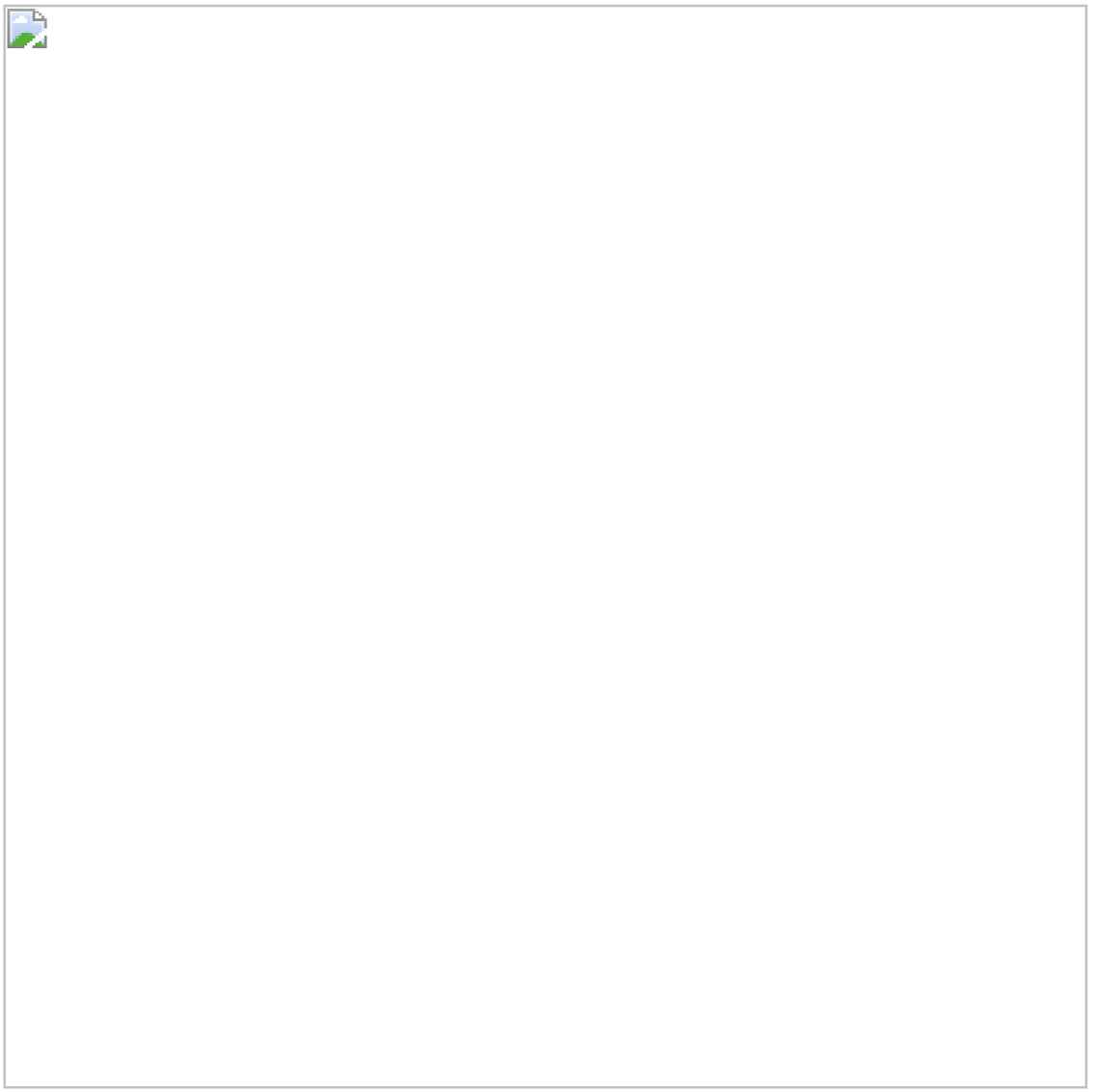

The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia

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The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia.—Todd M. Schneider, Giff Beaton, Timothy S. Keyes, and Nathan A. Klaus, Eds. 2010. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division. University of Georgia Press, Athens. xxii + 470 pp., 204 color photographs, 192 maps, 128 figures, and 168 tables. ISBN 9780820328935. Hardbound, $64.95.—"Sumptuous" is the word for this gorgeous, thorough, well-designed, and authoritative book. Organizing and running a breeding bird atlas (BBA) project, and then analyzing the data and publishing them, is a marathon sometimes completed in ragged form, if at all. Georgia's southern neighbor, Florida, with seemingly many more resources to draw on, has its BBA data available only online; they were never published.

