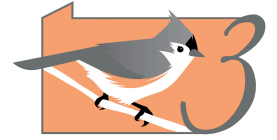
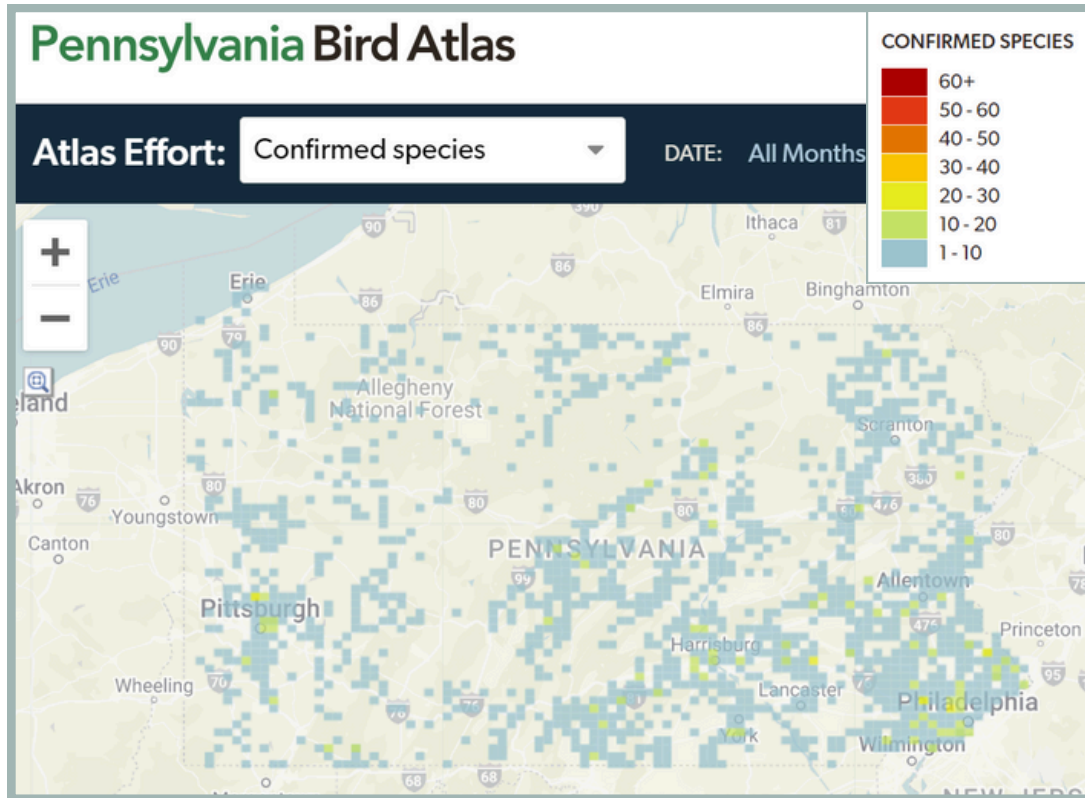


MAY 2024

# The PennsyAvian Monitor



*News from the 3rd Pennsylvania Bird Atlas*



Confirmed number of species in each block as of early May 2024. As expected, some regions are very well covered, but there are many blocks with no or few coded species. Now that we've entered peak atlasing season, let's get out to those under-surveyed blocks across the state!



Female Red Crossbill that nested at R.B. Winter State Park. Photo by Jessie Sauder.

## Atlas Updates

Pennsylvania's 3rd Bird Atlas launched on January 1, 2024 and atlasers across the state dove in headfirst! Reports for those early breeding species began rolling in: Bald Eagles working on nests, duetting Great Horned Owls, Rock Pigeons incubating. A pleasant surprise came less than a week into the year, when Red Crossbills were observed nest building at R.B. Winter State Park. Soon after, Crossbill breeding was confirmed at two additional locations in north-central PA. These were remarkable finds for a species with only about 11 previously confirmed nesting attempts in the state.

Confirmed species accumulated slowly for the first couple months, though it was a notably early spring here in Pennsylvania (perhaps the new norm?). More recently, the rate of increase in the number of coded species has steadily picked up, and we've just recently surpassed 100 species confirmed breeding in the state. Now, in the first few days of May, it feels like you can't step outside without witnessing territorial disputes, copulations, nest material being carried, and other signs of the season! Pennsylvania's 3rd Atlas is certainly off to a strong start.

