

Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Breeding Bird Survey
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Memorandum to Cooperators

SUMMER 2013

CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1 — NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME | 4 — 2012 ROUTE COVERAGE |
| 2 — NEW!! “Add-As-You-Go” FIELD SHEETS | 7 — PARTICIPANT AWARDS |
| 2 — NEW!! ONLINE ROUTE VACANCY MAP | 8 — ROUTE PROBLEMS |
| 2 — COORDINATOR UPDATES | 8 — NOTES FROM THE FIELD |
| 3 — FREQUENT QUESTIONS | 11 — ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS |

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, 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 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 BBS season 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 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!

NEW!! BLANK PRINTABLE “Add-As-You-Go” FIELD SHEETS

BBS observers know that, in the course of returning their maps at the end of the season, it's also essential to include a copy of their original field sheets to allow the BBS office to complete our annual error-checking routines. That's a relatively straightforward task for observers who record their data directly onto our official scan sheets, but it can be more of a challenge for “add-as-you-go” style users who create their own field sheets of varying pages and formats. As with all data collection though, it's paramount that these folks take the time to create their field sheets prior to heading into the field each year. With these things in mind, we're pleased to offer a series of blank, printable 8 ½” x 11” field sheets that, when printed front and back, provide “add-as-you-go” style users a relatively compact and time saving option. If you're an add-as-you-go style observer, please visit the BBS website and click on the “Participate” link, where you can both see and print these for use in the field.

NEW ROUTE VACANCY MAP

Recent visitors to the BBS website have likely noticed that we've revamped the tool that displays what routes are available in any particular state and where they're located. If you haven't seen this new tool yet, take a minute to stroll over to the BBS home page and click the “Vacant Routes” link. The map is interactive so some functions, like the ability to turn on route paths, appear the further you zoom in. Bear in mind that this tool was designed solely for the purpose of providing prospective observers just enough information to allow them to identify available routes and assess whether they would be a good fit for them. That having been said though, there's also a wealth of information about all currently active BBS routes (including run details, species lists, etc.) that's likely to be of interest to existing observers too.

COORDINATOR UPDATES & HELP NEEDED

We welcome Joel Jorgensen to his new role as **Nebraska** state coordinator. In the 2012 memo we congratulated Loren Padelford for his successful 25+ year run in that state, and now we're relieved and excited to have Joel continuing in that legacy.

It is also with great excitement that we welcome Maurice Mills to the post of **Maine** state coordinator. The northeast has a strong reputation for good leadership in bird conservation, so we look forward to the progress that Maurice and that state's fine pool of observers will make.

After years of working with observers to keep **Louisiana** routes filled, we were sad to see that Gary Lester was going to pass the torch. He still plans on continuing to add to his impressive total of 187 routes completed, but his friend and former colleague, Michael Seymour, has heeded the call and taken up the reigns in his stead. We look forward to working with Michael well into the future.

We congratulate Mike Delany on his retirement from the **Florida** Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and also Erin Hewett Ragheb, scientist and artist, for her being named as Mike's successor. While we will miss Mike as the Florida state coordinator, we're looking forward to building a long and prosperous relationship with Erin, Mike's replacement, over the years to come.

For the past several years in **California**, Lyann Comrack, Rob Doster, and Brian Williams have proven that, by pairing up with co-coordinators, great gains can be made in large states that have many routes. Thanks to Daniel Applebee for volunteering to join this industrious team in Lyann's place, providing her a well-earned break from her generous service to enjoy more post-retirement birding.

We continue our search for 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.

If you think you might like to increase your involvement in the BBS program and help coordinate the efforts of some of the best birders and most dedicated conservation minded folks in the country, please contact us at the national office. We would especially appreciate help directing the BBS effort in the states listed above. As always, a complete list of current state and national coordinators and their contact information is available from the BBS web page via the "Contact Us" link.

