

EBBA2

European Breeding Bird Atlas



Fieldwork support from foreign observers: ideas

Document to be discussed at the Barcelona workshop 2013

Background

In the questionnaires sent out to EBCC delegates in 2011 many countries indicated a wish for support by foreign observers to help with fieldwork for their national atlases or more generally to help fill the gaps for the European atlas. On the other hand, birdwatchers from western Europe expressed their interest to help with data gathering. Several people have approached the atlas steering committee directly. So far, these people were put in contact with the national contact persons in the countries they wanted to visit and they were encouraged to keep records of their observations for later use. However, more systematic ways of support can be thought of. In this document, we provide some ideas for discussion. Different ways are of course possible, depending on the possibilities and needs in particular regions and countries. Ideally, we aim to take home a list of tips and suggestions to be tested and implemented in countries.

Recording options

1. Untargeted recording

The basic information needed for any national or European atlas project is to provide a list of breeding species per atlas square. Visitors to a country can contribute to this if they provide their data via online recording systems, reports etc. Visitors, tour leaders etc. should be asked

- to record the data according to the basic guidelines for data collection, i.e. with precise location if possible, atlas code etc.
- to make excursion lists for particular sites rather than daily lists of observed species (which is the usual way birdwatching tours record their observations), because if people travel far within a day, many different sites may be visited.

This option would be suitable for all interested people visiting areas with poor coverage, but also for researchers or species specialists that make expeditions to particular areas and might be prepared to provide their records of the species studied but also additional observations.

We expect that information gathered this way will be biased – foreign birdwatchers are assumed to come to the most attractive sites (or to see their target species). Nevertheless, such information will be valuable too.

2. Targeted recording - basic

The information recorded would be the same as in option 1 but visitors would be directed to particular areas/atlas squares where support is most needed. This requires closer involvement of the national coordinators to provide the information on which areas should be visited. Most likely, other guidelines will be needed too (e.g. size of a site to be visited, habitats to be covered, fieldwork effort etc). We could also expect a need to provide advice on logistics (how to get there, things to avoid etc.).

3. Targeted recording - advanced

Some countries want to record more than just species lists per atlas square, e.g. by asking observers to visit sites repeatedly, gather quantitative information via transects or point counts. Repeated visits during the breeding season might be difficult for people that cannot spend much time, which requires more specific organisation by national coordinators, e.g. by sending different teams to the same area at different times. This option also requires translation of national atlas methodology into English. However, there may be an opportunity that countries with similar languages can help each other. Logistics, field method and data provision will be the most complicated, thus further guidelines and more intensive cooperation between fieldworkers and national coordinators will certainly be needed.

Logistic requirements

In areas with a tradition of birdwatching tours and areas where travelling is easy, visitors will be able to work independently. In remote areas, by definition the ones where most gaps will exist, access may be more difficult to organise by the visitors themselves, and language issues may increase the difficulties. If logistical support can be provided by national coordinators or other institutions in the target countries, this may encourage foreign visitors to go to these areas. Joining teams of foreign visitors and local people with less experience in bird identification but who could help with the logistical aspects would also offer an opportunity to train volunteers from the target countries.

Birdwatching tour companies may be encouraged to organise special “EBBA2 support tours”, i.e. carrying out targeted surveys in particular regions, which might be attractive to birdwatchers that would like to combine their travelling with active support of a Europe-wide project but would not feel comfortable to organise an expedition by themselves.

Finances

Support from foreign birdwatchers should not be a financial burden to national coordinators. As a minimum, visitors should pay their expenses and expenses (but not necessarily more than expenses) of any national partners accompanying them. Tour operators, in particular if they organised special “EBBA2 support tours”, should be encouraged to charge a small additional fee to the overall costs of the trip that would be transferred to the atlas projects in the country they visited.

Coordination and promotion

As a first step, visitors can be put in contact with national coordinators. However, having to deal with requests from potential supporters needs time, and organising logistical support for visitors may overstretch the possibilities of national coordinators, who are busy enough with

work within their country. On the other hand, potential visitors will be disappointed easily if they do not get answers, and word of this will easily spread in the birdwatching community. A central coordination point linking volunteers and national coordinators might help but would need resources and rely on the willingness of national coordinators to give up some of their independence.

A more centralised coordination could also be done via the EBCC/EBBA2 website. As a minimum, information on data gathering targeted at foreign visitors can be made available, together with the names of national coordinators. In a more advanced way, national coordinators could post their requests for support and potential visitors could offer their possibilities.

An EBBA2 fieldwork support scheme can be advertised via online recording platforms (e.g. observado.org, ornitho.ch), ornithological societies, social media. Tour operators could be approached from within the target countries via local tour guides, who in their turn should be approached by national coordinators to provide their observations. Tour operators in western Europe could be approached individually, e.g. by the EBCC delegates or other partners in the EBCC network.

Questions

A successful fieldwork support scheme can only work in collaboration between the national coordinators and the EBBA2 coordination team. A number of specific questions have to be discussed and answered before we can proceed:

1. Are you as national coordinator willing and do you have the capacities to deal with requests from individual persons?
2. Would you prefer to deal with the requests yourself or would you prefer to have a central contact point?
3. Do you agree that the EBBA2 coordinators promote visits to your country via the website, by approaching tour operators etc.)
4. Do you see possibilities to organise logistical support for visitors?
5. How do you think visitors could contribute: all of the options 1 to 3 or just 1 or 2? This could be country/region or even species specific.
6. Do we need a central European data collection system in addition to national online platforms (e.g. for people who don't understand the language of the national system or want to provide reports or excel sheets rather than typing in individual observations)?
7. Which potential problems could we face (for different scenarios?)
8. Any other ideas?

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