

WHAT'S HATCHING?

Official Newsletter of the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3

ISSUE NO 14 | MAR 2021



Photo credit: [Matthew Addicks/Macaulay Library](#)

CONTENTS

From the Coordinator.....	3	Bird of the Month.....	4
Atlaser Spotlight.....	6	Tips and Tricks.....	7
From the Field.....	11	Out of the Archive.....	13

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

Contact the editor: mddcbba3@mdbirds.org | 202-681-4733

Want to donate to the Atlas? You can do that at mdbirds.org/donate

On social media? Join the flock! @mddcbba3 | #mddcbba3



BIRD OF THE MONTH

Pine or sycamore? Which tree the Yellow-throated Warbler selects for nesting depends largely on whether or not the bird is in the Coastal Plain.

TIPS & TRICKS

David Smith provides a thorough walk-through of the MERLIN interface—including how it helped him find a woodcock.

FROM THE FIELD

Tyler Bell ponders covid, backyard birding, and "rainbow birds", and what this will mean for the upcoming nesting season.

The kids across the street from Bonnie Borsa discovered a Northern Cardinal nest low in a thick evergreen tree on April 3, 2020. They brought Bonnie over to show her the nest, and she logged that, a House Finch nest, and a Carolina Wren nest into [eBird](#).

The nest's three eggs represent a new early egg date by two days for Northern Cardinal in Maryland and DC. The previous early date was set in 1931 by J.C. Jones in DC.



"The list total isn't important, but the birds themselves *are* important. Every bird you see. So the list is just a frivolous incentive for birding, but the birding itself is worthwhile. It's like a trip where the destination doesn't have any significance except for the fact that it makes you travel. The journey is what counts."

--Rich Stallcup in Kingbird Highway



Eastern Kingbird.

Photo credit: [Dan Carbaugh/Macaulay Library](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Southern Maryland Audubon Society
April 7, 7:00–8:30 PM

Atlas Coordinator Gabriel Foley will provide an overview and update on the Atlas, a project that is an excellent opportunity to learn how to observe and identify breeding behaviors in the field and to hone your skills.

<https://www.somdaudubon.org/event/1876/>

Allegany & Garrett Bird Club
April 13, 7:00–8:00 PM

Atlas Coordinator Gabriel Foley will give a refresher presentation on BBA3 and ways club members can participate and support the effort as well as answer any questions.

<https://mdbirds.org/birding/virtual-meetingq-allegany-garrett-bird-club-5/>

From the Coordinator

The journey is what counts.



Over the past year, I've enjoyed reading the responses from the atlasers who have graciously accepted my request to feature them in the newsletter. I love learning what first sparked their interest in birds or what bird they think best fits their personality (the concept for this question actually came from a tradition outlined in one of my favorite books, *Kingbird Highway*, by Kenn Kaufman). But my favorite response is what the atlasers perceive to be the best aspect of atlasing.

The theme among those responses has consistently been that atlasing allows you to slow down, observe behavior more closely, and ultimately learn more about the bird. And I'm not surprised; this answer would be my response as well. I've come to think of atlasing as "slow birding"—a

term that I think was coined by Julie Hart, the New York atlas coordinator.

I recently re-read *Kingbird Highway*, an account of the author's 1973 attempt to see as many birds as possible—an effort known among birders as a 'Big Year'. There are multiple aspects of the book that I love—a teen's adventure on the road, the overt enthusiasm for all things birds, the descriptions of birding's maturation into the hobby we know today, and Kaufman's personal shift from listing species to carefully observing individual birds. Just before beginning his big year, Kaufman meets legendary California birder Rich Stallcup. Their conversation inevitably turns to keeping a list of species seen (Stallcup was wrapping up his own big year in California), and Stallcup explains that while lists can be fun, their real value is

providing further incentive to see more birds. Kaufman echoes this sentiment later in the book, saying, "As a crass young bird-lister, I might have said: a trip to the Tortugas is good, because it adds species to the total. But a better viewpoint would be: working on a list is good, because it gives me an excuse to come to the Tortugas."

Brian Rollfinke, this month's featured atlaser, recalls this sentiment in his response to what he sees as the best thing about atlasing. Rollfinke says, "atlasing encourages what I consider a healthy and mindful way to spend time appreciating the *journey* through nature, not a particular destination."

The decision to maintain a list of birds is a personal one, and there is no right or wrong decision. Atlasing provides many additional opportunities for listing, if you enjoy that incentive. You can find breeding codes for additional species, explore new blocks, or track your total Confirmations. But regardless of how you incorporate listing into your bird observations, atlasing forces you to slow down and study a bird's behavior. As Kaufman states near the end of his book, "I resolved to look at birds more carefully...to see if I could really get to know them."

It seems like atlasing would fit Kaufman's resolution well.

--Gabriel



Part of the journey: a singing Cape May Warbler. Photo credit: Gabriel Foley

bird of the month:

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER

Photo credit: Daniel Irons/Macaulay Library

Yellow-throated Warblers are one of the earlier arrivals in Maryland and DC, perhaps not surprising since many overwinter in the southeastern US. Males arrive in early April in full song, belting out their rolling trill from the top of a leafless tree. By May 1, they have completed their migration through Maryland and the species is busy breeding. Socially monogamous pairs begin to form soon after males begin singing, then shortly after that, the pair begins nest-building. The early egg date of May 16 may seem surprising given their early arrival, but the inaccessibility of Yellow-throated Warbler nests has contributed strongly to this lone egg date, which has remained unchanged for over a century (in fact, this was also Maryland's first breeding record of the species). In 1958, Robert Stewart and Chandler Robbins stated that the warbler's nesting season is mid-April to early

July.

