



Breeding Bird Atlas – 2008 Pilot Season

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The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County has coordinated a volunteer breeding bird monitoring program for over 10 years with goal of assessing bird populations, updating species lists, and evaluating the effects of restoration projects. Though evidence of breeding is documented when encountered during point counts, a focused effort to seek out and document breeding proof is not undertaken. A breeding confirmation provides a higher level of certainty that habitat requirements are being met and is more valuable than just a species account. Furthermore, some species breed outside of the six-week monitoring window and those populations are rarely noted during point counts surveys. A Breeding Bird Atlas project can fill in these data gaps by providing further evidence of breeding and offer greater insight into populations and aid management activities. Breeding Bird Atlas projects are not limited to a time period within a year and efforts are focused on documenting breeding evidence rather than just presence.



Great-horned owlets

A pilot Breeding Bird Atlas project was initiated in 2008 at 4 forest preserves with the following goals:

- Determine the distribution of bird species among these 4 preserves.
- Document new breeding or occurrence records for lesser-observed species.
- Identify sites that provide critical habitat for locally uncommon species.
- Develop baseline data that will serve as a historical reference.
- Determine volunteer participation and enthusiasm for a more extensive program.
- Determine the amount of volunteer commitment needed to acquire useable data.

METHODS

Preserves – Four preserves were selected to be surveyed as part of a pilot project based on availability of volunteers and ecological value: Herrick Lake, Springbrook Prairie, Waterfall Glen, and West Chicago Prairie.

Data Collection – Volunteers were assigned a specific preserve and asked to coordinate their efforts with other volunteers assigned to that preserve. Volunteers were provided a field data form listing all species that might breed in DuPage County. With each visit to the preserve,



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volunteers recorded breeding evidence for each species encountered, the survey date, time spent in the field, and ecosystem unit if breeding was confirmed. Within reasonable limits, volunteers were asked to spend time trying to obtain the highest breeding category for each species. Only species that potentially breed in DuPage County were noted (that is, migrant species were not recorded).

The breeding evidence criteria were taken from the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas program conducted from 1986-1991 and are listed on the summary sheet (Table 1). The four breeding categories from highest to lowest level of certainty are: confirmed (CO), probable (PR), possible (PO), and observed (OB). The confirmed, probable and possible categories provide evidence of breeding. The observed category provides only evidence of occurrence, not of breeding. Once confirmed breeding status was verified, no further notations for that species were needed.

Volunteer assignments – The following volunteers agreed to participate and were assigned to the following Forest Preserves:

Herrick Lake

Jim Hedges
Eric Secker
Jerry Zamirowski
Jody Zamirowski

Springbrook Prairie

Joe Suchecki

Waterfall Glen

Glenn Gabanski
Bob Fisher
Karen Fisher
Mike Madsen
Vicky Sroczynski
Rob Thomas

West Chicago Prairie

Marilyn Bell

Other volunteers and staff contributed to this project. Multiple “Breeding Bird Atlas Blitzes” were conducted at Springbrook Prairie which recruited handfuls of volunteers for each blitz.

RESULTS

In the four preserves surveyed, 72 species were confirmed breeders in 2008. An additional 35 species were considered possible or probable breeders. Table 1 lists the number of preserves where each species was documented along with its breeding status. Volunteers at Waterfall Glen confirmed the most species breeding (52; Table 2). Herrick Lake volunteers documented the most total species on site (95).

Owls – Noticeably absent from the data were Great Horned and Eastern Screech Owls. Breeding was confirmed at Springbrook Prairie for Great Horned Owls, but no other confirmations or probable breeding evidence was noted for either species. Both are considered fairly common in DuPage County. The secretive nature of Eastern Screech Owls makes observations of this species extremely difficult. In addition, both species are most active during the evening and overnight hours when volunteers are less likely to encounter them.

First DuPage Breeding Confirmations – One goal of the Breeding Bird Atlas project was to document breeding evidence for species that might get overlooked. Until this project, breeding



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had never been confirmed or recorded in DuPage County forest preserves for Pine Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, or White-eyed Vireo.

Yellow-breasted Chat – Chats were confirmed as breeders at 3 of the 4 preserves surveyed this year. At Herrick Lake, they were listed as probable breeders. Chat populations have been declining in Illinois according to the USGS Breeding Bird Survey. Observations of this species breeding at multiple preserves are encouraging.

Black-billed Cuckoo – The Black-billed Cuckoo will soon be added to the Illinois Threatened Species list. This species was a confirmed breeder at Herrick Lake and a suspected breeder at 2 other preserves. Observations of this species at multiple preserves show the importance of our preserves for providing habitat for less-common species.

Shrubland birds – The birding community has given much attention to shrubland birds over the past few years based on the declining trend of many of these species. Besides Yellow-breasted chats and Black-billed cuckoos, 10 other shrubland species were examined: Bell's vireo, Blue-winged warbler, Brown thrasher, Eastern kingbird, Eastern towhee, Field sparrow, Gray catbird, Orchard oriole, Willow flycatcher, and Yellow warbler. All 12 of these species were observed at Herrick Lake FP and Waterfall Glen FP in 2008. At Waterfall Glen, 10 of these species were confirmed as breeders; at Herrick Lake, 7 were confirmed.



