



2009 Newsletter

Greg Campbell
March 2010

2009 marked the ninth year of surveys for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, and the eighth for mainland Nova Scotia. We are excited to be celebrating our 10th year of surveys with NB and PE in 2010!

A total of 121 owl routes were surveyed in the Maritimes in 2009, up six routes from 2008. Seventy routes were conducted in New Brunswick, 30 in Nova Scotia, and 21 in Prince Edward Island. In all, surveyors counted 526 owls, the lowest total since 2004. Barred Owl detections dropped in all three provinces, to 4.9 Barred Owls per route in NS, 2.6 in NB, and 2.1 in PE. This was after all three provinces had established record high numbers for this species in 2008. Great Horned Owl numbers remained relatively stable in 2009 compared to previous years. While Northern Saw-whets in NB and PE still appear to be following the expected 4-year pattern, the peak in saw-whets that was expected in NS in 2009 never happened. In fact, NS had its worst year ever for saw-whets, with only 0.6 per route. This was the third straight year of declines for this species in NS (Appendix 1). Indications are that rodent populations did peak in 2009 as expected, but probably too late for nesting owls. Only two Boreal Owls were detected in 2009: one in Nova Scotia and one in Prince Edward Island. For the second straight year, no Long-eared Owls were detected.

The top owl route of 2009 belonged to Susann Myers and Pat McKay, who had 20 owls on their route north of Truro, Nova Scotia. They had an astonishing 14 Barred Owls, 3 Great-horned Owls, 2 Northern Saw-whets, and the lone Boreal Owl for Nova Scotia. Mark Arsenault had the highest number of owls in PEI (19!), including 10 Barred Owls and 6 Northern Saw-whet Owls. John and Tessa Castell were tops in New Brunswick, with 18 owls. John also had a very close and startling encounter during one of their stops. After hearing a Barred Owl call in the distance, he decided to walk up the side of the road a bit to get a better listen, not realizing that there was a moose in the ditch a few feet from where he stood! He didn't see it in the dark, and only noticed it moments before it moved off into the brush. This highlights the importance of carrying (and using!) a flashlight during surveys!



Long-eared Owl

They're out there, but we're not finding them on surveys

Photo by Rod O'Connell



Barred Owl. Photo by Rod O'Connell



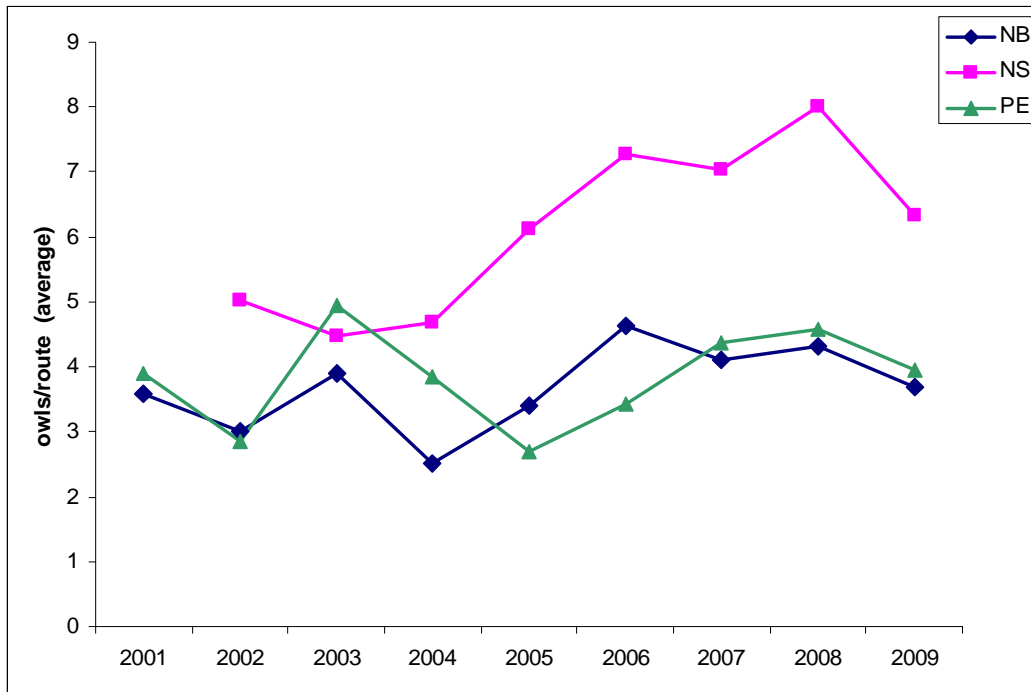


Figure 1: Average number of owls per route in each of the three provinces from 2001- 2009 (the Nova Scotia survey started in 2002).