TOP 2 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF 2012

** I noticed in the newsletter last year that I've been doing the BBS for 10 years but I hadn't received a pin. Do you guys still send those out?*

It was with dismay that, due a number of factors including budget uncertainties, etc., we weren't able to get awards out last year at the time that we normally would. Because the BBS operates on such a tight schedule, this shift and others had created an awards backlog that we haven't been able to get to just yet. Although we frequently hear from observers that they don't participate in the survey for the awards, it still is very important to us to be able to express our sincere appreciation and gratitude to observers for their service. We plan on catching up to this backlog later this summer so for those observers who we've missed providing commendation to this year and last, you'll be hearing from us later this year. In the meantime, thanks again for your patience!

** I get stopped frequently on my route by passerby's who want to make sure I'm OK, but it concerns me even more when I see residents come out to ask me why I'm looking at their property. These things are killing my timing – how is it that others are avoiding this?*

That is one sentiment that every BBS observer can relate to, so take consolation in that you're in good company. Routes will, of course, vary depending on where they occur but, if you're in a busy area, which it sounds like you are, then you might want to follow the advice Walt Hackney sent in from his Colorado route. He wears a high visibility construction worker's vest (the kind

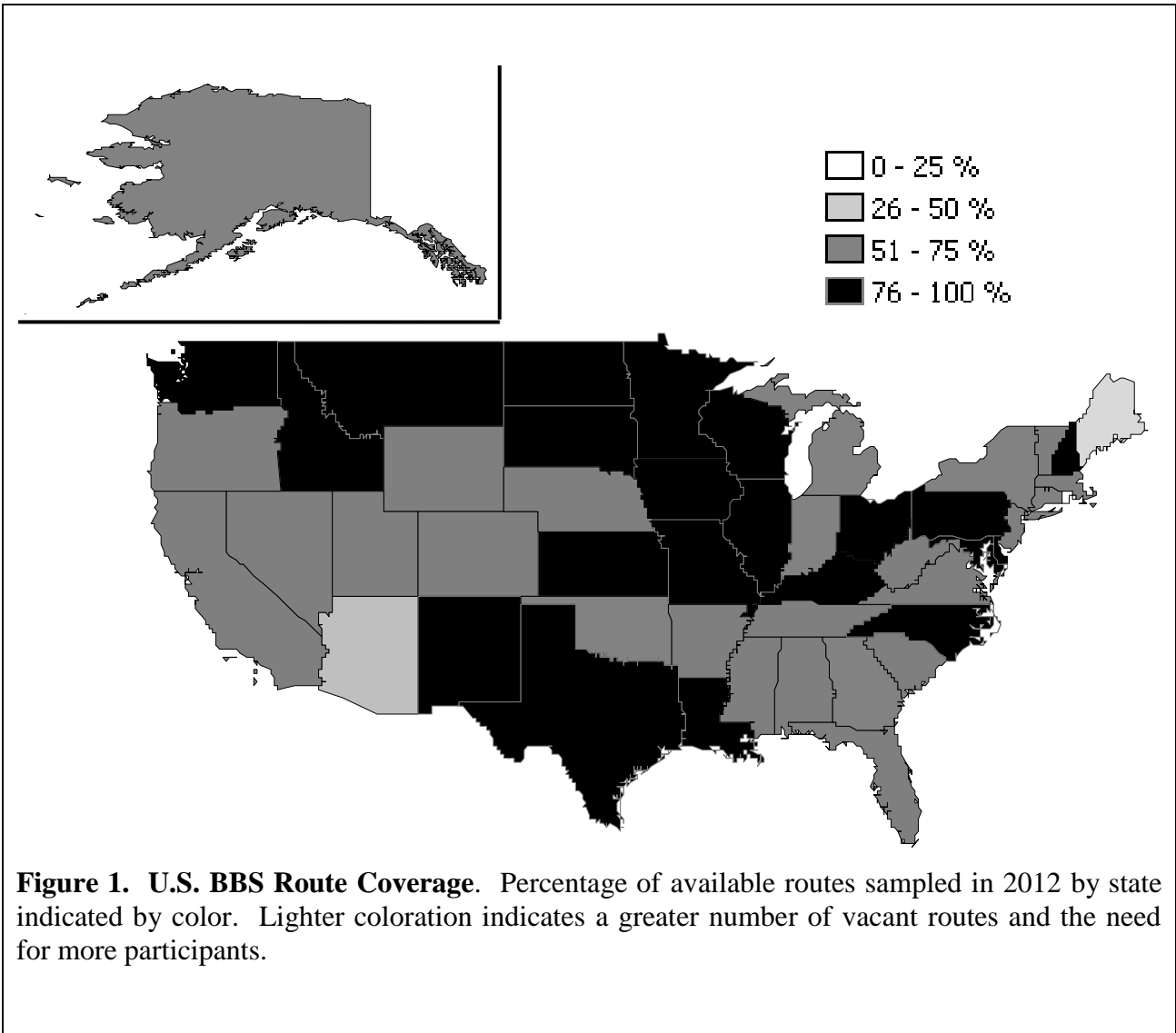
with the reflector strips) that he picked up from the local big-box home repair store. He says, *“The reflector strips really stand out to passing traffic and we look more “on purpose” as we do our observations. I have worn mine for the last two years and have had far fewer passersby stop to ask if I needed help or inquire what I was up to – I looked like I was supposed to be there. It seemed like vehicles went a little slower as they passed also.”* We here in the office always wear ours when in the field and we agree whole-heartedly ... when we forget our vest is when we get stopped a lot.