Yellow-throated Warbler nests are built 80–100 ft in the canopy. Not only are the small nests difficult to find, but their height precludes checking for eggs or young. If you want to Confirm this species, the BBA2 coordinator, Walter Ellison, suggests watching for nest building activity. Yellow-throated Warblers tend to build their nests on a horizontal limb 6–10 feet from the trunk. The nest is often in a clump of leaves or pine needles near the end of the branch. In Maryland, Matt Hafner told me, nesting Yellow-throated Warblers tend to select pines on the Coastal Plain and sycamores in the Piedmont and west.

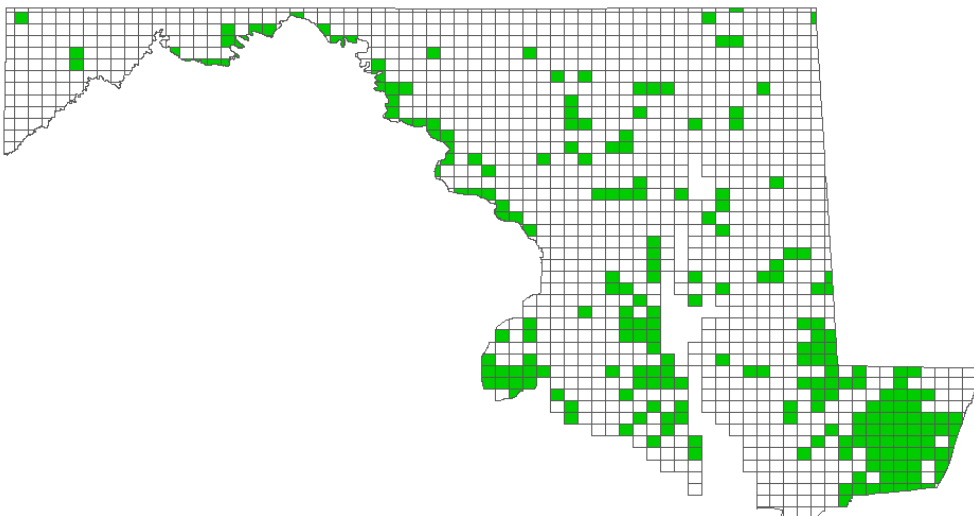
It was once thought that the differences in nest site selection and morphology—the bird's body shape

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER

Carefully documenting observations is how the natural history of a species is learned.

Yellow-throated Warblers represent yet another reasonably common breeding bird for which surprisingly little is known, evidently due in large part to the inaccessibility of its nest. Further highlighting the need for additional information about this species is the major range contraction that it underwent in the late 1800s. The reasons for that contraction are still unclear, but the warbler has been increasing its range north again.

Should you find a pair of Yellow-throated Warblers, consider watching them for a time and keeping notes about their behavior. This form of detailed observation is the basis of natural history, and the MOS publication *Maryland Birdlife* is an ideal outlet to publish those natural history observations. If you have something you would like to contribute, you can contact the editor, Eugene Scarpulla, at ejscarp@comcast.net.



Yellow-throated Warbler breeding distribution map from the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 2.

and color—represented two subspecies. However, research has found that there is no morphological demarcation; differences within the species change gradually over a geographical gradient. There is little genetic difference between populations, and subsequently little support for any true subspecies.

Yellow-throated Warblers feed on insects like caterpillars, flies, and a suborder of true bugs (Hemiptera) known as scale insects. They forage along the tops of canopy tree limbs, probing crevices with their long bills in a manner that is reminiscent of Black-and-white Warblers.

Unlike many songbirds, male Yellow-throated Warblers sing frequently throughout the day and well into their breeding season. They maintain five- or six-acre territories in bottomland or mature pine forests. Stewart and Robbins reported that Worcester County pine forests held 29 males per 100 acres, while the same county's "second-growth river swamp" held a third of that, 11 per 100 acres. In Maryland, the warbler's distribution follows much of the state's southern border, then spills out into the Coastal Plain.

The male helps the female build their cup nest out of bark strips, grasses, and weed stems. Once the structure is lined with plant down or feathers, the female lays 3–5 grayish, red-splotched eggs. If you happen to witness a copulation, pay attention to any displays that precede or follow it; these pre- or post-copulatory displays remain undocumented. She spends the next 12–13 days incubating, but has to forage for her own food. The male



will help provide food after the eggs hatch. Ten days after the chicks have hatched, they take their first flight. They'll remain in their natal territory for two or three weeks. Once they have gained independence, they wander widely and will flock with other species, particularly chickadees and titmice. This means that a Yellow-throated Warbler travelling in a mixed flock should not receive a breeding code.



In the more southern portions of their breeding range, Yellow-throated Warblers routinely raise two broods. However, it is unknown if this also occurs in Maryland and DC. Yellow-throated Warblers do not appear to reuse their nests, so if local populations do lay a second a clutch you should expect to see nest building in early summer. Of the eighteen nest-building observations from the last atlas, 75% were in May. There was a single June record (June 14), and three April records. Interestingly, all three of those April records (and the only May 1 record) were from a single year, 2002. An additional seven observations of recently fledged young were split between mid-June and early July. This pattern seems to indicate that unlike southern populations, our local birds may only raise one brood per year.

