



Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas

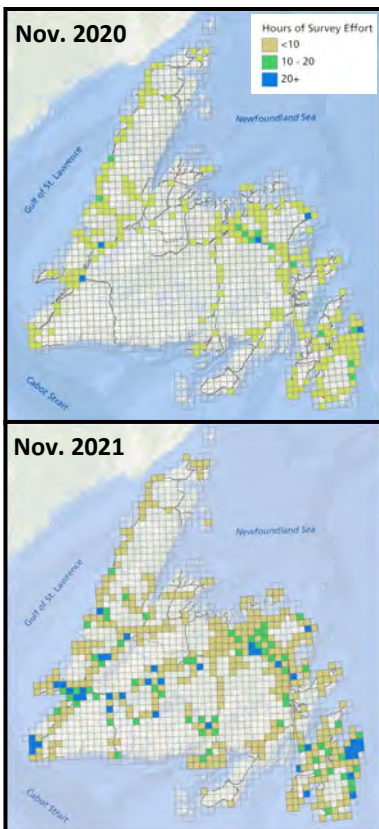
Atlas des oiseaux nicheurs de Terre-Neuve

FALL NEWSLETTER 2021

Volume 2 - Issue 1

Atlas Update

Summer is short in Newfoundland, but it's hard to believe that our second data collection season has already come to a close. However, one look at the Atlas coverage map proves that Newfoundland atlassers made the most of every moment of summer! Since last November, we have added almost 3,000 hours of effort to our coverage map and collected data in 212 new squares. Perhaps most excitingly, we've almost quadrupled the number of point counts – from 270 last fall to an amazing 948 currently (with more than 100 bioacoustic counts still to be entered)!



Some of this increase is thanks to our Atlas field techs, Megan Buers and Blair Dudeck, and Assistant Coordinator Jenna McDermott. These hardy folks were tasked with atlassing some of the harder-to-reach squares this summer. They spent 5 weeks braving ravenous bugs while camping out along woods roads and in gravel pits, collecting tons of data and a few stories along the way! Also for the first time this year, the easing of public health restrictions allowed us to welcome atlassers from other provinces, whose contributions to the Newfoundland Atlas are very much appreciated.

One of this year's highlights was a major incursion of White-winged Crossbills. Breeding evidence codes of S (singing) or higher were reported for this species in 46 squares in 2021 (compared to only 10 squares in 2020). Gray Catbirds were also reported in 11 squares, and

observed entering a nest near Grand Falls-Windsor. This species is a rare breeder in Newfoundland, and current range maps don't include the island. Finally, St. John's saw some interesting urban breeders this summer, from a successful Northern Saw-whet Owl nest in the MUN Botanical Gardens to a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers making themselves at home in the centre of a local dog park!

Progress To Date:

Checklists: 3,733

Registered volunteers: 130

Squares with data: 477

Records: 31,788

Breeding species: 160

Hours of atlassing: 3,679

Point counts: 948

Current as of 15 November, 2021



Gray Catbird. Breeding evidence: S

Photo: Megan Buers

A publication of





A Boreal Chickadee returns to its nest with a mouthful of insects. Breeding evidence: CF
 Photo: Megan Buers



Atlas Field Team (L-R): Catherine Dale, Jenna McDermott, Megan Buers, Blair Dudeck.
 Photo: Darren Sheppard



A young American Robin hunts for food. Breeding evidence: FY
 Photo: Catherine Dale

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A perfect summer evening in central NL.
 Photo: Catherine Dale

IMPORTANT DATES

- December 1, 2021: Deadline to apply for tax receipts for 2021 atlassing
 - January 31, 2022: Deadline to enter 2021 atlas data
- January—April 2022: The birds of Newfoundland: online bird ID course

The Amazing Adventures of Atticus Zoom

I started my first morning of Atlas point counts following a remote dirt road up into the hills of an atlas square in western Newfoundland. At some point, the road ended, but I kept going, aiming for the off-road point I had chosen on the map the night before. The view was spectacular, but lonely – shrubland stretching to the horizon in all directions – and I had to admit to some trepidation about my first point count. But as I glanced over my shoulder, I was reassured by the fuzzy ‘hair’ of my inanimate companion: a handheld audio recorder affectionately nicknamed Atticus.

