



Voice of the Vireo

Delaware's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas Team

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Recapping Year 1 - Kicking off Year 2!

Is it Spring already? I am sure many of you are asking this very question and the answer is a resounding YES! It seems as if Year 1 of the BBA just ended and here we are gearing up for our second year. So what have we accomplished so far you ask?



Eastern Screech Owl Photo by atlaser Ken Bass

The next question is what will Year 2 bring? Now we have some idea of how well the atlas works and how truly dedicated all of the volunteers are in making it a success. What areas need more coverage? What species have yet to be discovered or confirmed? How are our rarest breeders fairing - and are they still the rarest? And don't forget our common species - are they still really common or are they really declining since the first atlas?

Only with your support will we ever make these discoveries and advance what we know about Delaware's birds! If Year 1 is any indication, then Year 2 will certainly be as exciting and successful!

I look forward to seeing many of you out in the field this season. And as always, let me know how I can help, from getting you forms, to answering questions, or even joining you in the field. **HAPPY ATLASING!!**

- Anthony



Horned Larks are often seen in agriculture fields throughout the year, but finding a lark nest? That's no simple task!

Photo by Ken Bass

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How about over 20,000 submitted observations? Yes, that's right - 20,000! Or maybe that we collected BBA data for over 65% of the total blocks in DE? Should we consider that we confirmed breeding for 124 species in Delaware? Could it be that BBA volunteers gave over 2300 hours of their time in 2008 - and this does not include time yet to be reported! Everything we did - everything **YOU** did - in 2008 was a significant accomplishment towards our end goal. We all should be nothing less than proud of the effort put forth in Year 1. In this issue, we highlight some of the interesting things we have already begun to see and some other ways BBA data are being collected for some species, like Osprey!

Want Some Practice?

Check out our schedule of field trips on the back page!

Join other atlasers as we look for breeding signs across the state on a half day BBA field trip or join us on May 24 for a full day of finding and ID'ing breeding birds!!

Frequently Asked Questions



- **I have a B-list Species that seems pretty common in my block. Do I have to complete a Species of Special for every one?**

While we really appreciate volunteers who fill out SSI forms for every time they encounter a A- or B-list species, we certainly don't require it. Here are some helpful tips on what to do:

For a A-list species, please report every **new** location to a regional compiler or the coordinator when the species is within safe dates and in appropriate habitat! Completing a SSI form will help, but remember to check your list - for some A-list species we want to know only

What do I do if I make mistakes when entering my data into the BBA Database?

We have all done it - or we will! If you enter the wrong data, enter data for the wrong block, or make some other mistake, there is nothing to worry about - even if you have finalized the field card!

To correct any errors, send an email including your name, the database reference number (provided for every report you make), and a brief description of the issue, bad entry, or error to anthony.gonzon@state.de.us

Most corrections take only a few seconds to make!

when you find a nest!

For a B-list species, we ask that you complete a SSI form when you **confirm** breeding for that species, preferably by finding a nest. If you confirm more than one occurrence of that species in your block, you are not required to fill out additional forms, although you can if you wish. Consider completing additional forms **if** there is something significantly different from the first record.

- **The definition of the “E” code states that a bird should not be exhibiting breeding behavior. But, many of birds I see before safe dates are singing - isn't that breeding behavior?**

Absolutely! Singing is one of the behaviors we use during safe dates to provide some breeding evidence. The definition of “E” (pages 60 & 64) should read “... and not exhibiting **confirming** breeding behavior”. Please make that correction in your handbook. Anytime you encounter a species that typically breeds in DE outside of the safe date period, you should record it as an “E” **unless** you observe something that would otherwise confirm it as actively breeding!

- **What do I do about woodpeckers and drumming? How should they be coded?**

Coding drumming woodpeckers during safe dates depends on the situation. If you observe a single drumming individual, you may code it as a POSSIBLE “X”. Return 7 or more days later to the same site and you again hear one individual of the same species drumming, you may

code it as a PROBABLE “S”. If, however, you hear two woodpeckers of the same species drumming during safe dates at the same location, you can treat this as counter-singing with songbirds and code it as a PROBABLE “T” for territorial display, regardless of any previous observations.

