

# ATLASER SPOTLIGHT

*David R. Smith, from Mt. Airy, is the Carroll County Coordinator for the Maryland & DC Breeding Bird Atlas 3.*



## *What made you interested in birds?*

A family friend of my parents, who was an avid birder, spent a week with us at our summer home in the Cumberland Plateau region of Eastern Tennessee when I was 12 years old. As I was leaving the house to start my day each early morning that week I would see her on the porch with her binoculars looking at birds. I had always been a nature boy, but at the time, butterflies were my main interest. However, each day I found that I began to pay more attention to birds. One day I came home and described a small grayish bird that I had seen that day that was similar to a mockingbird but much smaller. The woman explained that it was likely a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and she showed it to me in her Peterson field guide. Bingo! After that I was hooked. Later that year she gave me several bird books, including a James A. Tucker Combination List of Birds of North America checklist, within which I began to keep a list of the birds I had seen. I still have that list, and have never lost my love for birds.

## *What bird best reflects your personality?*

Probably any corvid, but I will go with Blue Jay, and not because they are among the most intelligent birds. Jays seem to always be intensely curious about every little thing and they can be quite a chatter box. I think my wife would attest to that latter similarity in particular.

## *What is the best thing about atlasing?*

I love slowing down my birding to fully appreciate the nuances of birds. Atlasing, unlike counts or big days, requires patience in following a bird's behaviors to look for clues that it is breeding. I often learn so much just by spending quality time with a bird in its breeding habitat. And more times than not, I am rewarded with a nice Confirmation of breeding.

## *You can take binoculars, a field guide, and what other item?*

Smartphone for sure; it's now indispensable for keeping checklists, and has replaced the hardcopy field guide in my pack.



Black-billed Cuckoo by [David Smith/Macaulay Library](#)



## *Where is your favorite place to atlas?*

As the Carroll County Coordinator it may be blasphemous to say, but my favorite place to atlas is the Audrey Carroll Audubon Sanctuary in eastern Frederick County. I do a lot of volunteer work there for the Audubon Society of Central Maryland, including leading nature walks. I also covered the sanctuary during the previous atlas when I served as the Frederick County Coordinator, where I added some very good breeding bird records (Swamp Sparrow for one). I enjoy birding there so much that for this atlas, I volunteered to take the Libertytown CW atlas block that includes most of that property even though I have all of Carroll County to worry about.

*What's our biggest conservation issue? What bird do you particularly like?*

So many negative forces seem to be conspiring against Mother Earth these days that it is hard to pick just one issue. However, from an immediate conservation perspective, habitat loss is high on the list of concerns. Whether more gradual from the effects of climate change or sudden from the destruction of natural habitats for sprawling developments, the alteration of our natural landscapes is causing widespread declines in the biodiversity of the planet. As E.O. Wilson stated in his book *Half Earth*, to avoid another catastrophic extinction event humans must protect and restore half of the earth as green space. While a seemingly pie in the sky notion, Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware entomologist and author of the 2020 New York Times Best Seller *Nature's Best Hope*, presents a compelling recipe for doing just that, one quarter acre lot at a time, through landscaping with native plants.

*Who would you go atlasing with?*

Mike Welch—past Frederick County Bird Club president, past state May Count compiler, long time Catocin Christmas Count compiler, and co-discoverer, along with Kathy Calvert, of Maryland's only confirmed Couch's Kingbird. Mike moved from Maryland out to Tucson a few years ago, but over the years I have had some great birding days with him in Maryland and some amazing trips with him to Central and South America. He is the birding yin to my yang. Unlike me, he is always so well prepared on birding trips, and seems to tolerate well my constant need for one thing or another. He is also a most fun traveling companion.

The American Kestrel has been near and dear to my heart since I intensively followed adult and fledgling kestrels of the Southeastern *paulus* race at the Archbold Biological Station in South Central Florida in the early 1980s. I later studied habitat behavior of the wintering northern kestrels as a graduate student at the University of South Florida. Since moving to Maryland, I have continued to enjoy observing kestrels, including a work project documenting their nesting in transmission towers. During the atlas, I have taken great pleasure in finding nesting pairs in Carroll County, primarily in the northwestern corner of the county within the Monocacy Grasslands IBA, and have gotten to work with farmers to attract kestrels by erecting nesting boxes on their property.

*Have you been involved with any atlases prior to this one?*

I participated in the first Florida BBA in the mid-1980s while at the Archbold Biological Station. I covered an entire quad that occurred on one large cattle ranch just west of the biological station that contained a broad diversity of Florida upland and wetland habitats. What an introduction to atlasing. I discovered a mixed species heron rookery, nesting Least Bitterns, a King Rail nest, and a new colony of Swallow-tailed Kites. I missed the fieldwork for the first Maryland atlas but wrote the kestrel species account for the book after moving here in the late 1980s, then served as the Frederick County Coordinator in BBA2.

