

Establishing Survey Stops for Maine Owl Monitoring Routes

Updated 3/16/06

Most of the routes for the Maine Owl Monitoring Program were established in 2002 and 2003. As we move forward, we expect to add new routes only in areas of the state where there are no existing routes. As a volunteer on a new route, you will need to do some additional work in order to start the survey. You will be sent a map with the route highlighted as well as “Owl Survey Route Information Sheet”.

First, ten stops along the route need to be established where the actual owl surveys will be conducted. Stops should be established during the day, prior to starting owl surveys. See the guidelines below for setting up stops. Stops should be clearly marked and identified on the map, and a copy of the map should be returned to Maine Audubon at the end of the season. **Second**, the “Owl Survey Route Information” form should be filled out to describe where each stop is along the route. This will allow someone unfamiliar with the route to replicate survey stops.

Guidelines for setting up stops:

- **Stops should be at safe locations along relatively quiet stretches of roads.** Avoid putting stops at dangerous curves or busy intersections, and in places where constant noise may interfere with owl detection (like close to interstate highways, loud streams, industrial machinery, etc.). It's best to avoid stops directly in front of houses, to minimize disturbances like barking dogs and inquisitive homeowners. Note that running water may become a noise issue for stops later in the season. Avoid putting stops near streams that may run high (and loudly) in the spring.
- Most routes will go through a variety of habitat types. Mixed and coniferous forests are a favorite habitat for many owls, but they also may be found near open fields, forest edges. **Try to establish stops in a variety of habitats.** A stop in an open area or on a ridge may allow the tape to broadcast over a larger area compared to a stop in a block of forest. The “Owl Survey Route Information” form includes an area to describe the habitat at each stop.
- Most routes start at an easy to find spot, generally at an intersection. **This starting point may or may not be suitable as your first survey stop.** Use your discretion, based on these guidelines, to either establish your first stop at this point or start down the route to the first good stopping point.
- **Stops should be at least a mile from each other** (to minimize hearing the same owl twice on a survey). In general you can use the car odometer to measure the distance between stops, though note that if your route has many turns, you'll also need to keep the stops more than a mile apart “as the owl flies”. On the route maps we've sent out (which are slightly enlarged pages from the Maine Atlas and Gazetteer), a mile is approximately 5/8 inches.

- **Look for good visual markers at your stops.** These might include bridges, telephone poles (most are marked with numbers on silver tags), road signs or mailboxes. Describe these landmarks in detail on your “Route Description” form. Try to avoid subjective landmarks like “large rock” or “small fir tree” that may change over time or be difficult for someone else to find.
- **Establish stops during the day when you can see and spend time selecting a good, safe spot to stop.** You might find it helpful to check the stops you selected during the day again at night before your first run. This way you can move stops from nighttime nuisances like barking dogs and bright yard lights that may not have been noticeable in the daylight.
- Routes have been established primarily along secondary roads and away from town and city centers, but in some cases routes pass over sections of primary highway and/or through a town. If this is the case with your route, **avoid putting stops along that section of the route.** We’ve tried to make the routes long enough to accommodate these “unsuitable” stretches of road, but if you run out of space, call us so we can extend the length of your route.
- **Routes are set up on a random basis,** though in some cases we have used information about the presence of owls to place routes in appropriate habitat. If you feel your route is unsafe or access is difficult, please call before you make any changes to the actual route in order to avoid overlapping with neighboring routes.

If you have any questions about how to set up your stops or if you’d like guidance on where stops should be, please contact Susan at Maine Audubon for help (781-6180 ext 216, sgallo@maineaudubon.org). **Please make copies of your route maps and stop descriptions and send them to Maine Audubon at the end of the season.**