- **What is the difference between the Confirmed Codes “AY” (attending young) “NY” (nest with young) and “FL” (fledglings) and which one should I use if I see an adult feeding young?**

“AY” represents **attending young**. Technically speaking, if you see and adult feeding a young bird that has left the nest that is attending young - but AY can also include other behaviors such as removing fecal sacs or brooding chicks no longer in the nest. Although AY confirms breeding, it is not always the most informative code to use. Consider what you are observing. If you use AY when you see a bird feeding young in the nest, use “NY” for nest with young. In the case of fledglings - young no longer in the nest and capable of only weak, unsustained flight, the code “FL” is more appropriate than AY if you see adults still tending the youngster. Both NY and FL provide more precise data about the breeding cycle.

Have question???

You can always contact your regional compiler or the project coordinator with any question - at any time!

On the other side of the lens...

Volunteer Observations



Orchard Oriole carrying food back to the nest.
Photo by atlaser Ken Bass.

FROM THE FIELD

April and I am itchy to get atlasing but looking at the safe dates and don't want to rush things. Meanwhile, as I walk around Delaware, I'm listening to the songs of birds that have been here - the juncos that are about to leave are tuning up with their metallic trill and the cardinals are singing madly from the tops of trees. Every bird is getting ready or has already begun to set up a territory, find a mate, make a nest, and breed.

Helping out at the Cape Henlopen hawk watch, I was struck, like I am every year,

by the miracle of migration, and the push and pull that move winged creatures to fly miles to mate and procreate. We know the basic reasons behind migration; better food sources for young and better habitat. However, why do some birds travel so many thousands of miles to find the best breeding habitat and conversely the best non-breeding habitat? Is there no suitable place closer? And how did the birds that travel so many miles ever start traveling that distance? Birds like the blackpoll warbler that travel not only north/ south, but also East/west across the continent defy logic. Why are they so driven when the trip is so perilous? It seems the more researchers learn, the more questions are thought of.

Walking around Silver Lake in Rehoboth, I spied the black swan that has appeared for a few days during migration for the past few years. I don't believe anyone has documented where it has come from or where it is going. It is an exotic, a native of Australia, and probably brought here to decorate a pond. It struck me that the black swan will fly North and South for several years, following the pull of migration, but never finding another black swan - never finding a mate or fulfilling the

promise of procreation. A melancholy fate for such an object of beauty.

The time for musings is about over, and I'll soon be getting up and out early to check out my blocks for possible, probable, and confirmed breeding of birds in Delaware. Time to review my notes from last year and make a plan for May and June. This year I'll get that indigo bunting in block #8.....

See you in the field! Sally O'Byrne



A well camouflaged Ovenbird nest was not hidden enough to fool atlaser Nick Mielnikiewicz who was able to grab this shot!

Nesting Niches: A Brief Look into Suburbia



Ken Thomas



Ken Thomas



Thomas O'Neil



USDA



USFWS

Eastern Bluebird

A more common sight today, bluebirds have rapidly taken to nest boxes provided in a variety of suburban habitats. Look in mid-late spring for early signs of nesting. Adults can often be seen feeding at the nest box opening.

Clutch: 3-5 eggs
Broods: 1 (typically)

Carolina Wren

One of our "half-hardies", these wrens overwinter in DE and are one of our earliest nesters. They build multiple nests, typically in cavities, but also clothes pin bags, cans, and any other protective cover they might find.

Clutch: 3-5 eggs
Broods: 1-3/year

Red-tailed Hawk

Our largest breeding hawk, red-tails can be found in a variety of settings including small woodlots and single trees. An early nester, this hawk can be sitting on eggs as early as late February to early March.

Clutch: 2-3 eggs
Broods: 1

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

The smallest breeding bird in Delaware, this species makes very small cup nests using plant down, lichen and spider webbing. While they do use nectar heavily, summer diets for young are primarily insects.

Clutch: 1-2 eggs
Broods: 1-2

Northern Mockingbird

A common bird at most suburban homes, mockingbirds are great mimics of all sounds, not just birds. Extremely defensive of their territories, this species will challenge most birds that encroach on its home.

