

said. "It would have been prohibitively expensive."

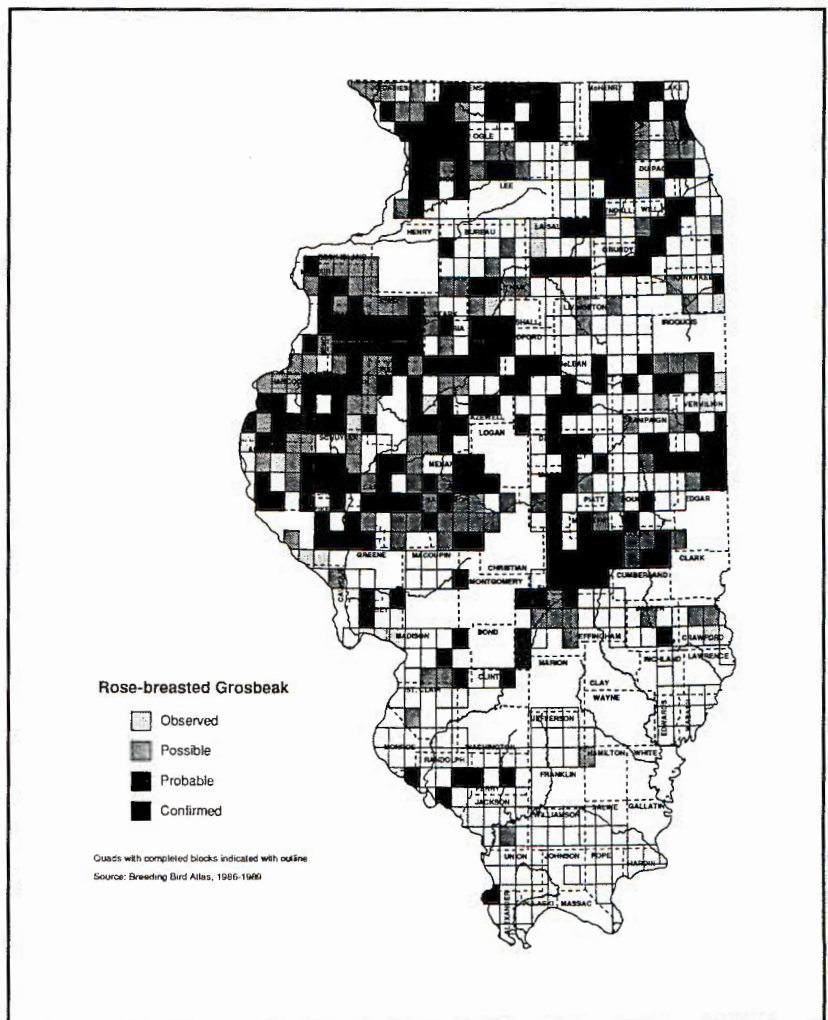
Volunteers followed a standardized code system to describe the status of every species. A bird seen or heard in a block was labeled as observed, possibly breeding, probably breeding, or confirmed breeding. The latter two categories were further split into another seven to ten categories that describe the type of behavior leading to a particular designation. Breeding could be confirmed, for example, by observing nest building, recently fledged young, an adult carrying a fecal sac or a nest with eggs.

*'You never look at a bird the same way again.'*

Throughout the project, volunteers tried to nudge as many species as possible into the confirmed category. Sometimes it was difficult to confirm the nesting of even common species.

"The Common Yellowthroat was one of the most frustrating," said Margaret Mechtenberg of Kane County. "We had to work very hard on that. And the Warbling Vireo - we were almost ready to cheat on that one," she admitted. "We heard him singing in a particular area year after year but never got beyond the probable category."

"You never look at a bird the same way again after doing this kind of atlas work," added Mechtenberg, who now more closely observes bird behavior when out in the field. Keen



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak's Illinois breeding season distribution as determined by Atlas researchers. Map courtesy of Ms. Lian Suloway, Center for Biodiversity, Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois.*

observation techniques helped her to discover a Common Yellowthroat performing its spiraling aerial courtship display. "It's something I wouldn't have been aware of unless I was looking for it," she said.

Along with learning to observe nuances of behavior, surveyors also gained greater understanding of habitat. Marilyn Campbell, coordinator for Vermilion County, said one of her team's most satisfying finds was the Least Bittern.

"It was in a wetland we had just put in at Kennekuk County Park on the middle fork of the Vermilion River," she said. Workers tore drainage tiles out of a bottomland area that had been farmed, and then allowed the area to flood. "That really enhanced the park area," said Campbell, who discovered the Least Bittern the first year of the renovation.

"It's gratifying to see how quickly the place was used," she said. "Of course, that

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