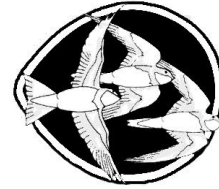


## Patuxent Wildlife Research Center

Breeding Bird Survey  
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### Memorandum to Cooperators

### SUMMER 2012

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#### CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

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#### NEW OBSERVERS WELCOME

If this is your first year, thank you for joining the flock of thousands who make the BBS a success! Through your efforts and those of your peers, federal, state, and local conservation agencies have reliable bird population information on which to base sound conservation and management decisions. We want your BBS observer experience to be as enjoyable and meaningful as possible. In working towards this goal we provide many resources, conveniently located on our general web site, to assist you ([www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs)). For instance, via the “Data Entry” link on our home page, you can log into our online data entry system where you can take the methodology training, enter your bird data, and maintain stop location information for your route(s). You can also use this site to easily update your contact information and to view and print your historical data. The comprehensive online *Dendroica* bird sound reference tool is available year-round and is especially handy for brushing up on identification skills throughout the winter and spring. If you have any questions or problems regarding the BBS, please do not hesitate to contact your state coordinator or us here at the national office. You can find our contact information both online and at the close of this Memorandum, and we are always happy to hear from you.

Here are a few guidelines to follow to help ensure that your BBS season is as productive and enjoyable as it can be:

- 1) Log in to the online data entry system and complete the BBS Methodology Training program and the final review. We cannot use your data if you do not.
- 2) Pay close attention to survey instructions (especially regarding observer requirements, survey timing, and specific route start time as shown on data forms).
- 3) Scout your route before the actual survey day to avoid unexpected delays.

- 4) Submit your data electronically for faster feedback.
- 5) Return your maps and paper data in a timely manner at the end of each season.
- 6) HAVE FUN!

### **“ADD-AS-YOU-GO” A SUCCESS – PLAN AHEAD FOR 2012 FIELD SEASON**

Judging by the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received in 2011, last year’s newly unveiled “Add-As-You-Go” entry method hit the mark in easing data entry for many observers who don’t record data using our pre-printed forms while in the field. Observers in this camp typically jot species lists on their field sheets in the order that birds are detected at each stop. Given that there are 50 stops along a route, this could mean up to 50 different species orderings – a lot of concentration is then required to transfer such count data accurately to the pre-ordered species rows found in our traditional online entry method. Our new “Add-As-You-Go” entry method alleviates this by offering folks the opportunity to enter online data in the format that they collected it, and then subsequently review it in that format too.

If you are a practitioner of the jot as-you-go style, give this new entry mode a try (we’re betting you’ll find it a marked improvement over your previous entry experience) – however, be sure that you’ve planned ahead before getting into the field! Since hard copies of your field sheets are *vitaly important* to our editing/error checking process, we ask that you collect your data on 8½ x 11” field sheets that can be easily mailed (or photocopied and then mailed) following the survey. A good strategy that we’ve seen most observers are using involves dividing a page into 4 or 6 blocks, then pre-labeling those blocks with stop numbers prior to the survey (with space added for the start/end time, wind, sky, and temp measures on stops #1 and #50). Pre-labeling your field sheets goes a long way towards reducing data recording errors while in the field.

### **BIRDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE – PLEASE DO NOT ADJUST SURVEY DATES**

It is well known to most BBS observers that a broad scientific consensus has emerged that a global transition in climate conditions is underway. In fact, scarce would be a birder who hasn’t heard of the strong evidence that some migratory birds have advanced their spring migration and arrival dates in a way consistent with climate change. It is important, however, that BBS observers resist the urge to generalize this information with regard to adapting current BBS protocols – BBS surveys *should not* be advanced to accommodate perceived shifts.