Clutch: 3-5 eggs
Broods: multiple

Species Spotlight



Photo by Ken Thomas

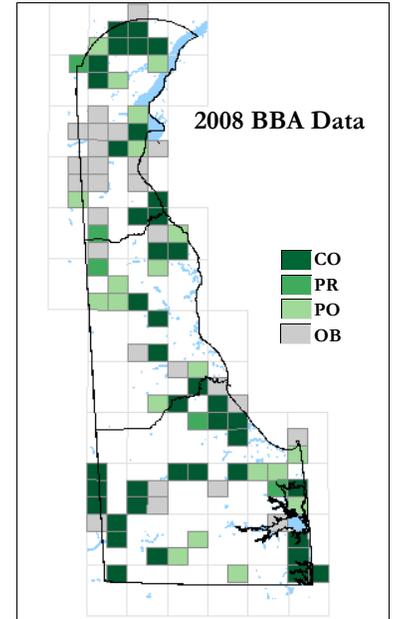
Tree Swallows arrive in large numbers during spring migration and we often have individuals or small groups present every winter, making this species present year-round in Delaware.

Tree Swallow

The Tree Swallow breeds throughout North America from as far north as the Boreal south to just north of our southern border states. As cavity nester, these swallows are often limited by the number of nesting sites present in a given area. During the first atlas, Tree Swallows were confirmed in 42 atlas blocks; in 2008, the first year of our atlas, the species was confirmed in 45!! That's three more in !

Why? We don't know for sure, but one suggestion is that bluebird nest box programs may have contributed to the swallows' increased success and expansion!

How many more blocks will it be confirmed in before 2012? Only time will tell!



LOOK FOR: Open areas and edges.

FIELD MARKS: Metallic blue-green color, appearing black at some angles; white belly and a notched tail.

LISTEN FOR: Listen for a distinct "wheet" and often a bubbly twitter.

NEST: Cavity nester; occasionally found in natural tree cavities, but typically in man-made nest structures and boxes.

SAFE DATES: June 01 - June 25

Want to know the easiest way to confirm breeding Tree Swallows?

Check any bluebird nest box!!

These species compete for the same nest sites!

Because they are cavity nesters, they are also easier to confirm. Just watch for the adults bringing nesting material to the box!

Migration Happens! - The Delaware Shorebird Project

Delaware is home to only a select few shorebird species that choose areas in our state to nest. But each year a great phenomenon occurs right here along our bayshore - Shorebird Migration! Each year thousands of shorebirds that travel to the arctic to breed stop along the Delaware Bay. They're drawn to Delaware Bay by the promise of food; they time their arrival to coincide with the horseshoe crab spawning period. During this time, vast numbers of protein-laden horseshoe crab eggs are just waiting to be gobbled up in a dazzling feeding frenzy on the beach. The horseshoe crab eggs sustain the shorebirds for their remaining 2,000 mile trip to the Arctic. During their brief stay here, shorebirds that arrive emaciated from a long flight from South America can double their body weight!

The threat to Delaware's shorebirds is what fuels the dedication of the people involved in the Delaware Shorebird Project (DSP). This team of state and federal scientists, local volunteers, local and international researchers, birders and others is working to mitigate the threat to our shorebirds. Since 1997, the team has researched the populations and health of migratory shorebirds in the Delaware Bay. This team has banded

over 34,000 shorebirds in Delaware Bay since 1997. Color-marking birds has resulted in a growing database of sightings describing habitat use and migratory routes as well as estimating stop-over length, population size, and annual adult survival.

As atlasers, you might encounter these banded and color-flagged birds. If you do, the Shorebird Project would appreciate knowing about it! You can find out more about the DSP and how to report color banded birds by checking out www.fw.delaware.gov/Shorebirds or contact project lead Kevin Kalasz (kevin.kalasz@state.de.us) at:

The Delaware Shorebird Project
DE Division of Fish and Wildlife
 4876 Hay Point Landing Road
 Smyrna, DE 19977



Alarm Call!

