



Finding Early Nesters

January - April

NY Breeding Bird Atlas III

General Atlasing Tips

- For these species, be on the lookout in winter and early spring for:
 - Courtship, carrying nesting material, and nest building
- Be aware of each species' distribution in NY and preferred habitat
 - See the distribution on the [Atlas website](#)
 - Get habitat information from [All About Birds](#) or [Audubon](#)
- Learn their songs and calls, including juveniles
 - The [Merlin](#) and [Audubon](#) apps are free
 - Also reference [Macaulay Library](#) and [Xeno-canto](#)
- Be familiar with their courtship behaviors
 - See [All About Birds](#), [Birds by Bent](#), and [Birds of the World](#)

Note: The dates for egg laying and young are from the 2nd NY Atlas and may include earlier dates for young than for egg laying. This is not an error, but a lack of data. Data from the 3rd NY Atlas will help refine these dates!

Owl Tricks

- Target April
- Learn the sounds of adults, duets, and calls of young
- Nocturnal surveys 30 min after sunset to midnight
- Clear moonlit nights with little wind and background noise
- Drive back roads, stop every mile and listen for 3 minutes
- Record negative observations too!



Barn Owl

- Region: sparse; Long Island and lower elevations upstate
- Habitat: open habitats
- Egg laying: year-round
- Young: year-round
- Tips: Check abandoned buildings, talk to farmers



Great Horned Owl

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: open and second-growth woodlands, swamps, and agricultural areas
- Nest: often use old Red-tailed Hawk nests, also cavities and old buildings
- Egg laying: 1/22 – 7/24
- Young: 2/15 – 12/21
- Tips: Listen for duetting on calm nights in Jan-Feb; listen for young in spring

I'm scared!

This is a defensive posture.

A pair of Barred Owls is shown perched on a mossy tree stump. The owl in the foreground is facing right, with its head tilted back and its beak slightly open. The second owl is behind it, also facing right. Both owls have brown and white barred feathers. The background is a soft-focus green forest.

Barred Owl

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: extensive, dense forests near low, wet woods
- Egg laying: 3/20 – 5/4
- Young: 4/14 – 9/11
- Tips: not in areas with Great Horned Owls; active year-round and during daytime; listen for duets and young



Eastern Screech-Owl

- Region: low- to mid-elevations statewide
- Habitat: fragmented forest habitats, usually deciduous or mixed forests
- Egg laying: 3/23 – 7/8
- Young: 4/9 – 9/18
- Tips: not in areas with Barred Owls, vocalize throughout the night

Raptor Tricks

- Courtship starts early
- Young are noisy
- Look for white wash
- Listen for alarm calls from smaller birds to alert you to raptors nearby
- Look up!





Bald Eagle

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: mixed forest habitats with water nearby and tall, emergent trees
- Egg laying: 3/1 – 6/30
- Young: 4/11 – 8/29
- Tips: Look for a large bird and an even larger stick nest in a super tall tree



Golden Eagle

- Region: Adirondacks (historic)
- Habitat: open-country, cliffs overlooking water
- Egg laying: March - June
- Young: 7/10 – 7/24
- Tips: Be on the lookout

Northern Goshawk

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: mature forests with open understory
- Egg laying: 4/17 – 6/19
- Young: 5/9 – 8/13
- Tips: Hike into deep forest, target mornings for peak foraging activity, and listen for alarm call
- Warning: Watch your head!



Peregrine Falcon

- Region: NYC, Hudson Valley, Champlain Valley, expanding
- Habitat: cliffs, bridges, skyscrapers
- Egg laying: 3/2 – 6/19
- Young: 4/19 – 8/31
- Tips: If you see one, watch closely where it lands



Red-tailed Hawk

- Region: statewide, low- to mid-elevations
- Habitat: open areas with forest nearby
- Egg laying: 2/25 – 7/25
- Young: 3/31 – 8/21
- Tips: Look for them carrying nest material, performing courtship displays, and later listen for begging young



