



Voice of the Vireo

Delaware's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas Team

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Delaware's BBA Nationally Recognized

WOW! Can you believe that 2008 is nearly over? I truly hope that all of you have enjoyed Year 1 as much as I have. Together, we have gotten Delaware's 2nd BBA off to a fantastic start! All together, we have spent over 2000 hours in the field this season, confirming breeding and collecting data. But that is just the beginning.

In early August, I attended the joint meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Cooper Ornithological Society, and the Society of Canadian Ornithologists. There, I took part in an atlasing workshop and attended several talks on the value and importance of atlases for conservation. One presentation, by fellow atlaser and technical Committee member, Bruce Peterjohn, highlighted our atlas in front of a national and international audience. Through our efforts we will be able to look at our breeding bird populations in ways many of us did not consider early on. Ironically, the

meeting was in Oregon, and I was surrounded by references to the Oregon Trail and early pioneers. I now realize that we, too, are pioneers, exploring our new methods for the benefit of Delaware's birds and beyond.

So, where do we go from here? Take some time and read through our first newsletter to find out! And remember...It's **you** that makes our BBA possible. Delaware is truly fortunate to have every one of you! Our birds thank you and I thank you!

See you in the field!

Ant



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URGENT REMINDER!

If you participated in any way with the DE BBA, please complete and return your Volunteer Time Sheets if you have not already done so! Our project depends not only on you to help in gathering data, but also your time. The hours you spend participating in the BBA count as **match dollars** towards the State Wildlife Grant funding our efforts. **Remember: ANY TIME that you give to the atlas counts! Your time is a valuable donation in the success of the BBA!**

- 1 hour online search for species info for the atlas- **COUNTS!**
- 2 hours of data entry - **COUNTS!**
- 1.5 hours writing emails or reports for people/organizations that granted you land access - **COUNTS!**
- **If the task or action will benefit the BBA in any way, then it COUNTS!!**

What's New?

As part of the DE BBA, we want to provide atlasers and other interested parties up-to-date information about the status of the project, new and exciting news, and a way for atlasers to share their experiences with others! Inside, you can find data summaries, stories, tips, and other information that we hope is useful to you and adds to the enjoyment of the 2nd Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas!

Frequently Asked Questions



- **How many times should I survey the block I have selected?**

The DE BBA is a 5-year survey, so keep in mind that we don't need to know everything in the first year. But, the more you survey your block, the more likely you will be able to assign more species to it and confirm more breeding. At the very least, try to atlas your block four times in a season - once in April, May, June, and July. Better, try to survey once every 15 days from mid-April through July. Keep your surveys spread out, leaving at least 7 days between periods, especially during safe date periods.

- **Most safe dates start in early-mid May and end by mid-July. Should I really be looking for breeding birds before and after**

that period?

Absolutely! Keep in mind that safe dates help us to assume a bird *is not a migrant*. However, many of our breeders arrive well before migrants of the same species are passing through. Early in the season, make an effort to conduct one or two surveys, focusing on those birds that might already be breeding like chickadees, woodpeckers, and wrens. And, even though many safe dates end in mid-late July, many species are still breeding well through the month. Even in August you can still find some species tending nests and young.

- **Do I have to keep recording observations of common species, even if I already confirmed them for my block?**

Yes, please continue to record any observation of a potential breeding species regardless of how common you think it may be, especially if the observation confirms breeding. Remember, we are trying to improve what we know about the breeding phenology (cycle) for our breeding species. By collecting every observation, we can determine when peak dates are for nest-building, eggs, nestlings, and fledging for most species. The most important aspect is

that we will be able to make direct comparisons in the DE BBA III. With all that is going on around us, such as sea-level rise, climate change, and habitat changes, it is important to assess the impacts on our breeders and we can do it with an accurate and robust phenology.

