aide observers in this task, we have posted a printable page of BBS information cards (complete with official logo, BBS web address, and phone number) that you can hand out to inquiring minds that approach you during the survey. The link to this page can be accessed by navigating to the “participate” section of the BBS home page (or directly at www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/participate/).

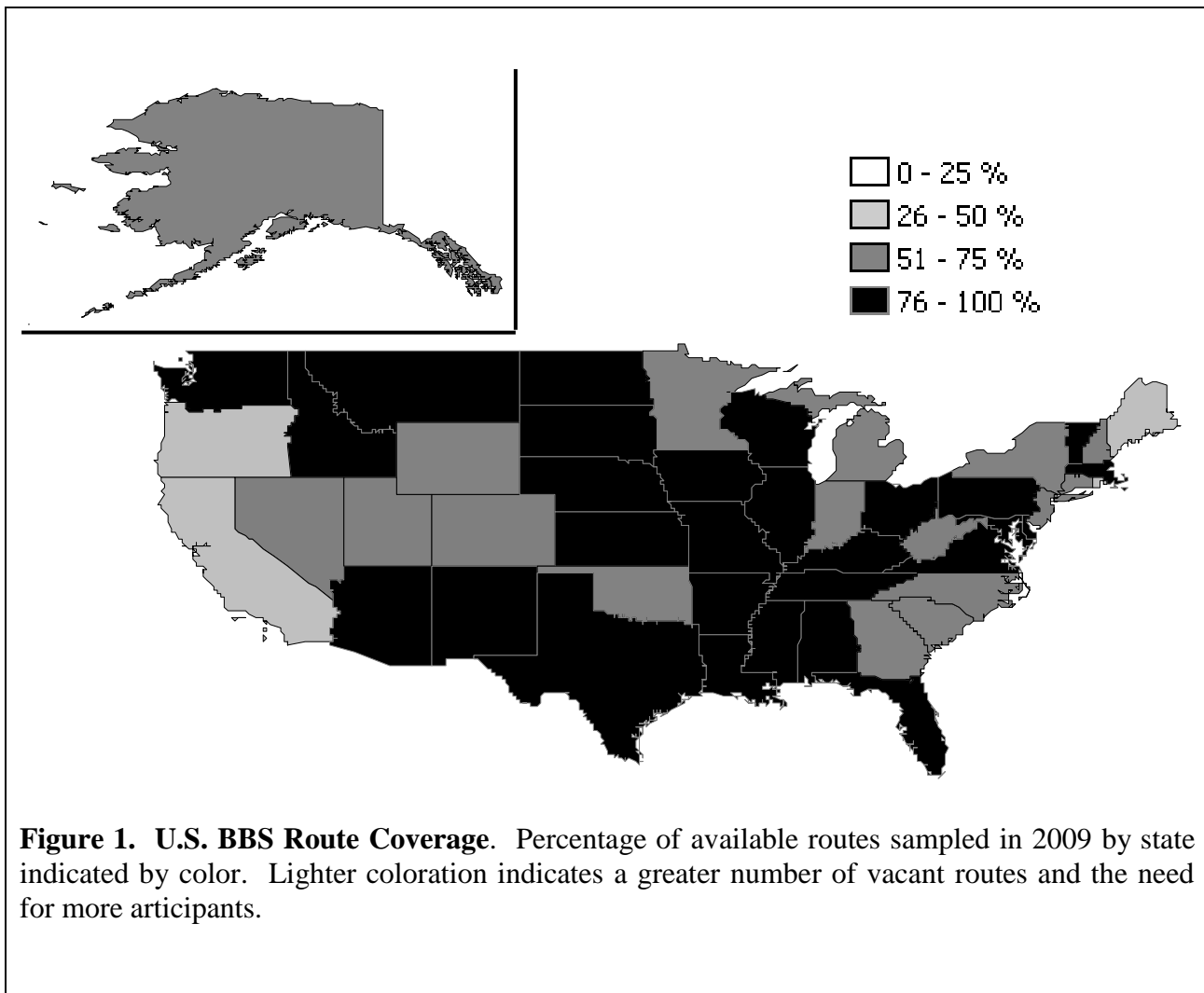
2009 ROUTE COVERAGE

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2009 BBS season! Data for 3058 routes have been received by the national office so far. While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2009 data has yet to arrive), Table 1 below provides a good indication of how route coverage in each state shaped up. Thirteen states advanced into the 76-100% coverage bracket relative to this time last year. The work of Brent Ortego and his devoted team of Texas observers proved once again that everything in Texas is big, if not huge. They rebounded from a coverage loss of a couple of routes in 2008 with a mega gain of 26 more routes run in 2009! We here were just thinking about how big TX is and how much dedication it takes to reach some of these routes – it’s inspiring! South Dakota observers and their state coordinator Laura Hubers, as well as Nathan Stricker and his team of Ohio observers all deserve special mention for having achieved double digit increases in number of routes covered this year. The remaining states that made the leap to the upper bracket include Arizona, Iowa, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Congratulations to the observers and their state coordinators (Troy Corman, Doug Harr, Wayne Petersen, Dan Twedt, Dan Sullivan, Loren Padelford, Chuck Nicholson, Steve Faccio, Sergio Harding, and Ed Miller, respectively).

We’ve said it once before but it bears repeating that, given the number of challenges, maintaining consistent growth over multiple years is a task more difficult than it at first appears. Accolades this time around go to the observers in Mississippi, Montana, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Vermont, and North Dakota and to their state coordinators (Dan Twedt, Dan Sullivan, Dan Brauning, Ed Hopkins, Steve Faccio, and Ron Martin, respectively) for increasing coverage in both 2008 and 2009. And what BBS route coverage