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# Atlasing and eBird

## Will Stollsteimer

When it comes to the PBA3, Atlasing and eBird go hand in hand! Understanding the best ways to use eBird for the Atlas will ensure success as the breeding season ramps up.

### Checklist Basics

Let's start with the basics. All Pennsylvania checklists completed now through February 2029 may be submitted to the [PA Bird Atlas portal](#) in eBird, whether they contain [breeding codes](#) or not. When it comes to keeping checklists for the PBA3, birders should aim for concise checklists that

represent a single atlas block. Keep traveling checklists to a maximum distance of one mile, and stationary checklists to a maximum time of about one hour, to provide better spatial resolution and ensure that the data produced by the Atlas has maximum value for conservation efforts.

### Geopolitical or Atlas Boundaries

Birds don't abide by arbitrary geopolitical borders or [Atlas block boundaries](#). However, to accomplish the task of determining which species are breeding in each block, we must pay attention to these boundaries while atlasing. Birders should be mindful of block boundaries and begin a new checklist when crossing into a new block. Birders are also encouraged to start new checklists when crossing county boundaries to prevent complicating county lists. Find more information on eBird's recommended practices when birding near borders [here](#). If you observe breeding behavior in an adjacent block while atlasing, you may include that species on your checklist to create a "complete" checklist, but do not include the breeding code. Instead, create a separate "incidental" checklist including the species and the breeding code, and submit from the actual location of the breeding bird. If you happen to go birding in blocks along Pennsylvania's borders, you may also observe birds that are outside of the state. Because this is the Pennsylvania Bird Atlas, we want to only include observations of birds in the state! Leave those birds off your checklist and identify it as an "incomplete" list by selecting "No" when asked, "*Are you submitting a complete checklist of the birds you were able to identify?*" Finally, care must be taken when using hotspots for checklist locations while atlasing, as many hotspots cross block boundaries. In many cases it will be more appropriate to use a personal location instead. Please see the Atlaser Q&A in this newsletter for tips on using hotspots appropriately.

### Cryptic Species and Hybrids

Species identification is of the utmost importance when submitting data to eBird and the PBA3. When a bird can't be confidently identified to the species level, it should be left off checklists rather than tentatively included. It's better to be conservative as not to misrepresent a species that may not actually be breeding in that Atlas block. Keep in mind, though: If you can't identify the species by sight or sound but are able to capture a photo or record the bird singing or calling, other birders may be able to help identify it. Similarly, use caution when birding in known hybrid zones, as hybrids are easily misidentified. If an identifiable hybrid bird is seen demonstrating a breeding behavior, it should be submitted as a hybrid with the appropriate breeding code applied. For instance, if an impure Golden-winged Warbler is observed carrying food to a nest, this should be coded as a Golden-winged x Blue-winged Warbler hybrid and given the "CF" code to indicate a food carry. Cryptic hybrids should be addressed with care and patience as they can be very difficult to differentiate from genetically (or phenotypically) pure individuals.

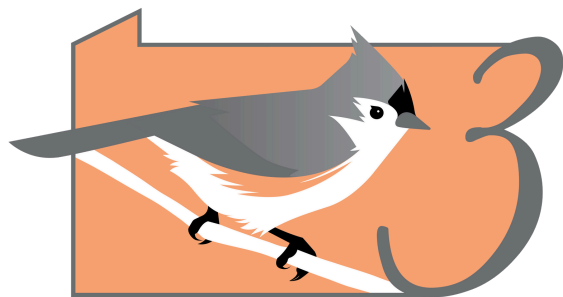
### Conclusion

Using eBird offers a lot of convenience in contributing to the PBA3, but it does require care and some small differences in protocol relative to typical birding trips. By paying close attention to [eBird best practices](#) and taking special care with identification and borders, making accurate and effective lists can be very simple. As with all matters related to atlasing, your regional and county coordinators can offer advice or solutions to any questions that arise concerning these topics.