- **I found breeding evidence of a species on the Species of Special Interest (SSI) list. What should I do?**

Species of Special Interest need additional documentation for various reasons. If you encounter a SSI, complete an SSI reporting form, or, contact your compiler or coordinator to report it as soon as possible, providing detailed directions. In some cases, these observations may need to be confirmed by additional observers based on the rarity of occurrence. In cases where the bird can not be confirmed by additional observers, detailed notes (and photos) will provide strong support for the record, particularly if the bird(s) occurred outside of the expected habitat or range. While not required until the bird has reached the confirmed category, documenting any SSI can provide background in the event you do confirm breeding.

Why don't some breeding codes work for some species?

For some species, certain codes are inappropriate to use. For example, Brown-headed Cowbirds are nest parasites and never build nests so the code NB should never apply to them. To prevent errors in the database, any "bad" code will be flagged to prompt a review by the compilers or coordinator. If you are unsure of why a code is inappropriate, contact the project coordinator for an explanation.

Have a question?

Contact your Regional Compiler or the Project Coordinator!

Alarm Call!

When we think of breeding bird atlasing, we tend to think of warm spring and early summer days. Unlike most of us, some of Delaware's birds don't wait for those idyllic times. Indeed, several interesting and rare species show breeding behavior in winter and early spring. In just a couple of months,

Great-horned Owls will begin counter-calling as they initiate courtship and maintain pair bonds. Bald Eagles often start tending nests in November and can be surprisingly visible as they begin carrying new sticks and nest lining to nest trees. In February, adults will begin feeding chicks. Long-eared Owls - a potential Delaware

nester -- can begin courtship as early as late February. Indeed, winter can be a great time to scout for raptor nest sites. Often these species return to the same general vicinity to raise young year after year - sometimes the same nest structure is used in successive years depending on the species. Take a hike on a warm winter day and

Kitt Heckscher



Great Horned Owl

On the other side of the lens...



Orchard Oriole fledgling, Middle Run 6.29.08. at 4:39 PM by Derek Stoner using a Canon Power Shot SX100IS

FROM THE FIELD

From a Atlaser's Point of View...

Back in March, the area I was scouting for the up coming Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas was cold, flat and gray. The area on the edge of the forest is being managed as secondary growth; maples, tulips and a good number of oaks; fifteen to eighteen feet tall, with brambles, brush, and shrubs in between. During the scout I had made a small map in my notebook and marked the locations of a couple of nice Blackberry brambles. Returning today; the scenery was lush, green, and hot. There was almost no breeze at noon.

" You know the bugs are bad when you go to Bombay Hook for relief."

—BBA atlaser Randy Murphy

I set out equipped with binoculars, berry baskets, and way too much DEET. The bugs out our way have been especially bad this year, so bad, I had to hide out at Bombay Hook yesterday and do some shore-birding. You know the bugs are bad when you go to Bombay Hook for relief.

Blackberry brambles have wicked and evil tendencies to draw you in deeper and deeper, always presenting a bigger, riper, berry just out of reach, drawing you into it's clutches of little tiny thorns just the right size to get under your finger nails, and bigger ones sharp enough to slice and pierce Levi's.

Like most Chat encounters I heard it first. The striking thing was how close it was. The hubbub it was making (song just isn't



Three Wood Thrush nestlings in a small Red Cedar tree at Lums Pond State Park (Bear, DE) taken on July 18, 2008. This nest was discovered during a Breeding Bird Atlas training session given by Anthony Gonzon to a group of summer campers from the Delaware Nature Society.

the right word) certainly didn't seem like territorial singing. It flew from a tree 20 feet away to one even closer and became even more emphatic in it's din.

It's like the bird knew I'm hard of hearing and wanted to make sure I heard it. I raised my bins and got a really great look, the bird's gaze was boring straight through my binoculars looking directly at me, as if confirming I saw it, and then it flew away a few yards, but not too far.

Bending down to continue picking, I saw it, the eye first, and then the yellow bright gape around the mouth of a fledgling yellow breasted chat!

It was about twenty feet away, perched a little below eye level in an 8 foot maple. It had the beak of a chat. It was an overall grayish olive color. I think I saw the beginnings of the white rings around its eyes.

The sting of a thousand thorns, and the stink of DEET, and hot sun, all went away as my mind's camera made multiple exposures. Hanging onto my almost full quart basket of berries; I backed out slowly and moved away a few more yards to let the birds be in peace.