When I started as Coordinator of the Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas in 2019, I knew point counts would be my biggest challenge. Point counts are an integral part of a Breeding Bird Atlas; the data collected allows us to map species relative abundance. But as any birder knows, birds are more often heard than seen – so the ability to recognize species by ear is vital to conducting successful point counts.

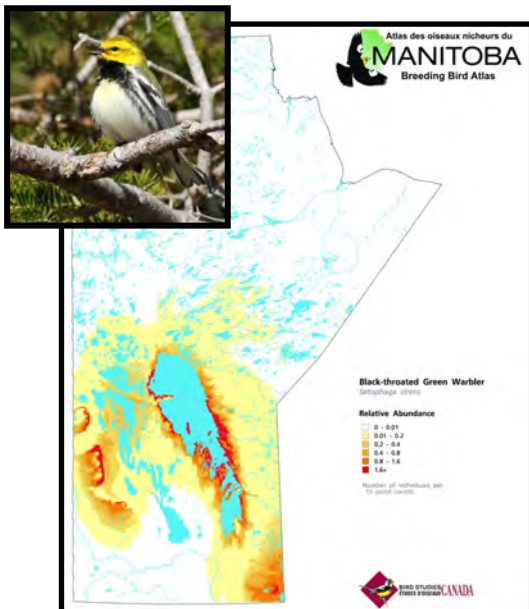
Enter Atticus, my constant companion during the field season. Before starting each point count, I attached him to his tripod, made sure his hair (windscreen) was securely in place, and hit record. During the count, as I noted down each species I heard, it was immensely reassuring to know I could go back to the recording later to double check my identification or get help with any song I was unsure of.

Because a high-quality recording can be used to replicate a point count, Zoom recorders can also be used by atlasers who don’t want to conduct in-person counts at all. If you’re out birding in the early morning, you can set up the recorder at the designated points, hit record, and wait 5 minutes. Then submit your recordings to the Atlas office for processing, and voila: point count complete!



Atticus the Zoom recorder recording an off-road point count in Region 2.

Photo: Catherine Dale



Map of relative abundance of Black-throated Green Warblers in Manitoba. Relative abundance is derived from point count data.

Photo: Randolph White

There are a couple of things to keep in mind when making point count recordings. Avoid using your own recorder, unless yours can make high quality, stereo recordings which are necessary for the Atlas. To ensure all recordings are standardized, follow the [instructions](#) available online. And to minimize background noise, make sure to use a tripod and windscreen when recording. (As a bonus, the ‘hair’ of the windscreen adds personality to the recorder, although it’s also a source of great fascination to Newfoundland’s robust mosquito and blackfly populations.)

Zoom recorders are a powerful tool for collecting the point count data we need for the Atlas – and a great way to allow all atlas volunteers to get involved with every aspect of data collection. With support from the Baillie Fund, the Atlas Office has purchased a number of recorders to loan out to interested volunteers. **If you’re interested in borrowing a Zoom recorder to collect point count data next summer, contact your Regional Coordinator!**

Coming soon: The Birds of Newfoundland, an online course!

Mondays at 7:30 pm

- Jan. 24: Beginner Bird ID
- Jan. 31: Seabirds, Gulls, Terns
- Feb. 7: Ducks and Loons
- Feb. 14: Shorebirds and Gamebirds
- Feb. 21: Raptors, Woodpeckers, Kingfishers
- Feb. 28: Warblers
- Mar. 7: Sparrows, Finches, Grosbeaks
- Mar. 14: Other Passerines
- Mar. 21: Habitats of Newfoundland
- Mar. 28: Species at Risk
- Apr. 4: Atlassing 101
- Apr. 11: Birding by ear and Bioacoustics

**To register, visit the Atlas
Facebook page in early
January!**



Species in Focus: Olive-sided Flycatcher

There's nothing better than strolling through the forest in the late afternoon and hearing your local bird bartender sing out, "Quick, Three Beers!"

