

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

The Prairie Naturalist

Great Plains Natural Science Society

---

3-2005

**THE SOONER STATE BIRD ATLAS: Review of *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*, Dan L. Reinking, editor**

Timothy J. O'Connell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tpn>



Part of the [Biodiversity Commons](#), [Botany Commons](#), [Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Commons](#), [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), [Systems Biology Commons](#), and the [Weed Science Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Natural Science Society at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Prairie Naturalist by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

### THE SOONER STATE BIRD ATLAS

*Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*. Dan L. Reinking, editor. 2004. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma. 519 pages. \$34.95 (paper).

In Oklahoma, forest meets prairie, prairie meets mesa, and throughout, our native ecosystems are shaped by human land use. Across this shifting mosaic of habitats, animals find food, raise young, and disperse to find other members of their species. Management for these species is best informed when it springs from a common baseline of knowledge about distributions across the entire management area. For birds, that baseline can be effectively established with a breeding bird atlas.

Based on methods developed by the British Trust for Ornithology (J. T. R. Sharrock. 1976. *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Great Britain and Ireland*. T. and A. D. Poyser, Staffordshire, U.K.), a breeding bird atlas is a geographically referenced survey for all breeding species in an area. The objectives are to map distributions and to ascribe some degree of confidence that the species detected belong to a breeding population. Breeding bird atlases present a snapshot of distributions compiled from data collected over several years, and are ultimately intended to serve as long-term monitoring tools. For example, *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland: 1988-1991* (D. W. Gibbons, J. B. Reid, and R. A. Chapman. 1993. T. and A. D. Poyser, Staffordshire, U.K.) documents changes in distribution since the first atlas effort in the 1960's. In North America, several second atlas projects are underway or have been completed.

In 2003, while working with a team to design the sampling plan for Pennsylvania's second atlas, I moved to Oklahoma and was delighted to learn that an atlas had recently been completed and "the book" was pending. With a mix of professional scrutiny and a transplanted birder's anticipation, I cracked open my copy of the *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*.

The book exceeded my expectations on both counts. First, the amazing cover photograph of a scissor-tailed flycatcher welcomes and whets the appetite for more. Once inside, 220 field guide-quality photographs reward the reader for turning each page. To take nothing away from the superb artwork common to atlas texts, the photography presented with the species accounts for this atlas raises the bar considerably.

The text begins with acknowledgments and details of the field methods and analysis, basic results, and descriptions of Oklahoma habitats. This information is presented clearly and concisely. I encountered one minor typographic error (a missed period) in this section. I am a little disappointed that the section on Vegetation of Oklahoma (pages 13-17) does not express more emphatically the widespread conversion of grassland to woodland due to proliferation of invasive eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). This idea is briefly mentioned on page

14, as is fire suppression as a problem under the headings for specific vegetation types, but I see red cedar invasion as an overarching influence on the distribution of breeding birds in multiple habitats across most of the state, and its passing mention in this text is a missed opportunity to get an important conservation message out to a large and diverse audience.

Like any atlas text, the species accounts (pages 20-463) are the where the rubber meets the road. Here the 34 authors have done a superb job of presenting the relevant information in a disciplined, accessible package. Each account covers identification, breeding habitat, nesting ecology, rangewide and Oklahoma distributions, historical distribution, population trend, and references. Maps are presented with adjacent tables listing the total number of blocks in which the species occurred, broken into subtotals for confirmed, probable, and possible breeding evidence. Bold colored squares are used for the breeding codes, with solid circles representing nest locations. People with impaired ability to discriminate colors may have difficulty interpreting the breeding code maps, but the accompanying tables should help to clear up any confusion.

I could find only one typographic error in the species accounts ("scare" should be "scarce" on page 358). With respect to the data presented in the text, I would like to have seen the abundance code data presented for at least some species, but I appreciate the editor's comment on page 6 that these codes may have been applied inconsistently among observers and are of questionable value.

Relative to other atlases, the *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas* was restricted to a stratified random sample of atlas blocks covering just one-twelfth of the state's land area, rather than coverage in every block. Given that the number of field workers (about 100) was at least an order of magnitude lower than that contributing to atlas efforts in some eastern states, it is a remarkable testament to the dedication of Oklahoma's birding community that even the sample of blocks was completed on schedule. For most breeding species, the 583 atlas blocks delineate the species' distribution accurately; supplemental records are included for nesting records of rare species that were not detected in atlas blocks.

In sum, the *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas* presents timely information on a fascinating statewide avifauna in a clear and attractive package. The text is well-written and informative, and the photographs alone could reserve it a spot on even the most discriminating coffee tables. My copy, however, will remain at arm's reach for the foreseeable future, and I recommend a similar spot for it among the reading material of anyone interested in the natural history of the southern plains.—*Timothy J. O'Connell, Department of Zoology, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK.*