

**North American Ornithological Atlas Committee (NORAC)
2016 Workshop – Meeting Notes**

Tuesday, 16 August 2016, 08:15-13:00
Washington Hilton (NAOC VI)
Washington, D.C.

Organizers / Co-chairs:

Charles M. Francis charles.francis@canada.ca
Andrew Couturier acouturier@birdscanada.org

Additional Participants:

Dan Brauning - Pennsylvania; Erin Cashion - Ohio; Andrew Coughlan - Quebec; Charles Clarkson - Rhode Island; Adam Kent - Florida; Adrienne Leppold - freelance; Jennifer McCabe - Wisconsin; Michelle Peach - freelance; Ashley Peele - Virginia; Joan Walsh - Massachusetts; Becky Whittam - Maritimes; Andy Wilson - Ohio, Pennsylvania; Chris Wood - Cornell

Action Items:

- Charles and Andrew: to circulate final draft of Handbook for endorsement.
- Joan and Dan: to investigate whereabouts of older atlas datasets for archiving within AKN.
- All: to consider options for finding a statistical expert (grad student / post-doc / contractor) who could analyse Pennsylvania point count data to compare results from analyses using time / distance sampling with those obtained from treating count as a simple unlimited distance count.

NORAC Handbook - Update

- Manual is almost finished, save for final read-through and copy editing. Some edits remain before the draft can be circulated; once this is done, NORAC members should, in particular, be prepared to review the recommendations and flag any major problems or disagreements. The manual will be published by Bird Studies Canada on behalf of NORAC so the review and endorsement of the draft is important.
- We gave a very high-level review of the manual at the meeting, and went through chapter three (Recording Breeding Evidence) in detail.
- Need to address flyover instances - different than 'observed'? New BE code needed? How to judge whether a bird is moving through versus foraging near a nest site?
- Manual could be translated to Spanish in the future to help promote atlases in South America.
- Paper forms still seen as useful in certain situations, but vast majority of records are submitted electronically through the web.
- Recommendation that state atlases should be timed to come just before State Action Plans are published, as atlas information is extremely valuable to the Plans (and funding can be leveraged).
- Problem of incidental checklists (which do not contribute to species / effort analyses and change analyses) - how can we encourage people to submit complete checklists? e.g., incentives, rewards, competitions, etc.?
- Recommendation to record abundance (no. of individuals) along with BE - could be useful for change analyses and contributes to eBird
- Idea to take photos of habitats at each point count location to match up with Google and Modis imagery.
- Psychology and sociology taking a greater role in our efforts to understand atlasers, motivate them, and keep them interested (this was a general theme that ran through the conference as a whole).
- eBird has significant lull in submissions following the excitement of spring migration; atlases can help even out eBird coverage and fill this gap, as can incentive programs, such as posting "birders with top numbers of checklists in priority areas" or other variations on the theme – effectively creating a competitive, gaming environment. Likely best to target incentives on effort rather than outcomes, to avoid incentives that promote exaggeration of species / numbers of individuals, etc. although birders are always trying to maximize species

Abundance sampling & analyses of abundance data

- Presentation by Jennifer McCabe where goal was to evaluate the level of sampling required in Wisconsin (WI) to achieve adequate coverage for a suite of species ranging from scarce to widespread.
- WI using random Point Count system very similar to Ontario, Maritimes, etc., plus a Tier 2 system for sampling special habitats.
- Question of more complicated protocols including distance sampling, time bands, etc. Noted that there is still the option (discussed at a previous meeting) to analyze PA point count data with and without time / distance sampling to see if results are any different.
- ACTION: can anybody find a graduate student, postdoc, or skilled contractor who might be interested in doing this?

New developments in data management tools

- Cornell atlas / e-bird tool (lead: Chris Wood)
 - Planning numerous enhancements to their atlas tool, including digitization of polygons.
 - Photo sharing capability within eBird (to bring in photography community).
 - Avi-caching - points/rewards/incentive tool to direct birders to under-sampled habitats
- Bird Studies Canada / atlas e-bird tool (lead: Andrew Couturier)
 - New application in development to link atlas records and eBird and to allow functionality not currently available within eBird. Would include tools to draw actual areas sampled on each checklist, and link point counts and other observations on checklists. Will result in a unified database for future Canadian atlas projects.
 - Note that current system includes tables of acceptable codes.

Atlases in Latin America

- An atlas project in Chile is ongoing at present. It is using eBird, but using its own adaptations to eBird, as opposed to the new atlas tool that Cornell has developed on the eBird platform.
- Argentina potentially interested to start an atlas.
- Strong interest in printed publications in South America (seen as having greater credibility).
- Challenge with bird naming conventions. Common names of birds not nearly as established as for North America. Common names can vary by geographic region and attempts to standardize can be seen as imposed from afar, thus turning people off. Many birders use scientific names, but these also change regularly with new taxonomic studies, so books may differ.

Other

- Dan and Joan note that data from some first generation US atlases are not archived anywhere. With USGS not being active in this area presently, the recommendation is to load these data into AKN for permanent archiving.
- ACTION: Joan and Dan to investigate the whereabouts of these datasets and determine whether they could be archived in AKN.

NORAC Business

- Election of chairs / co-chairs - consensus that current co-chairs (Andrew and Charles) should continue.
- Clarification of mandate of NORAC – is it still useful? All agreed that NORAC still serves a useful function as a unique forum for discussing atlas-related matters. Coordinators of new projects find it especially helpful for accessing expertise.
- Next meeting? Not discussed, but may be worth considering a meeting before / after the International Ornithological Congress in Vancouver in August 2018, when representatives from many other countries will be present (but there are also disadvantages to meeting when there are many other meetings going on)