

# The Wingbeat

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[The Wingbeat archives](http://www.uvm.edu/~vbba/Newsletters.htm): <http://www.uvm.edu/~vbba/Newsletters.htm>

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### *Quick notes*

Last chance for 2006 confirmations! The breeding season is beginning to wind down, and these last two weeks of July provide the last (and best) opportunity for confirming most species. If you haven't managed to meet your 2006 goal yet, now is the time! See "Peak Time for Confirmations," below.

## 1. ATLASSER CONTRIBUTIONS – POEMS AND STORIES FROM THE SPRING

Hoo Wrote it?

There once was an atlasser who  
One day heard an owl say "Hoo."  
He said, "I must see  
By studying thee  
What species of hooter are you."

Then the owl responded in kind  
"Who the hell are you? Do you mind  
Telling me what you do,  
When the atlas is through,  
With each owl like me that you find?"

"I'm no wiser than you it is true  
Until I find out where you flew,"  
The atlasser said,  
"And then your homestead,  
Can be marked for the atlas debut."

The owl replied "That's a hoot,  
I don't give a mouse's pitoot,  
Except to cough out  
What's left of the lout,  
And to fly off too fast for pursuit."

The atlasser tried to give chase  
but found he was too slow of pace  
(so "X" marks the spot,  
"Confirm" was not got)  
And defeated, trudged home in disgrace.

- Anonymous

### Riled About Rustys in Rutland

By Linda Shelvey

Oh, the joys and surprises of Breeding Bird Atlassing! One never knows what the new season will bring! In mid-April, as my birding buddy Connie Youngstrom and I made the first spring rounds of our Mount Holly 4 block, we noticed beavers had enlarged a marshy area off Patch Brook Road. Mt. Holly, located in Rutland County in southern Vermont, hosts a variety of habitats, including Lake Ninevah, open meadows and high-elevation forests. The beaver pond is a marshy area of boreal/mixed woods and woody shrubs, at an elevation of 1760 feet.

Connie has a finely tuned ear for bird sounds. As we worked the edge of the beaver pond, she remarked "I'm hearing something in the marsh I'm not familiar with." If Connie wasn't familiar with it, then it had to be something unusual! As we listened intently and pondered the possibilities, I began to realize that, thanks to the work of the beavers, this was now perfect habitat for Rusty Blackbirds. After checking our field guides we found the Rusty's "KTLR-TEEEE" call seemed to match what we were hearing. We followed the calls deeper into the wet area and located a small flock of Rusty Blackbirds!

Wow! To say that we were excited would be an understatement. The Rusty Blackbird is listed as a "rare" on our Breeding Bird Atlas forms, and is not commonly found in Vermont, especially not the southern half of the state. If only they would stay in our block until their May 10 safe date!

We checked "our" Rusties every week after the initial sighting and were able to find them each time, until the first week of May. They had vanished just as the safe date was coming up! We were very disappointed.

We returned a week later on May 15, now within the safe date for Rusty Blackbirds, resigned that the birds had just been moving through our block.

However, Connie's sharp ear, now acutely tuned to the "KTLR-TEEEE" call, heard the Rusties almost before we were out of our vehicle on Patch Brook Road!

The birds were there, but more elusive this time. We followed the calls the length of the pond. I sloshed out to a rock to stand with my feet out of the water. While Connie had a delightful look at a Canada Warbler, I saw a Rusty Blackbird fly into a thicket of willow, carrying what appeared to be an insect in its beak. My partner had her Muck boots on so I stood on my rock and directed her to the spot where the Rusty had disappeared. I noticed later that the water had been much deeper than the tops of her boots!

In the willows she found a bulky nest of twigs with a tail sticking out at an angle and a yellow eye staring back at her. Breeding confirmation! On Nest (ON)! The Rusty Blackbird flew off the nest revealing a clutch of eggs. Nest with Eggs (NE)! Two weeks later we returned to see how our Rusties were faring and found the nest filled with fuzzy young. Nest with Young (NY)!

Will the rest of our 2006 atlas season be anti-climatic after our Rusty Blackbird adventure? Heavens no! Who knows what other surprises await us in Mt. Holly?