Kitt Heckscher



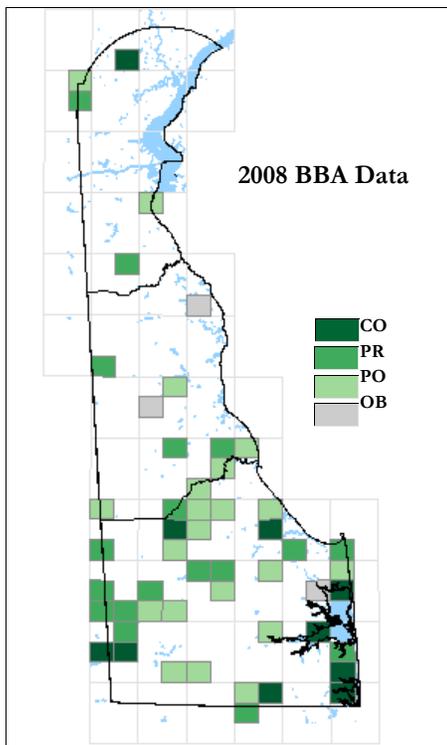
Now that the first breeding season is behind us, and the cardinals and robins have been checked off our block lists, atlasers may wish to focus more attention on unusual environments that may harbor uncommon breeding species missed during the first year. This is a good idea because some uncommon bird species may take several years to confirm even if they are not difficult to initially find. Unusual natural cover types like uncommon wetlands or forests often host uncommon bird species. My next several essays will focus on uncommon habitat types that should warrant special attention. For now, I'm going to focus on pine and spruce woodlands.

Atlasers covering blocks on the Piedmont portion of Delaware -- north of Interstate 95 -- should pay particular attention to pine and spruce plantations that occur in that region of the state. Most atlas blocks in the Piedmont region maintain at least remnant patches of these forest types. And those that don't may have areas of planted pine and spruce in residential neighborhoods that may also warrant a close look. Most plantations are abandoned now and are slowly reverting back to hardwood stands. This means bird species that use some of these sites may disappear before the next atlas efforts.

blers become rare northward. Isolated pine stands can maintain small isolated populations of Pine Warblers tucked away in a sea of deciduous forest. As stated, Pine Warblers are rare in this region of the state but they can readily be found with concerted effort. As warblers go, this is one species that should not be too difficult to confirm because of their affinity with open pine forest. Listen for their song as you approach conifer stands. Then, as usual, watch for adults carrying nesting material or food through the pine canopies.

One thing I have noticed about Pine Warblers is that fledglings can be particularly conspicuous as they beg for food and move about from limb to limb. Pine and spruce plantations on the Piedmont can be productive for accipiters as well. Our most common accipiter is the Cooper's Hawk. However, the Sharp-shinned Hawk was recently added to our list of Delaware breeding birds. That species was found inhabiting a conifer stand in the Red Clay Valley.

Atlasers can make significant contributions to our known breeding bird fauna by seeking out unusual habitats. My focal bird was the Pine Warbler because this species is dependent upon conifer stands (unlike the Cooper's Hawk which will nest in deciduous forests). There is another very rare Delaware breeder that is unlikely to be found outside of conifer stands. I'll keep you guessing until our next issue!



Pine Warblers are one of the few warbler species that can be found in Delaware nearly year-round. Often seen on at least one Christmas Bird count each year, they can even start nest building as early as late March!
Photo by Ken Thomas

This makes their documentation this time around especially important in order to provide baseline information for future reference.

On Delaware's Piedmont, former pine plantations may be the only areas where Pine Warblers nest. Common in Sussex County, Pine War-

Dr. Christopher (Kitt) Heckscher is an Associate Professor at Delaware State University in Dover, DE. You can contact Kitt at heckscher@desu.edu or call (302)857-6400.

2008 Pine Warbler Distribution
Map provided by the **USGS**
BBA Explorer
www.usgs.gov/bba

The Finer Details - Tracking Species

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*): The Breeding Bird Atlas is making great strides in adding to the information we have on all of Delaware's breeding birds. However, there are a few species of birds for which breeding data have been gathered on annual basis for over twenty years. Piping plovers, which nest on our Atlantic coast beaches, have been intensively monitored by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) since they were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1986.

Since that time, nesting pairs of piping plovers in Delaware have increased from a low of two pairs to the record high of ten pairs that nested in 2008. This level of success has not come without some effort. Each year about three miles of dunes and overwashes are fenced off to protect the habitats where piping plovers nest. The fencing goes up in March when there are few people out on the beach. However, by Memorial Day, when most of the plovers are sitting on eggs, the beach habitat has been transformed from empty stretches of sand to a busy haven for vacationers. The melodic "peep" of the plover can be drowned out by the revelry of folks out enjoying the sun and the surf.

