

# WHAT'S HATCHING?

Official Newsletter of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3  
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Photo credit: [Nuthatch Field Station/Macaulay Library](#)

## BIRD OF THE MONTH

Red Crossbills haven't nested in Maryland or DC in well over a century—learn why they're featured here anyways.

## TIPS & TRICKS

Nocturnal atasing can be immensely rewarding, but it has its challenges. Test out how these tips work for you.

## OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

Read the entertaining account of Maryland's first Nashville Warbler nest (and second Northern Saw-whet Owl breeding record).

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Have a story or a picture for the newsletter? We'd love to hear about it!

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The Maryland Nest Record File, where most of the state's early and late egg records come from, documented a Carolina Chickadee nest with eggs on April 12. This was the earliest record of a Carolina Chickadee egg in Maryland—although 6- and 8-egg clutches have been found in mid-April, indicating that egg-laying can begin in early April. Last year, Charles County Coordinator Lynne Wheeler found a clutch of seven eggs in a bluebird box on April 1, setting a new early egg date for Carolina Chickadee in Maryland. Since chickadees lay one egg per day, this pair started laying eggs by at least March 26, 2020.



Photo credit: Elizabeth Wheeler/Macaulay Library

The basic rules for studying nesting birds, therefore, are as follows: disturb as little as possible; preferably examine nests only when the owners are absent; be as quick as possible; and at all times exercise the greatest care and caution, remembering that a little carelessness can bring about the accidental destruction of the nest and brood.

--Paul Baicich and Colin Harrison



The authors of *Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North American Birds* provide excellent advice on searching for and interacting with nests.

Minimizing disturbance is crucial and the welfare of the bird should always be put before data collection.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*Have you filled out the Atlas's end-of-year survey yet?*

*We want to know what materials you found useful, suggestions you have for new resources, and how COVID-19 impacted your atlasing. These results will help plan the next year of the Atlas and show us how we can best support you. You can find the survey at [bit.ly/AtlasSurvey2020](https://bit.ly/AtlasSurvey2020).*



Blue Jay. Photo credit: Daniel Irons/Macaulay Library

# From the Coordinator

*All the Atlas resources, all in one place.*



There are a number of Atlas resources available, but knowing where to find them isn't always easy. That's why I put together a summary that you can find at [ebird.org/atlasmdc/about/how-to-atlas](http://ebird.org/atlasmdc/about/how-to-atlas). This downloadable document contains links and descriptions for each of the two dozen resources we have created to help you with your atlasing.

The most important resource is [the Handbook](#). It provides detailed explanations about most atlasing methods. If you are unsure about something, chances are an explanation is in the Handbook. There is also [a smaller, shorter version](#) designed to be carried into the field with you (if you download this, the pages may appear out of order, but they're not. It's designed to be printed on the short edge,

folded in half, and stapled into a small booklet).

[The Breeding Timeline](#) provides a visualization of when birds in Maryland and DC tend to migrate or disperse, and when they are nesting. This can help you know if a species is likely to be nesting when you see it, or whether you might confuse migrating individuals with nesting birds. For example, Eastern Bluebirds begin nesting here in early March, but migrant bluebirds are still passing through the region in late April. That's a full six weeks when it's difficult to know whether a bluebird that you see is nesting or migrating, unless you observe behavior that is associated with nesting. During that overlap period, it's best not to use weak breeding codes like code H (habitat) or code S (singing).

An easy way to help you find more

species in a block is to use the species lists from past atlases. Every block has a list that includes each species and its breeding status found in BBA1 or BBA2. This is a great way to see if you are missing any potential habitats in your block or species that you may have overlooked. To find the list for a given block, use [the block tool](#) hosted by Maryland DNR. Click on the block you're interested in, then select the "More info" hyperlink beside "Link to Species List". You can also download block maps here and see which blocks have been adopted.

There is an [FAQ section](#) on the website that provides more details about using specific breeding codes and using eBird. There is also a document compiled by experienced atlasers with [tips on general atlasing and for select species](#).

Finally, you can join [the Atlas Facebook group](#) to post questions or interesting observations. You can also follow the [BBA3 Facebook page](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#) accounts to see regular updates. The Atlas's handle is the same for all of our social media accounts: @mddcbba3. If you want to share your posts with us, use the #mddcbba3 hashtag. And if you're not on social media, don't worry; any important updates will be shared in the monthly newsletter and delivered straight to your inbox.

--Gabriel

The image below is what the summary of resources looks like—all the resources, all in one place!

## Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3

### List of Atlaser Resources

Updated January 2021

[Atlaser Handbook](#) – this user manual is a must-read for every participant, even if you are an atlasing veteran.

[Atlaser Field Handbook](#) – print this shortened handbook and take it with you into the field as a handy reference guide.

[Breeding Timeline](#) – this chart shows when birds are nesting in Maryland and DC and when they are migrating or dispersing.

[Safe Dates](#) – use these dates as a guide for when it is acceptable to use Possible codes.

bird of the month:

# RED CROSSBILL



Photo credit: Stephen Davies/Macaulay Library

The Red Crossbill is best treated as a historical breeder in Maryland and DC. Two accounts published in the *Auk* in the mid-1880s provide evidence of regional breeding. One, from DC, reported a recently fledged young. The second, from Prince George's County, stated that a collected female "showed unmistakable evidence of having recently incubated". Perhaps more surprisingly, it also provided a second-hand report of multiple nests found in Baltimore City. Stewart and Robbins report in *The Birds of Maryland* that Red Crossbills were seen summering in Dorchester County from 1932–33, but no further evidence of breeding was reported.

Red Crossbills have a fascinating life history shaped by their dependence on a specific food source that regularly fluctuates in abundance. Local food

shortages instigate large-scale, irruptive movements in search of sufficient food. If these new food sources are plentiful enough, the wandering crossbills may attempt to nest. This means that, while there hasn't been evidence of Red Crossbills breeding in Maryland or DC for 135 years, an irruption coinciding with a substantial local cone crop could elicit impromptu breeding. But Red Crossbills don't carry food in their bills, and females remain on the nest throughout the entire incubation period, so detecting breeding is tricky. Observers who are fortunate enough to see a crossbill in Maryland should be on the lookout for indications of breeding.

Red Crossbills occur on four continents; in North America, they are most abundant in western

## RED CROSSBILL

### *So. Many. Types!*

There are ten Types of Red Crossbill in North America that are distinguished by their calls. Each of these Types has a different portion of the continent they are most frequently found in, but there is variation and overlap between Types. Roughly, Type 1 (Appalachian) is found in the Appalachians and northeastern US, but irrupts to the Pacific Coast; Type 3 (Western Hemlock) and Type 10 (Sitka Spruce) have the opposite pattern. Type 2 (Ponderosa Pine) is found in western and Great Lakes forests and its irruptions radiate outwards. Type 7 (Enigmatic) is something of a mystery, and it has been hypothesized that eastern Type 10 could actually be Type 7. Cassia Crossbill, found almost entirely within Cassia County, Idaho, used to be considered Type 9 but was split from Red Crossbill in 2017. Type 8 (Newfoundland) is similarly restricted to Canada's Newfoundland Island, and the remaining four Types are found in western or southern North America.



Photo credit: Lisa Nasta/Macaulay Library

coniferous forests, south of the White-winged Crossbill's range. They exhibit substantial variation in size, color, and bill shape, but in North America there is considerable overlap in the breeding range of each different size and shape. Since geographic isolation is important for subspecies recognition, the variation is instead sorted into ten Types. Variation in color doesn't associate well with different Types, but size, bill shape, song, and call type all differ with each of the ten Types. Their call is the most useful identifier of Type, and calls should always be recorded when possible.

The unique bills that provide crossbills with their name are well-suited to extracting seeds from coniferous cones. Bill size—specifically, bill depth—affects foraging efficiency on different species of cones and this has led to the formation of the different Types. As they're foraging, Red Crossbills must make decisions about which trees will provide easiest access to the most seeds. A flock can make better, faster decisions about this than a lone individual can, so crossbills tend to forage in flocks. The

flock uses calls to communicate with flock members; the flock will be silent while eating, then call rapidly before flying off. But using the flock to identify good food sites works best if all the flock members have similarly sized bills, since bill depth influences foraging efficiency. A different call associated with each different bill depth helps an individual know what sort of bills a flock has, and as a result what sort of trees they will forage on. They'll preferentially select flocks that sound more like themselves. And since Red Crossbills form pairs from within their foraging flock, this selection pressure is strengthened and leads to the formation of multiple distinct Types that are distinguished by call and bill depth.

There are ten Types in North America: types 1, 2, 3, and 10 will all nest in the northeastern US. Nesting Red Crossbills are not as seasonally restricted as many species are. They avoid nesting during fall months, but otherwise can nest year-round. Breeding is most frequent during early winter, when seeds are plentiful and accessible, or in late summer, when cones are developing.

