

Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 Update

By Grant McKercher, Atlas Coordinator, North Bay Region

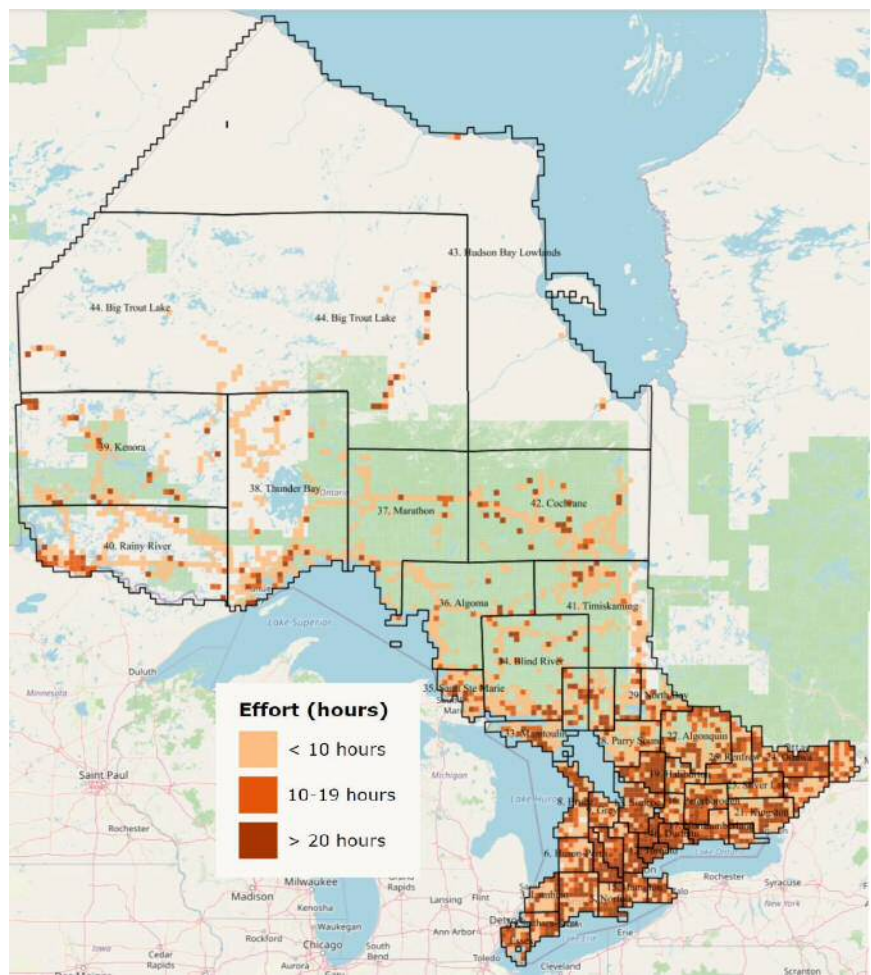
This article is an update on the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-3 (<https://www.birdsontario.org>) which is just completing its second year, with three more years to go. The goal of the Atlas is to map the distribution and relative abundance of Ontario's approximately 300 species of breeding birds, from as far south as Middle Island in Lake Erie to Hudson Bay in the north. The data collected over five years provides essential information for researchers, scientists, government officials and conservation professionals. It will guide environmental policies and conservation strategies for years to come.

Anyone interested in birding please consider joining in the project. It's a great opportunity to improve your birding skills and participate as a "citizen scientist" in this important province-wide research initiative.

Coverage to date from the Atlas Newsletter "What's Sap?" October 2022

Although 2022 data are not yet all in, results so far indicate another strong year for the Atlas. Thanks for all your great work!! As you can see from Figure 1, which shows the total coverage by atlas volunteers and some of the paid crews to date, Atlassers have submitted data for almost all squares in southern Ontario, and a goodly portion of the squares in the road-accessible north. Although some work is needed in almost every square, the white, green, and light orange squares in southern Ontario will require special attention in years 3 to 5 of the Atlas. The first brown squares have appeared in far northern Ontario - with lots more to come!

The map at right shows the hours of coverage reported so far in Atlas-3. (Maps like these showing coverage to date are available on the [NatureCounts](https://www.naturecounts.org) website.)



