

Help sought for bird atlas

Dear Editor:

If you enjoy watching birds, here is a chance to improve your observational skills and contribute to the knowledge of bird behavior.

This is the final year of a five year project for collecting information on the breeding birds of Alberta. The project will result in the publication of the Bird Atlas of Alberta, which will show which birds successfully produce offspring and where. This information will be useful for seeing which birds are declining or increasing in numbers. Then work can be directed to those species that need the greatest help. The information will also be useful for determining the long term effects of agricultural and logging practises.

The Alberta Bird Atlas project is organized by the Federation of Alberta Naturalists but relies on volunteers to collect the information. Volunteers are asked to observe birds for evidence of successful breeding such as nest-building, presence of eggs, and carrying food for young. Volunteers also are asked to concentrate their observations on selected 10 km by 10 km squares. Each square is expected to take 20 to 25 hours of observation time between now and July and may contain up to 75 species of birds. In this area, the results should be sent by August 31 to: Terry Thormin, Provincial Museum of Alberta, 12845-102 Avenue, Edmonton, T5N 0M6.

Thormin is the Edmonton regional co-ordinator for the project. If you need help with verifying the identification of a bird, please contact Terry Thormin at 482-1389 after 5 p.m.

For the Athabasca area, you can contact me (675-6226, Faculty of Science, Athabasca University) for information on which areas are in greatest need for study and for information packages. The information packages describe

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how you should record your observations. Athabasca people have given a considerable amount of information for this project in past years, but there is still more information needed to obtain a good overview of the current situation. Let me know if you would like to help with a square or wish to start a new one.

Athabasca University Library has a good set of bird books and recordings to help with your identifications. Members of the public can become members of the library by simply filling out a form.

On a related matter, if you find a dead bird, please wrap it in plastic and freeze it. Then let me know. When I receive dead birds, they are preserved and added to the university's collection. With co-operation from the public, Athabasca University has now got a collection of about 80 specimens of 35 species. They will be used to help with identifications, biology courses and research. Please remember that possession of dead wildlife is illegal without a permit from Fish and Wildlife.

Robert Holmberg, Athabasca University

THE ATHABASCA Advocate