The encounter lightened my mood and my step, making the hike back home less of a trudge.

I would have sent this sooner, but I had to enjoy my ice cream and blackberries first.

Randy Murphy - Clayton NW / #49

Alarm Call! continued

look for large stick nests when they are most visible. Make a mental note of their location so you can return a few months later to look for breeding activity. Trying desperately to confirm Pileated Woodpecker in your block? Adults begin territorial and breeding behavior in February and March and can

often be heard calling and drumming from great distances on quiet winter days. Finally, remember that Carolina Wrens can nest build and even raise young in almost any month!

As you grab that remote and head to the couch for four months, keep in mind that

winter can be productive in terms of compiling breeding evidence. Watch for a warm day and use the atlas project as an early excuse to work off some of that pumpkin pie and fruit cake!

Kitt Heckscher

We appreciate your contributions to this newsletter! Please send photos, artwork or stories to:

Editor, The Voice of the Vireo
6180 Hay Point Landing
Smyrna, DE 19977

or

jeanniejayne@verizon.net

Species Spotlight



Photo by Daniel Berganza

With a state rank of S1B, the Northern Parula is considered an extremely rare breeder in Delaware and is listed as endangered. If you encounter this species during safe dates, especially away from the Piedmont, notify your compiler!!

Northern Parula

The Northern Parula breeds in eastern North America from southern Canada to Florida. A rare summer resident that is generally found in flood plains, swamp forests, and moist upland forests, the parula prefers to nest in hanging moss. However, an adult was observed feeding a fledgling in a Norway spruce in 1976, which is consistent with reports of this species breeding in evergreens when hanging moss is not present. Note that it has also been observed nesting in honeysuckle tangles. Keep your eyes and ears out for this summer breeding rarity!

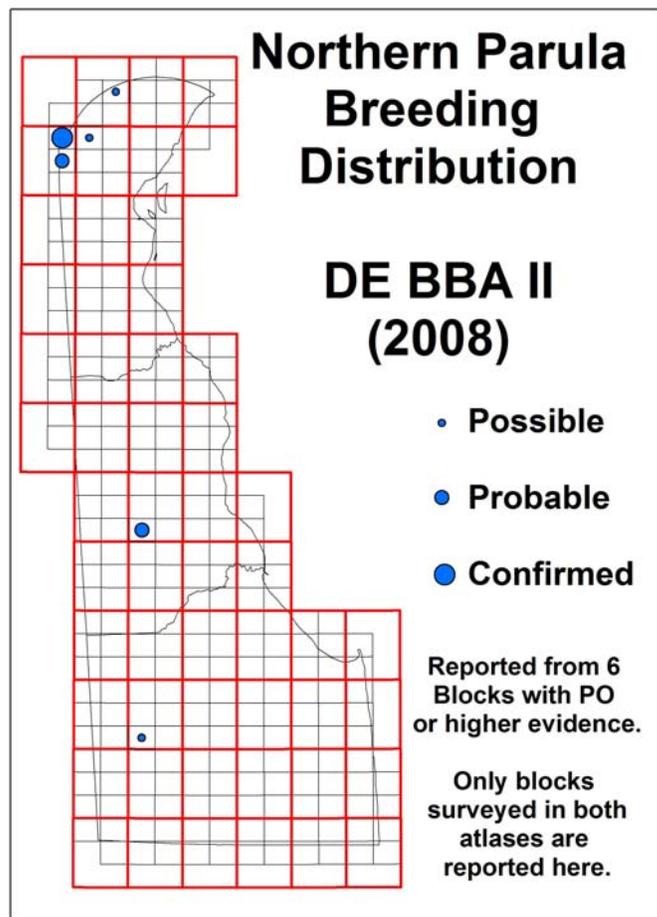
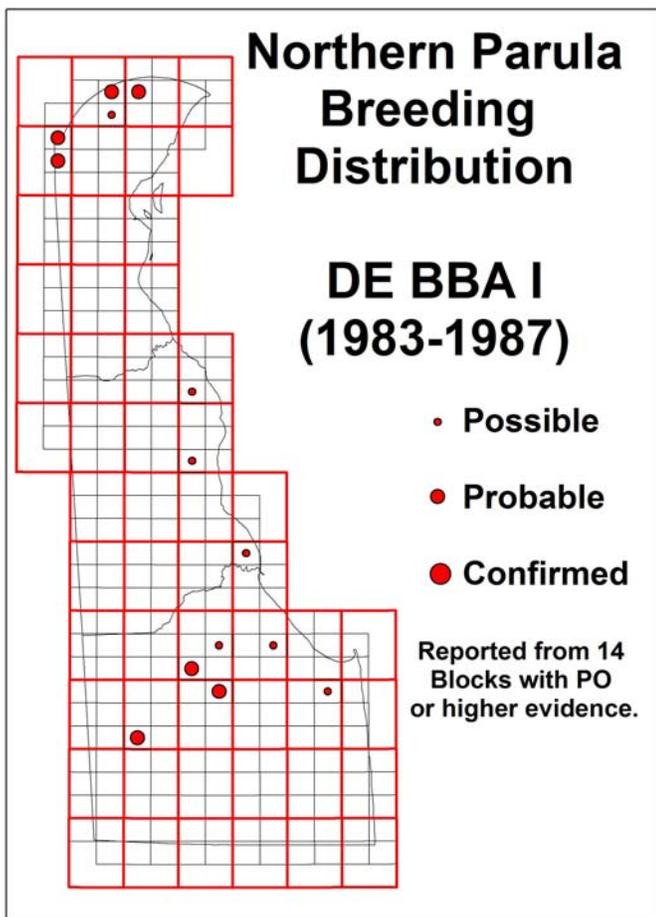
LOOK FOR: Upper canopy of moist forest (esp. pine) habitat, especially with tangled vines.