Key here is that the annual cycle of birds varies considerably from species to species, and there is a large and poorly understood variability among species in term of how they are responding to climate change. For instance, most birders have noticed that resident birds and short-distance migrants, like Carolina and Bewick’s Wrens, Robins, and Phoebes, are breeding earlier today than in past decades. These birds are widespread and relatively common near our homes and favorite birding spots so they impart strong influence on or perception of how the overall bird community might be responding. However, there are also numbers of other species that occur on BBS routes, including many that migrate long distances to the tropics, that don’t appear to be showing such strong advancement in breeding dates. Biologically speaking, this makes sense since a warmer climate is not necessarily a more stable one, and a strong late-spring cold-snap could be just as lethal to a non-cold hardy migrant, despite combined spring temperatures being warmer on average.

The particular reason why species' responses to climate change are of such concern to the BBS has to do with a fundamental underpinning of the survey's design. All observers realize that, even though present, not all individuals of a species are likely to be detected at any given stop. For a bird to be detected it must be either seen or heard so, naturally, an observer will have more detections if they visit a particular stop when birds are singing more frequently and when there are a greater number of birds singing. But, because the BBS is aimed at measuring population trends, the goal isn't as much to maximize the opportunity for detections at stops as it is to ensure that observers have the same *opportunity* to have the same number of detections between years. This is why the BBS methods call for observers to start their routes at a predetermined start time each year; the object being to have observers arrive at the same sequential stops at the same time as they had been visited in years prior – thus, equal opportunity for detecting birds at each stop each year. Likewise, in regards to the question of when to run routes, the survey methods specify: “in general, a date as near as possible to last year's is most desirable”.

It is true that this raises the potential that some species that have shifted breeding dates ahead in response to climate change may now experience their peak of detectability more towards the beginning of the BBS season. But it also means that, for the reasons discussed earlier, moving survey dates ahead to accommodate those species would also mean advancing ahead of the target dates for other species who are not responding in the same way – so the ability to predict an ideal survey date is subject to extreme uncertainty. Fortunately, the results of two recent studies (listed below) indicate that there is no immediate need to shift survey dates. BBS trend estimates are not compromised by recent shifts in phenology. USGS analysts currently employ statistical tools that take systematic variation into account in models of species' abundance and we are currently evaluating ways of extending this to include phenology. Observers are most helpful in this pursuit by maintaining survey protocols; not doing so at this point will only complicate efforts to accurately measure and understand the magnitude of changes currently underway.

*As mentioned above, the results of two studies indicate that BBS trends estimates are not compromised by recent shifts in phenology. The first set of results is currently in preparation for publication by John Sauer and colleagues at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and the second is:*

McClure, C. J. W., N. D. Burkett-Cadena, R. Ligon, and G. E. Hill. 2011. Actual or perceived abundance? Interpreting annual survey data in the face of changing phenologies. *Condor* 113(3): 490-500

## **RECENT MEETINGS & OUTREACH**

At The Wildlife Society's 18th Annual Conference – November 5-10, 2011:

- 1) USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center scientists Andy Royle, Keith Pardieck, Bill Link, and John Sauer organized a symposium titled “*Analysis of the North American Breeding Bird Survey*” that included the following presentations:
  - *Progression of the BBS and future directions* presented by Keith Pardieck
  - *Keeping the right eggs in the right baskets: Scientific management of the BBS database* presented by Dave Ziolkowski
  - *Hierarchical models and the BBS: Lessons in institutionalizing a complex analysis* presented by John Sauer
  - *Detectability, not detection: on modeling count data for monitoring population change* presented by John Sauer

- *Modeling trends from North American Breeding Bird Survey data: A spatially explicit approach* presented by Florent Bled
- *Modeling population dynamics and detection probability using Breeding Bird Survey data* presented by Richard Chandler
- *Estimating regional landbird populations from enhanced breeding bird surveys* presented by Dan Twedt
- *Models and maps for conservation planning: spatial considerations when modeling North American Breeding Bird Survey counts* presented by Wayne Thogmartin
- *The BBS in Canada: Adjustments to the scale of hierarchical Bayesian estimates of annual indices* presented by Adam Smith
- *Joint analysis of roadside and off-road breeding bird survey data from Alaska* presented by Colleen Handel

2) Also at the conference, John Sauer organized a day long workshop titled “*Analysis of the North American Breeding Bird Survey*” that featured presentations and hands-on demonstrations by John and USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center colleagues Florent Bled, Richard Chandler, Keith Pardieck, and Dave Ziolkowski.

