

# Colorado Bird Atlas Quarterly

News from the Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II Project

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Grace's Warbler. Photo by Jeremy Mizel.

## *Update from the Project Manager*

Greetings Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas II (COBBAIL) volunteers and friends. Spring is in the air, and I am already receiving reports for Colorado's early breeders. Elevational migrants are on the move towards their breeding grounds, owls and turkeys are calling, and some diurnal raptors are sitting on their nests. Everything is bursting with energy, including Colorado's birders.

Heading into our third year, COBBAIL has made tremendous progress since last year (Table 1, Fig. 1). There are 1,824 priority atlas blocks, and so far 818 have been assigned to volunteers. Of these 818 blocks, 108 have been completed. Volunteers have logged almost 11,000 blocks hours, submitted over 52,000 observations, and

identified 267 breeders or potential breeders statewide.

To date this year, I have received reports of confirmed breeding activities for the following species: Great Blue Heron; Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle; Red-tailed Hawk; Rock Pigeon; Eurasian Collared-Dove; Mourning Dove; Great Horned Owl; Say's Phoebe; Western Scrub-Jay; Pinyon Jay; Clark's Nutcracker; Black-billed Magpie; American Crow; Common Raven; Bushtit; American Dipper; European Starling; House Finch; and Red Crossbill. I'm confident there are other species out there that have already begun their nesting activities, and I encourage atlasers to visit their blocks, where appropriate, to focus on collecting data on early breeders.

**Table 1.** Comparison of COBBAIL summary statistics between spring of 2008 and 2009.

Summary Statistic	Spring 2008	Spring 2009
Number of Blocks Assigned	638	818
Number of Blocks Assigned On-line	488	797
Number of Blocks with Data <sup>a</sup>	485	1,003
Number of Blocks Complete	8	108
Number of Block Effort Hours	3,742	10,883
Total Auto Miles	41,193	126,510
Total Data Submissions	19,359	52,305
Number of Species Reported	253	267
Number of Species Confirmed	207	236

<sup>a</sup> Includes non-priority blocks.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of COBBAIL block assignments in spring 2008 and spring 2009.

If you haven't done so already, I encourage you to begin scouting your blocks and planning your atlasing activities for the 2009 breeding season. With only 3 years left to finish fieldwork for COBBAIL, the clock is ticking to complete still over 1,800 blocks. I truly appreciate the efforts put forth by all

COBBAIL volunteer field workers, Regional Coordinators, and members of the Technical Committee. Best wishes for a successful year, and good birding!!

Lynn Wickersham  
COBBAIL Project Manager

## *Welcome New FLC Students*

*By Lynn Wickersham*

Since the fall semester, the COBBAII Office has welcomed two new Fort Lewis College (FLC) students to its project management team—**Tarah Nelson** and **Sara Bombaci**.

**Tarah Nelson** is a senior FLC biology major who began an internship with the COBBAII project in early January. Since then, Tarah has been busy entering daily field card observations into the website database and compiling COBBAII data for use in Quarterly Newsletters and Presentations on the project's progress. This spring, Tarah will also be assisting with local owl surveys in COBBAII Region 10 (Durango Region). Welcome to the project Tarah, and thanks for all of your hard work!

**Sara Bombaci** is also a senior student who is working on both a Bachelor's degree and a Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). As part of her work towards the GIS Certificate, Sara has been developing several GIS layers that will help the Atlas Office keep better track the progress of the project as well as better organize incidental data that have been submitted by volunteers in GPS format. Sara's work will also allow us to create detailed species lists per county, as well as per Region and block. While Sara is gaining "real-world" GIS experience, she is also contributing significantly to an important project. Thanks for your efforts, Sara!

In addition to Tarah and Sara, I would like to acknowledge three upper level Computer Science majors that have been diligently working on the beginning stages of the on-line version of the COBBAII book. They include **Nick Collins**, **Kimball Hutchins**,

and **Justin Vallelonga**. As many of you know, the final products of COBBAII will include not only a hard copy publication, but also a web-site database that will essentially serve as an online version of the book. The database will include the same species profile pages that will be presented in the book, but will also feature searching capabilities that will summarize the species and breeding evidence reported per 1) priority block; 2) region; and 3) county.

In the fall of 2008, the COBBAII Project Management team began working with FLC professor Dr. Brian Hanks, the instructor for a two-semester, senior-level Computer Programming course, in which students work on actual projects in need of development from other FLC staff or local businesses. During the past two semesters, the COBBAII programming team of Nick, Kimball, and Justin, have done a tremendous job developing the website's template and project background pages, and have programmed several of the intricate data queries that will be part of the final product. In the fall of 2009, a new student team will pick up where the team left off and continue to develop the site with more data queries, and the incorporation of photos and maps. It is anticipated that the final site will take three years to complete, just in time to incorporate a full COBBAII dataset in 2011.