FIELD MARKS: Blue-gray hood and wings, yellow chest with black-reddish band across it, white crescents above and below the eyes, green back, two white wing bars

LISTEN FOR: A rising buzzy trill with a final sharp note, or a series of buzzy notes.

NEST: Typically suspends a cup nest near the tip of a tree limb with hanging moss or possibly tangled vines.

SAFE DATES: May 25 to July 25



What's New with the USGS BBA Explorer??

Our database provider, USGS, has recently added a NEW feature to its database application! New species distribution maps are available for you to view on the website! Go to www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bba and select Delaware 2008-2012. Then click on Results by Species. This will be updated as we keep adding records! See what's showing up near you!

Compiler's Corner

Chris Bennett



A visit to Chiricahua National Monument in Arizona

Chris says...

Stephen and Shirley Graff contributed 598 individual records while conducting fieldwork in 8 blocks!

With the 2008 field season all but complete (safe dates for Northern Bobwhite and House Sparrow extend to the end of September and Rock Pigeon is safe year round!) I want to thank the many volunteers that got out in the field in Region 3 this year. Of the 45 blocks in the region 26 are assigned to atlasers and sightings were recorded in 28.

For those not familiar with Region 3 - it contains most of the lower two-thirds of Kent County – roughly from just



Northern Bobwhite

north of Dover to Milford. It includes some great birding areas including Ted Harvey Conservation Area, Milford Neck and Norman G. Wilder Wildlife Areas and Killens Pond State Park.

Fifteen volunteers entered field cards in 2008 for fieldwork and

incidentals in Region 3. And this does not include the additional observers that took part in many of these outings. Region three atlasers tallied a very impressive 1,686 individual records! Two atlasers in particular deserve to be recognized for their efforts this year. Stephen and Shirley Graff contributed 598 individual records while conducting fieldwork in 8 blocks! Congratulations and thank you to all of the great volunteers that contributed to Region 3 atlasings in 2008.

DID YOU KNOW....

...that the DE BBA has its own web group? Go to http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/DE_BBA/ to learn how to join the group. It's a great place to chat about atlasings, ask questions, tell stories, request for help, or share pictures. If you're interested in only the listserv function of the group, send an email to: DE_BBA-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

It's NOT JUST Birds!