A good winter for Hawk Owl sightings in New Brunswick

Several Northern Hawk Owls have been giving many thrilled New Brunswick birders the chance to closely observe them as they look down at observers from their customarily high perches. They breed in boreal parts of Canada and only come south to areas like the Maritimes in years when food is scarce further north. These appearances are known as “irruptions.” Unlike most owls, Northern Hawk Owls are primarily diurnal (active during the day), and they are also not very skittish, offering good views and photo opportunities. We’ve been tracking their appearances in northern New Brunswick this winter through the NatureNB listserv.



Northern Hawk Owl. Photo by Denis Doucet

We’ve noted at least 6 different hawk owls observed over the winter, four of them discovered by current or former owl survey volunteers. The first mention was from Little Shippegan on Lamèque Island, on November 20th. Another was observed during the Edmunston Christmas Bird Count on December 19th. A week later, on December 26th, a hawk owl was observed near Sheffield. Charlo has had one near the airport since January 3rd, and Saint-Leonard’s owl was first observed on January 5th. The latest known hawk owl was noticed near Canaan River on February 12th. Most of these owls have been photographed and can be seen fairly easily. They will likely be gone back to their northern breeding grounds by the time owl surveys begin on April 1st, but you can check your local nature listserv for any early spring sightings. To our knowledge, no Hawk Owls have been seen in PE or NS this winter.



Last chance to Atlas for owls!

The final year of the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas is now upon us. The Owl Survey database has contributed over 2,000 owl records to the Atlas so far. But we've got one more year to go. All the 10 x 10 km Atlas squares along Owl Survey routes have been fairly well covered for owls at this point, but if you'd like to try to add owl records to new squares, please visit the Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas website (www.mba-aom.ca) and click on "How to Atlas for Owls" on the link bar on the right-hand side for tips on where to find owls. You can also look at the bird maps to see which squares are lacking owl species. For example, several large areas of the Maritimes still don't have breeding evidence for Great Horned Owls (Figure 2). Central and western New Brunswick, western Prince Edward Island and southern Nova Scotia are all areas where the species was found in the first Atlas but not yet in the second Atlas. This spring and summer will be your last chance for atlasing in the Maritimes for at least 16 years. Atlases are done on a 20-year cycle, so the third Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas will not take place until 2026-2030. In other words – get out there and find those owls!