### **COORDINATOR UPDATES & HELP NEEDED**

We welcome Bryan Glover to his new role as South Carolina state coordinator. While we will miss his predecessor, Laurel Barnhill, for her years of generous service, we are pleased to see that Bryan has agreed to carry the torch and we look forward to working with him into the future.

Loren Padelford has been working with **Nebraska** observers to keep routes filled for more than 25 years! He has been very successful at it too, which makes it all the more difficult for us to put aside our selfish yearnings to keep him on and wish him the best of some well-deserved time for more birding and travel. We are currently seeking someone to fill the void to coordinate this state’s great team of observers.

Additionally, we seek a coordinator to work with **Maine**’s fine pool of observers. The northeast has a strong reputation for good leadership in bird conservation, so we look forward to finding someone up to the challenge of filling Eric Hynes shoes there.

We continue our search for a state coordinator for **Delaware**. Having just 10 routes in a region with some of the mid-Atlantic’s most dedicated and enthusiastic birders, Delaware represents a great opportunity for someone looking to contribute to the birding community in a new role. Additionally, the BBS is seeking suggestions for a new co-coordinator for northern and western areas of **New York** who will lend assistance to Charlie Smith, who has been single-handedly managing all of New York for many years.

If you think you might like to increase your involvement in the BBS program and help coordinate the efforts of some of the best birders and most dedicated conservation minded folks in the country, please contact us at the national office. We would especially appreciate help directing the BBS effort in the states listed above. As always, a complete list of current state and national coordinators and their contact information is available from the BBS web page via the “Contact Us” link.

## **TOP 2 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS OF 2011**

*\* I had heard a Flicker [or Junco, Yellow-rumped Warbler] on my route but did not see the bird so I reported it as “unid.” form – the BBS office then later changed it to a known form...when then, should I report data using “unid.” forms?*

The BBS offers a good number of “unidentified” bird groups for data entry (e.g., “unid. Greater Scaup / Lesser Scaup”) so here, in this particular discussion, we need to clarify that we’re talking specifically about just 3 complexes: Northern Flicker, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Dark-eyed Junco. Obvious to all birders, of course, is that each of these species is comprised of two or more sub-specific forms that are recognizable in the field. In all 3 cases, only one form (Yellow-shafted Flicker, Slate-colored Junco, and Myrtle Warbler, respectively) is a regular breeder and migrant in the states both along and east of the Appalachian Mountains, up through northeastern Canada. Any reports of others from these areas during the BBS season would be exceptionally rare and would require documentation in order to be accepted. That said, when observers report, say, “unid. Northern Flicker” from one of those states, they’re usually doing so on a technical point and not actually suggesting that they believe that they’ve possibly detected a western form. Were the BBS office to leave these “unid.” records unchanged, then the Flicker data from eastern states would actually fall into two different groups (the eastern form and the unknown form) in the BBS database, even though only one (the eastern form) had actually been sampled. This would complicate BBS data analysis. While here we’ve illustrated this discussion using an eastern example, it’s important to note that the same issue occurs in some of the western states too. The rule of thumb then is, for these 3 complexes, in regions where only one form is known to exist during the BBS season, report your data using that form. For observers who run routes in regions where more than one form is known to breed or where others regularly migrate through, feel free to use the “unid.” form designation whenever it is appropriate.

*\* I recently moved to a new address and want to be sure my packet gets there, who should I send my address update to?*

The great thing about our online data entry system is that, in less time than it would take you to find a BBS coordinator’s email address and draft a message, you can log in and change your address. All you need to do is visit the BBS home page (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBS/>), click the “Data Entry” link, and log on. No password? No problem. Simply click the link that says, “Forgot your password?” and then a new password will automatically be sent to you (you can then change it to whatever you’d like once you’ve logged in). Of course, this reminds us to also mention that it’s important to try to keep your email address up to date in our system as well. Not only for the new password function, but also because this is the most convenient way to get in touch with you if we have questions or need clarification regarding data in our end-of-year edits (it is also probably how we sent word to you that this memo was available for online viewing).

