

Bird Atlas Basics

What is the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II?

The Atlas is a **comprehensive field survey** that documents the distribution and abundance of birds nesting in the state. It updates and improves upon the first atlas survey, which ran from 1995 to 2000. Information from this new effort will allow us to see changes in bird populations since the last survey, give us a yardstick to measure future changes, and help shape land management decisions and conservation efforts for the coming generation.



Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II

Getting current, comprehensive information is critical because anecdotal information and smaller surveys suggest that while some bird species have shown strong gains in the last 20 years, many continue to decline and need serious attention. Habitat loss and degradation, invasive species, environmental pollutants, and climate change are main factors affecting bird survival and distribution. This new survey will help us know and respond to birds' needs to assure they remain a beloved fixture in our backyards and beyond.

Go big

This second Atlas survey is expected to be one of the **largest avian "citizen science" projects ever in Wisconsin**, with several thousand volunteers and up to 10,000 participating. The first survey was the largest field ornithology project at that time. More than 1,600 field observers participated. This time, organizers expect at least double that based on the number of people who filed Wisconsin bird records in 2013 via eBird, the popular web-based bird reporting platform.

Birds of a feather...

The survey is a **cooperative project that brings bird enthusiasts together with partnering organizations and agencies**. The first survey was largely mounted by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and its members. This time around, the society is teaming up with the Western Great Lakes Bird & Bat Observatory, the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to carry out the survey.

Why is the Breeding Bird Atlas so important?

The Atlas survey is important because it's comprehensive and looks for birds that call Wisconsin home by virtue of their breeding, nesting and raising their young here. We get a true picture of what's going on with Wisconsin birds. We learn about their status and trends, their geographical distribution, and their timing for when they establish their territories, court, build nests, raise broods, and fledge their young.

Understanding changes in bird populations and their habitats will help guide property and species management in the state, the region and continent-wide. The first Atlas results are widely used by DNR and other land managers in master planning for public properties and in developing the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan that guides efforts to conserve nongame species, and more.

Birding with a purpose and patience

Volunteers participating in the Atlas, also known as "Atlasers," are encouraged to sign up through wsobirds.org/Atlas and commit to surveying one or more 3 x 3 mile blocks of land. They count the birds and watch closely for behavior that indicates birds may be breeding in the local area (such as singing, building nests, feeding young birds). They record their observations online using a special customized version of the website eBird. County coordinators check in with volunteers to offer help and support and make sure that all the appropriate areas are being covered. The data collected by volunteers will be analyzed and displayed online and in an Atlas book. Volunteers do not need to be birding experts to participate; the online data entry and numerous online bird identification tools make it easier than ever to join in!