The Georgia project faced formidable physical challenges: the state is the largest east of the Mississippi River, with 57,918 square miles yet with a relatively small human population (8,186,000, or 141 people per square mile, in 2000). Florida had 239 people per square mile in 1990, during its atlasing time (I am assuming that qualified and willing observers increase linearly with population). The Georgia effort was further hampered by having half its population packed into the Atlanta metro area, just 14.5% of the land. This means that the remaining half is spread thin, especially so south of the fall line, where 61% (35,600 square miles; Norris 1958:58) of the state lies. For many participants, altasing entailed traveling hundreds of miles.

Georgia has a rich physiographic and habitat diversity, with mountains in the north up to 4,784 feet in elevation (Brasstown Bald) that have breeding Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*), Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), and Veeries (*Catharus fuscescens*), to Coastal Plain Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*) savannas with Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*) and Bachman's Sparrows (*Peucaea aestivalis*). The immense (600 square miles) and mostly inaccessible Okefenokee Swamp occupies the southeast corner of the state, and the Atlantic coast has a vast salt-marsh ecosystem bordered by a chain of barrier islands with their oak hammocks and sandy dunes. Charles H. Wharton (1977) described 100 "Natural Environments of Georgia," and there are many additional anthropogenic habitats.

That the BBA was completed during the allotted years (1994–2001) and published so lavishly just nine years later is quite an achievement by the editors, the 16 regional coordinators, the 33 contributing authors of the text, and the field observers. "More than 1,050 different individuals contributed at least one record," but the burden really fell on about 420 observers, among whom there was undoubtedly a hard core that really carried the load. Solid funding was important, too: substantial help came from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia Ornithological Society, the Woodruff Foundation, and the Wormsloe Foundation.

Atlasing techniques have become standardized since the initial project in the British Isles that began in 1968 (Sharrock 1976, Smith 1990); a chapter reviews these methods, results, and highlights. Another describes Georgia's "land, climate, and vegetation," presenting an overview of the state's physiographic regions and major habitats, each with a photograph of a well-chosen example. There is a chapter on "Changes in Georgia's avifauna since European settlement," and another on avian conservation. Throughout, the book is copiously illustrated, and all in color.

There are two-page species accounts for each of the 182 breeding species found in the state: 177 confirmed, 3 probable, and 2 possible. The left-hand pages have succinct commentaries on habitat and life history, distribution (general, then Georgia), status, and conservation. In all of these, there was an apparent and successful effort to use literature examples from Georgia when possible, but the net was cast wide: the Literature Cited (49 pages) is a treasure trove not only of Georgia ornithology but of recent research elsewhere. The left-hand page of each account also has a color photograph of the species; when dimorphic, the male is shown. Remarkably, most of the photographs in the book (totaling 204 according to the publisher) came from Georgia bird photographers; only a few were purchased. Ty Ivey, a Macon dentist, produced 48, and Giff Beaton, one of the editors, produced 30; together they contributed 38% of the total.

The right-hand page of each account presents the atlas records plotted on maps of Georgia with its 159 counties; pleasing earth tones show the physiographic regions of the state. Below these are summaries of the "sampling information" with the number of priority blocks noted for possible, probable, and confirmed. Also, "when appropriate," there are graphs that show Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) population trend data from the atlas period, either from Georgia, the Southeast, the East, or the entire BBS area. This helpful addition is marred by two rare lapses: where these graphs are discussed and explained (pp. 60–61) there is no literature reference for the BBS (e.g., Robbins et al. 1986, which is in the Literature Cited but is not cited at this pertinent point). Also, the data plotted against the *y* axis, called "Count," are not defined. Apparently, "Count" means the average number of individuals recorded per route.

It has been said that to publish a range map is to invite nitpicking, and indeed there are the usual shortcomings of rigid adherence to the atlasing regime: some grossly misleading maps (e.g., vultures, Black and Turkey, only plotted for "actual nest sites," nests notoriously hidden and difficult to find; that so many were discovered—30—is a marvel), obvious gaps due to coverage or criteria (e.g., no Yellow-throated Warblers in Thomas County, where they occur year-round; Crawford 1998), and failure to somehow include on the maps prior work by generations of ornithologists, birders, and naturalists that carefully documented bird distribution, including nesting. Some of these issues are addressed on page 60 and in some of the species accounts, but the problems remain.

This grousing is not meant to cast aspersions on the Georgia effort: it followed the rules, produced magnificently, and the overwhelming majority of the maps and commentary is most informative and clearly presented. The volume is so beautifully illustrated, it could be called a coffee-table book, but it is also a valuable reference. As a Georgian, I am proud it came from my state. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in the birds of the southeastern United States, and to those contemplating atlasing concepts, techniques, and projects.—Robert L. Crawford, *208 Junius Street, Thomasville, Georgia, USA. E-mail: rlcrawfd@rose.net*

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