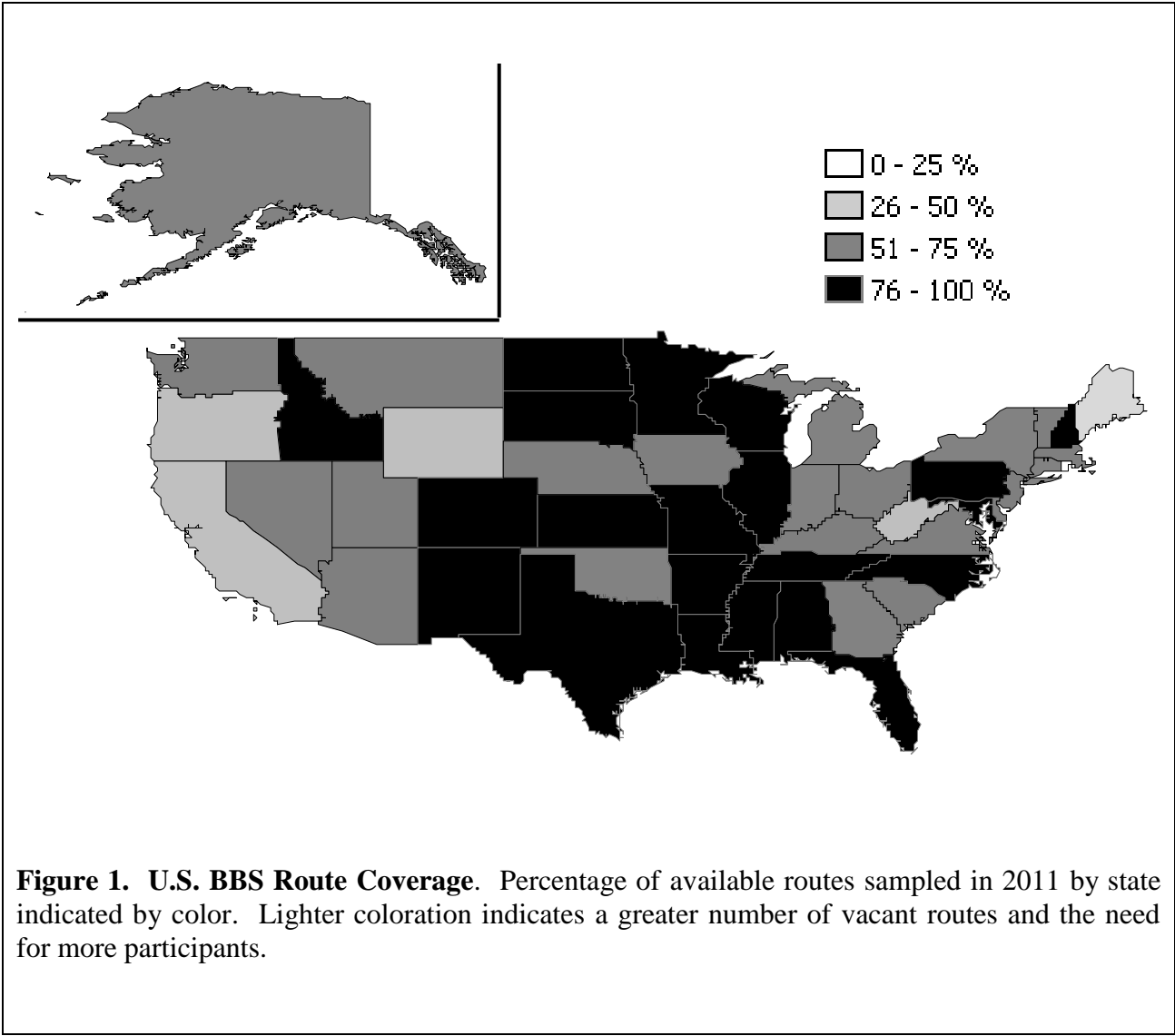
## **2011 ROUTE COVERAGE**

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the 2011 BBS season! Data for 3044 routes have been received by the national office so far. While the numbers are not exact (a small percentage of 2011 data have yet to arrive), both Figure 1 and Table 1 below provide good indication of how route coverage in each state played out. Relative to last year’s map, Colorado, Minnesota, and Tennessee advanced to the 76-100% coverage bracket and Nevada earned a leg up to the 51-75% bracket. Minnesota, in particular, is proof positive of the added gains a co-coordinated team can make; Tony Hertzell and Bob Janssen worked with the committed cadre of Minnesota observers to

achieve a 12% increase in route coverage between 2010 and 2011. Congratulations are also in order for observers in Georgia, Louisiana, and New Jersey plus their coordinators (Todd Schneider, Gary Lester, and Sharon Petzinger, respectively) for achieving similar double digit percent increases.

Not to be bested, Dan Twedt and the hardworking observers in Mississippi took their coverage up 14%, obtaining 100% coverage of that state's routes. Hard to do much better than that! That is, of course, unless you're Sandy Williams or one New Mexico's elite observer squad who both samples each of their routes every year and turns in all of their data on time...I'm worried we'll eventually run out of novel wording arrangements for congratulating these folks!! That is one problem we, sadly, haven't had to worry about with Maryland – but we owe a big apology for that because we certainly should have. For many moons the exceptional observers in our office's home state have achieved 100% route coverage...we know all of these observers well and often express our gratitude to them in person, but it's important that we acknowledge their outstanding efforts to the rest of the flock too.