2012 ROUTE COVERAGE

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2012 BBS season! Data for 3071 routes have been received by the national office so far. While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2012 data have yet to arrive), both Figure 1 and Table 1 below provide good indication of how route coverage in each state played out. Relative to last year’s map, 10 states gained a leg up to the next highest coverage bracket. Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, Ohio, and Washington recovered from coverage losses in the previous year to advance from the 51-75% coverage bracket to the 76-100% bracket. Oregon, West Virginia, and Wyoming made recoveries that advanced them from the 26-50% bracket to the 51-75% bracket. California had made that step too, only it was more of a bounding leap – the hard working observers there covered 29 more routes than they had in 2011! Rob Doster, Lyann Comrack, and Brian Williams have been working hard to fill that state’s 228 routes, which is obviously a formidable challenge, and with growth like this, it’s clear that their combined effort has been paying off!

Seven states had sampled 90% or more of their available routes in 2012. This is an appreciable feat so we want to especially acknowledge the dedicated observers in Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin and also their respective state coordinators (Collen Moulton, Bill Busby, Dave Ziolkowski, Sandy Williams, Ricky Davis, Dan Brauning, Mark Korducki) for this fine accomplishment.

One of these years we’ll be able to end on that high note but, unfortunately, 2012 wasn’t the year for it. Twelve states had experienced a coverage loss of more than five routes in 2012. Check and see if your state was one of them by comparing the “sampled in” columns from 2011 and 2012 in Table 1. Six states dropped from their previous benchmarks in the 76-100% coverage bracket to the next lower 51-75% bracket, and one dropped from the 51-75% bracket to the 26-50% bracket. Observers are sorely needed in Arizona, Maine, and Rhode Island where fewer than 50% of routes were covered in 2012 (see figure 1 below), leaving plenty of room for qualified observers wishing to make a difference in those states. New York, South Carolina, Utah, and Wyoming are also in special need of additional observer assistance to reverse recent coverage losses. 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 the state coordinator to lend a wing. As always, coordinator contact information is conveniently accessible via the “Contact Us” link on our website (<https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/contactus/>).



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!