Author: Gabriel Foley

References

- Ellison, W.G. (2010). *2nd Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore. 494 p.
- McKay, B. and G.A. Hall (2020). Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga dominica*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A.F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.yetwar.01>
- Stewart, R.E. and C.S. Robbins (1958). *Birds of Maryland and the District of Columbia*. United States Department of the Interior. Washington, DC. 401 p.

ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

Brian Rollfinke is from Timonium, Baltimore County, and is the Director of Education at Irvine Nature Center.



You can take binoculars, a field guide, and what other item?

A large and full water bottle. Somehow my birding outings always run longer than anticipated. The time that happened in southern Arizona in July was a bit scary—I ran out of H₂O several miles from the car.

What bird do you particularly like?

I've always been fond of Pileated Woodpeckers. Their sheer size, strikingly bold plumage, loud rattling call, and powerful hammering make such a statement relative to most forest birds. Few wild creatures announce their presence so dramatically.

What's our biggest conservation issue?

As a lifelong educator, I'm worried about the disinterest many youngsters seem to have in nature and the outdoors. Video games, social media, the internet, and television occupy far too much of children's attention, and parents are increasingly losing the battle to get their kids to unplug. The immediate result is a general lack of awareness of the critters living in kids' own backyards; long-term, however, this could make it even more challenging for future generations to preserve what's left of the natural environment. Acts of stewardship rarely target causes in which people have little interest or investment.

Have you been involved with any atlases prior to this one?

Yup. My parents and I shared a block in the first Pennsylvania atlas, and I covered the northwestern quarter of Baltimore City in the second MD-DC atlas. I've also helped a bit with blockbusting efforts.

What bird best reflects your personality?

I'd have to say the Acadian Flycatcher. I do not like Baltimore's hot, humid summers and would choose to spend them in the cool shade along a forest stream, if I could. Second, I tend to be somewhat understated but come through loud and clear when I really have something to say. And, of course, I'm a huge fan of PEET-SAH!

Where is your favorite place to atlas?

At Irvine, I'm the rare birder who can walk right out of their office and into one of the best birding hotspots in the region. This past spring, there were Willow Flycatchers, Yellow Warblers, Field Sparrows, and Yellow-breasted Chats all nesting in our meadows; we maintain 80+ nest boxes, which are used by a roughly equal split between bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens. We also found baby turkeys on the property for the first time. It's the ideal work setting for an avid birder!

What is the best thing about atlasing?

While I do keep several lists, I'm not much of a 'twitcher'. I tend to do most of my birding within 15–20 minutes of home and rarely chase birds much farther away. Atlasing is more or less the antithesis of twitching. It requires revisiting familiar sites, closely observing behaviors, and scrutinizing for evidence of nesting. In today's fast-paced, on-the-go world, atlasing encourages what I consider a healthy and mindful way to spend time appreciating the *journey* through nature, not a particular destination.



What made you interested in birds?

I grew up within walking distance of the LeTort Spring Run, a trout stream in south-central Pennsylvania. As a ten-year-old, I became curious about the many large birds I encountered when biking the neighborhood, and I soon learned that there were large numbers of waterbirds in a nearby marshy stretch of the stream. To cultivate my new interest, my father introduced me to a colleague who ran a small bird-banding facility. Netting a Sharp-shinned Hawk and most of the eastern thrushes on my first visit sealed the deal; over the next few years my parents rose early on many a Saturday to get me my banding fix.

Who would you go atlasing with?

My family members! My dad has been a reliable birding partner for decades. My eldest son, a college senior who's studying avian ecology, has an amazing ear for birdsong and also does a much better screech-owl imitation than I. My younger son, a high school senior, has an eye for photography and does a superb job documenting our findings.