Fortunately, the closed areas afford refuge to the nesting plovers. Within a few hours of hatching, the plover chicks can be found outside of the nest, being led around by their watchful parents. In as little as one day the brood makes their way down to the shoreline, where the chicks forage for small invertebrates while the adults stay on the lookout for danger. Inside the closed areas the adults have one less worry, since the general populous is not allowed to enter.

If you would like to volunteer to help NHESP to protect these plucky little birds and their breeding habitat, please contact Matthew Bailey at: matthew.bailey@state.de.us or by phone at: 302-382-4151.



Piping Plover adult & chick on the bayside of The Point at Cape Henlopen State Park. Photo courtesy of DE Division of Parks and Recreation / Gary Cooke

Ospreys Everywhere!

The Ospreys have returned and are quickly getting started with this year's activities. Many established pairs already have eggs to incubate and in not too many days, those same adults will be making numerous journeys to catch fish and raise young.

Not too long ago, DDT (a toxic pesticide) significantly reduced the Osprey population throughout the US. Once the EPA banned the chemical in the 1970's, the Osprey able to find a road to recovery.

Lacking a sufficient number of natural nest sites, nesting platforms went up, and the Ospreys responded. Today, much like in the movie Field of Dreams, we can truly say "If you build

it, they will come". But how do those platforms get there and who maintains them?

That task, for over the past 10 years, much of the work has been accomplished by two very dedicated individuals - atlaser Bruce Lantz and regional compiler John Janowski. Bruce and John not only volunteer for the BBA, but also put in many hours building, installing, and maintain platforms throughout Delaware.

So, if you happen to see John or Bruce out in the field give them a pat on the back and a big "THANKS!" for helping to keep our Osprey population strong, healthy, and available for everyone to admire!

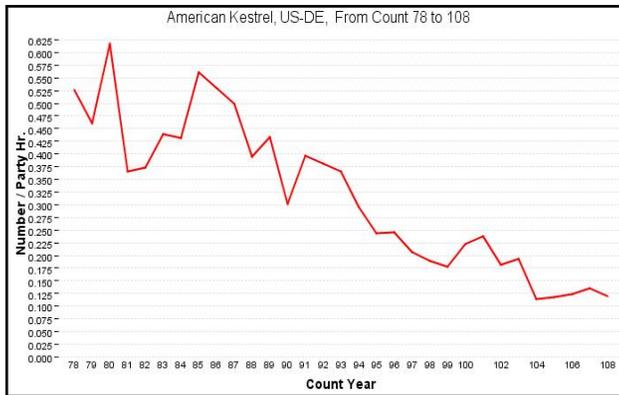
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John and Bruce install a platform. Each year they provide the maintenance needed to keep "fish hawks" returning! See the next page to learn how you can help the Osprey through atlasing!!

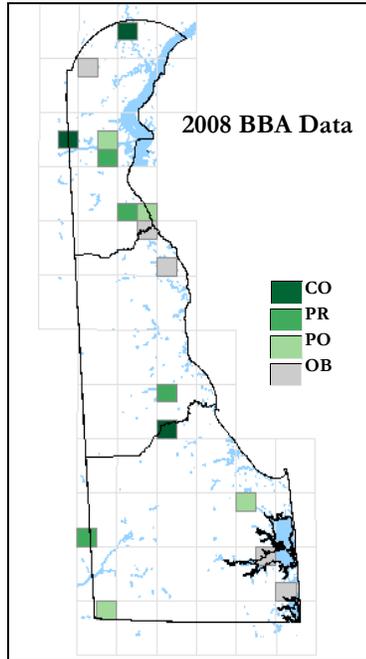
Decline of the Sparrowhawk?

Once a common sight along rural roads in Delaware in any season, the American Kestrel appears to have suffered a significant decline in numbers. Christmas Bird Count data from 1978 through 2008 from the National Audubon Society (below) shows an obvious decline in numbers.



More alarming is the obvious decline in breeding kestrels in Delaware. According to BBA data from Year 1 (2008), only three blocks had confirmed breeding kestrels. During the first BBA (1983-1987), some evidence of breeding was observed in 156 blocks and kestrels were confirmed breeding in 42.

Beginning in 2006, the Delmarva Ornithological Society assembled a working group to address concerns



smallest raptor.

