Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP): The Protocol Explained

Introduction

The atlas protocol is a survey protocol, designed to record the presence of as many bird species as possible within a defined area. The project allows for two types of surveys (cards) to be submitted – **Full Protocol** and **Ad-hoc Protocol**.

- Full Protocol card: The atlaser fully complied with the protocol rules (set out below).
- Ad-hoc: The atlaser did not comply with all of the atlas rules.

Atlasers should always aim to submit Full Protocol cards, as they have far more value for tracking changes in bird communities than Ad-hoc Protocol cards.

The Criteria

1) In the field – area surveyed

SABAP uses a grid-based system based on earth's latitudinal and longitudinal lines – each 5 minute x 5 minute area (about 9 km north-south and 7 km east-west in South Africa) is called a **pentad**.

- A map with the pentads in South Africa can be found here: http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/coverage/country/southafrica
- If using the mobile app BirdLasser, pentad boundaries will be displayed on the phone screen

An atlaser needs to visit as many different habitats as possible in the pentad. However, if for some reason you cannot access all habitats, this **should not stop you** from submitting a full protocol card.

2) How much time should you spend atlasing

The full protocol requires at least 2 hours of dedicated atlasing within a pentad. Each atlaser can submit one full protocol card per pentad every five days. This is to prevent cards merely being replicates of each other. The atlaser may choose to continue atlasing whilst still in the 5-day period. Ideally, the initial two-hour survey should happen in one continuous period, but it may be split up into multiple smaller segments

Other timing related factors to consider:

- When taking coffee breaks and you are not actively birding, you should exclude the time from the **first part of the survey.**
- An example of a segmented intensive period would be if you spend a night out, you can do the first hour in the evening you arrive and complete the second hour the next day.

3) The Observations

- All bird species need to be recorded.
- Only the first observation of a species must be logged, i.e. no duplicates on a card.
- The atlaser needs to record each species in the order observed.
- Birds seen and/or heard, may be recorded.
- Photos or sound recordings of birds for later identification can be very helpful.
- You are responsible and accountable for each record on your card (and will get an Out of Range query for rare or unusual species). When getting information from additional observers, ensure the information is accurate and correct as any queries will be sent to you and not the additional observer.
- **When in doubt, leave it out**.
- Atlasing should preferably be conducted during good birding conditions, for example when there is little wind and no rain. If in your opinion bad weather has greatly reduced the number of species recorded, rather submit the card as an Ad-hoc Protocol card.
- It is not necessary to record the number of individual birds seen (but BirdLasser might prompt you for additional information such as numbers of individuals for some threatened species).

Independence of atlas cards

- When two or more atlasers atlas the same pentad, at the same time, it is recommended to submit the observations on a single Full Protocol card. It is up to the group to decide who will "own" the card, i.e. submit to SABAP. The other atlasers may be added as additional observers.
- Atlasers can atlas together, independently, if they can devise a system that will produce significantly different cards. As an example, if two atlasers travelling together, walk in different directions each time they stop, it would result in different species and orders on the cards.

General guidelines

- If you are new to birding and not able to identify most of the birds seen/heard whilst atlasing, please submit all cards as Ad-hoc Protocol cards, even if you followed the full protocol rules. You should only submit cards as Full Protocol cards once you can identify at least 95% of all species you encounter.
- If you bird only at one spot every day, for a combined 2 hours or more in a 5-day period, rather submit an Ad-hoc card, because your coverage of the pentad is too limited.
- For cards with only a few records, only submit a Full Protocol card if all the rules were obeyed, and there were no obvious reasons for the low species count (e.g. bad weather) - suggesting that the area really is largely devoid of birds.

Important Websites

Southern African Bird Atlas Project
- General Website: http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/

BirdLasser
- https://www.birdlasser.com/
- FAQ: https://www.birdlasser.com/about/faq

Videos
Videos about SABAP2 and BirdLasser:
- BirdLasser Videos: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=birdlasser
- How to submit an atlas card: http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/media/youtube#pgcontent
- SABAP2 Protocol: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud54-84d-YU&t=1s

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