Nine states experienced a coverage loss of more than five routes in 2011. Check and see if your state was one of them by comparing the "sampled in" columns from 2010 and 2011 in Table 1. Two states dropped from their previous benchmarks in the 76-100% coverage bracket to the next lower 51-75% bracket, and two dropped from the 51%-75% bracket to the 26%-50% bracket. West Virginia, Rhode Island, Maine, Oregon, Wyoming, California, and South Carolina are in special need of additional observer assistance for their sampling effort. Roughly 50% or fewer of the routes in those states were covered in 2011 (see figure 1 below) leaving plenty of room for qualified observers wishing to make a difference. Observers are also needed in Texas, Ohio, and Utah where at least ten or more routes previously covered in 2010 were not covered in 2011. If you nest in any of these states or in one of the states experiencing reduced coverage, please encourage your qualified birder friends to migrate over to your state coordinator to lend a hand with the BBS. As always, coordinator contact information is conveniently located on our web site.



**BETTER LATE THAN NEVER** - Do you have BBS data from previous years that were never sent in? Remember, it is never too late. Whether they are from last year or a decade ago, we can still use them. While we don't wish to promote late data submission, don't throw them out just because they are old; send them to us!





## **PARTICIPANT AWARDS**

With the completion of the 2011 BBS season, 132 participants have earned the following BBS awards:

*Recipients appear in alphabetical order grouped by award category*

### **10-years — 56 recipients:**

Mark Adams, David Arnold, William Atwood Jr., Lynn Barber, David Benson, Brian Bockhahn, Sarah Bradley, Richard Carlson, Eddie Childers, Lisa Church, Mark Conway, Keith Corliss, Donna Daniel, Deedee Delorenzo, Thomas Edwards, Bruce Ehresman, John Gobeille, Mark Gonzalez, Kathy Groschupf, Janet Hewitt, Steve Huckabone, Benjamin Israel, Daniel Jackson, Judy Jordan, Tim Keyes, Homer Klonis, David Klute, Vicki Lang-Mendenhall, Steven Lavalley, John Lupardus, Jr., Iain Macleod, Jeffrey Marcus, Mark Miller, Daniel Moorehouse, Charlie Muise, Jens Munthe, Russell Norvell, Kevin O'Kane, Stan Oswald, Gregg Painter, Michael Petrucha, Jeffrey Pippen, Robert Randall, Rhonda Rimer, Paul Rodewald, Amber Roth, Donald Self, Mark Shieldcastle, Jim Surdick, Gerard Therrien, Allen Waldron, Duane Weber, Diane Weber, Thomas Weber, Robert Wilcox, Mark Wimer