As part of the BBA, we continue to add to our knowledge about kestrels in Delaware and we are always looking for new breeding sites. If you find American Kestrels breeding, or locate them during safe dates (May 20 - June 30), or if you want to know more about the DOS Kestrel Working Group and its purpose, visit: <http://www.dosbirds.org/kestrel> for more information!

about our breeding sparrowhawks. A survey was initiated and undertaken in 2007 to locate breeding pairs. Led by Bruce Lantz, the group found their survey results were later supported by the first year of the BBA - breeding kestrel numbers are low!

More emphasis is now being placed on these birds and their nesting habitat. Nest boxes are being assembled, installed, and monitored. Areas of activity during the summer are being more thoroughly examined for confirmed breeding. And DOS continues to educate landowners, land managers, and others about our

Ospreys Everywhere!

(cont.)

In 2009, the Delaware Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) will again conduct its Osprey Nest Monitoring Program. As atlasers, you can help the program while out atlasing. Although most nests have already been identified, there are certainly new nests located throughout the state. If you are in your second year of atlasing, and locate an Osprey nest, consider if the nest was present the previous year. If you are a new atlaser, keep notes on where Osprey nests are located within your area and note any changes the following year!

If you believe you have found a new Osprey nest or would like to report one, you can contact Holly Niederriter



Photo courtesy of Holly Niederriter/
DE Div. of F & W

at Holly.Niederriter@state.de.us. Please provide the following details:

- Date
- Exact Location (maps are great!)
- Presence of adults and/or chicks
- Adult behavior
- Nest support structure (tree, pole, navigation marker, etc.)

Additionally, if you would like to become a nest monitor, you may contact Vickie Henderson at Vickie.Henderson@state.de.us for more details on the program.

CALENDAR

Saturday, May 9 - 40th Annual DOS Spring Round-Up: Join birders across the state as they tally all encountered species on this single day census! For more information contact **John Janowski** (jsbirders@verizon.net)

Saturday, May 16 - Field Trip to Fresh Pond (DE Seashore State Park): Check out a great site near the shore and discover what species might be present. Meet at 8 am at the Fresh Pond parking lot on Hickman Rd (1/2 day trip). Contact Anthony Gonzon for more details (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us).

Tuesday, May 19 - Field Trip to C & D Canal State Wildlife Area: Search for breeding evidence in several different habitats along the canal. Meet at the People's Plaza Park-n-Ride at Rt.40 & Rt. 896 at 8 am (1/2 day trip). Contact Anthony Gonzon for more details (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us).

Saturday, May 23 - Field Trip to Brandywine Creek State Park: Visit the Piedmont and see the diversity of birds there! Meet at 8 am at the Thompson's Bridge parking lot (1/2 day trip). Contact Anthony Gonzon for more details (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us).

Sunday, May 24 - ADVANCED ATLASING: Full day trip visiting a variety of habitats. Designed to use different methods to locate and confirm breeding birds in Delaware, including night birds such as owls and rails. **NOTE: This trip begins at 4:00 AM and preregistration is required. Space is limited.** Contact Anthony Gonzon for more details (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us) and to register.

Tuesday, May 26 - Field Trip to Little Creek State Wildlife Area: Close to the hustle and bustle of Dover, see what birds inhabit our bay-side communities. Meet near the Little Creek State Wildlife Area office at 8 am. Contact Anthony Gonzon for more details (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us).

Tuesday, June 9 - Taber State Forest: Visit a relatively unknown area for birds, where every breeding record could be new! This trip begins at **6:00 am**. Contact Anthony Gonzon (anthony.gonzon@state.de.us) for meeting location and directions.

Saturday, June 13 - Delaware Breeding Bird Atlas field trip at a location to be decided: Help the effort to finish the DE Breeding Bird Atlas as we visit a block that has not yet been surveyed. Learn the techniques involved in atlasing breeding birds. Full day. Contact Joe Sebastiani at (302)345-1563 or at joe@delawarenaturesociety.org if you are planning to attend.

Lace. Saturday, June 20 - Middle Run Park: Visit the diverse woodlands and wetlands of this park to search for an array of breeding birds. Learn the techniques involved in atlasing breeding birds. Half Day. Contact Derek Stoner at derekstoner@hotmail.com for meeting time and place.

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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Delaware's 2nd Breeding Bird
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