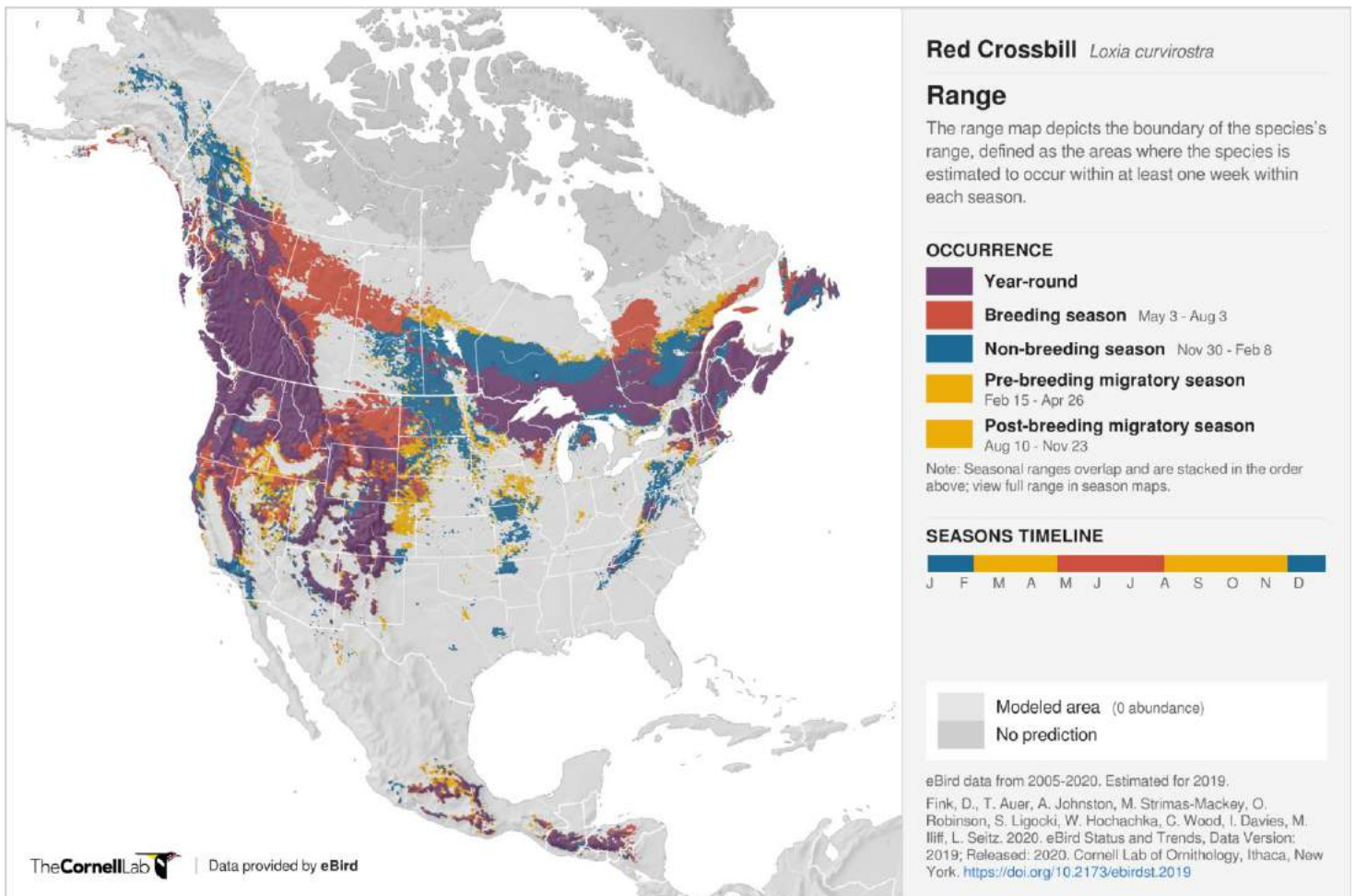




Photo credit: George Jett

Crossbills feed their young a slurry of seeds carried in their crop. The dark color of the viscous liquid has led some observers to postulate that the seeds are supplemented with insects, even in winter. However, others have noted crossbills' propensity to gather soil and grit which would similarly discolor the partially digested seeds, and caution against attributing the coloration solely to insect protein.

