



# ILLINOIS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## President's Message

### Is it time to do it again?

26 years ago, almost 1,000 birders across Illinois made a commitment to participate in a five-year survey of our state's breeding birds. The goal was "...to conduct a comprehensive and systematic statewide survey of breeding birds, to document their distribution and status in the state." In 1991, after several hundred thousand hours of volunteer time in the field, the survey work was completed, and the lengthy process of collecting, consolidating and analyzing the data began, culminating in the publication of *The Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas, Illinois Natural History Survey Special Publication 26*, authored by Vern Kleen, Liane Cordle and Bob Montgomery.

It's beyond the scope of this column to name all the myriad people who helped make this mammoth project a reality. But it's certainly fair to say this was a true commitment by our state's great birding community – to come together and work toward the common goal of capturing the data needed to assess the what and where of Illinois' breeding birds.

Why, do you ask, should we do it again? And even if we should do it again, isn't it too soon? There are several reasons:

Climate change is apparently having an effect on the breeding ranges of various species, especially some southern species, which appear to be making big moves northward. Land uses continue to change. On the positive side, restoration technology has advanced and has brought back some major habitat chunks available to our breeding birds. On the negative side, agricultural practices continue to change, and some of those changes may be having a profound effect on certain species. One of the goals of the first survey was to provide a baseline to monitor change. Some states have already completed their second round (our neighbor to the north is in the early stages of planning their second survey. And they completed their first survey nine years after Illinois). In casual conversations about the need for another atlas with some of our birding friends, some have asked: "Doesn't eBird make the need for these surveys a thing of the past?" I think the simple answer to that question is – No. While a great resource, eBird does not provide the rigorous, carefully designed database needed for a comprehensive atlas.

It is also certainly true that today's technology makes it possible to simplify and streamline the data entry process. Can't you just see it – surveying an atlas block and immediately entering your data into a dedicated user friendly website, using your smartphone, iPad, etc.!

As you read this column, we have simultaneously activated a simple on line survey, asking whether you would be willing to volunteer for field surveys, what part of the state do you reside, are you willing to help in the overall organizing process, etc. We will be providing access to this same survey to all the state's birders, IOS members and non members alike, via IBET, the Illinois Birders Forum, BCNnet, and other appropriate listservs. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey.

Given the degree of advance organization required, it's likely the first field work would be the spring/summer of 2014 at the earliest.

Are you in?

— Robert Fisher

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CityWide Printing

Des Plaines, Illinois