PARTICIPANT AWARDS

With the completion of the 2012 BBS season, 149 participants have earned the following BBS awards:

Recipients appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category

10-years — 68 recipients:

Laurel Barnhill, Carol Beardmore, William Benish, Kathy Beyer, Milton Blake Jr., Kim Bousquet, Alexander Brown, Crista Cabe, Charlie Chase Iii, Dwight Cheeks, John Churchill, Marvin Collins, Rickie Crone, D. Currie, Glenn D'Entremont, Lisa Edwards, John Ehinger, Fern Ford, Dawn Fox, Nancy Freedman, Steve Gross, William Grossi, Eric Haley, Thomas Hall, Beverly Hansen, Lisa Hardy, Ginny Hartman, Susan Hazelwood, Dona Hilkey, Stephanie Horton, Pamela Hunt, Henry Ingersoll, Richard Kostecke, Nathan Kuhnert, Dell Little, Elizabeth Madden, Eric Masterson, Gary Matthews, Curt Mccasland, Jody Millar, Jim Mountjoy, Lannois Neely, Brooke Nicotra, John Nystedt, Ricky Olson, Ed Pandolfino, Andy Paulios, Robert Penner, Catherine Pohl, David Rintoul, Janet Ruth, Floyd Schrock, Amy Seglund, Jan Shaw, Randy Siebert, Tom Skilling, Barbara Smith, Dave Sovereign, John Spahr, Robert Sparks, Douglas Stotz, Charles Swift, Linda Wagner, Mindy Waldron, Robert Walton, Mike Ward, Dennis Wiesenborn, David Ziolkowski Jr.

20-years — 51 recipients:

Jack Armstrong, Susan Bagby, Allen Batt, David Benson, Kathleen Bibby, Michael Borysewicz, Kevin Calhoon, Eva Crane, Laura Deming, Joan Elias, Cynthia Ellis, Mark Elwonger, Thomas Evans, Steven Ford, Tanner Girard, Theresa Hartz, David Hauber, Scott Horton, Mark Howery, Mary Humphrey, Jay Kaplan, Danny Kassebaum, James Knickelbine, Bill Lisowsky, M. David Luneau, John Mahon, Craig Miller, Warren Nelson, Don Norman, Charles Otte, Christine Paige, Mark Phipps, Neal Ratzlaff, Robert Ross, Russ Schipper, Roger Schnoes, Brenda Senturia, Darrell Shambaugh, James Sparks, Kevin Spencer, Randy Stanley, Todd Strole, Ned Swanberg, Terry Toppins, Dale Tribby, Else Van Erp, Lynn Verlanic, Larry Weber, Daniel Williams, Mike Wolder, Chuck Yohn.

30-years — 17 recipients:

Paul Adamus, Chris Baer, Barbara Duerksen, Mary Eberwein, Thomas Feiro, David Freeland, Steve Gniadek, Katherine Haws, Michael Huber, Timothy Matson, Bruce Peterjohn, Janine Polk, Jerry Probst, Susan Richmond, Georgann Schmalz, Charles Smith, Meryl Sundove.

40-years — 2 recipients:

Elizabeth Brooks, Noel Cutright.

50 Routes sampled — 11 recipients:

David Cleary, Ruth Gronquist, Joseph Grzybowski, Mark Oberle, Paul Raney, Jr., John Reinoehl, Robert Russell, Mark Stackhouse, Shelley Steva, Richard Stuart, Diana Teta.

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!

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 (301-497-5803) for an immediate route solution.

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 year we received a number of brief musings and succinctly written stories that we feel well represent a number of different aspects of the BBS experience.

Thanks to Bill Vermillion on Louisiana's Natchez route we can start out by saying, move over "Powdermilk Biscuits" and "Bepop-A-Reebop Rhubarb Pie", the BBS made it onto that quintessential staple of public radio, "A Prairie Home Companion"! Bill explained:

"Set up tent in Kisatchie National Forest the day before running this route and drove to Natchitoches, LA to meet a friend on his way to see a live recording of the "Prairie Home Companion" radio show in Shreveport. Audience members are encouraged to submit notes for the program host to read after intermission. I submitted a note. Was delighted to hear the host Garrison Keeler read my note: "Dennis says "HEY" to Bill Vermillion up here conducting a Breeding Bird Survey." Keeler went on to joke "I thought all birds were breeding"."