So here we are! We head out into the woods, fields, marshes and dunes to look for signs of birds breeding. And we are finding great things! But we should always remember that there are other things out there beyond those birds we search for!

Atlaser Dave Fees knows this! This year, while atlasings his blocks in Sussex County, Dave came upon one of Delaware's endangered mammals, the Delmarva Fox Squirrel! Dave reported his find to Endangered Species Biologist, Holly Niederriter, who took immedi-



ate action to follow up Dave's sighting.

Because of Dave's find, Holly was able to document on camera (see photo) that Delmarva

Fox Squirrels were present at a location where there was previously only one reported sighting (with no pictures). The confirmation increases the importance of the area and habitat!

So while you are out there, craning your neck to see where that warbler went, or frolicking through the multiflora as you chase down that chat, remember that birds are not Delaware's only important wildlife resource!

Lastly, congratulations and GREAT WORK Dave!

Reminder!

Enter your data into the online database or get it to your compiler as soon as possible. This will allow us to provide you with current and up-to-date statistics and will save you time down the road!

Species Spotlight



Photo by Alan D. Wilson

The number of resident Canada Geese has increased significantly since the first DE BBA.

Canada Goose

The Canada goose is both common and widespread in Delaware. While these waterfowl may seem to be more abundant October through March, *resident* Canada geese are defined by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as those

“nesting in the lower 48 states during April-August”. The average resident population size in Delaware is 8,500 and is slowly increasing. You can often find them on any marsh or pond or a slow -moving stream along with other waterfowl, such as the Mallard.

The Canada geese that breed in Delaware belong to a feral population of introduced, non-migratory birds that move in search of food, shelter and open water. This breeding population is concentrated on ponds and along creeks, but Canada geese can also be found nesting in salt marshes around the inland bays. In only the first year of the 2nd Delaware atlas, the Canada Goose was confirmed in 44 blocks - the same number this species was confirmed in during the entire five year first atlas period!!

LOOK FOR: Open water, grassy or marshy open ground usually adjacent to water, flock flies high in “V” formation