Game Birds

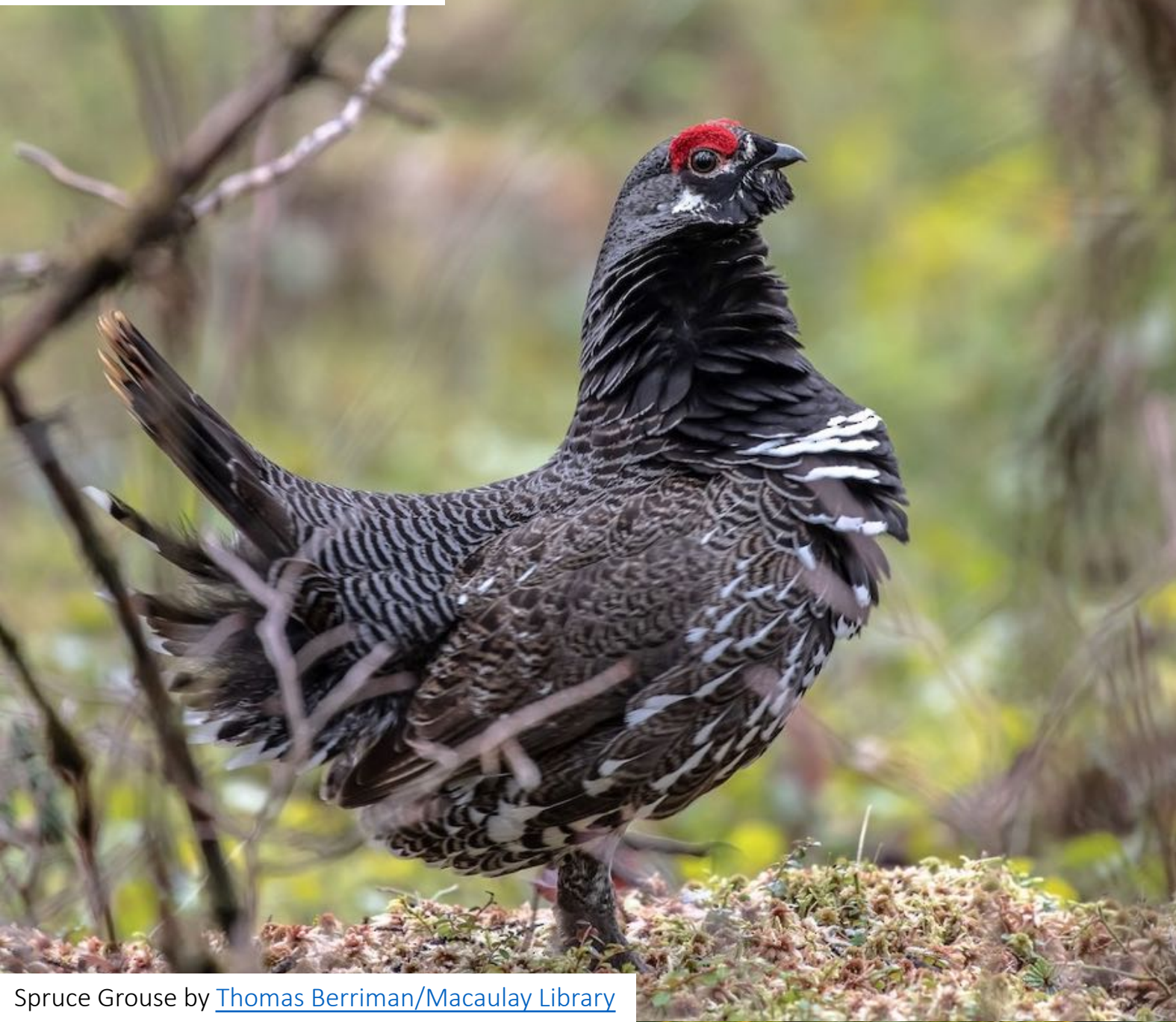
- Courtship, courtship, courtship
- Target suitable habitats at the right time of day
- Fierce defenders of young



Ruffed Grouse

- Region: upstate, sparse in Great Lakes Plain and Hudson Valley
- Habitat: forests, particularly with regenerating hardwood or shrubs
- Egg laying: 4/1 – 7/8
- Young: 5/18 – 8/22
- Tips: Listen for drumming in patches of dense forest, drive back roads

Jonathan B. Bourgault



Spruce Grouse

- Region: Adirondacks
- Habitat: spruce bogs
- Courtship: Visit spruce bogs early mornings mid-April to mid-May, get off-trail and walk slowly (stop every 50 m to listen for display flight and tail flicks) and don't forget to look for birds perched in trees
- Young: look for the hen with young in spruce bogs or nearby uplands in June – August
- Scat: similar to Ruffed Grouse in size and shape, but composed of pine needles and lack white (uric acid)

American Woodcock

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: clearings next to dense, young forest with moist soil
- Egg laying: 3/24 – 7/7
- Young: 4/17 – 8/14
- Tips: Check abandoned fields, especially those that are low or seasonally wet and bordered by aspens and early second-growth, on an evening in early spring. At dusk, listen for the nasal “peent” note followed by the eerie flight song from overhead.



Wild Turkey

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: mix of mature hardwood and ag
- Egg laying: 4/18 – 8/1/0
- Young: 4/15 – 10/7
- Tips: Courtship or young in open areas; strong preference for acorns



Corvids

- Be sure of ID
- Courtship and allopreening
- Look for carrying sticks and nest building
- Large stick nests
- Noisy young



Pair of Common Ravens by [Blake Matheson/Macaulay Library](#)

Canada Jay

- Region: Adirondacks
- Habitat: medium-mature boreal forest, especially low-lying areas with black spruce
- Egg laying: 3/10 – 6/5
- Young: 5/19 – 9/15
- Tips: make noise, look behind you; in the right habitat, they find you!