Thanks to Nick, Kimball, and Justin for getting us off to a terrific start on the website database, and good luck with your careers in Computer Science. Special thanks to Dr. Brian Hanks for allowing the COBBAII to become a part of the learning experience for FLC students.

## *Completed Priority Blocks*

The COBBAII Office acknowledges the following block owners and helpers for completing priority blocks in 2007–2008:

- Susan Allerton
- Audubon Society of Greater Denver
- Jim Beatty
- Dan Bridges\*
- Steve Brown
- Lori Brummer
- Joanna Chan
- Mary Cunningham
- Linda Deeds
- Coen Dexter\*
- Fran & Paul Didier
- Beth Dillon
- John Drummond\*
- Ken Ecton
- Fern Ford
- Mike Foster
- Keith Giezentanner
- Mackenzie Goldthwait\*
- Amy Gorospe
- Allison Hilf
- Ed Hollowed
- Brian Holmes
- Chuck Hundertmark
- Judy Kennedy
- Doug Kibbe\*
- Hugh & Urling Kingery
- Dave Leatherman
- Cici Lee
- Randy Lentz
- Tony Leukering
- Robert Magill
- Tom McConnell
- Ron Meyer
- Jeannie Mitchell
- Jeremy Mizel
- Mary Ellen Moore

- Roberta Peterson
- Pete Plage
- Kim Potter\*
- Terry Rau
- Chuck Reichert
- Amy Seglund
- Dave Silverman
- George Steele\*
- Joyce Takamine
- Brenda Wright\*
- Yampa Valley Bird Club

\*Asterisks indicate volunteers that have completed 5 or more priority blocks.

Rewards for volunteers that complete priority blocks include:

- 1 block = COBBAII decal
- 5 blocks = COBBAII t-shirt

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### *COBBAII Top Block*

To date, the COBBAII priority block with the highest number of species reported is...

#### **Castle Rock North–SE**

Block owners Hugh and Urling Kingery, with assistance from other local birders, reported 103 species in the Castle Rock North-SE block, with 18 Possible, 24 Probable, and 61 Confirmed breeders. Way to go Kingerys!

Coming in a very close second is...

#### **Glenwood Springs-SE**

Tom McConnell completed this block, with 4 Observed, 34 Possible, 21 Probable, and 43 Confirmed species. Nice job Tom!

## Species Profile: Burrowing Owl

By Lynn Wickersham

Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*) are generally associated with dry, open, short-grass, treeless plains. In the southwest, they occur in semi-desert or salt-desert habitats that may also include four-wing saltbush, rabbitbrush, and sagebrush. Burrowing owls rarely dig their own burrows; thus, the species is dependent on existing small mammal burrows, such as prairie dogs and ground squirrels. Burrowing Owls have also utilized burrows of larger mammals, such as badger, and coyote.



Burrowing Owl. Photo by Octavio Cruz.

Burrowing owls are migratory in Colorado, typically arriving on their breeding grounds in late March or April, and leaving by mid-October. Young owls may fledge from May through July. Burrowing Owls are widespread on the eastern Plains of Colorado; however, there are also scattered populations on the Western slope.

Burrowing Owls are currently listed as state-threatened by the Colorado Division of

Wildlife. Threats to the species include 1) loss of habitat due to urbanization and conversion to agriculture; 2) lethal and non-lethal control methods for prairie dogs; and 3) insecticides for control of their primary prey species.

After the first 2 years of COBBAIL, distribution of Burrowing Owls appears to follow a similar pattern as during the first Atlas; however, no owls have been reported to date in the heart of their population on the Western Slope, in the vicinity of Grand Junction (Figures 1–2).

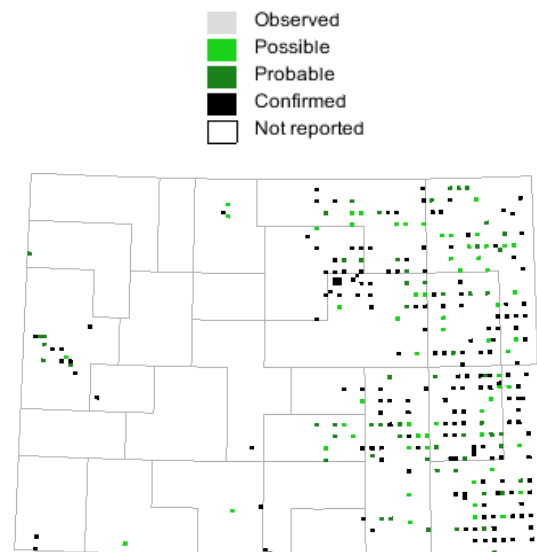


Figure 1. Burrowing Owl breeding evidence (1987–1995).