Eastern kingbird hatchlings



Sora nest with eggs



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Unusual finds – the most notable observation came from Mike Madsen on July 9th when he spied a MacGillivray’s warbler at Waterfall Glen. This is the first record of this western species in DuPage County. Other notable observations include a Blue grosbeak at Herrick Lake, Olive-sided flycatcher at West Chicago Prairie, and Horned lark at Springbrook Prairie.

Hours – The volunteers from Herrick Lake reported the most accurate lengths of time spent in the field. Collectively, nearly 150 man-hours of active birding were reported at Herrick Lake during this project.

Volunteer participation – The fewest number of species observed was at West Chicago Prairie. This is likely indicative of participation at this preserve. Marilyn Bell was the only volunteer and did not have much help during her surveys. Despite this she was able to confirm 27 species as breeders, which is quite a task for one person.

The majority of the volunteers indicated they would like to continue the Breeding Bird Atlas project in 2009 at the same preserves to try and confirm those species that were only listed as possible or probable breeders.



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Table I. Number of preserves where each species was observed and breeding status for each species during the Breeding Bird Atlas pilot project in 2008.

	OB	PO	PR	CO		OB	PO	PR	CO		OB	PO	PR	CO
Acadian Flycatcher		1	1		Chipping Sparrow				2	Least Bittern				
Alder Flycatcher		1			Clay-colored Sparrow		1		1	Least Flycatcher	2	1		
American Bittern					Common Grackle			1	3	MacGillivray's Warbler	1			
American Coot	1				Common Moorhen					Mallard	1			3
American Crow	2	1			Common Nighthawk					Marsh Wren		1	2	
American Goldfinch			1	3	Common Yellowthroat				4	Monk Parakeet				
American Kestrel	1	1			Cooper's Hawk	1	2		1	Mourning Dove		2		2
American Redstart	1		1		Dickcissel		1		1	Mute Swan	1			
American Robin				4	Double-crested Cormorant	2				Northern Bobwhite				
American Woodcock		1	1	1	Downy Woodpecker				4	Northern Cardinal			1	3
Baltimore Oriole				4	Eastern Bluebird				4	Northern Flicker			1	3
Bank Swallow	1	1			Eastern Kingbird				4	Northern Harrier	1		1	
Barn Owl					Eastern Meadowlark			1	2	No. Rough-wing. Swallow	1	1		2
Barn Swallow		2		2	Eastern Phoebe		1		2	Olive-sided Flycatcher		1		
Barred Owl			1		Eastern Screech-Owl		3			Orchard Oriole				4
Bell's Vireo		1		1	Eastern Towhee		1	1	2	Ovenbird		1		
Belted Kingfisher	1				Eastern Wood-Pewee		1	1	2	Pied-billed Grebe				
Black Tern					European Starling				4	Pileated Woodpecker			1	
Black-billed Cuckoo		1	1	1	Field Sparrow			1	3	Pine Warbler				1
Black-capped Chickadee				4	Grasshopper Sparrow		2	1		Prothonotary Warbler				1
Black-cr Night-Heron	1				Gray Catbird			1	3	Purple Martin	1			
Blue Grosbeak		1			Great Blue Heron	4				Red-bellied Woodpecker	1			3
Blue Jay	1		1	2	Great Crested Flycatcher			3	1	Red-eyed Vireo			3	1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher				4	Great Egret	4				Red-headed Woodpecker				1
Blue-winged Teal	1		1		Great Horned Owl		1		1	Red-shouldered Hawk			1	
Blue-winged Warbler		1	1		Green Heron	2		1		Red-tailed Hawk			1	3
Bobolink				2	Hairy Woodpecker		2		1	Red-winged Blackbird				4
Broad-winged Hawk				1	Henslow's Sparrow			3	1	Ring-billed Gull	3			
Brown Creeper		1			Hooded Merganser				2	Ring-necked Pheasant				1
Brown Thrasher				4	Hooded Warbler		1	1		Rock Pigeon	3			
Brown-headed Cowbird				4	Horned Lark			1		Rose-breasted Grosbeak		1		2
Canada Goose		2		2	House Finch	2		1		Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	1	2		1
Carolina Wren			1		House Sparrow			1	1	Ruddy Duck				
Cedar Waxwing				4	House Wren				4	Sandhill Crane				
Cerulean Warbler					Indigo Bunting				4	Savannah Sparrow				2
Chestnut-sided Warbler		1		1	Killdeer		1	1	1	Scarlet Tanager		1	1	1
Chimney Swift	3	1			King Rail					Sedge Wren		2	2	



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Table 2. The number of species observed and their breeding status at each preserve surveyed as part of the 2008 Breeding Bird Atlas project.

Preserve	Confirmed	Probable	Possible	Observed	Total
Herrick Lake	38	23	17	17	95
Springbrook Prairie	44	16	5	17	82
Waterfall Glen	52	16	17	7	92
West Chicago Prairie	27	11	21	7	66