



# Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas

Atlas des oiseaux nicheurs de Terre-Neuve

FALL NEWSLETTER 2020

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## Atlas Update

Launching a new breeding bird atlas is always a challenge—but particularly so in the middle of a pandemic.

Early last winter, the Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas was gathering momentum, with plans for an official launch event and workshops across the island. But in March, everything changed: people were asked to stay home, national parks and other outdoor spaces were closed to the public, and NL closed its borders to everyone except residents.

Birds Canada put citizen science surveys on hold, and for a few months, it seemed unlikely that any Atlas data collection would happen this summer. Even when surveys slowly began to resume, we encouraged volunteers to avoid travel and instead asked them to atlas their own backyards and neighbourhoods.

But the Newfoundland Atlas volunteers rose to the challenge magnificently. The online Atlas database began filling with bird sightings from cities, towns, and villages all over the island. And as public health restrictions began to relax and atlasers ventured further afield, data trickled in from some of the more remote atlas squares. In total, over the last 6 months, **88 registered participants have spent more than 780 hours surveying for birds, collecting data in 265 atlas squares and reporting breeding evidence for 134 species.**

This year's highlights include the discovery of a Rough-legged Hawk nest (with 5 eggs) on the Avalon Peninsula and a report of probable breeding for Bay-breasted Warblers in Barachois Pond Provincial Park, where they were seen for the first time in 11 years.

Thank you to all the volunteers and supporters who worked so hard to make the first year of the Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas a triumph! To keep up with the Atlas over the winter and get the latest news and events, check out our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

### Progress To Date:

Checklists: 1074

Registered participants: 88

Squares with data: 265

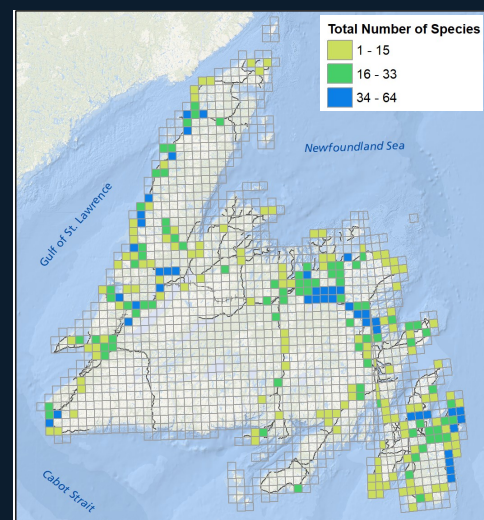
Records: 9413

Breeding species: 134

Hours of atlassing: 783.5

Point counts: 270

Current as of 28 Nov. 2020



A publication of







Rough-legged Hawk nest discovered on the Avalon Peninsula. Breeding evidence: NE.  
 Photo: Alvan Buckley



Male Bay-breasted Warbler in breeding habitat. Breeding evidence: H.  
 Photo: Randolph White



Black-legged Kittiwake nest at Cape St. Mary's. Breeding evidence: NY.  
 Photo: Catherine Dale

## Table of Contents

Atlas Update .....	1
2020 Highlights .....	3
Species at Risk.....	4
Whoooo's there? .....	5
An App for the Atlas .....	6
Winter Resources .....	6
Frequently Asked Questions.....	7
Announcements.....	8



Atlassing near St. Alban's, July 2020.  
 Photo: Catherine Dale

## IMPORTANT DATES

- November 30 and December 2, 2020: Data entry workshops
- January 15, 2021: Deadline to submit 2020 atlas data



# 2020 Highlights

The Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas is off to a great start, with almost 10,000 records submitted this summer alone. Here are some of the highlights of our first field season!



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird in flight. Breeding evidence: H.  
*Photo: Randolph White*

## ***Interesting sightings***

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were seen at feeders from the Codroy to Norris Point (with a couple of sightings reported in Trinity and Renewals as well). Although no one has yet reported a pair, these tiny jewels stuck around all summer in some places...so perhaps it's only a matter of time before breeding is confirmed for this species!

