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Volunteer To Help MDC With Breeding Bird Survey

Calling all bird-lovers and nature enthusiasts. Are you someone who can tell the difference between a Baltimore oriole, indigo bunting, and a scissor-tailed flycatcher? Do you know what a cerulean warbler sounds like? The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is in need of volunteers to assist with the 2014 North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS).

The BBS is a long-term, large-scale, international bird monitoring program that started in 1966. According to MDC Resource Scientist Janet Haslerig, the purpose of the BBS is to track the status and trends of North American bird populations.

"Bird populations are subjected to numerous, widespread threats including habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, land-use changes, and chemical contaminants," said Haslerig. "If significant declines are detected, their causes can then be identified and appropriate actions taken to reverse them before populations reach critically low levels."

Each year during June — the height of the bird breeding season for most of the U.S. — volunteers collect bird population data along roadside survey routes. Each survey route is 24.5 miles long with stops at half-mile intervals. At each stop, a three-minute point count is conducted. During the count, every bird seen within a quarter-mile radius or heard is recorded. Surveys start one-half hour before local sunrise and take about five hours to complete.

There are currently 19 vacant routes (<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/RouteMap/Map.cfm>) in Missouri that need volunteers.

Haslerig said to volunteer a person needs access to suitable transportation, good hearing and eyesight, and the ability to identify all breeding birds in the area. She also stressed that knowing bird songs is extremely important. "Most birds counted on these surveys are singing males," said Haslerig.

All new BBS volunteers must also successfully complete an on-line training program before their data can be used in any BBS analysis.

Haslerig also hopes surveyors will commit to multiple years of collecting data on the same route. "It helps with the consistency in data collection," said Haslerig. "And the volunteers get to know the route and have a good feel of what birds they will encounter."

For more information or to volunteer, contact Janet Haslerig at Janet.Haslerig@mdc.mo.gov or 573-522-4115, ext. 3198.