TIPS AND TRICKS

How a MERLIN helped me document a woodcock—by David Smith

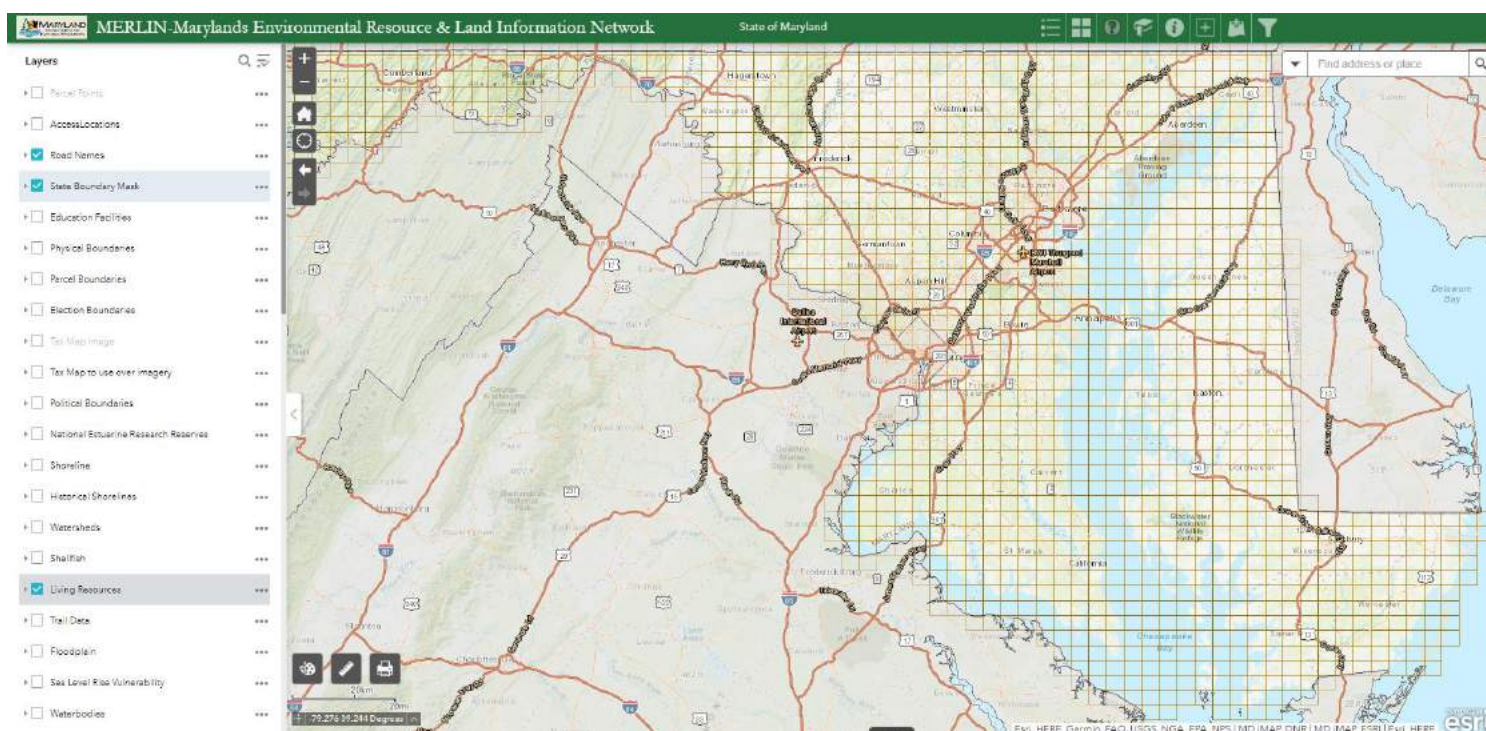
My day job is working as an environmental consultant. For many years now, my company has used a Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) mapping tool known as MERLIN, or Maryland's Environmental Resources and Land Information Network. This is not to be confused with the phone app Merlin, which is a wonderful birding resource created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that complements eBird with images, sound recordings, and brief descriptions of birds. If you don't have this free app on your phone, you need to download it. But I digress—MERLIN the mapping tool is just as wonderful in its own right. Using the Global Information System, or GIS, platform of multiple resource layers organized into a single online

mapping tool, it is a one-stop-shop for learning a considerable amount about any particular location in the state. And, as I will point out in this article, it can be a valuable atlasing tool for finding potential sites for habitat specific birds.

The MERLIN website can be accessed at gisapps.dnr.state.md.us/MERLIN/index.html (you can also find the website address and tips for how to use it within the [Atlaser Resources document](#) available on the Atlas website). Once the MERLIN page is open, a list of available layers will appear to the left of the base map. If you click in the box of a given layer option, that layer will open on the adjacent map. To navigate within the map, you can click and drag to move

around the map and use the scroll bar to zoom in and out. The list of available layers is quite impressive and many are extremely useful for atlasing purposes. Most also have sublayers within them that can be accessed by clicking on the arrow to the left of the layer name. This is useful if you want a single sublayer but would like to turn off the others to unclutter the map. When you click the main layer box all sublayers will show up on the map. However, if you open up the layer list to reveal its components, you can then turn off those sublayers that you don't want by toggling off the checked box. The layers and sublayers that I find most helpful for atlasing purposes in order from top to bottom of the legend are as follows:

- Road Names



A screenshot of the MERLIN interface.