Looking more closely at the details of coverage to date, the level of participation is a little below the first year, except in point counts, including digital point counts, which both showed nice increases in 2022. The number of records submitted seems likely to surpass 1 million in 2023!

YEAR	ATLASSERS	SPECIES	SQUARES	RECORDS	POINT COUNTS	DIGITAL PCS	PEAK HOURS
2021	1,139	261	2,371	448,164	10,082	847	23,267
2022 (SO FAR)	924	251	2,312	371,565	10,378	2,102	18,014
TOTAL EFFORT (2021-2022)	1,344	269	2,824	819,729	20,460	2,949	41,381

Atlassers: The number of people who have submitted data which will probably increase as the Atlassers get in their data. You can help us to increase participation in 2023 by getting your birding friends to jump onboard!

Species: It's not surprising that the species count is lower in Atlas-3. So far, we haven't had as much coverage in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. We are looking forward to filling out that list as we expand our coverage throughout the Lowlands in 2023 and beyond.

Squares: Data has been submitted in a staggering number of squares! Next step for 2023 will be to focus efforts outside the city centers where full coverage has been reached.

Records: The checklist approach provides considerably more data, which will be very useful for understanding our breeding bird populations. At this rate, we'll surpass 1,000,000 species records in 2023! Who will submit the millionth record?!

Point Counts & Digital Point Counts: 2022 was the year of the Point Count! We've surpassed 2021 for both traditional and digital point count numbers! It's quite possible that there are a lot more point count data yet to be submitted.

Hours: 41,000 hours of Atlassing is an impressive number! Let's keep this momentum going for 2023!

Thanks to everyone who submitted data so far to the Atlas. **If you still have data from the season, please try to enter it as soon as possible!**

How the North Bay Region (#29) is doing

The table below shows how we compare so far to the Breeding Bird Atlas-2 which was conducted in 2001-2005.

Year	Atlassers	Species	Records	Point Counts	Digital PCs	Peak Hours	Squares with Data	Squares with Completed Coverage
BBA-2 (2001-2005)	80	169	-	-	-	-	47 of 61	34 of 61
BBA-3 (2021-2022)	44	151	8022	280	25	566.5	40 of 61	4 of 61

Atlassers: We have fewer registered Atlas volunteers than in BBA-2, but I expect this number to increase as we identify gaps in coverage and invite Atlassers from other regions to assist with general Atlassing and point counts over the next three years. However, there is plenty of opportunity for more local birders to join and contribute, either with casual observations, point counts, or participation in ‘square bashes’ in which we can make a concentrated effort to get full coverage of a square that may have less attention or challenging accessibility.

Species: We’re doing well in identifying total species, having observed 151 of the approximate 175 breeding birds expected for our region. We now need to put more focus on finding the less common or rare species that might be breeding here. Who knows what rarity or new breeding species we might find?

Records: Volunteer Atlassers have logged in 8,022 checklist records to date in our area!

Point Counts: No point counts were done in our area in BBA-2 but we have started to submit some for BBA-3, using both the traditional method (real time listening) and audio recording with Zoom H2N recorders. This is a great way to do point counts if you are less experienced/confident with your aural identification of birds. I have some Zoom recording units that I can lend out if you would like to try one. The recordings from the units are reviewed over the winter months by expert birders who have been contracted to interpret the audio recordings. The results will be added to the database for each square.

Peak Hours: These are the number of observation hours done during the peak breeding season (May 24 to July 15) in our area.

Squares with Data: We are doing well with the number of squares that have had at least some coverage – 40 of 61 squares have observation data so far. Although some of our squares are challenging to access (no roads), there are a number that are more easily accessible and would provide important data for the Atlas. If you are interested in doing some field observations, I can direct you to where we have some gaps in coverage in terms of squares and species.