Olive-sided Flycatchers, the large flycatchers who sing this unmistakable song, are listed provincially as Threatened and are always a treat to find when out birding. They sing loudly from the top of the tallest tree or snag in the area, and can be heard from incredible distances. Olive-sided Flycatchers are often found near forest edges and openings, either man-made or natural, like bogs, lakes, or windfall. They defend their nests aggressively and have even been observed knocking red squirrels off branches when the squirrels get too close to their nests!

To date, Olive-sided Flycatchers have been found in 79 atlas squares across the island, but the highest breeding code recorded is only Agitated, and most of the individuals seen have been observed singing. This is likely due to the sheer volume of their song, and because they hold very large territories – between 10 to 45 hectares (that's equal to 10 to 45 football fields)!



Olive-sided Flycatcher.

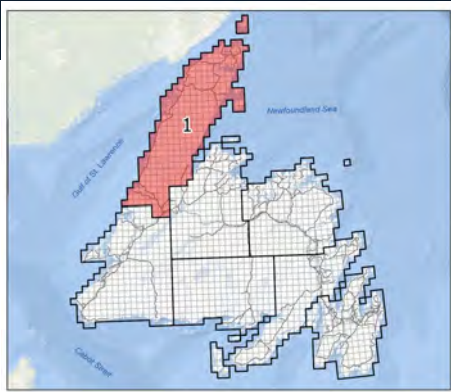
Breeding evidence: H

Photo: Jared Clarke



Olive-sided Flycatcher. Breeding evidence: S

Photo: Scott Leslie



Region 1: Northern Peninsula

The Northern Peninsula is a great region to explore for the chance to find exciting species like Harlequin Duck and White-crowned Sparrow. The habitat varies widely from coastal plains to mountains, barrens, and interior forests. The Long Range Mountains also provide endless opportunities for finding at-risk species like Olive-sided Flycatchers and Rusty Blackbirds.

Some numbers:

- 260 total squares (65 priority squares)
- 312 hours spent atlassing
- 151 point counts completed
- 118 species recorded
- 21 participants registered



Atlassing in Region 1. Photos: Darroch Whitaker; Catherine Dale



Holly Lightfoot: **Regional Coordinator**

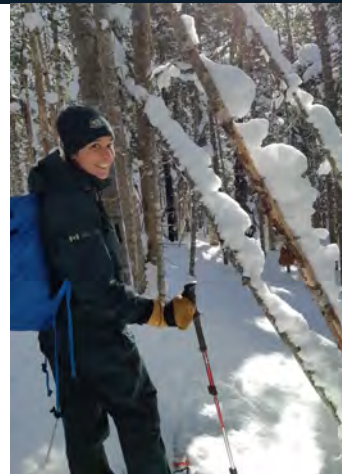
I didn't start birding until later in life but a field course in university on an offshore island with thousands of Leach's Storm

Petrels had me hooked. There are a lot of great birds to be discovered in our region, but if I had to pick a **favourite Newfoundland bird** I would say one of our chickadees, either Black-capped or Boreal. They always seem so cheery and if you have ever been fortunate enough to work at a bird banding station you will know that they are feisty! No wonder they can survive our Newfoundland winters! I'm still exploring this region so have a hard time picking a favourite birding spot, but do love that there are some trails close enough to the office that I can get out for a lunch time birding walk (like Berry Head Pond, Berry Hill Pond, and the ski trails at the Visitor Center).