## 2. PEAK TIME FOR CONFIRMATIONS

July is THE time for atlassing, and we still have half the month to go. What's so spectacular about July? Parents are busy feeding chicks, and the number of species you can confirm per hour of atlassing is at its highest throughout the month. For skeptics, there is data to prove it. Atlasser Ted Murin of Charlotte calculated the number of confirms per hour for his 2005 atlassing season. Here's what he came up with:

Month	Range of confirmations per hour atlassing*
May	0.19 – 0.64 (average: 0.46)
June	0.13 - 0.88 (average: 0.54)
July	1.60 – 2.00 (average: 1.72)

\* Values calculated on a per week basis

In two weeks the atlassing season of 2006 will be gone. Now is the time to make up for all of that rainy weather we had, and to come out of this season ready to go for the final push of 2007. If you're close to completing your block, please consider finishing it off in the next two weeks. We will need plenty of help in our final atlas year to complete "needy" blocks! A big thanks to each of you for all of your hard work, and a special thanks to Ted Murin for his report of atlas effort.

### 3. SPECIES COMPARISON WITH FIRST VERMONT ATLAS

Here's an easy way to view quantitative changes so far in block occupancy for each species. Go to: <http://www.uvm.edu/~vbba/Resultssofar.htm> and click on the first link, "Comparison of first and second atlas."

Take a quick glance and see if any of the species with negative percent changes might be on your block. Make sure you look for these species if the appropriate habitat exists. This will ensure that by the end of this atlas we will be confident that their occupancy rates have truly declined.

The table shows some interesting trends, many of which are not surprising and match what we've reported in previous versions of The Wingbeat. Changes would be significant only for species found in many blocks. Because we are still missing data for the final two years of this atlas, species that have "declined" should be viewed with caution for the moment. After we've completed our last year of atlassing, we will present a more complete analysis, including data from the New York and Ontario atlases for comparison.

### 4. MEET THE COORDINATORS: BONNIE PUTNAM, SOUTHERN BENNINGTON COUNTY

My love of and interest in birds started when I was four years old. I often stayed with my grandparents in Pittsfield, NH. My grandpa Sam was a guide for "city folk" in the Great North Woods though he would wonder where that name came from as we who lived there did not use it. Grandpa Sam loved the outdoors and the creatures found there. He fed birds with grains, suet, breads and peanut butter-covered donuts (raised yeast made by my grandmother!). He always had seeds in his pockets and I have pictures of him with chickadees sitting on his hat and his shoulders.

Growing up on a farm in northern New Hampshire gave me the opportunity to watch and study birds as a child. The Bobolinks nesting in the hayfields were safe because we only hayed once a year. Goldfinches were called wild canaries. Crows were said to be wary because farmers sometimes hunted them but they were said to be poor eating. A swan once came down into one of the field ponds exciting great interest as most people had never seen one, at least not outside a book of fairy tales.

Time passes and I moved into my teen years, becoming more interested in clothes and school and boys. I attended a school of nursing where we were kept too busy for many outside interests. Marriage and children and life in several major cities followed. Then Uncle Sam sent us to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for

two years. My one big regret now is that I had little interest in birds at that time. I missed a wonderful opportunity. It's interesting that no one suggested birdwatching as a recreation.

After settling in rural Bennington with children, not babies any more, I became more aware of the natural world again. The sight of hundreds of Evening Grosbeaks feeding in the Ash Maples led to my first bird guide, my first bird feeder, and a rekindling of an old interest. Thirty years later, I have a library of books about birds, a backyard filled with feeders, binoculars, a telescope, a camera, I lead bird walks, have worked on two breeding bird surveys, have bird-friendly landscaped areas surrounding my house, and a network of birdwatching friends.

And now there are those beguiling dragonflies and damselflies...

## 5. ATLAS SHIRTS FOR SALE

We still have Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts for sale. In order to offer the shirts at a great price, the sales are a break-even venture for the atlas, not a money-maker. All shirts are heavy-weight 100% organic cotton, with a small, attractive embroidered atlas logo in the upper left corner.

Colors: Dark blue, Natural (cream), Red, and Granite (gray). Sizes: S, M, L, XL. We also have natural short-sleeved shirts in a youth size.

Prices:

Long-sleeved: \$20

Short-sleeved: \$10

SPECIAL: With the purchase of 1 long-sleeved, you can buy 1 short-sleeved for only \$6!

Shipping: Free!

To order, please email: [renfrew@vinsweb.org](mailto:renfrew@vinsweb.org) and include the following:

1. Shipping address
2. Shirt type (long or short-sleeved), and first and second choice of size and color
3. Payment (check or credit card brand, number, and exp. date. If you prefer, you can call in credit card info. 802-457-1053 X 127)