

Instructions for Volunteers

Participating in the Breeding Bird Atlas is a fun way to experience new birding areas, often areas one would not think to actually be worth much time and energy. The time you spend in observing the birds of a particular block help us all get a picture of the effect of Iowa's current landscape on the breeding population of our species. This project does not look at numbers of birds but rather the distribution of species, so the activity of observing bird behaviors to determine the level of nesting evidence can provide a whole new experience for many birders. Each block needs 20 hours of atlas work within the five-year timeframe to get the best evidence possible. As data is entered through the website, you will be able to see how much time has been devoted to each block and allocate your time accordingly.

Species of Interest

The purpose of the Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas project is to document the breeding status and distribution of Iowa's birds. Thus, participants should focus on species that have a high probability of actual or potential breeding in a given block. We have provided a list of safe breeding dates to give participants a general timeframe for breeding of all expected Iowa breeding birds. There is a possibility that you will encounter a species not on this list. Unless you have firm evidence of breeding, please do not report such species to the database as it will increase the Atlas Steering Committee's work later. Still other species (late migrants and non-breeders) may be encountered in seemingly suitable habitat at sites where breeding is extremely unlikely. Again, please don't report these species except when you have firm evidence of breeding activity. Some examples include many waterfowl that regularly linger into early June, non-breeding American White Pelicans and Ring-billed Gulls, and late migrants such as Alder Flycatcher and Chestnut-sided Warbler.

Add a new (or more recent) breeding species to Iowa! You will note on the field forms and in the on-line data entry that the species list is limited to breeding species within the more recent past. Perhaps in the five years of this project new species can be confirmed. Some species to be watching for include:

- *Common Loon*
- *Whooping Crane*
- *Sharp-tailed Grouse*
- *Northern Saw-whet Owl*
- *Alder Flycatcher*
- *Say's Phoebe*
- *Rock Wren*
- *Golden-winged Warbler*
- *Canada Warbler*

New species may be added to the species list by contacting the BBA Coordinator through the Contact Us form on the website. All new breeding species should also be documented on the [IOU documentation form](#).

Maps

For each block you are surveying, you will want to print a copy of two different maps. The **block map** outlines a 3x3 mile square of the area to be surveyed. These are generated through Google maps so you will be able to create various levels of detail as needed. Most of these blocks contain private land, but previous experience has been that landowners are very cooperative in allowing access to their property when you explain the purpose of the survey. The second map is a GIS map of the **block landscape and habitats**. Since these were created in 2002 we ask that you take a copy with you and verify that the map is still accurate. If there have been major changes to the landscape; i.e., grasslands are now row crops, you may indicate this on a web form so the analysis of habitats used by our breeding species will be as accurate as possible.

Trip Information

The simple form for recording trip information will capture party hours and information. This information should be entered into the website after each trip in order to maintain a current accounting of hours devoted to a particular block. This is an ambitious project and once a block has been surveyed your time may be needed elsewhere.

Party hours: John, Joe, and Jim spend four hours surveying Block 233. They wander the properties as a group – 4 party hours. Jim takes off by himself to explore the southwest corner of the block while John and Joe stay together in the northern tier of sections – 8 party hours. The three friends split the block into thirds and each takes their own three sections – 12 party hours.

Species Information

Recording the species seen in the block is the heart of the Breeding Bird Atlas. Over the course of the atlas project, we will attempt to get the highest level of evidence possible to determine if the species is actually breeding. Naturally nests and baby birds confirm nesting, but there are other behaviors that indicate possible and probable nesting. These codes will be used on your field checklist. When you enter your data you will also be entering a date of your observation. This exciting addition to the data should help better define the breeding season for various species in the state.