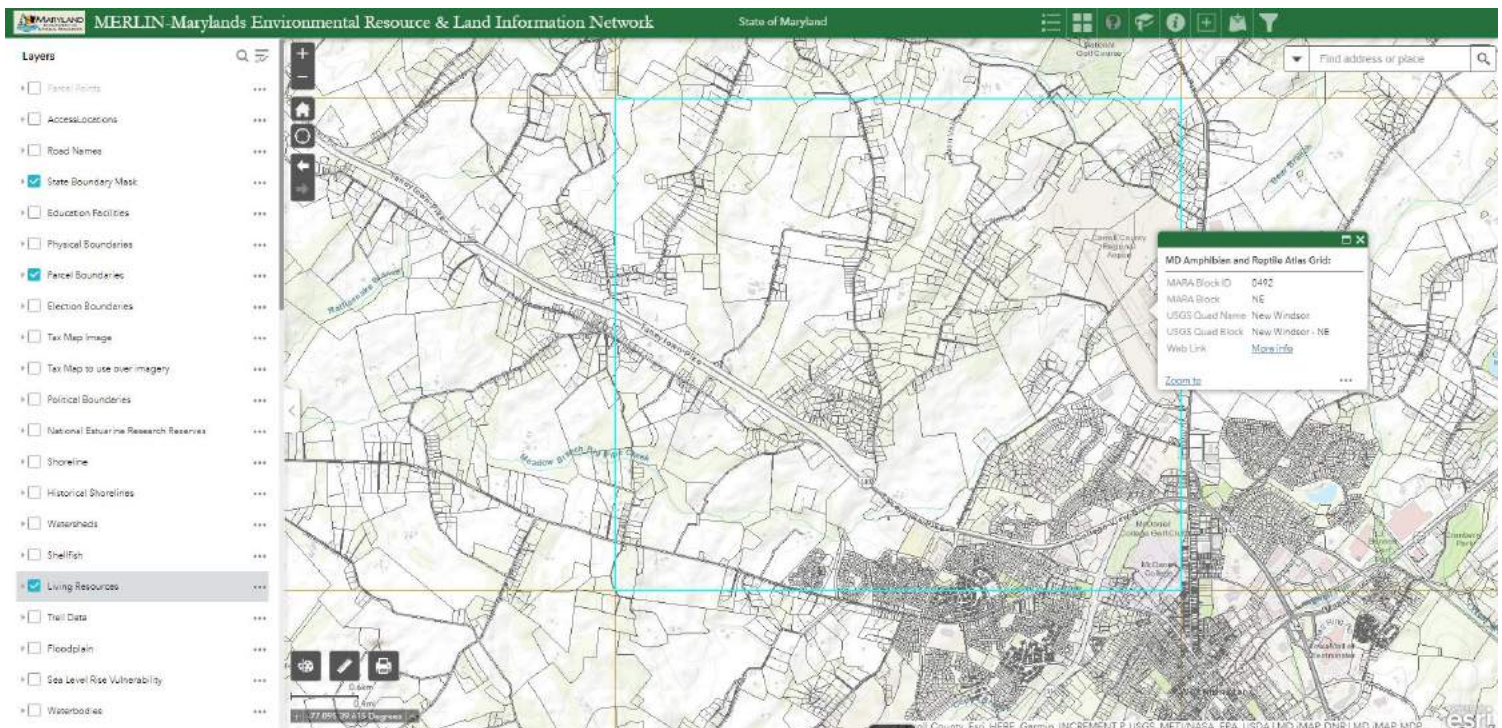
- Physical Boundaries—state and county lines
- Parcel Boundaries—delineates all distinct land parcels and provides Real Property data about each (see below)
- Living Resources—the MD Amphibian & Reptile Atlas grid sublayer (the same grid as the breeding bird atlas grid) provides the block boundaries
- Protected Lands—different colored polygon overlays depict different types of protected lands, but these obscure the background so toggling this layer on and off is helpful
- Aerial Imagery—there are various imagery years available; some are also high resolution.

There are certainly many other layers that you might also find useful, such as the Wetlands layer, which will show wetlands and streams mapped

by DNR. However, for me, the above are the basics that I use when searching out a particular location. And once you have all those layers selected, some, like the protected lands layer, show up visually with colored polygons overlain onto the map. For other layers, their value lies a bit deeper. If you left click your mouse within a particular parcel of interest, an information box will pop up on the screen with information about each layer that has been selected. If you have checked the box for the Parcel Boundary layer, then that will generally appear first since it is near the top of the layer list. If there are other selected layers that also pertain to where you clicked in the map, those can also be accessed by clicking on the right arrow in the green header of the initial information box. For example, if you turned on the Atlas Blocks sublayer, when you scroll past the Parcel Boundary information the next information box will show you in which quad and atlas block you

you clicked on a Protected Lands parcel, the information box will tell you whether it is a state or local parkland, in an agricultural or conservation easement, or other protected land category. These extra bits of layer information can prove most useful in your search for good access or potential habitats.

With respect to the access issue, the Parcel Boundary information box can provide lots of helpful information. The initial information will show the Jurisdiction Code, which is the county within which the parcel resides. The box will also show the Parcel Account Number and a hot link to the SDAT Real Property data for the parcel. If you click on that link, you will be directed to the property information page that lists the owner(s) information, location and structure information, value information, transfer information, and more. Some of the most helpful information here is the owner(s) name(s), mailing address, parcel acreage, and whether



Clicking on a feature, such as one of the blocks, will provide more information about it.