report would be complete without again mentioning Sandy Williams and the outstanding observers in New Mexico? They were just one route shy of again, for the third year in a row, achieving 100% coverage. But 98%...who’s splitting hairs – outstanding work!! Keep an eye on Dan Brauning and his team in Pennsylvania and Bill Busby and the Kansas folks though, they’re gaining on you. This year they achieved 94% and 93% coverage, respectively – top notch job!

Seven states experienced a coverage loss of more than five routes in 2009. Check and see if your state was one of them by comparing the “sampled in” columns from 2008 and 2009 in Table 1.

Three states dropped from their previous benchmarks in the 76-100% coverage bracket to the next lower 51-75% bracket and two dropped from the 51-75% to the 26-50%. Observers are sorely needed in Maine and Rhode Island where fewer than 50% of routes were covered in 2009 (see figure 1 below), leaving plenty of room for qualified observers wishing to make a difference in those states. Oregon, California, and Wyoming are also in special need of additional assistance since recent coverage losses there 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 accessed on our web site via 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!

Table 1. 2008-2009 Route Coverage Summary

UNITED STATES							
State/Prov	Number of Routes			State/Prov	Number of Routes		
	Existing in 2009	Sampled in 2008	Sampled in 2009		Existing In 2009	Sampled In 2008	Sampled in 2009
AL	92	73	74	RI	5	1	2
AK	104	73	70	SC	34	27	25
AZ	65	45	51	SD	61	35	50
AR	32	30	29	TN	47	37	36
CA	230	115	115	TX	197	144	170
CO	136	114	101	UT	101	67	72
CT	16	10	10	VT	23	17	19
DE	10	10	8	VA	70	48	55
FL	90	75	78	WA	91	61	69
GA	96	52	58	WV	55	39	41
ID	58	54	51	WI	92	81	78
IL	101	79	84	WY	108	62	57
IN	61	39	41	Totals	3485	2499	2571
IA	33	22	25	CANADA			
KS	61	53	57	AB	180	100	98
KY	48	40	37	BC	133	68	61
LA	68	65	60	NWT	13	8	7
ME	70	39	34	MB	78	61	61
MD	56	47	47	NB	31	18	19
MA	24	16	19	NF/LB	31	21	19
MI	88	63	60	NU	4	0	0
MN	85	63	60	NS	28	19	17
MS	50	34	40	ON	193	97	109
MO	53	46	44	PEI	4	2	0
MT	65	48	54	PQ	152	66	58
NE	46	28	35	SK	87	28	27
NV	41	19	27	YT	40	11	11
NH	23	22	17	Totals	974	499	487
NJ	28	16	19	PROGRAM-WIDE			
NM	62	62	61	BBS	4459	2998	3058
NY	112	74	76				
NC	89	69	59				
ND	44	36	37				
OH	68	43	53				
OK	65	39	42				
OR	123	68	62				
PA	108	99	102				

