

JOHNSON COUNTY BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

Well 1987 is upon us and its time to start thinking about your breeding block. I am going to try to send out a short newsletter every so often with hints on how to look for certain birds. It will also be used to let participants exchange news and stories. I think each of us would enjoy hearing about each others atlas efforts.

So what breeds in March anyway? There are several species that could profitably be looked for in March. Great Horned and Barred Owls, Red-tailed Hawk, Rock and Mourning Doves, and Horned Larks all breed now.

Barred Owls live in woodlands, particularly river-bottom woods. They prefer cavities in large deciduous trees, although they will occasionally nest in old hawk, crow, or squirrels nests. As a result their nests are usually hard to find. The non-incubating bird will remain in a roost tree nearby which may be easier to spot. The prescence of the owls usually can be ascertained by hearing them call on several consecutive visits. The ones that live by my house make a lot of noise just before dawn.

Great Horned Owls also live in woodlands and generally require a larger area than Barred. They nest in old hawk nests (particularly Red-tailed) or occasionally crow or squirrels nests. They prefer conifers if any are available. Searching the trees for evidence of excreta (whitewash) or pellets (brown, oblong, furry things) may locate a nest or roost tree. Again perhaps the best way to ascertain their prescence is to hear calls on consecutive visits.

Red-tailed Hawks live in the same areas as the owls. In fact Red-tails and Great Horned will nest very close to one another. They build large stick nests high in deciduous trees.

Mourning Doves breed from March to September. Their flimsy stick nest may be located anywhere from low bushes to high in trees. They also like conifers. Rock Doves (pigeons) breed all year. They nest on ledges of buildings and under bridges.

Horned Larks breed from March to June in open country. They build small nests on the ground in cultivateds fields.

I hope to see you all at the Iowa City Bird Club meeting, Wednesday, February 25. There will be a workshop on owls with many additional tips on how to locate them.

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