Ruffed Grouse: Deb Rittelmann

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## The PBA3 Logo Story

The PBA3 logo has garnered many compliments from within Pennsylvania and beyond our borders! The design was a collaboration between Dan Callahan, a graphic designer currently studying at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia, and Bobby Brown, the PBA3 Lycoming County Coordinator, and one of the birders behind the 'LycoBirds' website, YouTube channel, and Facebook page. Dan chose the Tufted Titmouse as the featured species for the logo because it is a well-recognized species found throughout Pennsylvania. Bobby developed the overall design of the logo, including the '3' in the state outline, which mimics the path of the Delaware River forming the eastern border of PA and signifies that this is our 3rd Atlas.

As a year-round resident of the state, the Titmouse is a fitting symbol for PA's first atlas to include both breeding and winter surveys. It's also a very accessible species, easily seen at bird feeders and in yards and parks. Many birders are familiar with the Titmouse's jaunty gray crest, feisty scolding, and whistling call of "Peter Peter!" Once thought of as a southern species, the Titmouse has steadily increased its range northward in response to warming winters and increased popularity of bird-feeding by humans. By the mid-1960s it was present in nearly every Pennsylvania county. During PA's 1st Atlas, it was found in 81% of blocks, with missing blocks primarily in northern counties. By the end of the 2nd Atlas, the Titmouse had continued to expand across the northern tier of the state and was observed in 95% of blocks. This range change exemplifies one of the key reasons that repeating atlases is so important – to map the distribution of bird species and detect range shifts and changes in response to climate change, habitat loss, and other factors.

Find Dan Callahan at @danlouddesign on Instagram and X (Twitter) and Bobby Brown at [lycobirds.com](http://lycobirds.com). Thanks to Dan and Bobby for sharing your talents!

## Atlaser Q&A

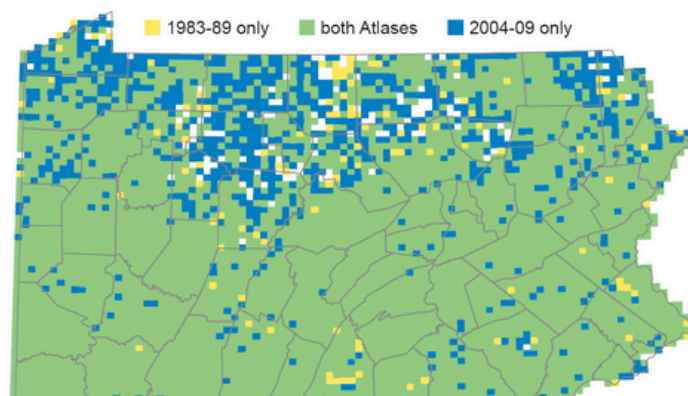
**Q:** What's the deal with hotspots and atlasing? Can I use them for my checklists?

**A:** Selecting hotspots as locations for checklists is a familiar practice for eBirders. Unfortunately, using hotspots doesn't always align with best practices for atlasing because hotspots can span more than one Atlas block and a hotspot pin may be in a block adjacent to the block being surveyed. Hotspot pins are ok to use when: the entire hotspot falls within a single block, the hotspot pin is less than one mile from the birding location, and the hotspot reflects the habitat that was birded. Otherwise, a personal location should be created for the checklist.

See this [video](#) for a more detailed explanation.

**Do you have an atlasing photo, short story, or art to share?**

Send to [pabirdatlas@hawkmountain.org](mailto:pabirdatlas@hawkmountain.org) to have it featured in a future newsletter or on social media.



Map showing change in distribution for Tufted Titmouse between Pennsylvania's 1st and 2nd Atlases.

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# Coordinator Spotlight

## Meet Dan Brauning, Upper Susquehanna Regional Coordinator



Dan with his wife, Marcia Brauning

Dan Brauning, of Lycoming County, is the PBA3 Upper Susquehanna Regional Coordinator. Dan is retired from the Pennsylvania Game Commission where he was involved in a number of bird conservation projects, including the recovery of the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Osprey. He coordinated and published Pennsylvania's 1st Breeding Bird Atlas and co-published the 2nd Atlas. He was also a founding member of the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) and currently serves as its president. PSO is an organization dedicated to the conservation of Pennsylvania Birds and was born directly from the connections that birders built during the 1st Atlas in the 1980s.

Though he may not approve of the title, many consider Dan "the grandfather of Pennsylvania bird atlases." We are fortunate that he hasn't yet tired of atlasing and has been willing to lend his expertise and thoughtfulness to the planning and implementation of the PBA3!

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### How did you become interested in birds?