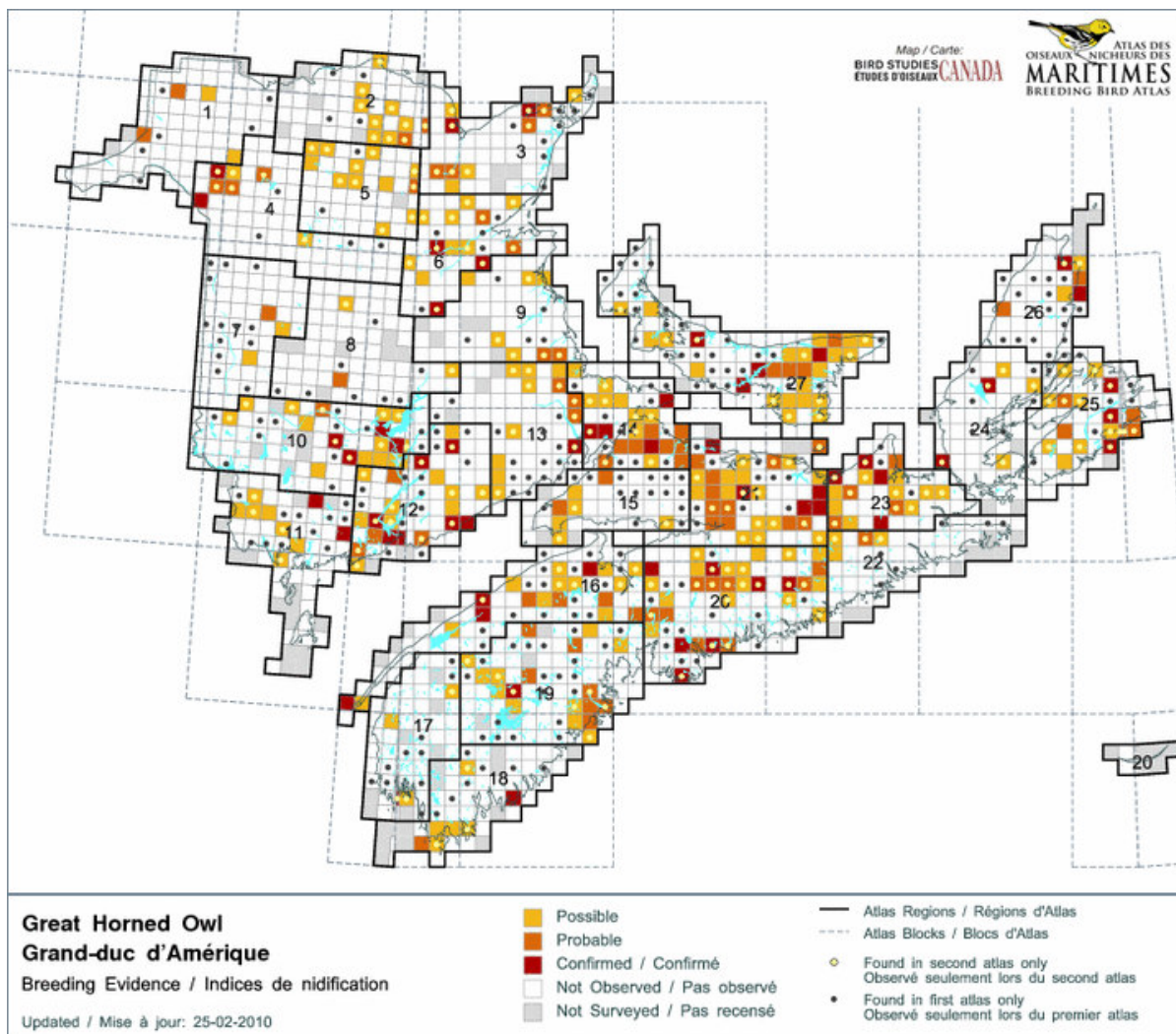


Figure 2: Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas breeding evidence map for Great Horned Owl, including data from 2006-2009. Squares with black dots indicate areas where Great Horned Owls were found in the first Atlas but not yet in the second Atlas.



Kids give a hoot about owls

With special funding from the Shell Environmental Fund and the TD Friends of the Environment Fund (Dieppe and Northern Nova Scotia chapters), we were able to visit 20 classrooms including over 500 students ranging from Grades 1-6 in the Moncton NB to Amherst NS corridor over the winter. For each class, we gave an interactive presentation on owl biology, followed by questions and answers and a chance to look at a number of mounted owl specimens. Each student received a bilingual *Owls of the Maritimes* poster specially designed for this purpose. Kids and teachers alike responded enthusiastically to the presentations and we hope to do more of this type of work in the future.

Thanks to volunteers and partners!

We greatly appreciate all of the time and effort donated by all Owl Survey volunteers. The 2009 Owl Surveyors were:

In NB: Bill Nelson; Ron and Arlene McGuire; Bruce and Kathy Beaton; Jack Lavender, Ian and Ruth Giberson, Roy LaPointe; Mike Lushington; Jim Clifford; Larry Sweet; Gerald Hallihan; Laurel Bernard; Gary Moore; David Myles; Mike Sullivan; Gilles Belliveau; John and Tessa Castell; Tracy Dean; Doug Bartlett; Marilyn Brady; Hank and Joanne Deichmann; Brian Cowan and Maureen O'Hara Cowan; Bev Schneider; Gordon Parsons; Susan and Terence Amos; Andrew Stewart; Rebecca Blakley; Julia Connell; Rod O'Connell; Karl Branch; Gérard Robichaud; Dave McLeod; Jim Saunders; Leonel Richard; James Mundle; Stephen Coughlan; Greg Watling; Joe Kennedy; Todd Beach; Mike and Roseanne Martin; Kelly, Denise, Kyle, Madeline and Bridget Honeyman; Jim Brown; Mark Pokorski; Burton Murray; Kathleen Fawcett; Denise Roy; Roger LeBlanc; Duane Leger; Greg Campbell; Kate Robinson; Becky Whittam and Sean Blaney; Andrew Macfarlane; Monica MacDonald; Roger Cormier; Pam Watters; Phil Riebel; Andrew MacInnis; Kier Gigeroff; Charles Neveu; Joyce Regan; Jacques Richard; Frank Branch; Jolande St-Pierre; Rosita Lanteigne; Deanna McCullum; Doug Hiltz; Sébastien Hébert, Ghislain Fontaine; Jonathan Cormier; Gary Stairs; Tracey Dean; Marilyn Bartlett; Jim and Jean Wilson; Jonathan Cormier.