PARTICIPANT AWARDS

With the completion of the 2009 BBS season, 97 participants have earned the following BBS awards:

Recipients appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category

10-years — 55 recipients:

Keith Arnold, Bobby Baker, Penny Barham, Nick Bolgiano, Christopher Brantley, Marvin Bryan Jr, Jenny Bryant, Susan Cameron, Jeanie Cole, Kevin Corwin, Christopher Cross, Julie Crouch, Steven Doud, Richard Fike, Brush Freeman, Gregg Friesen, Bonnie Gall, Jeff Grabmeier, Jeffrey Hall, Stan Hamilton, Susanna Henry, Kamal Islam, Pete Janzen, Barbara Jensen, Rhett Johnson, Mary Alice Koeneke, Rolf Koford, Susan Lanier, Janet Lloyd, Michael Magnuson, Edwin Miller, Chris Moorman, Diane Nijensohn, Darrin O'Brien, Millie Page, Matthew Pelikan, Gary Pontiff, Cynthia Price, Lisa Rawinski, Peg Robertsen, Todd Schneider, John Schukman, Mickey Scilingo, Thomas Skaling, Joe Suhecki, William Sweetman, Steven Thomas, Carol Thompson, Tony Vazzano, Darrell Vollert, Joel Volpi, Judy Williams, Kristin Wood, Laraine Wright, Ben Yandell

20-years — 20 recipients:

Joyce Bennett, Norma Brockmoller, William Busby, Darrell Chatelain, Roger Clay, Andrew Fuller, Joye Johnson, Claire Krusko, Bruce Lenning, Kenneth Luepke, Robert Mirer, Marian Moeckel, John Patterson, William Patton, John Reinoehl, Sue Ricciardi, Allan Richards, Richard Rivers, Victoria Saab, Diana Teta

30-years — 10 recipients:

Walter Ellison, Don Glass, Edward Hollowed, Harriet Marble, Donald Mease, Edward Miller, Loren Padelford, Michael Prather, Paul Schwalbe, Thomas Sobolik

40-years — 3 recipients:

Barbara Grace, Vernon Kleen, Dwight Platt

50 Routes sampled — 9 recipients:

Leif Anderson, Wayne Bell, Thomas Hays, Gerald Morsello, Florence Mcguire, Barbara Peck, Roger Schnoes, Brenda Senturia, Russ Schipper

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 adventure from recent runs on BBS routes. One could argue that this simply stands to reason since participating in an unusual behavior seems a surefire way of accumulating unusual experiences. Just how novel our surveying actions are to the unacquainted is something well appreciated by veteran BBS observers, but can sometime come as a surprise to our new observers who are greeted with the challenge of informing the curious while maintaining the brisk pace of the BBS. To that note, this year we received more comments and questions relating to this topic than ever before, so we have addressed the issue in our “frequently asked questions” above.

All that to say that the glances from passing motorists and questions from local landowners affirm that traveling across the landscape, stopping frequently, and then intently observing is just plain unusual these days. But as alluded to earlier, unusual has its upside, as Hadley Roberts captured in a question about his Idaho route: how many people can say that they’ve experienced 5 species of big game animals in half a day? Peter Bente could easily ask a similar question on his Alaska routes, where seeing Rock Ptarmigan, a Northern Shrike nest, and herds of Muskox and Reindeer is only a morning’s work. Even after garnering 19 years of experience across over 37 BBS runs in Oregon, Howard Sands is still accruing firsts – and this year he marked another, his first Fisher, running across the road with a Squirrel in its mouth! Much like Mary Ann Hoeffliger, I thoroughly enjoy these stories; and yet I can also attest to not always thinking of my own routes as being nearly as exciting. But this year a handful of stories from otherwise ‘ordinary’ routes made me reconsider that assessment – highlighting dimensions of the ordinary that I might sometimes overlook on my own routes.