Females build the nest in a conifer tree out of small conifer branches, then line it with conifer needles, lichens, fine grasses, or feathers. Several pairs will often nest semi-colonally. Their nests are spaced 50–100 yards apart and they do not maintain real territories. She lays 2–4 pale, darkly blotched eggs and depending on



Photo credit: Evan Lipton/Macaulay Library

temperature, will begin incubating after laying either the first or the last egg. After beginning incubation, she remains on the nest continuously for 12–16 days, again depending on the ambient temperature. After the chicks hatch, the female continues her vigilant brooding for another 5 days. Throughout, the male accommodates her adhesive behavior by bringing her and the chicks food at the nest. Eventually, both sexes help feed the young and will forage up to half a kilometer away. Depending on temperature and food supply, the young will fledge in 15–25 days.

After fledging, the young birds somewhat resemble a female House Finch, with a finely streaked breast and brown back. Their parents will continue to look after the fledglings for another month, although if conditions are



Photo credit: Stephen Davies/Macaulay Library

good for another brood, the female will begin incubating immediately and the male will look after the fledglings on his own.

Red Crossbills nesting in Maryland or DC is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, their peripatetic habits, nearly year-round nesting phenology, and discreet breeding behavior makes it worth being aware of the possibility.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*

#### References

Benkman, C.W. and M.A. Young (2020). Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (S.M. Billerman, B.K. Keeney, P.G. Rodewald, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.redcro.01>

# ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

*Gemma Radko is the Communications and Media Manager at American Bird Conservancy and lives in Ijamsville, Frederick County.*



*What made you interested in birds?*

I developed a fascination with birds when I was around nine years old, living in Canoga Park, California. Our neighbors across the street had hummingbird feeders, and I used to go over and watch the hummingbirds with them.

*What's the best thing about atlasing?*

I love atlasing because it gives you a better understanding of different species' nesting habits and behaviors.

*What bird reflects your personality?*

Yellow-breasted Chat—I love to laugh, but prefer to remain inconspicuous. I have also been compared to a Phainopepla because I have black hair that tends to stick up.

*In addition to binoculars and a field guide, what would you take atlasing?*

I would take my iPhone, so that I could eBird and take photos.

*What is today's biggest conservation issue?*

Habitat loss, hands down. We need to permanently protect important breeding, wintering, and migratory stopover sites for all birds—so much has been lost to overdevelopment. We also need to work on slowing climate change, which is modifying and even eliminating bird habitats.

*Have you been involved with other atlasings?*

Yes, I was involved with the previous two Maryland and DC atlas efforts.



*What bird do you particularly like?*

So tough to narrow down...I really love Black-throated Blue Warblers—the male looks like a piece of jewelry, while the female has a subtler beauty that I enjoy seeing just as much.

*Where is your favorite place to atlas?*

Little Bennett Regional Park in Montgomery County has long been one of my favorite spots.

*If you could pick anyone to go atlasing with for a day, who would it be?*

It's a tie between Claire Wolfe and Jim Green.



Phainopepla. Photo credit: [Brian Calk/Macaulay Library](#)

# BLOCK PARTY

## Denton NE, Caroline County



If you sort blocks by the number of nocturnal species detected in the last atlas, a pattern emerges. Most of the blocks include waterbodies or marshes and are at well-known birding sites. Good examples are blocks like Bristol SW encompassing Jug Bay, Chicamacomico River SE with Elliot Island Rd running through it, or Frostburg CW, home to the MOS Carey Run Sanctuary. But nearly a quarter of BBA2 blocks had all three of our common owls reported: Great Horned, Barred, and Eastern Screech-Owl. Nocturnal species are widespread and, with a little effort, readily detected.

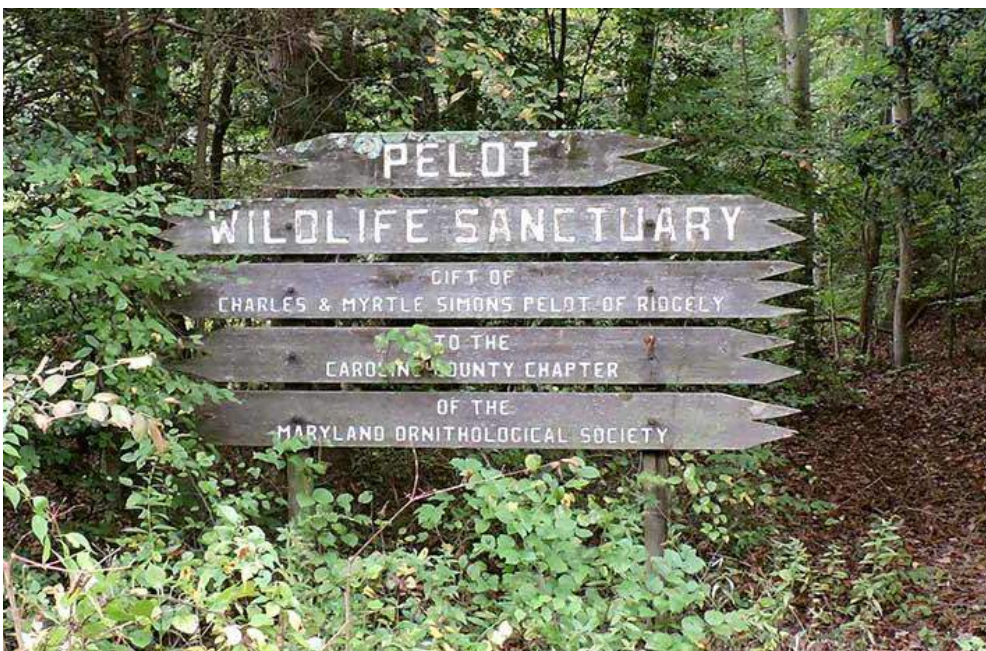
Denton NE was a productive block in BBA2 for both diurnal and nocturnal species. BBA2 reported 80 species in total for this block, two-thirds of which were Confirmed. Its tally of