Gabrielle Robineau-Charette: **Regional Coordinator**

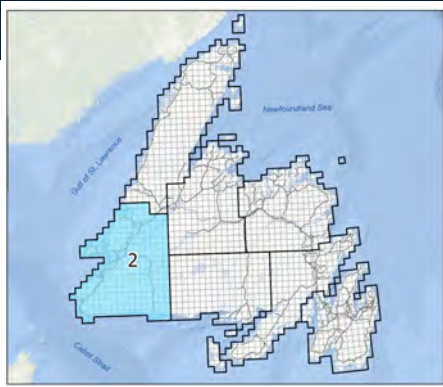
I moved to Newfoundland for work for what was supposed to be three months, and here I am still, six years later! I first got into birding when I was a summer student with Parks Canada. A park interpreter started to teach us how to identify warblers by song and we spent the whole summer walking in the woods, practising. I was hooked! My favourite birding spot here in Region 1 is in the woods behind my house. I love being able to get out the door with the family and instantly be surrounded by forest birds. I especially enjoy when chickadees mob around us and curiously check us out.

Favourite Newfoundland bird? Canada Jay and Boreal Chickadee. Can't decide. Oh and Winter Wren for the song! Makes me laugh!



Region 2: Southwest Newfoundland

Region 2 is most famous for the Codroy Valley, a destination for many birders in the spring. But this region has so many other places to explore! It is home to the highest peak in Newfoundland and plenty of mountainous areas, providing the chance to see ptarmigan and other high-elevation species. And if you're not into hiking up mountains, there are plenty of sandy beaches and shoreline to enjoy and atlas too!



Some numbers:

- 259 total squares (64 priority squares)
- 852.2 hours spent atlassing
- 197 point counts completed
- 29 participants registered
- 127 species recorded

Julia Briffet: Regional Coordinator

My early years were in Channel-Port-aux-Basques, a rocky, foggy place with not a tree to be found. Occasional visits to the Codroy Valley taught me that there were a lot more birds in the world than the



gulls I saw every day. It was when moving to Corner Brook in 1973 in the backyard of our first family home that the sighting of an American Redstart got me excited about learning to identify what I was observing. Finding like-minded friends and going on field trips not only added to knowledge but created life long friendships. Interest in learning more about bird behaviour and population shifts led to participating in citizen science projects. I have done Feeder Watch and Christmas Bird Counts for 30+ years. Since retiring from a long and varied career as a nurse, I continue to enjoy my 2 passions, birding and gardening.

Favourite Newfoundland bird? I find the Piping Plover particularly endearing.

Lois Bateman: Regional Coordinator

I got into bird watching as a child when I borrowed my father's heavy old binoculars to try to see singing warblers in the woods behind our house in rural southeastern New Brunswick. Living in Tobago, WI, after university, I became fascinated with the subtropical birds there. I've lived in Western Newfoundland for over 45 years and still prefer 'watching' birds of any species to chasing down a rarity.

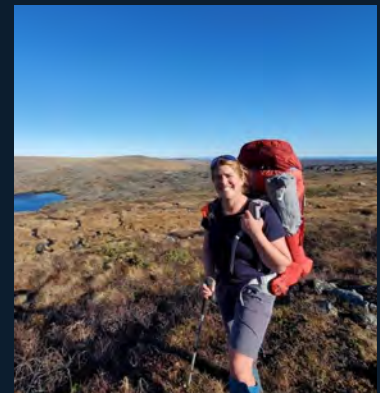
Favourite Newfoundland bird? Bobolinks in the Codroy Valley in June.



Tina Newbury: Regional Coordinator

I spend most of my time out enjoying nature whether it's during my day job with Canada Post as a letter carrier or in my free time back-country skiing, hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, SUP or wild swimming. While I enjoy exploring all the nooks and crannies, and seeing new places, I think my favourite habitat is higher elevation terrain in the western region of the province. I like the landscapes, colours, wildflowers, and birds and other fauna found in these regions.

Favourite Newfoundland bird? Tough one. I'm going with Northern Saw-whet Owl.