Common Raven

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: cliffs, trees, towers
- Egg laying: 3/23 – 6/22
- Young: 3/21 – 8/15
- Tips: noisy flight displays, large conspicuous nest, noisy young



American Crow

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: trees near open areas
- Egg laying: 3/31 – 7/11
- Young: 3/15 – 9/15
- Tips: allopreening, but little courtship, easiest to see nest building and fledglings when adults bring them to open areas to feed



Fish Crow

- Region: Long Island, Hudson Valley, Central NY, expanding
- Habitat: near water in urban parks, golf courses, and wooded residential areas
- Egg laying: 3/20 – 6/24
- Young: 4/20 – 8/18
- Tips: little courtship, generally breeds 1-2 months later than American, beware calls of female American Crows on the nest, fledglings not taken to open areas and moves them away from nest site quickly



Cavity Nesters

- Most resident cavity nesters start early!
- Look for courtship behavior and cavity excavation in March and April
- Learn their courtship songs and rituals (begging, feeding, displays)
- Listen for noisy young



Red-bellied Woodpecker

- Region: statewide at lower elevations
- Habitat: mixed forests and suburbs
- Egg laying: 4/6 – 6/28
- Young: 5/3 – 9/1
- Tips: look for old cavities, mutual tapping, reverse mounting, copulation, aggression, noisy young



Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding young by [Sue Barth/Macaulay Library](#)

White-breasted Nuthatch

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: deciduous forests and suburbs
- Egg laying: 4/13 – 7/13
- Young: 4/27 – 9/4
- Tips: catch them early (Mar-Apr), they get quiet after courtship



Red-breasted Nuthatch

- Region: scattered statewide
- Habitat: spruce-fir forests
- Egg laying: 4/30 – 6/17
- Young: 4/25 – 8/19
- Tips: catch them early (Mar-Apr), they get quiet after courtship



Black-capped Chickadee

- Region: statewide
- Habitat: deciduous and mixed forests, suburbia, parks
- Egg laying: 4/1 – 7/15
- Young: 4/28 – 9/9
- Tips: devoted parents; easy to find while excavating hole; young are loud and active





City Slickers

Don't overlook them!

Rock Pigeon

- Region: low- to mid-elevations statewide
- Habitat: human-disturbed areas
- Tips: look for nests year-round near buildings, bridges, ledges, and farm buildings; check under all bridges



Mourning Dove

- Region: statewide except high elevations
- Habitat: open habitats, forest edges, cities, suburbs
- Egg laying: 3/9 – 9/28
- Young: 4/6 – 10/26
- Tips: catch them during courtship or nest building; fledglings are pretty mobile (buff edging and lack iridescence)



House Sparrow

- Region: low- to mid-elevations statewide
- Habitat: urban, suburban, farms
- Egg laying: 3/23 – 8/10
- Young: 4/7 – 9/6
- Tips: Will nest anywhere with a cavity or enclosed space much of the year



European Starling

- Region: low- to mid-elevations statewide
- Habitat: urban, suburban, farms
- Egg laying: 4/10 – 7/11
- Young: 4/17 – 9/7
- Tips: learn the juvenile plumage, nestlings are loud and beg incessantly



Monk Parakeet

- Region: NYC & LI, scattered elsewhere
- Habitat: parks
- Tips: Conspicuous nests, maintain nest year-round, learn call



Monk Parakeet carrying nesting material by [Michael Stubblefield/Macaulay Library](#)



Misfits

Horned Lark

- Region: agricultural areas and LI
- Habitat: open lands and grasslands with little vegetation
- Egg laying: 2/28 – 7/31
- Young: 3/11 – 9/13
- Tips: Check all plowed fields with a scope or binoculars and keep scanning. A Horned Lark may walk up out of a furrow onto a dirt clod before dropping back into the next furrow out of sight as it feeds, looking almost like a mouse against the earth. On Long Island, also found in dunes on barrier beaches, airports and golf courses.



Northern Cardinal

- Region: statewide except higher elevations
- Habitat: forest edges, hedges, suburbs
- Egg laying: 4/8 – 9/9
- Young: 4/23 – 9/23
- Tips: both sexes sing, courtship, nest building, feeding young, multiple broods



© 2012 Paul Hueber



Red Crossbill

- Region/habitat: high-elevation conifer forests
- Timing: irruptive, Jan-Feb and Jul-Aug
- Tips: learn the calls and pay attention when heavy cone crop, pick up grit along roads



White-winged Crossbill

- Region/Habitat: high-elevation conifer forests
- Timing: irruptive, Jan-Feb and Jul-Aug
- Tips: learn the calls and pay attention when heavy cone crop, also road edges with salt and eats snow

A close-up photograph of a Canada Jay chick sitting on a nest. The nest is constructed from a messy pile of dry sticks and twigs, with a layer of snow on top. The chick has a white face with a dark cap and a dark beak. The background is a blurred forest scene with evergreen trees and a tree trunk on the left. A white rectangular box with brown text is overlaid in the upper right corner.

ebird.org/atlasny