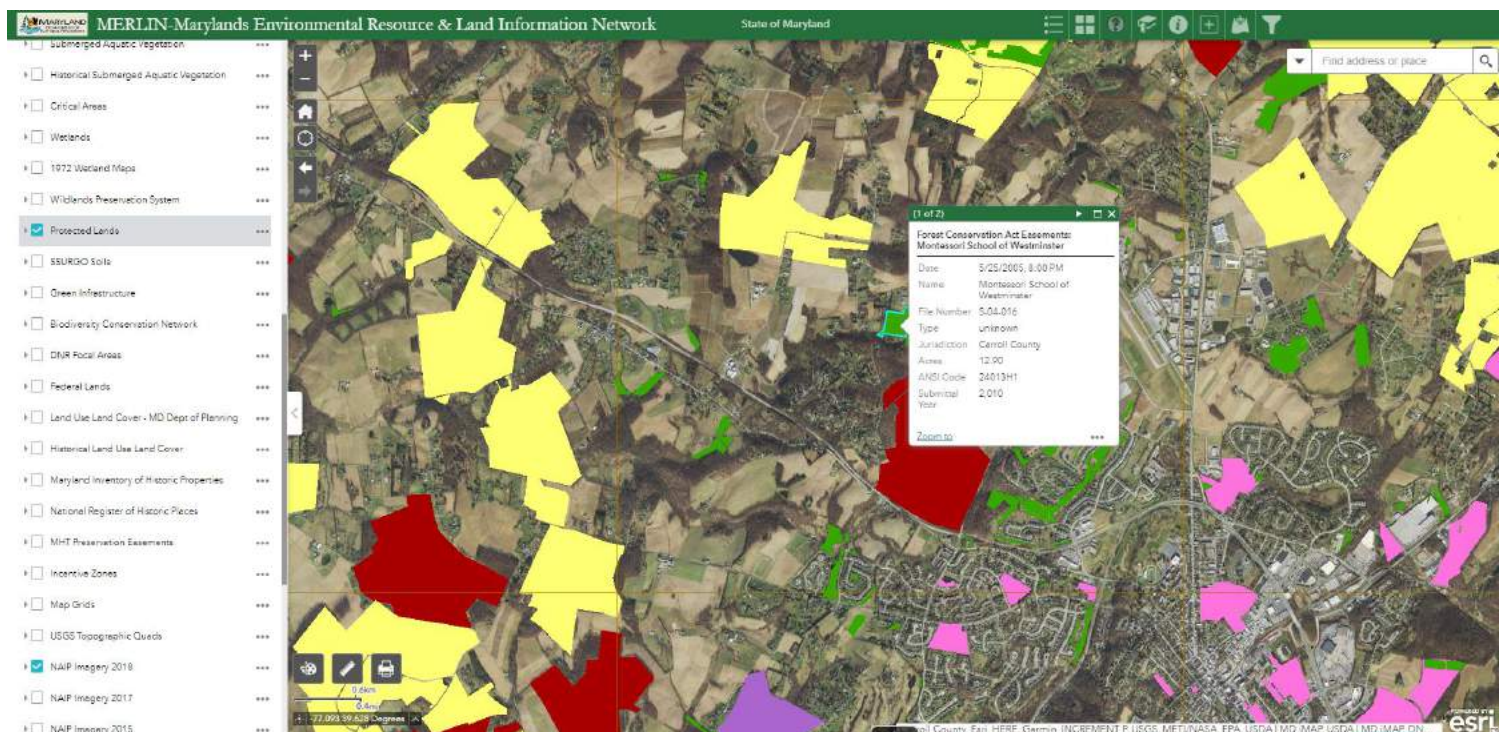
the parcel is a principal residence.

There are also many ways that one can use the MERLIN mapping tool. You may have driven by an area of particular habitat that looked good for a given species or group of species and want to know whether it is public land, or if not, at least who owns the land in case you might be able to contact them about access. For me, MERLIN's greatest asset is as a planning tool. For any given atlas block, you may have historical knowledge about well-known publicly accessible sites and the habitats (and their associated breeding birds) that occur within them. However, these sites are often quite limited in many atlas blocks. And there are likely many unrepresented habitats within the few accessible sites, so finding those bird species associated with those other habitats requires a different tactic. This is where MERLIN comes in quite handy. Let's say that your block has a park or sanctuary with a large tract of forest that

provides great habitat for forest interior dwelling bird species and edge species. However, grassland and early successional scrub shrub species are not represented, and many of these species were documented within the block during the previous atlas project. You can spend time driving around the block looking for those habitat types or you can first use the high resolution aerial images on MERLIN to explore where these habitats may still exist in the block. Once found, you can view property ownership, accessibility from public roads, etc.

A personal example of MERLIN's utility and the reason for the title of this article, pertains to my desire to locate potential American Woodcock display sites in various Carroll County atlas blocks for which potential breeding documentation of the species was still needed. Knowing that the woodcock display window is a relatively short one, I wanted to target potential sites quickly. My approach to this was to

create a MERLIN map, zoom into a particular atlas block of interest, and scan the high resolution images for the appropriate habitat. As we learned in the March 2020 newsletter, woodcocks prefer to display in early successional habitat and old fields that lie adjacent to forest. For one such block, Westminster SW, this approach turned out to be magical. When I first scanned the aerial images for what appeared to be accessible early successional habitat within the block, I was drawn to a parcel located off of a dead-end lane. When I clicked on the parcel in the MERLIN map, the property owner information came up as being state-owned land. When I then toggled on the Protected Lands layer, I learned that it was a disjunct parcel associated with the Morgan Run Natural Environmental Area. Things were looking up. I had seemingly good habitat that was public land and accessible from a public roadway. The one minor drawback to using MERLIN is that the most recent aerial imagery is from 2018. Early successional



Layers can be toggled on and off in the legend to explore ownership, land use, or access.

habitat can change quickly in a matter of two or three years. So, I looked at some more recent aerials on Google Earth and Google Maps, which showed that much of what looked like ideal habitat had indeed become perhaps too overgrown to be ideal for woodcock display grounds. However, a small portion of the parkland, tucked in adjacent to private property, still seemed good. So, on a still, late afternoon in mid-March I drove up to the area, parked on the road shoulder and prepared to hike into the property. My assessment of the denseness of much of the habitat that had initially appeared as old field habitat on the MERLIN map was correct. The habitat was now overgrown with invasive shrubs and was extremely thick. I was contemplating how I was going to bushwhack my way through to the better habitat when a voice called out inquiring as to my intentions. I turned to see a couple

about my age walking their large German shepherd up the road. I then proceeded to explain my purpose for being there. When I finished, the couple invited me to drive down to their house at the end of the lane that abuts the parkland from which I could easily hike a short distance into the park where the good woodcock habitat was. What luck! I drove back the lane to their driveway and the property owner and canine companion escorted me along a narrow trail that he had cut out on his property that led right up to a large wooden deer stand that overlooked prime woodcock display grounds. The property owner then retreated back to his house. I climbed his deer stand, which came complete with a comfy lawn chair, and from my perch about 15 feet in the air, I waited for dusk and what I hoped would be those first peent notes to signify the beginning of a woodcock display. I didn't have to wait long. The first peent call came from



American Woodcock.