You don't even need to be a "Norwegian bachelor farmer" to appreciate that – thanks for the publicity Bill! While surveying Utah's Moab route, Terri Pope also had a close encounter of the entertainment kind. Terri described seeing:

"Filming "The Lone Ranger" along Hwy 128, the first half of the route. Trucks with movie props going by during the survey, including train engine and car replicas."

Now if we go to see that movie, we'll be looking at every distant hill in the background wondering if Terri was on the other side running her route. Two other observers found themselves nearly swept up in an entertainment event this past summer too. As Phil Wire recounts from his Millwood, Missouri route:

"I ran my route on the Fourth of July to lessen vehicle disturbances... which worked! However, I also ran into a crowd at the (very small town of) Bellflower, MO, Fourth of July parade! I got some strange looks from onlookers, but I got my stop in the town done with no problems!"

If anyone could know what Phil was feeling, it's probably Elizabeth Johnson given her similar encounter on the Bloomsbury, New Jersey route:

"We ended up doing the route on Memorial Day this year. The route actually ends in a town that is the county seat of Warren County - and they celebrate Memorial Day big-time. We got to town to find that they had closed a portion of the route for the parade so we took some side roads to try to get around to the next stop. On our detour we just missed becoming "part" of the parade itself, and were able to squeak through to the next stop without losing time. Kind of fun to hear and see a parade on the survey!"

It's certainly not every day that a parade crosses your path, but then again, for most of us, it isn't every day that a bear crosses our path either. Granted, we stress that it's important that observers stay on task and move briskly when performing surveys, but Tom Hall and his daughter were quick on the draw and captured the event on Colorado's Buffalo Park route:

"My daughter Robyn and I had an interesting occurrence on our survey. We were driving around a corner in the road to a black bear in the middle. Fortunately I was going slow. I told my daughter to get the camera ready. She got it out, but the bear tootled up the hill on the side of the road out of sight before she could snap off a shot. We watched the hill for a few minutes and gave up. We drove around the next corner and "lo-and-behold" it was in the middle of the road again. This time it booked it - bears are something to watch run (usually much faster than given credit). I looked at my daughter and said, "I guess we won't get a picture of him" and she, "But dad, I did!" I could not believe it, but she snapped a quick shot and got him in action. ... What a feat to catch it mid-stride - I was shocked!"

Speaking of bears, that reminds us of another thing we'd be all too happy to be accused of over-stressing: safety first! Catherine Pohl took that to heart on her Hoonah, Alaska route this past summer (OK, maybe preservation-of-self had something to do with it too but):

"When a large brown bear crossed the road in leisurely fashion as I approached a survey point, I decided to survey that one from inside the car, with my head out the window and above the car. This felt silly, as you can imagine, but I felt exonerated when I saw the bear moving slowly parallel to the car about 15' away after I completed the count. It had been laying low in roadside brush right next to the car."

After all this talk of bears, we came across a pair of interesting Gray Jay anecdotes that had us recalling the old adage, ‘some days you eat the bear; some days the bear eats you’. The first came from Todd Deininger on the Radium, Colorado route:

“I saw a great interaction between a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and a Gray Jay. It seems that the jay was trying to get at a nest and the kinglet kept jumping in front of the jay and flashing its red crown. The jay would fly a short distance away, then come back to the same tree and the whole thing would start over again.”

What’s a kinglet to do when confronted with one of the most notorious nest predators in the forest? Well, suffice to say, it sounds like some kinglets got a day’s reprieve on one of Dara Whitworth’s stops on the Mud River, Alaska route this past summer:

“It was a grey, drizzly day with low clouds hovering just above the trees and rain pattering droplets on the smooth tea-colored water. We were just about to begin surveying at one of the stops when an osprey swooped overhead and landed on a nearby branch. It was clutching a prize in its talons; a dead gray jay! If only we could have witnessed the capture; it must have been thrilling.”