species best detected at night included woodcock, all three common owls, and Chuck-will's-widow. As its name implies, Denton NE is located just north of the city of Denton in Caroline County. The Choptank River flows south through the block, bordering the east side of Greensboro where Highways 480, 313, and 314 converge. Greensboro Christian Park, North County Regional Park, and the MOS Myrtle Simons Pelot Sanctuary are located in the block's northern half, providing access for atlasers. Detailed access information for the sanctuary is available at [the Birder's Guide to Maryland & DC](#).

A mix of agriculture and forest, most of the forest follows waterways that include the Choptank, Gravelly Branch, and Little Gravelly Branch. Over a square mile of agricultural

land is protected by the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation. Chandler Robbins spent some time atlasing here during the last atlas and coded 40 species. But it was Bill Scudder, [who thinks that Christian Park is one of the best birding spots in the whole county](#), who was responsible for the exceptionally high Confirmation rate. He found nests of three dozen species, including bobwhite, Turkey Vulture, Blue Grosbeak, and kingfisher. He found recently fledged young for an additional half dozen species like turkey, Indigo Bunting, and Pileated Woodpeckers. By the end of the Atlas, Bill had coded every species reported breeding in the block and expanded the species list considerably from BBA1. The only breeding species reported from the first but not the second atlas were House Wren, Northern Parula, and Pine Warbler.

Atlasers spent twelve hours in Denton NE in 2020, although no one has adopted it yet. Red-shouldered Hawk, Barn Swallow, and Grasshopper Sparrow have been Confirmed, and an additional nine species have Probable codes. This includes Dickcissel, a species that was not documented in the block during previous atlases. I'm looking forward to spending some time in Caroline County this summer myself, and you can be sure that will include a stop in Denton NE.



MOS Myrtle Simons Pelot Sanctuary. Photo credit: Maryland Ornithological Society

*Author: Gabriel Foley*



# TIPS AND TRICKS

Atlasing at night is the best way to document many hard-to-detect species, including owls, nightjars, woodcock, and rails. It also offers its own challenges, but with a little preparation and some luck, those challenges are accompanied by rewarding experiences.

The most important consideration when out at night is personal safety. Low visibility is inherently more dangerous, but these risks can be minimized. While the Handbook provides a good overview of general safety tips, some of the most pertinent considerations include parking well off the road along a visible section (not around curves or over hills), using your vehicle's hazard lights when stopped, and wearing high-visibility clothing. You should also travel with a partner when possible and let someone know your travel plans. Never prioritize data

collection over your safety.

Nocturnal atlasing is often focused on particular target species, and you will have more success if you plan ahead with your target species in mind. The season will determine which species are vocalizing, and ideally each block should have at least two nocturnal trips during two different seasons. One trip should be in early spring, when owls and woodcocks are most detectable, and one should be in early summer, when nightjars and rails are more easily found.

Great Horned and Barred Owls are the earliest species, and they are both actively calling right now. Listen for their duets, which you can record as code C (courtship display). Otherwise, their vocalizations should be coded as S (singing). By March and April, you should be listening for Eastern Screech-Owls and American

Woodcock—the woodcock's display should also be recorded as code C. May and June are when you can find nightjars and rails. Their vocalizations should receive code S, but they are good candidates for code M (multiple singing birds). For code M, listen for seven or more individuals calling in the same block on the same night. If their density isn't high enough for code M, upgrade them a week later to code S7 (singing for 7+ days). The nighthawk's buzzy *peent* call is not a good indicator of breeding, but their "boom" display can be safely recorded as code C. Finally, fledgling Great Horned and Barred Owls have distinctive calls that can be heard in early to mid-summer, providing a Confirmed FL code (recently fledged young).