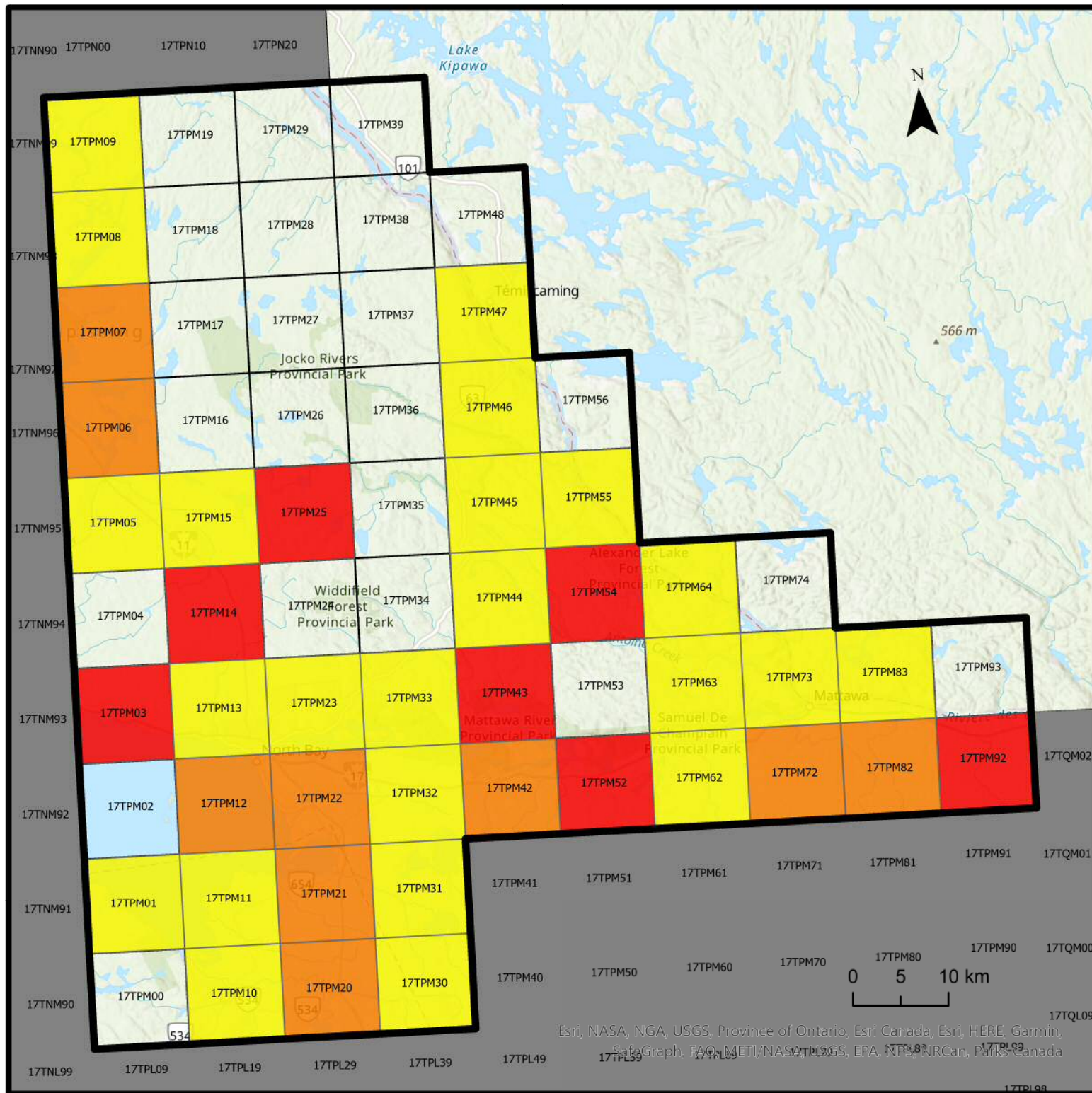
Squares with Completed Coverage: Although we have had some observations in 40 squares, only 4 squares have ‘completed coverage’. The goal of the Atlas is to have as many squares as possible assessed with a minimum coverage. This means **20 hours of field observation** over the 5-year duration of the project and **25 point counts**, traditional or audio recordings. (See maps on the following pages.) To achieve this ambitious goal, the Atlas Office has been encouraging volunteers from other regions to come to our area to help fill in some of the gaps. Summer students with Birds Canada and Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry personnel have also been actively participating in Atlassing in the Northeast regions and will continue to assist over the next three years.

Thanks to all the current Atlas volunteers for the great work to date in the North Bay region!

For anyone interested in participating during the next three years of the project, please contact me for more information at gmckercher@mac.com or visit the Atlas website, [NatureCounts](#). I am hoping to organize an outing in the spring to provide a demonstration on how Atlassing works in the field and answer any questions you might have about the project.