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

almost directly below me. Then another a short distance away. Then another from a bit farther away. For the next 15 or 20 minutes I had an elevated seat to a magnificent series of woodcock displays. All I needed was a cocktail and some hors d'oeuvres to go with it and it would have been the perfect evening. And mission accomplished; a probable breeding code for American Woodcock for the block. I also added a Barred Owl to the block as an added bonus.

And while not nearly as glamorous as the observation described above, this technique of using MERLIN to find potential woodcock display grounds has paid off in several other atlas blocks as well. So, get familiar with the MERLIN mapping tool. It can really help you plan how to maximize your atlas block coverage.

Author: David R. Smith, Carroll County Coordinator



Perfect habitat for American Woodcock in the Morgan Run Natural Environmental Area, found using MERLIN. Photo credit: David Smith

FROM THE FIELD

Covid musings and Painted Buntings—by Tyler Bell

Covid-19 came at an inopportune time in 2020. Well, it would never have come at a good time! But, mid-March was a time when atlasers were probably all starting to think seriously about approaching safe dates and strategizing about field work for the first year. When Governor Hogan announced travel restrictions, most of us really followed the guidelines and cut back on unnecessary travel, even within our own counties. I didn't put gas in our cars for months because we walked or biked to most places where we needed to buy groceries or prospective habitats within our home block and adjacent blocks.

But, the atlas wasn't waiting. I'm sure County Coordinators tried to think outside the box as much as possible for ways to get people involved without actually gathering outside of their respective bubbles. And, with all of the people shut in at home, they began to discover the nature that was always there around them. What is one of the most obvious and charismatic aspects of nature? Birds, of course! So many people began watching birds for the first time in their lives. Our local Wild Birds Unlimited (WBU) store in St. Mary's County has always had a Facebook group but the number of people who "liked" the group exploded. With smart phones and inexpensive point-and-shoot cameras came a plethora of photographs of birds, both common and uncommon.



Male Painted Buntings are spectacular and distinctive, and images can even be found by googling "rainbow bird".

Photo credit: [Michael Myers/Macaulay Library](#)



For those unfamiliar with the species, female Painted Buntings can be a challenge to identify.

Photo credit: [Sean McCandless/Macaulay Library](#)

Many people on the WBU group posted photos of birds in various aspects of breeding. Bluebird nest boxes with eggs or chicks (Code NE or NY, nest with eggs or young), Carolina Wrens feeding young (Code FY), juvenile Northern Cardinals at feeders (Code FL, recently fledged), etc. I was able to get people to submit their photos through the Atlas portal sometimes and other times, I had permission to use their photos to submit checklists using my admin account. This went along fine until people hit the 'Covid Wall' sometime in June, perhaps, then it all sort of stopped. But, getting data for what I call low-hanging fruit is great, especially for atlas blocks that got little attention in the last two atlases.

So, along with lovely photos of nesting birds, came a few photos of rarities. Particularly, Painted Buntings (PABU). They weren't only on the WBU group but other Maryland bird groups. The green ones are particularly vexing to observers because they can't find them in field guides or by Googling images. Males are easier. One person found them by searching for rainbow bird. Try it! I digress. Most of the reports in St. Mary's County seemed to center around Leonardtown and Hollywood which are only about ten miles apart. Painted Buntings were confirmed as breeders for the first time in the recently concluded Virginia BBA.



In 2017, this Painted Bunting was Confirmed breeding in Northampton County, Virginia, and represented the state's first breeding record.

Photo credit: [Luis Ramos/Macaulay Library](#)