Passive listening is an effective way to detect nocturnal species, but many of them respond well to playback (the use of a recorded vocalization to elicit a response from a bird). Although we discourage the use of playback for general atlasing—the impact of playback isn't well understood, but it likely has deleterious effects on the responding bird—playback can be used judiciously to detect nocturnal species, especially owls and rails. Besides increasing the rate of detection, an advantage of using playback is that the responding bird can be coded as T (territorial).

Prior to atlasing, carefully planning out which blocks you want to visit and where in the block you want to go can be exceedingly useful. Concentrate on covering a block thoroughly before moving to a different block. Think about which species you want to



Common Nighthawk. Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

# TIPS AND TRICKS



Barred Owl. Photo credit: [Simon Best/Macaulay Library](#)

target, then use satellite imagery or daytime scouting trips to find suitable habitat for that species. An effective technique is to drive quiet roads in a block, stopping at intervals of a mile or so and listening for 5–10 minutes. When planning your route, think about where you might want to stop; find spots near suitable habitat with a good shoulder or pullout (Google Street View can help with this), and avoid stopping in front of houses or around curves or hills.

Unfortunately, you can't pre-emptively create locations in eBird. An alternative is to use Google Earth or Google My Maps to place pins at each potential stop; these can then be exported to your mobile device. You can find a [tutorial for this here](#). When naming the points, it's helpful to include the block name and the target species you are looking for. Once you arrive at the identified

location, begin your eBird checklist. If you are alternating driving and listening, it's best to do a series of Stationary checklists rather than one longer Traveling checklist.

It's not infrequent that you don't detect any birds at your stop; these zero-species checklists should always be submitted. However, you should be aware that these zero-species checklists will not show up on eBird block summaries or visualizations. It will seem like there is an error—and this does make harder for you to track nocturnal effort—but those zero-species checklists are still registered in the Atlas database and are included in all analyses of Atlas data.

eBird identifies nocturnal checklists when they are started 20 minutes after sunset or 40 minutes before sunrise. This means that for your

checklist to be included in nocturnal effort totals, it needs to be started 20 minutes after sunset or 40 minutes before sunrise (this is another reason why more, shorter checklists can be better than fewer, longer checklists).

Another important consideration before heading out is the weather. Calm nights with no rain will be most productive. If the wind goes above 10 mph, it can be hard to hear birds. Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will's-widows also vocalize more on moonlit nights; the best time to detect these two species is on clear nights within a week of the full moon.

Although "nocturnal effort" conjures images of haggard observers fueled by caffeine and moonlight, many species are actually just as detectable at dusk or dawn as they are at midnight—sometimes even more so. This means starting before dusk and atasing for an hour or two will still get you back home at a reasonable hour. Similarly, you can begin a couple hours before sunrise. Particularly in late spring or early summer, this has the additional benefit of transitioning right into the dawn chorus—one of the most magical and productive times of day for an atlaser.

*Author: Gabriel Foley*

The **Cornell** Lab   
**NestWatch**

To document the outcome of nests,  
use [NestWatch.org](#)

# FROM THE FIELD

*Contributions from the atlasing community!*

Copulating American Kestrels (code C).  
Photo credit: [Max Wilson/Macaulay Library](#)



Grasshopper Sparrow carrying food (code CF).  
Photo credit: [Danny Poet/Macaulay Library](#)



Female Red-winged Blackbird carrying food (code CF).  
Photo credit: [Eric Walther/Macaulay Library](#)



Northern Rough-winged Swallow carrying nest material (code CN).  
Photo credit: [M Huston/Macaulay Library](#)



Female Northern Cardinal feeding a juvenile Brown-headed Cowbird (code FY).  
Photo credit: [W. Scott Young/Macaulay Library](#)



*Do you have a story or photo to share with atlasers?*

*We'd love to hear about it! Send your submissions to the editor at [mddcbb3@mdbirds.org](mailto:mddcbb3@mdbirds.org).*

# OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

## Adventure of a Baltimore Birder at Pleasant Valley Camp, Garrett County, June 15–17, 1951

Jones, P.W. 1953. Adventure of a Baltimore Birder at Pleasant Valley Camp, Garrett County, June 15–17, 1951. *Maryland Birdlife* 9(1–3):11–14.

Willis, E. 1952. Summary of Maryland Nest Records, 1951. *Maryland Birdlife* 8(4–5):41.