### **20-years — 51 recipients:**

Stephen Allen, Leif Anderson, Bruce Baker, Paul Boucher, Bruce Bozdos, Betsy Brown, Barbara Clarke, Dwight Cooley, Samuel Cooper, Troy Corman, Charles Debetaz, Richard Del Carlo, Carol Deno, Sam Droege, Bill Eddleman, Carol Foss, Joyce Foster, David George, Laurie Goodrich, Herman Griese, Deborah Grimes, Paul Hamel, Lisa Hamilton, Gregory Harber, Robert Harlan, David Hawksworth, Frank Howe, Sandra Johnson, Judith Johnson, Stephanie Jones, Forrest Luke, Juliet Markowsky, Michael Maurer, Lee Mcneely, Ted Nichols, Clark Olson, Andrea Orabona, Wayne Petersen, Linden Piest, Bill Prather, Bill Reiner Jr., Dan Reinking, David Sample, Susan Savage, Laura Schwieger, Richard Stuart, Robert Thobaben Jr., Louise Tommie, Lindsay Tudor, Myles Willard, Herb Wilson

### **30-years — 11 recipients:**

Alan Ashley, Douglas Bassett, James Baughman, J Paul Biggers, Priscilla Dauble, Blaine Ferrell, Douglas Gross, Margaret Higbee, Terry Johnson, Ron Martin, Sandra Turner

### **40-years — 6 recipients:**

Frederick Bowes Iii, Janet Green, Rudolph Keller, Joseph Lynch, Frances Pope, Regina Vanscoy

### **50 Routes sampled — 8 recipients:**

Steven Bailey, Keith Day, Russell Emmons, David Hauber, Nancy Martin, Joseph Merchak, John Peplinski, Terence Schiefer

Years-of-service calculations are based on the actual number of years that observers returned data for one or more of their assigned BBS routes. While we value and appreciate contributions made by assistants on routes, we are unfortunately unable to perform such calculations for them given the limitations of our strictly relational database based on observer numbers. If you work with an assistant that has participated in the BBS for any of the award time periods above and feel that they should be recognized for their service, please contact us in writing; include your assistant's

name and address in the correspondence and we will gladly commend them for their outstanding service as well.

**Congratulations to all and thank you again for your commitment to the BBS!**

## **ROUTE PROBLEMS**

As the degree of urbanization has steadily increased over the past decade, not surprisingly, so too has the number of route problem requests that the BBS receives annually. Safety is the highest priority in the BBS, and the staff would like to maintain a safe as well as fun experience for all observers. As might be imagined, we receive a large volume of requests each year and, though time and staff is severely limited, we do our best to resolve route problems before the upcoming field season. Observers can send hazard related issues directly to us using our route problem email address ([bbsrouteproblems@usgs.gov](mailto:bbsrouteproblems@usgs.gov)) or, if submitting data online, via the route problems section of the comments page.

We strongly appeal to observers to consider before submitting route problem requests that, while routes with dwindling natural habitat are certainly less appealing than those in more pristine areas, progressively urbanizing routes are critical to the survey's ability to measure the landscape level change that birds are experiencing. Even so, there are situations where routes become too challenging to hear birds on or suffer from other problems, such as very heavy traffic, road closures, and safety hazards. In these cases, please first consider that many problems can be solved simply by shifting a stop by the permitted .10 of a mile or by running the route as 'Sunday only', a day when traffic is usually significantly less. In cases where significant safety hazards are imminent and immediate, please cease sampling at that location and call the BBS office directly (301-497-5753) for an immediate route solution.