Dispatches from the Field

The Owls of Owl Hill: 22UCV15

By Darren Sheppard, Indian Bay Ecosystem Corporation

One evening in late summer 2020, we were out conducting an owl survey, looking for Short-eared Owls. This species has rarely been seen in Cape Freels in recent years, much less documented, but seems to be making a comeback to the sand dunes and marshes. While scanning the western horizon on this beautiful, cloudless evening, I spotted one right nearby, pitched on some branches within a group of small trees. As I focused my binoculars, it took flight! This was my first experience seeing a Short-eared Owl, much less one in full flight. As I followed the owl with my binoculars, it turned towards me, hunting, observing its surroundings, and not seeming to care in the least about my presence. It continued towards me, eventually flying directly over my head, only about 20 feet in the air, so close I could hear its wings flap

Since this memorable encounter, our team has spotted what we believe to be at least three different Short-eared Owls at Cape Freels this year alone. Watching and photographing these amazing birds has been a rewarding experience, both professionally and personally. Being able to identify these beautiful creatures, observe them gliding on the wind, hunting for prey, and weaving along the hills and sand dunes of Cape Freels...there are not many pleasures in this world that can compare.



Short-eared Owl surveying the marshes of Cape Freels. Breeding evidence: H.
Photo: Kaylene Stagg

Close Encounters of the Furry Kind: 21TWP91

By Megan Buers, Atlas field technician



Caribou mother and calf. *Photo: Megan Buers*

I had been walking with my head down for a few minutes, blindly marching through the wet vegetation, when I looked up and there, standing only 300 meters away, were two caribou. Shocked still, I watched the young calf, maybe a yearling, and presumably the calf's mother. To my ever-increasing surprise, they didn't run away, but the calf started at a brisk jog toward me.

At first, I was absolutely delighted. Realising my camera was in my backpack, I gently swung my bag to the ground and feverishly pulled my camera out. I thought that might scare them, but the calf was still on its forward trajectory and had me in its sights. Mother,

on the other hand, followed a few meters behind, occasionally raising her head warily, lipping the air in disinterested hostility.

I took some photos and watched them wandering around the scrubland for some time. After about 10 minutes, I figured I had best get on with my point counts unless I wanted to hike all the way back up the following day. But every time I moved to a new point count location, the calf started after me as if I was some very odd-looking caribou to play with.

Calling all story-tellers and photographers! Do you have an atlassing adventure or fantastic photo to share? We'd love to hear from you! **Send pictures and stories to the Atlas Office:** nlatlas@birdscanada.org.

Announcements

Important Dates

- To facilitate data review, please submit any checklists from last summer by **31 January, 2022**.
- Starting in late January 2022, we will be offering a **12 week online webinar-based course on bird identification**, focusing on the birds of Newfoundland. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to join us as we discuss the identification, habitat, and behaviour of the avifauna of The Rock! You'll be able to sign up for this free course on our website or Facebook page in early January 2022.

Spring Bird Walks

As the grand finale of our online bird ID course, Atlas staff and Regional Coordinators will be offering guided bird walks in locations across the island in May 2022. If you'd like to have us lead a walk in your community, contact the Atlas Office to request your stop be included on the itinerary!

Nocturnal Owl Survey

Spring will be here before we know it—and to get a head start on atlassing, sign up for the Nocturnal Owl Survey! This citizen science survey takes place between 1 April and 15 May every year, and allows us to monitor the status of NL's owl populations. We'll be looking for volunteers to take on established NOS routes and help us create new ones. To view routes and learn more about the survey, check out the [NOS website](#). If you're interested in participating, or have an idea for a new route, contact Catherine Dale at cdale@birdscanada.org.

Regional Coordinators needed!

We are still looking for Regional Coordinators for **Region 3** (Baie Vert-Buchans), **Region 6** (Bonavista-Placentia West) and **Region 8** (St. Pierre and Miquelon). If you're interested in learning more about this volunteer position, check out the information on the atlas website or contact the Atlas Office at 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.**

Have refundable bottles and cans?
Donate them to the Atlas at
any Green Depot in NL!

Account name:
Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas
Account #: 4841217
www.greenepotnl.ca



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