In NS: Randy Lauff; May Goring; Richard Mash; Ken McKenna; Charlie Kendall; Rick Ferguson; Susann Myers; Pat McKay; Doug and Mary-Beth Archibald; Patricia Chalmers; Suzanne Borkowski; Cameron Deacoff; Laura Simms; Verna Higgins; Rita Hartlin; Jeff Ogden; Doug Bliss; Sydney Bliss; Julie Paquet; Jennifer Stewart; Bob McDonald; Peter LeBlanc; Julie Towers; Wendy Turner and Bruce Curtis; Richard Stern; Bernard Forsythe; Sylvia Fullerton; James Hirtle; Dorothy Poole; Donna Crossland; Claire and David Diggins; Peter Hope; Peter Croft; Rick Olsen; Brian and Christine O'Meara; Rebecca and Robert Ellis; Paula Dodaro; Ryan Scranton; Dirk van Loon; Dale Prest; Samantha Page.

In PE: Ross Bernard; Anna Enman; Connor Poirier; Karalee McAskill; Edwin and Janice Gillis; Emily Swim; Kelli Macleod; Dwaine Oakley; Kevin Arseneault; Mark Arseneault; Fiep deBie; Meika Keunecke; Rosemary Curley; Gerald MacDonald; David and Kathleen MacNearney; Peter Dillon; Alan McLennan; Rebecca Hersom-Petersen; Trevor MacKinnon; Brad Potter; Christina Linton; Dominic Antle; Robert Sharkie; Sherri Doherty; Jennifer Kearney; Liam Kearney; Jonathan Platts; Jana Cheverie; Barry Jackson; Bily Martin; David Seeler.



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Appendix 1: Average number of owls per route in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island from 2001-2009. These numbers do not account for differences in the survey protocol in NS[†].

New Brunswick									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
number of routes	81	93	87	84	82	76	72	61	69
Barred Owl	1.85	1.94	1.77	1.50	2.01	3.07	2.17	3.51	2.58
Northern Saw-whet Owl	0.73	0.45	1.17	0.66	0.95	0.80	1.43	0.31	0.57
Great Horned Owl	0.70	0.38	0.52	0.19	0.44	0.54	0.35	0.39	0.51
Boreal Owl	0.12	0.09	0.24	0.06	0	0.03	0.01	0	0
Long-eared Owl	0.03	0	0.03	0	0	0.05	0	0	0
Short-eared Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.01	0	0
Eastern Screech Owl	0.01	0	0.03	0	0	0.03	0.04	0.02	0
Unknown Owl	0.15	0.15	0.13	0.12	0	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.03
Total	3.59	3	3.90	2.52	3.40	4.62	4.10	4.31	3.68

Prince Edward Island									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
number of routes	22	19	23	21	19	19	22	24	21
Barred Owl	1.95	0.84	1.57	1.62	1.21	1.37	2	2.17	2.14
Northern Saw-whet Owl	0.68	1.21	2.48	1.29	1	0.84	1.73	1.13	1.05
Great Horned Owl	0.64	0.21	0.57	0.86	0.42	0.58	0.32	0.96	0.38
Boreal Owl	0.46	0.53	0.17	0	0	0.21	0.17	0.17	0.05
Long-eared Owl	0	0	0.04	0	0.05	0	0.09	0	0
Short-eared Owl	0.05	0	0.04	0	0	0.05	0	0	0
Eastern Screech Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.08	0.14
Unknown Owl	0.14	0.05	0.09	0.10	0	0.37	0.09	0.08	0.14
Total	3.91	2.84	4.96	3.86	2.68	3.42	4.36	4.58	3.91

Nova Scotia								
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
number of routes	45	37	36	39	40	35	30	30
Barred Owl	3.62	2.57	3.31	3.72	5.05	4.46	6.43	4.97
Northern Saw-whet Owl	0.76	1.16	0.81	1.67	1.13	1.4	0.87	0.6
Great Horned Owl	0.42	0.59	0.36	0.49	0.87	0.97	0.6	0.57
Boreal Owl	0.04	0.03	0.11	0.10	0.1	0	0	0.03
Long-eared Owl	0.02	0	0.03	0	0.05	0.11	0	0
Short-eared Owl	0	0	0	0	0.02	0	0	0
Eastern Screech Owl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown Owl	0.16	0.14	0.08	0.15	0.05	0.09	0.1	0.17
Total	5.02	4.49	4.69	6.13	7.27	7.03	8	6.33

[†] Survey protocols varied between provinces:

NB and PEI use 2 minutes silent listening, followed by one set of Boreal Owl calls, then 4 sets of Barred Owl calls, with silent listening periods between, for a total protocol of 12.7 minutes per stop. Survey stops are 2 km apart.

Mainland NS uses 2 minutes silent listening, followed by 2 sets Boreal calls then 2 sets Barred calls, with silent listening between, for a total protocol of 9.3 minutes per stop. Survey stops are 1.6 km apart.