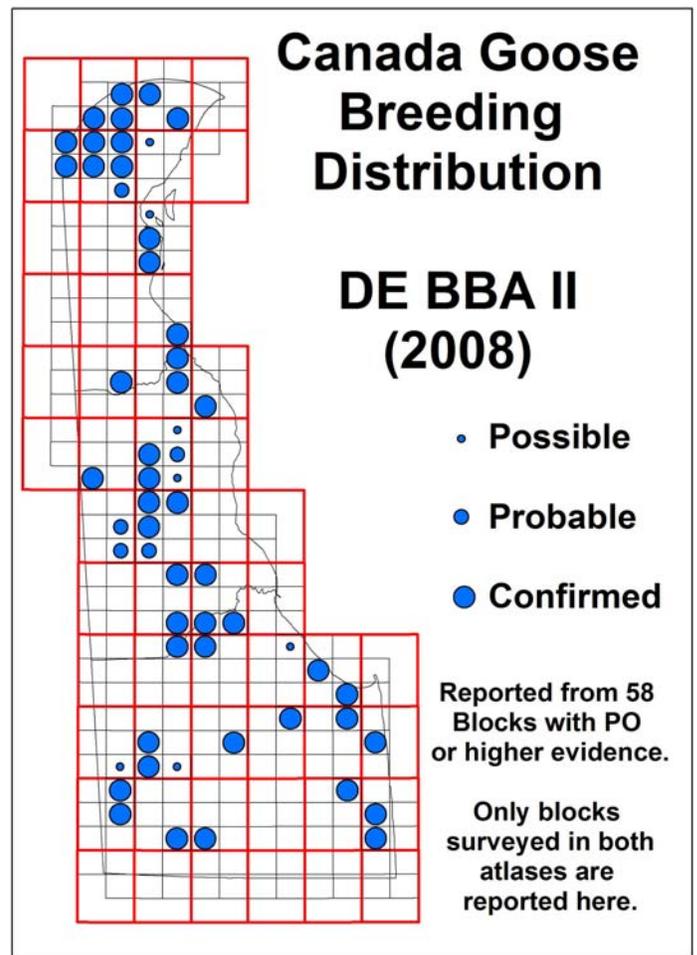
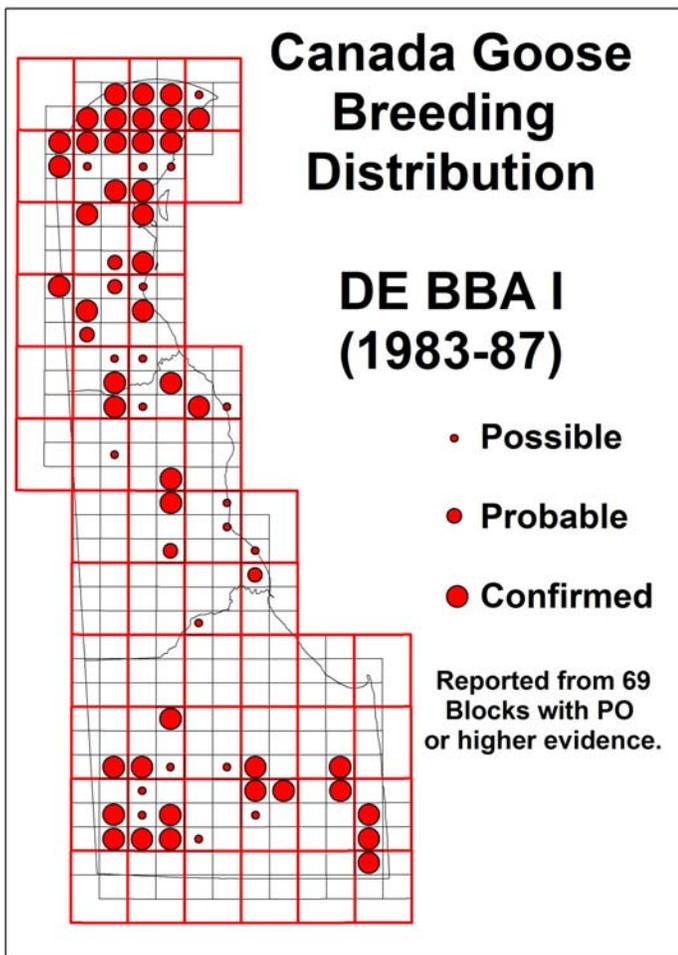
FIELD MARKS: Brownish color with pale breast and black neck, white cheek, dark bill and legs

LISTEN FOR: Flock chorus a resonant honking

NEST: On the ground in any marshy or grassy area, straw or grass lined with feathers

SAFE DATES: April 15 through June 30, nest construction in March

These birds can be highly aggressive if approached while nesting.



2nd Delaware BBA Stats (through September 2008)



In each issue, we will highlight some of the basic statistics for our atlas. Region 1 is leading the way in records and confirmations. Region 2 has the highest number of recorded species. This will help us look broadly at the atlas and see what regions need some more effort. Region 6, which was challenging during the first atlas, kept pace in Year 1. Interestingly, notice that neither European Starling nor House Sparrow made the top ten most commonly observed list! For the least observed species, note that some are ones which rarely breed in DE and there are still others that we would expect to breed that have not yet been reported (Black Rail)! For more results, visit the USGS BBA site (www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bba)!

| Region | # of Blocks | # Reviewed Sightings | Species PO | Species PR | Species CO | Total Species (incl. OB) |
|--------|-------------|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 44 | 6142 | 17 | 10 | 87 | 138 |
| 2 | 45 | 3553 | 18 | 19 | 72 | 139 |
| 3 | 45 | 1724 | 14 | 29 | 60 | 127 |
| 4 | 40 | 2875 | 11 | 28 | 72 | 129 |
| 5 | 47 | 2097 | 15 | 23 | 59 | 131 |
| 6 | 44 | 2370 | 10 | 23 | 65 | 121 |

