



# SOUTH DAKOTA BREEDING BIRD ATLAS 2

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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1. ***What is a Breeding Bird Atlas?*** A Breeding Bird Atlas is a relatively simple, repeatable, grid-based survey that aims to document the distribution of all breeding bird species in the state.
2. ***Why is South Dakota doing a second atlas?*** Since the first Breeding Bird Atlas commenced in 1988, South Dakota's landscape has changed. In addition, land-use changes in the upcoming few years could be staggering, with increasing CRP conversion, biofuels production, wind farm development, and urbanization, to name a few trends of concern. Most likely, these landscape-level changes are impacting South Dakota's breeding birds. Regular monitoring of all breeding species on a large scale allows us to detect impacts of landscape changes. The goal of the second South Dakota Breeding Bird Atlas is to document the current distribution of every bird species that nests in South Dakota and to compare these distributions to those of the first South Dakota Breeding Bird Atlas (1988-1992). A second Breeding Bird Atlas in South Dakota will not only describe the changes in distribution of all breeding birds over the past 20 years, but will serve as the next baseline to which future changes can be compared.
3. ***How is an atlas done?*** Surveys are conducted in 3-mile by 3-mile randomly-selected 'blocks'. For SD BBA2, all 124 random blocks from the 1<sup>st</sup> atlas will be surveyed, as well as an additional 301 newly-selected blocks. During the survey, the primary focus is to document all breeding birds in the block. To accomplish this, all habitat types within the block are searched for bird presence and evidence of breeding. Bird observations are categorized as *Possible* breeding, *Probable* breeding, or *Confirmed* breeding, based on a series of standardized criteria, within that species' breeding season, which is defined by 'safe dates'. To document breeding phenology, emphasis is on recording ALL observations, not just the 'highest' breeding category observed for each species. In addition, observers record the habitat within which each bird is observed.

Outside of designated blocks, all interested persons are encouraged to submit observations of *Confirmed* breeding by any species anywhere within the state, using the Extra Observations Report form.

4. ***What will be the outcome of this atlas?*** These data will support the efforts of land-use planners, conservation decision-makers, researchers, educators, students, and bird enthusiasts to maintain healthy bird populations and conserve avian diversity within South Dakota. Specific products will include statewide maps of the occurrence and breeding distribution of every species breeding in South Dakota, analyses of distributional changes since the first Atlas, and a website and reports containing maps and analyses.
5. ***Who collects the data?*** Most of the data are collected by volunteers who wish to contribute to our knowledge of South Dakota birds and to have fun. There will be a small number of paid atlasers who will go to blocks that are not covered by volunteers.
6. ***Do I need to be an expert at bird identification to participate?*** Definitely not! One of the beauties of atlasing is that you can take the time to identify birds and bird songs, and observe bird behavior. It's a great learning experience – everyone, novice and expert alike, learns something new every trip out.
7. ***How much time does it take?*** For each block, at least 20 hours are needed to visit all habitat types; some extremely diverse blocks may take up to 40 hours. Atlasers are asked to make at least 3 visits plus an 'owl visit' to each block during the breeding season. Visits should be at least 10 days apart and can be anytime during the course of the 5-year project.
8. ***What equipment do I need?*** Binoculars and notebook are all that are required. A spotting scope may be needed in some areas. Optional equipment that are extremely helpful include a GPS unit and a call-back tape or CD player for owls and secretive marshbirds.
9. ***How can I find out where the blocks are?*** Go to the interactive South Dakota map online ([www.rmbo.org/SDBBA2](http://www.rmbo.org/SDBBA2)) to see where blocks are located. Or else, contact the atlas coordinator with the counties that interest you and you will be sent county maps of block locations.
10. ***How do I sign up for blocks?*** Once you have chosen your blocks, contact the atlas coordinator to reserve your blocks and for block details.
11. ***What else can I do to help?*** Contact the coordinator to:
  - a. Be a regional coordinator
  - b. Be a member of the Steering Committee
  - c. Make a donation
  - d. Become a sponsor
12. ***How do I get more information?*** Visit the Atlas website at [www.rmbo.org/SDBBA2](http://www.rmbo.org/SDBBA2) or contact the atlas coordinator, Nancy Drilling, email: [SDatlascoordinator@rmbo.org](mailto:SDatlascoordinator@rmbo.org), office phone - 970-482-1707, ext. 22.