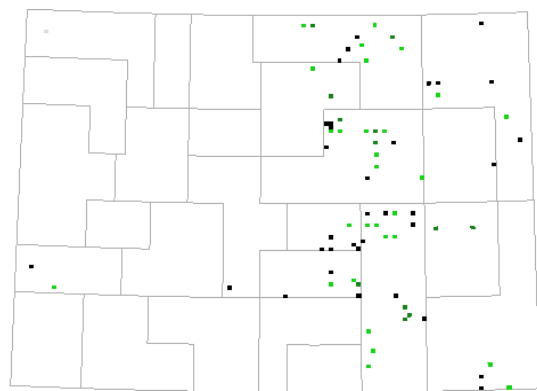


Figure 2. Burrowing Owl breeding evidence (2007–08).

## *COBBAIL Helping RMBO's Project ColonyWatch*

*By Jason Beason*

In 2009, the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) is attempting to gather data on all nest sites for colonially-nesting waterbirds in Colorado. This project and the COBBAIL are aiming to accomplish the same thing: documenting breeding by Colorado's birds. The Atlas Office will be sharing data with us, and we are going to share information with them also. We are off to a good start this year and have located volunteers to cover most of the known breeding sites; however, there are some locations that are still in need of a ColonyWatcher. In Colorado the 15 species we are attempting to monitor under this project are divided into three groups:

### **Island Nesters**

American White Pelican  
Double-crested Cormorant  
California Gull  
Western Grebe  
Clark's Grebe  
Eared Grebe

### **Tree Nesters**

Black-crowned Night-Heron  
Great Blue Heron  
Snowy Egret  
Great Egret  
Cattle Egret

### **Marsh Nesters**

Black Tern  
Forster's Tern  
White-faced Ibis  
Franklin's Gull

If you know of a nest site for any of these species or suspect that they may be breeding

in a location, we would really appreciate location information and, if possible, a count of the colony size. Location information is very important for the success of Project ColonyWatch and COBBAIL. We prefer data in UTM format (NAD 83 projection), but will be happy with anything we receive.

For tree- and shrub-nesters, we would like to receive a count of all active nests in the colony. Therefore, it is best to conduct surveys for these species before the trees leaf out. You can still obtain useful data, however, if trees have already leafed out.

For ground-nesting species, we would like a count of nests; however, a count of the number of adults present is also good information. If you accidentally flush birds, this can be an opportunity to get a count of the number of adults in the colony.

For marsh-nesting species, a count of nests is most desirable; however, that can be difficult. A method that also works well is to conduct flight-line counts of adults. If you have the time, you can spend a morning (beginning shortly after sunrise and continuing until about three hours after the birds start leaving the colony) counting all the individuals that leave the breeding site to go to a foraging area. This works very well for White-faced Ibis colonies.

It is important to not cause excessive disturbance to any of the breeding colonies, so please keep this in mind when surveying. We will also gladly accept size estimates for any breeding colony.

Thank You for assisting with the COBBAIL and RMBO's ColonyWatch Project.

## *COBBAIL Acknowledgements*

### **PROJECT PARTNERS**

The following organizations contributed significant funding and/or time to the COBBAIL Project from 2007–2008:

- *Colorado Division of Wildlife*
- *Colorado Bird Atlas Partnership (CBAP)\**
- *Fort Lewis College*
- *Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory*

\*CBAP's charter partners include:

- *Audubon Colorado and Chapters*
- *Colorado Division of Wildlife*
- *Colorado Field Ornithologists*
- *Denver Field Ornithologists*
- *Denver Museum of Nature & Science*
- *ERO Resources Corporation*
- *Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory*
- *SWCA, Inc.*
- *USDI Bureau of Land Management*
- *USDA Forest Service*
- *USDI Fish and Wildlife Service*

### **PROJECT SPONSORS**

The following organizations also contributed funding for COBBAIL from 2007–2008 at the “Sponsor” Level:

- *Colorado Field Ornithologists*
- *U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

### **PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS**

The following organizations donated to COBBAIL/CBAP from 2007–2008 at the “Contributor” Level:

- *Boy Scouts of America – Conservation Committee of Longs Peak Council*
- *Denver Field Ornithologists*
- *ERO Resources*
- *Mary Taylor Young Nature Writing*

### **INDIVIDUAL DONORS**

The following individuals contributed to CBAP from 2007–2008:

*Holly Annala • David M. Armstrong • James D. Beatty • Charles and Nancy Bell • Johanna Billmyer • Fred M. Blackburn • Chris A. Blakeslee • Susan Bonfield • Denise Bretting • Winston William and Sylvia Brockner • Barbara Byron • Mary L. Calkum • Frances D. Campbell • Nan Campbell • Zephyr and Roger Cecchi • Barbara Cheney • Irwin H. Cohen • Doris Cruze • Barbara Cummings • Raymond Davis • Holly Devaul • Shane Dimmick • Rob Dorival • James Eide • Jeanne W. Eisenstadt • Fred Engelman, Jr. • Robert D. Evans • Col. Richard Fisher • Robert Fleming • Owen O. Freeman, Jr. • Dolores J. Gable • Jody Georgeson • Scott Gillihan • Patrick J. Gould • Pat and Joel Hayward • Mindy Hetrick • H. Hoekstra • Jane Householder • Charles Hundertmark • Joey Kellner • Hugh and Urling Kingery • Ron Lambeth • Allen Levantin • Thomas Litteral • Coral Maxine Litzo • Karen M. Mancini • Sally Mathewson • Pat McLearn • Walter Messier • William K. Miller • Louis Moore • Ken and Marti Morgan • Julie W. Murad • Alice M. Newberry • Jan Oen • Mary E. Pearson • Susan Peters • Peter Plage • Sally G. Plummer • Leah Quesenberry • Marsha Randall • Robert Righter • Judy Scheig • Bill Schmoker • R. Andrew Schoeneman • Nancy Sherrod • Randy Siebert • Arthur R. Smith • Dennis Smith • Pearl and Clif Smith • Margaret Stuvell • Joe Swanson • Helel Traylor • Candy Vallado • Claire van der Linde • Joan Van Loan • Linda Vidal • Jan Justice Waddington • Robert and Maxine Wendler • Ann Wichman • Andre Wille • Marvin B. Woolf • Steve Yarbrough • Rhoda R. Ziegler • A. Ann Zielinski*

## **FIELD WORKERS**

These individuals have adopted COBBAIL blocks or assisted with fieldwork:

*Chris Abrahamson • Mymm Ackley • Herman Adams • Susan Allerton • Arden Anderson • Meredith Anderson • Brad Andres • Holly Annala • Andrew Archuleta • Laura Archuleta • Audubon Society of Greater Denver • Danielle Austin • Bev Baker • Jay Balzer • Debbie Barnes • David Baud • Karen Baud • Mia Baud • Olivia Baud • Ron Beane • Jason Beason • Brenda Beatty • Jim Beatty • Chuck Bell • Nancy Bell • Lisa Belmonte • Jim Berry • Karen Bickett • Mary Jane Black • Chris Blakeslee • Bob Blinderman • Dee Bolten • Ann Bonnell • Bruce Bosley • Cathy Bosley • Maggie Boswell • Steve Boyle • Bob Bradley • John Bregar • Erik Brekke • Denise Bretting • Dan Bridges • Leon Bright • Alex Brown • Steve Brown • Joe Brummer • Lori Brummer • Barry Bryant • Mary Ann Bryant • Tamie Bulow • Mary Cay Burger • Doug Buttery • Suzie Buttery • Gene Byrne • Barb Byron • Lance Carpenter • Diane Carter • Chuck Cesar • Joanna Chan • Charlie Chase • Theresa Childers • Janet Chu • Dave Clark • Rick Clawges • Chip Clouse • Carol Cochran • Carol Cogswell • Mary Coldren • Matt Comer • Rob Comey • Frances Commercon • Cathy Comstock • Gary Conover • Jeff Cook • Frank Coons • David Cooper • Jacob Cooper • Meg Cooper • Kevin Corwin • Michelle Cowardin • Christine Crandell • Tim Crisler • Mike Crosby • Kate Crow • Eileen Cunningham • Mary Cunningham • Thom Curdts • Art Dahl • Sharon Daugherty • Jeffrey Dawson • Bill Day • Cheryl Day • Linda Deeds • Eric DeFonso • Todd Deininger • Peter Derven • Doreen Dethmers • Coen Dexter • Brandon Diamond • Fran Didier • Paul Didier • Beth Dillon • Patt Dorsey • Kimberlee Douglas •*

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### **REGIONAL COORDINATORS**

These individuals have served or are serving as COBBAIL Regional Coordinators:

Susan Allerton • Lori Brummer • Tim Crisler • Cheryl Day • Coen Dexter • John Drummond • Doug Faulkner • Mackenzie Goldthwait • Allison Hilf • Chuck Hundertmark • Steve Jones • Bill Kaempfer • Doug Kibbe • Hugh Kingery • Connie Kogler • Steve Larson • Tony Leukering • Jim Liewer • Tom McConnell • Paul Morey • Forrest Luke • Duane Nelson • Kim Potter • Brad Steger • John Toolen • Lynn Wickersham • Mark Yaeger • Sherrie York

### **TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

These individuals are members of the COBBAIL Technical Committee:

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