| Most Commonly Observed (All observations) | Total Blocks | Total CO |
|---|--------------|----------|
| Northern Cardinal | 114 | 50 |
| Common Grackle | 107 | 62 |
| American Robin | 106 | 71 |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 106 | 44 |
| Carolina Wren | 104 | 32 |
| Northern Mockingbird | 103 | 35 |
| American Goldfinch | 103 | 6 |
| Barn Swallow | 98 | 48 |
| Chipping Sparrow | 96 | 34 |
| Mourning Dove | 96 | 18 |

| Least Observed (All observations) | Total Blocks | Best Evidence |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Gadwall | 1 | NONE |
| Blue-winged Teal | 1 | NONE |
| Common Merganser | 1 | NONE |
| American Bittern | 1 | NONE |
| Sora | 1 | NONE |
| American Coot | 1 | NONE |
| Upland Sandpiper | 1 | NONE |
| Cerulean Warbler | 1 | PO |
| Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow | 1 | PO |
| Black-throated Green Warbler | 2 | NONE |

Data collected from USGS North American BBA Explorer (Delaware 2008-2012) website. All statistics are current as of 20 October, 2008 and may change as new data is posted.

Nesting Niches: A Brief Look into a Delaware Coastal Marsh



Larry Graff

Common Yellowthroat
The most common and widespread warbler in DE, it can be found in wet, swampy, brushy areas. Nest is low to the ground, cup-shaped, and consists of dry leaves and grass.
Clutch: 3-5 eggs
Broods: 1 (typically)



Ed Ewen

Willet
One of the more vocal shorebirds in the tidal saltmarshes, willets construct cup nests of grasses on the ground in dry marsh vegetation or among dune grasses.
Clutch: 2-4 eggs
Broods: 1 (typically)



Ronald Laubenstein - USFWS

Short-eared Owl
Displaying its ear tufts only in defense, this medium-sized owl is rare in estuarine emergent wetlands and adjacent fields. Nest is usually a slight depression lined with dry grasses and feathers.
RARE!
Clutch: 5-7 eggs
Broods: 1



Larry Graff

Swamp Sparrow
A common DE resident, it prefers tidal wetlands (brackish-fresh) for breeding and attaches a bulky nest (made of dry grass stems) to marsh vegetation.
Clutch: 3-6 eggs



Alan & Elaine Wilson
www.naturespicsonline.com

Marsh Wren
This small wren prefers salt marshes with tall grasses and will weave multiple small oblong nests using wide grass leaves and vegetation. Nests are entered from the side and may be close to the ground.
Clutch: 3-6 eggs
Broods: 2

CALENDAR

December 1, 2008 - Start of Safe Date Period!

Sundays in winter are a great time to get out and scout your block for things you might have missed this past year! Eagles and Owls are approaching safe date periods and now is the best time to find established nests! Remember, if you find a nest, especially those of birds like eagles and owls, PLEASE observe from a distance. Disturbance can be potentially harmful to some species, resulting in nest abandonment and failure! Also, please remember that active hunting occurs throughout the winter months. For information on hunting seasons, please visit www.fw.de.gov.

Christmas Bird Counts - Find those OWLS and EAGLES!!

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| <u>Wilmington</u> - Contact Jim White (hylajwhite@aol.com) | December 14 (Sunday) |
| <u>Middletown</u> - Contact Bruce Lantz (emdb2lantz@aol.com) | December 21 (Sunday) |
| <u>Rehoboth</u> - Contact Jeff Gordon (jeffgyr@mac.com) | December 27 (Saturday) |
| <u>Prime Hook/Cape Henlopen</u> - Contact Frank Rohrbacher (rohrbaf@aol.com) | December 28 (Sunday) |
| <u>Seaford</u> - Contact Glen Lovelace (glovelace@dol.net) | December 30 (Tuesday) |
| <u>Milford</u> - Contact Chris Bennett (chris.bennett@state.de.us) | January 3 (Saturday) |
| <u>Bombay Hook</u> - Contact Andy Ednie (ednie@verizon.net) | January 4 (Sunday) |

The 2nd DELAWARE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS
Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife
Dept. of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
4876 Hay Point Landing
Smyrna, DE 19977
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