I grew up within Philadelphia's city limits, but as something of an introvert, found escape from the concrete jungle in the city's extensive parks. At that time, Tacony Creek Park, in the lower northeast, had a lot of wild spaces, so there I discovered birds. A fascination and appreciation for the natural world became focused on birds. It was the '60s and early '70s, so a desire to contribute to the environmental movement (save the species) was a motivator.

### Is there a special memory that stands out from the previous Pennsylvania atlases?

Memories range from birds to people. Friends I made during the first Atlas continue today! I can remember birding in a recently logged area of Wayne County and being dive-bombed by a territorial Goshawk. That's particularly poignant since the American Goshawk is almost gone from Pennsylvania now. But personally, it was a thrill and a discovery. During the Second Atlas, I spent a lot of time in northern Lycoming County and remember, with David Ferry, looking into the habitat requirements of Mourning Warblers, and finding them more frequently than expected.

### What are you most looking forward to in the 3rd atlas?

First, I must confess that a 3rd Atlas was not in my wildest imagination in 1985. When undertaking the first project, it was clear that we would replicate the project on a 20-year cycle. But a third? So, just being involved, and part of this project, is a tremendous privilege. Atlases have proven to be fun (so birders will participate) and deliver valuable information for conservation. So, in the most general sense, I look forward to the process and experience of discovery; as Andy Wilson says, "birding with a purpose."

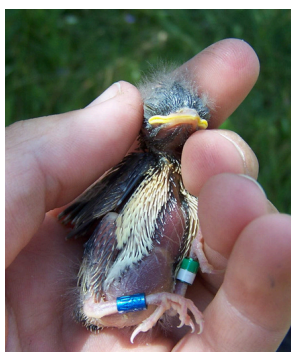
### What do you think are the most pressing conservation issues for Pennsylvania birds?

I see a range of issues that are collectively impacting bird populations. Each species has its own vulnerabilities. For migratory species, the cumulative impact of many issues (habitat changes on winter grounds, threats during stop-over, like glass, and then localized threats on breeding grounds) build into population-level impacts.

### If you could pick anyone to go atlasing with for a day, who would you choose?

Kenn Kaufman jumps to mind. I think I've been in the field with him before, a long time ago, but he reflects a broad set of birding values that I appreciate: interest in more than the list, attention to other taxonomic groups, and of course I'd learn from his depth of knowledge.





## Note from the Atlas Coordinator

Amber Wiewel

Greetings! I'm taking this opportunity to introduce myself to Pennsylvania atlasers. I grew up in Missouri and was bitten by the birding bug when I took an undergraduate Ornithology course. Over the next few years, I surveyed breeding birds and monitored nests in the Missouri Ozarks, counted Least Tern nests on the Mississippi River, studied nesting Willow Flycatchers in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, and earned an M.S. degree studying the breeding biology of the Puerto Rican Bullfinch – so you could say that I've had a thing for breeding birds for a while! From there, I moved to Maryland and then Pennsylvania while working as an amphibian research biologist.

Last July, I began working for Hawk Mountain Sanctuary when I was hired for the role of Atlas Coordinator. The past ten months have been a whirlwind as I've worked with the Atlas advisory group to assemble a topnotch team of volunteer coordinators from around the state, develop protocols, and promote the Atlas. The excitement leading into the 3rd Atlas has been contagious, and I feel fortunate to be working on this project here in Pennsylvania, a state with a strong history of executing successful, well-planned, and respected atlases, thanks in no small part to our unparalleled network of birders. I've already met many of you, traveled to a few new locations around the state, and learned so much about the breeding birds of Pennsylvania, and I'm looking forward to what the next five years have in store! Happy Atlasing!

- Amber

### Contact Us:

[pabirdatlas@hawkmountain.org](mailto:pabirdatlas@hawkmountain.org)

Find your County and Regional Coordinators at [ebird.org/atlaspa/about/atlas-team](http://ebird.org/atlaspa/about/atlas-team).

PENNSYLVANIA  
ATLAS OF LIFE



While you're atlasing, don't forget to document other flora and fauna you find and submit it to iNaturalist to contribute to the Pennsylvania Atlas of Life! Learn more at [inaturalist.org/projects/pennsylvania-atlas-of-life](http://inaturalist.org/projects/pennsylvania-atlas-of-life).