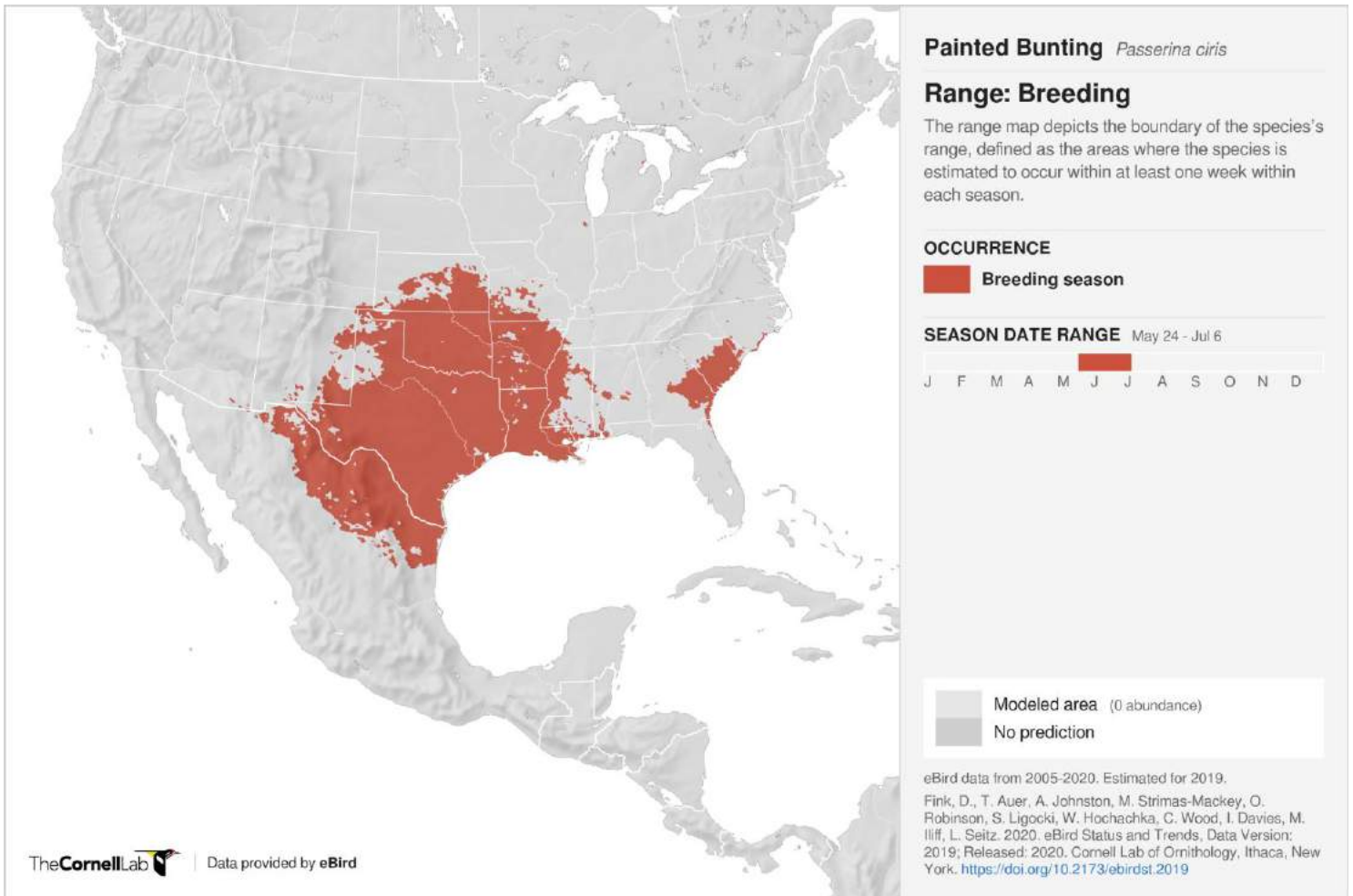
Since it probably was hoped for but not a lock, there are no safe dates for PABU. The MD-DC BBA3 doesn't have safe dates either. Indigo Bunting is a close relative with a safe date of May 25. Blue Grosbeak is June 5. None of the reported PABUs were in May, though. But why so many?

And, to sweeten the pot, enter the PABU invasion of winter 2020/21. Most of you probably either saw or heard about

the Great Falls bird. It made the Washington Post as well as the various metro TV news local interest coverage. Tim Carney, one of the Maryland eBird reviewers, did a tally of just the Maryland PABUs and the number currently stands at 17! Is it an aberration or is it because of people being cooped up by Covid and the buntings are just being more easily detected? Some of those birds are returning birds like the Tracy's Landing, Anne Arundel County, bird, which has come back for a third successive winter. One couple in Dares Beach, Calvert County has a male and two females. Three birds at one feeder is probably some sort of record in Maryland.

What will this all mean in the nesting season in 2021? With that many birds known to be in Maryland just this winter, and hopefully more birds arriving in the spring, it's looking better all the time for Painted Bunting to be one of the next breeding birds in Maryland. With the help of feeder watchers in St. Mary's County who like to post their photos on the WBU page, I'm hoping to cash in and have St. Mary's be the first county to host them. We've got four more years for this to happen but why wait!

Author: Tyler Bell, St. Mary's County Coordinator



OUT OF THE ARCHIVE

Two Robin Nestlings Fed Opposite Ends of Same Earthworm

Brackbill, H. 1945. Two Robin Nestlings Fed Opposite Ends of Same Earthworm. *Maryland Birdlife* 1(5):25–26.

A nest of Robins that I was watching in Baltimore held three blind, downy young four days old when, on July 5, 1943, the male parent arrived on one feeding trip with an earthworm about 4 inches long. The three yellow mouths gaped upward, and into one of them he thrust one end of the earthworm, and then put the other end in the mouth of a second bird!

At once each nestling began gulping its end; in a couple of seconds the two were bill to bill, then their bills were interlocked and they began to thrash around in the nest in their efforts each to go on swallowing the worm. Shortly one so far succeeded that it had a good part of the other's head in its cavernous mouth. Next they worked into a jowl-to-jowl position, facing opposite directions, and continued their tossing about, all the while watched but in no way aided by the parent that had got them into their fix.

After two minutes had passed, the female arrived. She fed the third nestling; the male flew away. And now the female

watched as the worm-linked pair tumbled about, again biting bills and heads. At last the little birds seemed to reach the limit of their strength; both heads flopped down in the nest. But in a little while they were lifted up again and the struggle was resumed.

Now, however, the female arrived at a solution of the problem. Whenever her youngsters presented an opening, she pecked at the portion of worm that showed inside their mouths, and after five minutes she succeeded in cutting the worm in half. That was eleven minutes after it had been given to the birds.

Writing in the *Passenger Pigeon*, the bulletin of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology, for February, 1941, Alvin L. Throne has described the similar feeding of an 8-inch Red-bellied Snake to two Hermit Thrush nestlings by the female parent. Those birds were linked for more than half an hour, and were finally freed when the male pulled the tail of the snake out of the gullet of one nestling.



American Robin on a nest. Photo credit: [Keith Eric Costley/Macaulay Library](#)