Counts of "budworm warblers" were also high in southwestern Newfoundland – not surprising considering that spruce budworms were literally dripping off the trees in late summer. Tennessee, Bay-breasted, Cape May, and Blackburnian Warbler populations are all known to increase during the periods of plentiful food provided by spruce budworm outbreaks.

In May, Regional Coordinator Alvan Buckley observed a Northern Shoveler pair at Lundrigan's Marsh in St. John's, where they've been seen breeding in years past. And in mid July, Barry Day reported a female Wood Duck with 2 ducklings in Deer Lake. Although single individuals have been reported on the island, successful clutches are uncommon.

Finally, Alvan also reported seeing Rock Ptarmigan in two locations in Region 6 (Bonavista-Placentia West) this year. Known to breed atop Gros Morne Mountain, this species is less common elsewhere on the island. Rock Ptarmigan have been reported in Region 6 only twice before, but Alvan saw a male actively courting two females!



Rock Ptarmigan moulting into breeding plumage. Breeding evidence: H.

*Photo: Alvan Buckley*

## ***A shout-out to our amazing volunteers***

Intrepid atlassers submitted data from all over Newfoundland this summer, making our first field season a huge success. Among the many people who contributed, here are a few who really pushed our numbers up: Alvan Buckley submitted the most checklists (215), visited the most regions (7), and saw an impressive 143 species. He was closely followed by Barry Day, Doug Clark, and Darroch Whitaker, who also saw more than 100 species. And congratulations are in order for Barry Day, who visited the most squares (74), and submitted the most records (2,726), and singlehandedly contributed 270 hours of atlassing – 34.5% of our total hours so far!

# Species at Risk

It's always great to know that our species at risk are around, and even better to know that they're breeding. In 2020, volunteer atlasers, along with staff of Qalipu First Nations, Intervale Associates, and Canadian Wildlife Service, observed 12 of our species at risk in Atlas squares!

Species	# Atlas Squares	Highest Breeding Evidence
Piping Plover	TBD	AE (adult entering nest)
Olive-sided Flycatcher	30	T (adult on territory)
Rusty Blackbird	21	CF (carrying food)
Evening Grosbeak	18	FY (fledged young)
Red Crossbill	14	FY (fledged young)
Bank Swallow	12	AE (adult entering nest)
Barn Swallow	6	P (pair)
Gray-cheeked Thrush	5	B (brood patch)
Hudsonian Godwit	2	—
Chimney Swift	1	—
Short-eared Owl	1	H (suitable nesting habitat)
Peregrine Falcon	1	—



Olive-sided Flycatcher. Breeding evidence: H.  
Photo: Jared Clarke

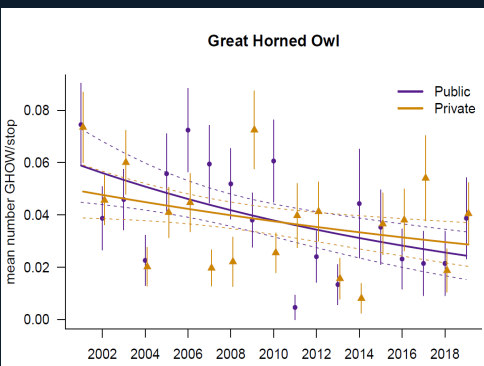


Bank Swallow in flight. Breeding evidence: H.  
Photo: Peter Thomas



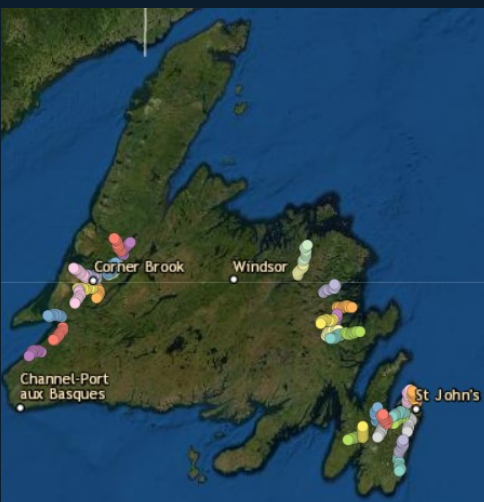


A Great Horned Owl surveys its kingdom.  
Breeding evidence: H.  
Photo: Alvan Buckley



Twenty years of data from the New Brunswick Nocturnal Owl Survey shows a population decrease for Great Horned Owls over time.