We wish we knew whether the Osprey eventually ate the jay! Records of Osprey taking birds are few and far between and most have involved aquatic birds, as you might expect. Surprisingly though, Charles Allen’s accounts from Plum Island, NY in the late 1800’s describe that birds as large as Black-crowned Night Herons and even as terrestrial as crows have been taken.

One of the things we love about hearing and sharing your stories is that, though we’re all in different parts of our great country, we all share the same passion ... and apparently a lot of the same eccentric experiences too! Like these next four stories that we here in the BBS office can personally vouch for having experienced ourselves in one way or another. We think it’s likely that you have too so we’ll file these under, “classic moments in common BBS history”:

Milt Blomberg’s story from Minnesota’s Mille Lacs route reminds us that worse things can happen to you on a BBS route than a bear encounter. After all, bears just attack you and then they’re done – but Milt was flirting with a real long-term disaster here:

“Lost a half hour at Stop #13 due to trying to find my wife's nice watch! Looking under the seats of the car and all..I then Assumed it was left on the trunk of the car as I drove down to Stop #14. I tried twice to find it along the shoulder of that half-mile roadway. I decided to continue on with the route and come back to search again. All along the journey my poor mind was bumming. At Stop #50, I decided to search the car again, but from the passenger side. A shiny piece of the band showed itself from a glint of sun in the well-hidden crease between the console edge. ... I will bring my own timer next time.”

How many times have *you* lost something on your route? But, then again, how many times have you *wished* you’d lost something on your route – like this memory that Joyce Fry picked up along her Johnsonville, Kentucky route:

“Before first stop, man came to door in underwear and I had to apologize and explain over the barking dog noise what I was doing.”

Sorry Joyce; it probably won't help now but we appreciate that you took one for bird conservation there! We feel for Margaret Higbee on Pennsylvania's Parkwood route too – we don't have a shoe fund but if we did, we'd send her a pair for taking this one in stride:

“At Stop 25 my husband Roger pulled over into high grass to get off the road as he usually does. I jumped out and felt something squishy underfoot. Looking down I realized I was standing on a dead raccoon. It startled me—I screamed and ran around to the other side of the van. Roger very calmly said, “I'll move up.” He pulled ahead about 20 feet and we started the timer. For several stops I was sure I smelled something dead, but...”

Trust me when I say that all of us here in the office would be owed new shoes, and we're sure that most of you probably would be too. It's good to know that there's help to be found on the road though. And Judy Kestner sent in a great example of just how anxious people along the Petronila, Texas route can be to render that help:

“This year a woman pulled up behind me, got out of her SUV with her cell phone stuck in her ear and asked if everything was all right. "I'm calling 9-1-1 right now because I was worried about you." What the.....???? But I do appreciate the concern ... and it's heartening to know that we're looking out for each other.”

James Sipiora has the right idea about how to deal with these situations as exemplified on his Cleburne, Texas route:

“Your little handouts about the BBS came in handy at stop 33. A pickup approached cautiously and the driver asked if I needed help with anything. I handed him the little form and his whole demeanor changed. He said he was sorry to bother me but there had been several arson fires in the area recently. ... A couple of days later in the news I saw that two arrests had been made for arson in that area.”

Thanks James, for giving us the perfect opportunity to remind everyone that the informational handouts are available at the “participate” link (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/participate/) on the BBS home page. Thanks to everyone 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 2013 and, until then, we'll leave you with this vivid recollection from Laura Hubers on South Dakota's Raymond route.

“Had a beautiful full moon light my way to my route. As I started my route I couldn't figure out why the moon was starting to look fuzzy along one side. Got to witness a partial eclipse before it sunk below the horizon. What a spectacular and unexpected sight. Makes those early, early mornings extra special and worth the lost sleep.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Besides the thousands of you in the field, we would also like to thank Alan Hedin for his outstanding help in the BBS office during the 2012 season.

Good luck & good birding in 2013!

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