The postcard announcement of this trip dated May 31st sent to the entire membership forecast what was to be expected in birding experiences. Would that I were gifted with the ability to express in the written word the joys and thrills that I personally experienced on this last of the state-wide trips of the season. Those of us who were fortunate to be there will echo I'm sure my own enthusiasms inadequately recounted though they are. I can only say to those of our friends and members who missed out this time, by all means do not fail to schedule it as a must in your log of future trips to be taken. I count myself fortunate indeed to have been among those present and emphatically record here my own recommendation that the Society place this trip on its annual list each year.

The gods were kind and the weather and temperature

ideal for the time of year and locale. Driving up Friday afternoon on Route 40 and beginning at Frederick the glorious scenery of the Appalachian Mountains unfolded before us range after range. A stop at Cumberland for a stout meal before pushing on to our objective, the camp at Pleasant Valley, shoved our spirits even higher if that were possible, and as we turned off the highway at Grantsville and headed south on 495, the sun was going down in a blaze of glory to our right beyond the next tree-covered mountain ridge. As per directions, we turned left in Bittinger and moseyed along to the pines marking the road in to the camp area. Winding our way around, and then over a bridge at the lower end of a beautiful lake, we immediately glimpsed the camp lodge and cabins higher up on our right in a splendid grove of trees. Wood smoke from atop a big stone chimney at the main lodge drew us on



Nashville Warbler. Photo credit: [Mary Brennan/Macaulay Library](#)

and after parking our car we were greeted graciously inside by our official hostesses Miss Livingstone and Mrs. Miller. The latter checked us off the registration list, assigned us our cabin and accepted our “dough”, meanwhile passing greetings and pleasantries back and forth among the birders already assembled before the big open fireplace ablaze with burning logs.

By ten o'clock all the anticipated arrivals had signed in and under our hostess' guidance announcements were made, directions given, (this was our first trip here), and plans for the next day agreed upon. Six of us, all men, righthanded aloft for the Wolf Swamp trip to be led by that peerless leader Chandler Robbins and due to leave at 6.00 A.M. following a rising bell at 5.00 and breakfast at 5.30. With that prospect before me, it

didn't take long to find our cabin and make up my cot. Piling on all the available blankets and sweaters— brrrrr! it was cold! I fell asleep amid sounds of snoring companions and after one last look at the moon above the treetops and the starshine overhead auguring good weather for the morrow.

No sooner had I snuggled down or rather literally curled up and the last man in had pulled the light, than I was conscious of a bell tolling. Great grief! it can't be five o'clock already! Yes it could be and was, confirmed by a hasty look at the luminous dial of my wrist watch. Dick Cole alongside had his flashlight on, Orville Crowder was zipping his way out of his sleeping bag and Chandler was pulling on his third pair of trousers by the time I screwed up courage enough to “hit the deck.” Grunts,

groans, and wisecracks about the temperature punctuated the small noises of creaking cots and guys getting into clothes and boots. As silently as possible in order not to wake the non-trippers, we filed out to morning ablutions followed by coffee and donuts at the main lodge. With a cigaret and my fourth cup of that delicious brew I began to thaw out and resemble a human being once more. Shortly we piled into Dick's car. The red top segment of the circle which is the visual outer rim of the mighty sun appeared above the horizon in the east as we shoved off.

Wolf Swamp lies approximately 4½ miles east of Grantsville, and the National Pike (U.S. Route 40) crosses the northern tip of the swamp area at Piney Grove. It shows up on the Avilton Quad topographic map as elliptical in shape, approximately 2½ miles in length and averaging about 1/3 of a mile in width, running in a southwesterly direction between Meadow Mountain and Red Ridge. Elevation 2700 feet. Red Run flows to the northeast out of the swamp into Piney Creek which in turn empties into the Frostburg Reservoir to the eastward. The spruce-hemlock bog itself covers nearly 15 acres, is irregular in shape and is the last virgin stand of this habitat of any size in Maryland.