Figure: Rémi Torrenta, Birds Canada



Map showing current NOS routes on the island of Newfoundland. There are also 2 routes established near Happy Valley-Goose Bay, not shown here.

## Whoooo's There?

Atlas methods are carefully developed to allow atlassers to detect most breeding birds. However, they don't always allow us to collect information about hard-to-detect animals, such as secretive marsh birds and nocturnal species. To figure out what's going on with these species, we use specialized protocols, such as the Nocturnal Owl Survey (NOS).

### *What is the Nocturnal Owl Survey?*

The NOS is a citizen science survey carried out by Birds Canada volunteers across the country each spring. These volunteers survey pre-determined routes for owls one evening between April 1st and May 15th each year.

The survey has a long history in places like Ontario and the other Atlantic provinces. In fact, the Maritimes NOS just celebrated its 20th year. The data collected by Maritimes NOS volunteers over the past two decades has allowed us to track the status of owl populations in the region.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the survey is relatively new: the first NOS took place in the spring of 2018. Continuing and expanding this program will contribute to the Newfoundland Atlas and provide important information about the status of NL's owl populations.

### *How does the NOS work?*

Participating in the NOS is simple! Each route consists of 10 pre-defined stops, separated by 2 km. Volunteers drive their routes one night in the spring, and at each stop, play a recording of Boreal and Great Horned owl calls, alternating playback with silent listening periods. Because owls are territorial, they are likely to respond vocally to a perceived intruder on their territory, and may even approach the speaker to defend their space.

Volunteers identify and count all the owls seen or heard during their survey and submit the data to NatureCounts using an online data entry portal.

### *How can you get involved?*

We have big plans for next spring! We will need volunteers to take on established NOS routes and we're also aiming to create new routes in under-surveyed areas. To view routes and learn more about the survey, check out the [NOS website](https://birdscanada.org/nos). If you're interested in participating, or have an idea for a great new route, contact Catherine Dale at [cdale@birdscanada.org](mailto:cdale@birdscanada.org).

The NL NOS is supported by:



**TD Friends of the Environment Foundation**

## An App for the Atlas

Do you prefer to enter your observations and checklists on the fly, while you're in the field? Well, now there's an app for that!

Thanks to the NatureCounts app, you can enter and submit checklists from your smartphone while out atlassing – even when you don't have service. The app can be downloaded free from both the App Store and Google Play. It provides an interactive data entry method for both general atlassing and point counts, and automatically determines your location, so you don't need to worry about which square you're in.

Even better, you don't have to wait for the breeding season: the NatureCounts app can be used year round! Just be sure to leave the Breeding Evidence section blank during the winter until early spring next year, when owls begin calling.

Once you've downloaded the app, you'll need to sign in with your NatureCounts login information. Then you can begin making travelling, stationary, or incidental checklists. As you go through the species list and add individuals, you can also click on the species name to include extra details about your observations, or (in the spring) enter breeding evidence. You'll be alerted if the breeding code you choose is improbable for that species, and provided an explanation of why.

Detailed, step-by-step information on how to use the app is available in the [Appendices](#). As always, we love feedback, so if you run into problems with the app or have comments to share, feel free to contact the Atlas Office at [nlatlas@birdscanada.org](mailto:nlatlas@birdscanada.org)

## Winter Resources



This Willow Ptarmigan in winter plumage is eagerly awaiting the breeding season too!

*Photo: Alvan Buckley*

Next summer may seem far away—but the breeding season will soon be upon us again! In the meantime, here are some resources to hone your birding skills.

[NatureInstruct – Dendroica](#): Free. Practice bird identification using images or sound. Explore a species list based on geographic location, and produce quizzes with songs and calls and/or photos.