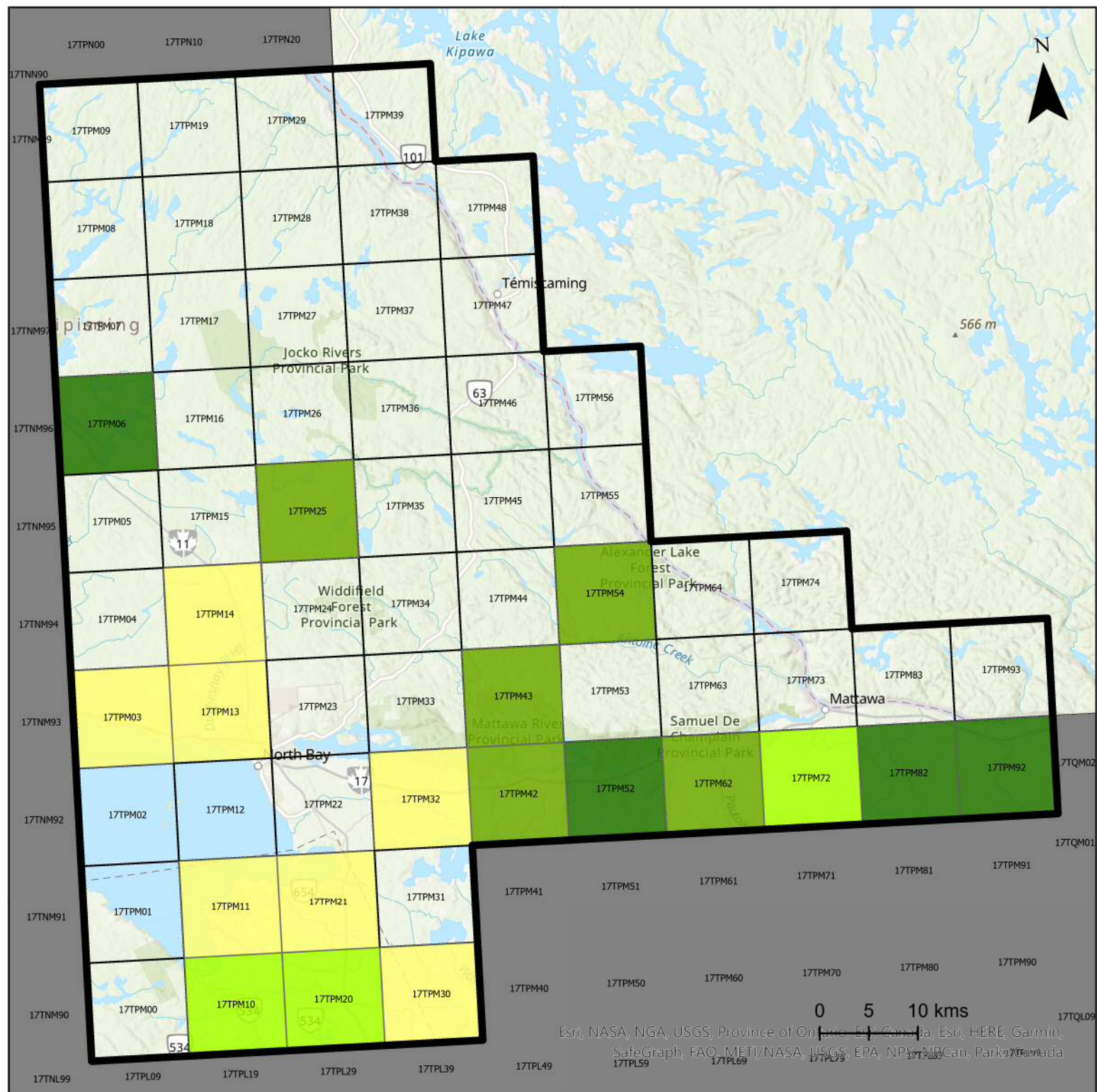
Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Peak Hours (2021-2022) - Region 29 (North Bay)

Effort Hours (peak period)



Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas

Number of Point Counts (2021-2022) - Region 29 (North Bay)



Point Counts Completed

- 0 point counts
- 1-9 point counts
- 10-14 point counts
- 15-24 point counts
- 25+ point counts