Debarking from our car on a side road paralleling the bog, Chandler led us down a mossy track with the big trees overhead and thick brush all about. 100 yards and we were forced into single file as there is a



Nashville Warbler. Photo credit: [Chris Hudson/Macaulay Library](#)

dense and quite uniform under-story of rhododendron and practically no herbaceous cover at all. Soon I was put to it to maintain my place in line, clambering over huge moss-covered logs, ducking under and around the dense tangles of rhododendron roots and branches, pulling aside long thick trailing vines, grasping hand holds to keep from falling in the bog water and stepping gingerly into water holes kneeboot deep when there was nowhere else to put my foot. Down there on the forest floor it was dank, chill and gloomy, and silence pervaded over all. What trail there was was known only to our leader. In less than ten yards, the man ahead was lost to sight and sound. Overhead the hemlocks and red spruces, the red maples and yellow birches lifted their huge trunks and leafy branches to almost completely shut out the sky and only once in a while let filter in a bit of sunshine. Every now and then the word was

passed to keep silent and standing frozen with "glasses" searching the thick cover, we listened intently for a bird note or song, identified a moment later by our leader and master of bird calls.

Hearing the songs of the Northern Water-thrush, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Canada, Blackburnian and Black-throated Blue Warblers was indeed a treat for they cannot be heard in summer in the Coastal Plain or Piedmont areas around Baltimore. We could hear them but seldom see them. This was virgin forest, remember.

The sun was well up now but I couldn't tell the points of the compass until we broke out into an open glade in the center of the bog. There my companions had gathered in a knot and were gazing down at something atop a mossy hummock. I looked too but at first couldn't see anything

unusual, and then Chandler squatted down and reaching out his hand toward a smallish open hole in the moss brought forth one at a time four tiny fledglings. We were all enraptured and why not? This was the first actual nest of record in Maryland of a Nashville Warbler. Chandler then proceeded to give us a lesson in expert bird banding; I didn't know before they made bands sufficiently small to fit those tiny nestlings' legs, now only some 6 or 7 days old. It was good to be out in the open again and for a while we wandered around noticing the late flowering flora, some similar to our own but contrasting vividly thereto at this high elevation and temperature for the month of June. Here we picked up a Magnolia Warbler and a Black and White, a Crested Flycatcher, a Catbird and a Black-capped Chickadee.

At a call from our leader we set off again into the swamp resuming our



Magnolia Warbler. Photo credit: Brad Heath/Macaulay Library

single file order and heavy going in the dense undercover. I'm sure I pulled my legs up and down a thousand times more than I stretched them forward and there were few spots where you could walk upright and then just a couple of yards. Where we were headed I hadn't the faintest notion but I sensed something was up. Before long I caught a signal from the man ahead to stop, make no noise and crouch down. Shortly he waved me on and stealthily I approached him as he pointed ahead. Just as I reached him he whispered "there! about 8 feet up and 15 feet ahead" pointing again. I carefully scanned what I thought was the right spot but couldn't make out a thing at first; then a bright splotch of color focused in surrounded by a blur of brown. "What is it," I whispered. "Owl," he replied. "Yeah, what kind?" "SAW-WHET." "Never saw one before." "Neither have I." WOW!! It

later developed to be a life first for every member of our party except our leader who with consummate skill had tracked down this one for us, still partly in juvenile plumage. On an earlier trip Robert E. Stewart and he had found an adult Saw-whet here. This was the second nesting record for this species in Maryland. What a thrill.

The morning was well along now as we made our way out of the bog. Before long we reached the grassy track leading up to the gravel road and our parked car. When we reached it off came heavy clothing and boots as we passed the water jug around and loafed a bit and soaked up the brilliant sunshine, a vast difference to the cool green depths of the swamp. The ride back through the glorious high-country side, winding roads and mountain ranges all about was gay and conversation

rife with frequent exclamations and references to all we had seen and heard. As we pulled into the parking lot beside the main lodge the blue water of the lake below looked most inviting and then and there I decided to have a quick swim before the luncheon bell. Hurrying to our cabin, I doffed the rest of my heavy clothing and slipped on a pair of swimming trunks. Grabbing a towel I ran down to the little pier jutting out from the shore and jumped in, much to the surprise of several grown-ups and some youngsters fooling around the edges. WHEW! was it cold! like ice water! Believe me I didn't stay in long, just enough to feel refreshed and appetite-sharpened for that meal coming up next. I was ready for anything now and the afternoon and following day brought further thrills and adventures which I shall always recall with great delight and pleasure. But that's another story.

*Author: Percy W. Jones*

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*Editor's Note: the excerpt below is the record published in Maryland Birdlife of the Nashville Warbler nest described in Percy Jones' account above.*

### Summary of Maryland Nest Records, 1951

Nashville Warbler – Nest with 4 eggs at Wolf Swamp, Garrett Co., May 30 (Stewart, Robbins); the 4 young two-thirds grown, June 16 (Robbins and M.O.S.); first Maryland nest record.

*Author: Edwin Willis*



Northern Saw-whet Owl. Photo credit: J.B. Churchill/Macaulay Library