[Merlin Bird ID app by Cornell Lab](#): Free. Enter information about location, date, size, colour, and behaviour of the bird to get a list of possible species. You can also submit a photo for ID.

[Larkwire](#) – Pay to download; various prices for different packages. A game-based tool for learning bird songs for your smartphone, tablet, or computer.

[eBird quizzes](#) – Free. Produce custom audio or visual quizzes based on location and date. For a collaborative experience, join [Nature NL](#)'s monthly online Bird Learning Night, where attendees work through a quiz together and discuss identification with local birding experts.





# Frequently Asked Questions

## ***Do I have to sign up for a square?***

No, you don't have to sign up for a square to participate in the Atlas. Signing up for a square helps the Regional Coordinators plan their efforts, but it is not required.

## ***Can I report observations from squares I'm not assigned to?***

Absolutely! Atlassers are encouraged to submit data from anywhere in Newfoundland, regardless of whether the square is assigned to them.

## ***I'm not a bird expert; can I still help?***

Yes! As long as you are 100% sure about the birds you report, we are happy to have the observations. Your skills will improve with practice, so consider attending a workshop to help build your skillset.

## ***I have entered a checklist in eBird – can it be transferred to the Atlas?***

Not yet, but stay tuned! A way to import eBird checklists into the Atlas is being developed. In the meantime, you can enter your data via the Atlas data entry portal and share it to your eBird account with a simple click.

## ***How do I know if I'm ready to do point counts?***

Point counts require you to be able to identify local bird species by both sight and sound. We are developing a self-assessment quiz for participants to determine their level of comfort with birding by ear, which will be available on our website this winter.

If you want to do point counts but aren't certain you're ready, you can also borrow a handheld Zoom recorder from your Regional Coordinators or the Atlas Office.

## ***Why does NatureCounts keep freezing when I'm entering checklists?***

Unfortunately, NatureCounts does freeze occasionally, and any unsubmitted data will be lost. To avoid having to start over, we recommend submitting the list frequently, then editing it to continue adding species and breeding evidence once it has been submitted.

## ***How and why should I enter red squirrel data?***

Red squirrels are invasive in Newfoundland, and we are hoping to use Atlas data to investigate how squirrels have affected native bird populations. When entering data, you can find this species at the very bottom of the list, below all the bird species. Unfortunately, squirrel data currently cannot be entered using the app.



American Robin with nesting material.

Breeding evidence: NB.

Photo: Jenna McDermott



A female Mourning Warbler carries food for her nestlings. Breeding evidence: CF.

Photo: Jared Clarke



Northern Flicker nestlings peer from a tree cavity in Dildo Run Provincial Park. Breeding evidence: NY.

Photo: Catherine Dale

# Announcements

## Important Dates

To facilitate data review, **please submit any checklists from last summer by 15 January, 2021.**

For those who would like help with data entry, we will be holding virtual data entry workshops on **30 November (3:00 pm)** and **2 December (7:30 pm)**. You can also contact the Atlas Office ([nlatlas@birdscanada.org](mailto:nlatlas@birdscanada.org)) at any time with questions about the data entry process.

## Atlasser Kits

Hard copy atlasser kits are available to participants, and include General Atlassing and Point Count Instructions, data forms, and regional maps. If you would like an atlasser kit mailed to you, please contact the Atlas Office at [nlatlas@birdscanada.org](mailto:nlatlas@birdscanada.org).

## Travel support for atlassers

Wondering how to support your growing Atlassing habit? Birds Canada offers tax receipts for mileage and other costs through a cheque exchange. For more details, visit the [Atlas Travel Support](#) page on our website. **Note: applications must be received by 1 December in the year in which expenses occurred.**

## Calling all story-tellers and photographers!

Do you have an atlassing adventure, amazing sighting, or fantastic photo you'd like to share with the atlas community? We'd love to hear about it! We will consider publishing the stories, photos, and recordings we receive from atlassers on social media, in future newsletters, or as part of our upcoming living story map on the atlas website.

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