## **NOTES FROM THE FIELD**

At the end of each field season the national office receives hundreds of notes detailing fascinating sightings, unusual occurrences, and outright tales of adventure from recent runs on BBS routes. As in previous years, this year we received a number of brief musings and succinctly written stories that we feel well represent a number of different aspects of the BBS experience. First and foremost, we'd like to start out by congratulating Noel Cutright on a monumental achievement. After completing his Raymond route in Wisconsin, Noel revealed:

“This route was the 200th BBS route that I've successfully completed!”

Noel then went on to complete two more routes in 2011, putting him at 202 routes to date – outstanding! Only 6 other observers have passed that milestone in the survey's history (including Bruce Peterjohn, Stephen Stedman, Danny Bystrak, Vern Keen, David Holmes, and the survey's progenitor, Chan Robbins). No doubt Noel can recall myriad stories of unusual occurrences he's run across on his routes over the years.

It would be surprising if he's ever experienced what Susanna Henry did on her (Quartzsite, Arizona) route this year though:

“A black-headed grosbeak arrived at Stop 50, after the time was up, while I was checking the ending temperature. He looked at his reflection in my truck's driver's side rear-view mirror, and then hopped through the open window into the front of the truck. Naturally,

he flew back out as soon as I opened the door. I looked on the driver's seat, and sure enough - a black-headed grosbeak dropping was left behind!"

Dolora Batchelor (Homestead route, Florida) had a similar story involving dogs (don't worry, it doesn't end in exactly the same way):

"At the 3rd stop 3 stray dogs appeared, a black lab mix (Male), a black and white pit bull mix (Female) and a small brindle puppy. Well after opening the back of the vehicle to retrieve a camera the female climbed in to the second seat and refused to leave. We opened that door and she climbed into the seat next to it. So I grabbed the peanut butter/tortilla sandwiches and bribed her out of the vehicle so we could continue with our bird count."

What that means is that, somewhere out there, for the remainder of Dolora's route, a dog was laboring to get peanut butter off of the roof of its mouth...and probably loving every minute of it. It sounds like Dale Monette took some time to feed the animals along the Ware River route (Massachusetts) too:

"Mosquitoes were terrible. In the 19 years I have done this route this is the worst ever. Most of the route runs through the watershed that supplies Boston's drinking water 75 miles west of Boston. It also runs through an Army Corps dam project in central Massachusetts on the Ware River. The management closed closed this spring, thus flooding over acres and acres of forests. As the water receded it left thousands of small forested ponds excellent for mosquito breeding. At times I felt like I was in the Amazon jungle they were so thick. I was down 2 quarts at the end of the 50 stops!"

From one road side hazard to another, David Fix described a nail-biting portion of his Orleans route (California) that we're sure many birders can relate to having experienced at one time or another:

"Much of the Orleans route follows the wild Salmon River as it drains the north slopes of the Trinity Alps. The road up to Forks Of Salmon is tortuous. At one point, it becomes essentially one lane and clings to a cliff far above the turbulent river. Just before the worst corner on the road--where it's customary to slow to a crawl and honk upon one's approach, to warn any oncoming heedless locals--someone has spray-painted BEGIN FREEWAY on a broad slab above."

Tom Hall also described some difficult conditions on the Deadman Road route (Colorado) that required a special approach this year. This is his route in July!:

"We had so much snow this year that the Deadman Road was not opened fully above Red Feather Lakes. I checked and called the U.S. Forest Service weekly because I wanted to complete the route. The first gate opened in late June (yeah!), but my route goes beyond the second gate. I drove up July 3rd, but still closed. I called again only to find they did not expect to open until mid-July, beyond the date when I needed to complete the route. Since only 6 stops (3 miles) were beyond the gate, I took my mountain bike to finish the route. It took a little longer to complete, but it was not too bad. A little out of shape to ride at 10,500 feet up the steeper hills, but I got off and walked the bike here and there where it was too steep. It took about an hour to complete the last 6 stops - not baddd! The best part was riding out - took 12 minutes. I had to use the brakes all the way (a little bumpy for this worn out body) and did not peddle except for a two short bits (4 or five peddles to reach the next crest). I did not realize just how uphill it was."