Jonathon Anderson, for instance, waxed aesthetic and sentimental in recounting a scene from his Keystone, Washington route; a daily awakening that similarly unfolds on all routes but that could easily go wanting for such recognition.

“Nothing special, but every time I do this route, the sunrise is glorious, and the coyotes howl from the breaks along these channeled scablands. I imagine that they have been greeting the dawn here since the last “Missoula Flood” scoured the basalt 13,000 years ago.”

Surely all of us can concede to at least a tinge of lament in thinking about the elements in our environment that we overlook during the course of an intensive bird survey. But a note from Linda Fink on Oregon’s Riley Peak route drives home that while missing some things may be lamentable, missing other things is just *downright* Lamentable!

“While scoping it [Western Bluebird] and an Olive-sided Flycatcher on another snag, a vehicle drove up from behind and asked if we were in trouble. We explained we were birdwatching. They then informed us they’d been following our trail of oil for the last ten miles. It turned out to be transmission fluid, not oil. The pickup had been running fine so we had no clue there was a problem. The couple kindly took us to town where we called a friend with a tow truck and trailer (no cell phone coverage on our route). We took my husband’s work van the next weekend for our BBS route because our pickup was in the shop getting a new transmission. Expensive scouting trip.”

This one from Sarah Stock on California's Tuolumne Grove route seems a little less easy to make heads or tails of. This one might make you wonder whether there are things on your route that you might just as well be perfectly happy not seeing.

"I'm fairly certain that mountain lions were mating between stops 10 and 11. Wow – the craziest and most wildly violent sounding noises I've ever heard emanating from the forest! I would have investigated (cautiously), had it not been for the strict time constraints of finishing the route on time."

Judy Jordan's note from Utah's Hatch route gives pause in its subtle recognition of things once more commonly seen, but now rendered novel by winds of change.

"Between stops #6 and #7, we had to take about 30 min to rescue a Navajo grandma and 2 children whose truck had broken down. The girl, about 10, came to our Exterra and asked if we could take them to their dad's trailer. We asked "how far?" She said "3 hills". We said "yes", and her 12 year old brother joined us. We asked him how far and he said "3 hills". So off we went. He said to look for a fork in the road with 3 tires piled up with some red paint on them and turn there. The ranch was 1/4 mile off our route and we knew it well. There is always water there. I heard Eurasian ringed necks in the trees, at least 2. The children woke up dad and we took them back to their waiting grandmother and broken truck. Except for a few words in English to us, Navajo was the only language spoken."

Surprising how the familiarity of a local context can potentially eclipse features so unique in a broader perspective. Julia Mast described an otherwise ordinary scene on Indiana's Lagrange route that she, in the course of a 3 minute point count, reframed as a view into the extra-ordinary.

"Once again my route took me through Amish country on a Sunday morning. Between stops a half mile apart, eight buggies passed me on their way to a home for church. One stop landed at such a church home. I pulled up a little beyond the half mile mark to be out of view of the house, blocked by the barn. I was on a dirt road, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. I counted my birds and their song during the 3 minute interval, but began to hear another beautiful sound - men singing. From beyond the barn a mens' chorus of melodic chant, in German, filled the quiet air in a cappella. I was stunned. How could such a beautiful sound with so many voices arise from nowhere? I stayed over at the stop for many minutes listening and marveling to this Sunday morning treat."

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 2010!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides the thousands of you in the field, we would also like to thank Alan Hedin, Ellen Kowalski, and Felicia Lovelett, and Sandra Jackson for their outstanding help in the BBS office during the 2009 season.

Good luck & good birding in 2010!

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