Birders are willing to do this kind of stuff though because, well, look at the other kinds of things we do. For instance, you know you're a birder when you hear yourself reciting sentences like this one that Laurie Goodrich (New Ringgold route, Pennsylvania) sent in:

“At one stop, watched a Red-tailed Hawk cough up a pellet as it sat on a phone pole near the road (no time to go find it!)”

We, here in the office, lamented Laurie having missed the learning opportunity but especially appreciated her having passed it up to maintain the pace of the survey. Along those lines, we also appreciated hearing positive feedback from Matthew King (Bethel route, North Carolina) regarding both the usefulness of the information handouts that we posted online a couple of years ago (available at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/participate/BBS-Handout-Cards.pdf>) and the value of scouting beforehand:

“I printed out a page of the handouts to give to people and glad I did. I had a couple people come up and ask what I was doing, I was glad to have information to give away. Route went well. The scouting I did the weekend before really paid off.”

We have never, on the other hand, recommended that folks enter Chickens into the BBS database – and we've often wondered why it is that so many observers report them each year. Paul Hamel (Isola route, Mississippi) provides a clue:

“I appreciate that Red Junglefowl is on the list, because it goes against the grain to hear a chicken (rooster) and not be able to record it.”

OK, fair enough (...we won't name any names, but we know for a fact that at least one member of our staff who runs a lot of routes has the same irresistible compulsion!). Lastly, we'll end on two stories from observers who have been doing BBS routes for quite a while – both of whom experienced a sentimental moment this year that it seems hard to imagine having happened any other way:

**From Bob Boekelheide, Port Angeles route, Washington**

“My 22-year-old son Eric helped again this year, which he has done for several years now. Compared with his teenage years, he stayed awake throughout the route much better this year, partly because he's become used to waking up early at college, and partly because during the route this year he poured over a music equipment catalog in-between stops. I've learned that father-son bonding is easier when we're discussing \$4000 guitars rather than when we're discussing Swainson's Thrushes.”

**From Stu Wilson, Coyanda Draw route, Texas**

“I've done nearly 30 BBSs in the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas over the last 9 nine years, but never recorded an Indigo Bunting. So there I stood at stop 11 of the Coyanda Draw route, in the midst of a vast open expanse of Chihuahuan Desert scrub, surrounded by near silence (the route averages 1-2 vehicles... total). Drought, nearby grass fires, and/or some other factor had quieted the Scaled Quail, Cactus Wren, Northern Mockingbird, and Cassin's and Black-throated Sparrow which normally provide a steady background chorus. So it was with interest that I began tracking a small passerine in flight. To my amusement, it adjusted its course and headed right toward me, so close finally that I lowered my binoculars and humbly stared, naked-eye. Not 15 feet from me, a tall blade of grass bowed and teetered, struggling to maintain its erectness under the 14-gram weight of a... male Indigo

Bunting. I do BBSs to contribute to conservation science. I delight in them because they produce moments like this.”

May we all remain as committed to conservation and find as much fulfillment in birding as Stu does!! Thanks to everyone who submitted notes from the field this year and, as always, we wish we could publish them all. We look forward to your stories in 2012!

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Besides the thousands of you in the field, we would also like to thank Alan Hedin, Ellen Kowalski, and Sandra Jackson for their outstanding help in the BBS office during the 2011 season. We owe a special debt of gratitude to a number of gulf coast observers who, once again, headed the call and performed triplicate runs of their BBS routes in order to establish a solid baseline for use in post-oil spill data comparisons. This dedicated team included Marc Ealy, Brush Freeman, Beverly Hansen, Janet Lloyd, Cecilia Riley, and Barbara Stedman.

*Good luck & good birding in 2012!*

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