

Killdeer

Charadrius vociferus

The familiar Killdeer ranks as one of the most widely distributed of Ohio's breeding birds. They were recorded from 758 priority blocks during the Atlas Project, and were missed in only six blocks within the Unglaciated Plateau region. Their widespread distribution results from their adaptability in the choice of breeding habitats. Killdeer thrive in fields and pastures in Ohio's farmlands. They are equally at home on gravel bars on large rivers, beaches along Lake Erie, and the shorelines of inland reservoirs. Reclaimed strip mines, quarries, and gravel pits provide ideal habitats as do disturbed lands with exposed soil throughout the state. Killdeer also regularly inhabit urban areas where they may occupy gravel parking lots, cemeteries, schoolyards, and the gravel roofs of buildings.

The relative abundance of Killdeer within Ohio is fairly accurately portrayed in the Breeding Bird Survey data. Killdeer are decidedly least numerous within the Unglaciated Plateau region where suitable open habitats are relatively scarce. They are nearly equally numerous within the Till Plain, Illinoian Till Plain, and Glaciated Plateau physiographic regions, and are most numerous within the intensively farmed Lake Plain region.

A conspicuous resident of these open habitats, breeding Killdeer proved to be relatively easy to confirm. Of the 491 confirmed records from priority blocks, adults accompanied by partially grown young were reported from 172 blocks. Active nests were discovered in 136 blocks, while Killdeer exhibiting their familiar distraction displays were noted in 132. The "30" code was utilized in 49 priority blocks.

Killdeer also exhibit fairly obvious territorial behavior including a distinctive butterfly-like flight over their breeding site as well as various ground displays (Stout 1967). Since these territorial activities are most evident shortly after the adults return to Ohio, they were largely missed by observers collecting data during June and July. Hence, most of the 175 records of probable breeders pertained to pairs occupying suitable habitats. Possible breeders were reported in only 92 priority blocks. These possible records were limited to May, June, and the first half of July to preclude migrants.

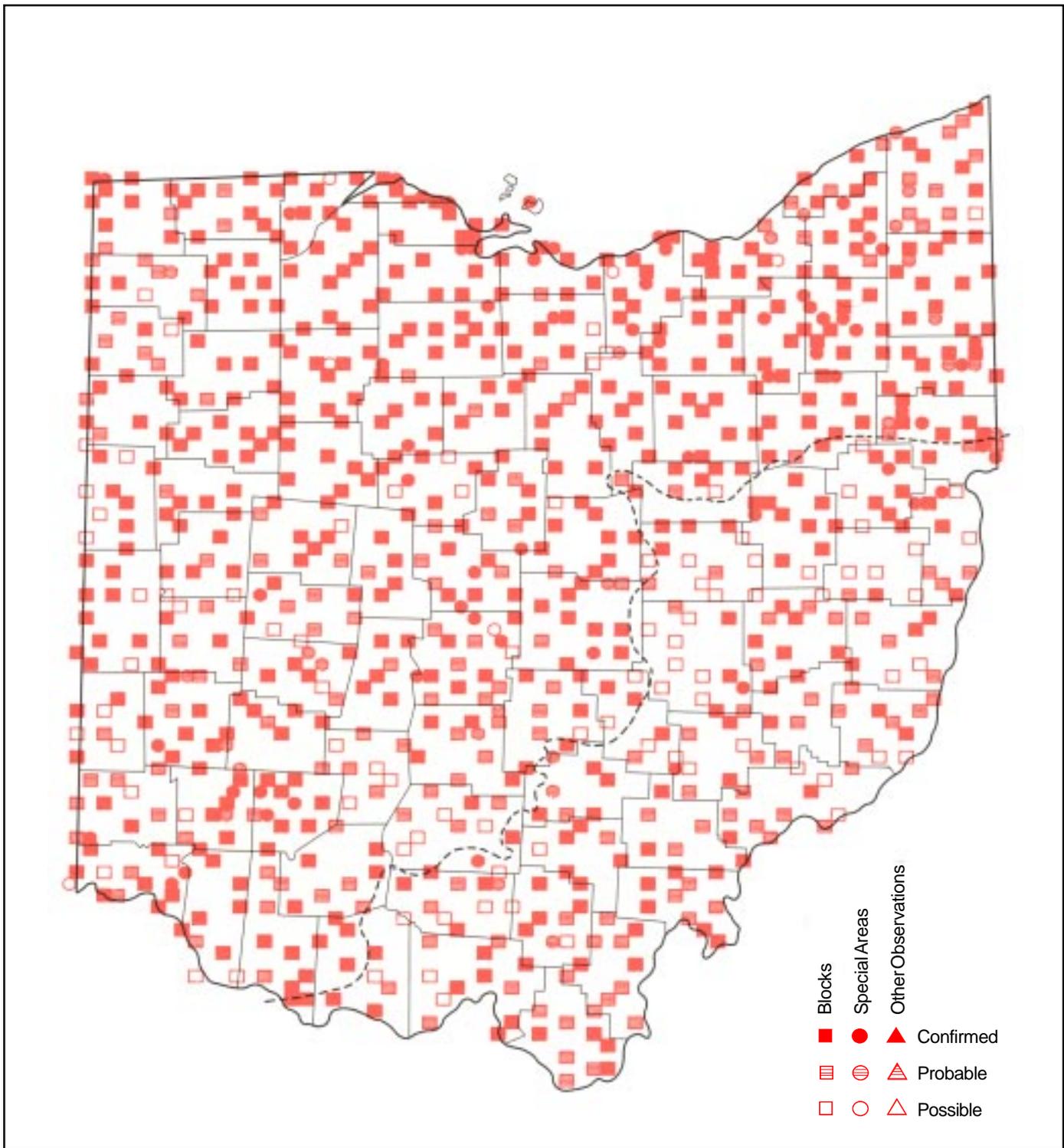
Killdeer have been widely distributed summer residents throughout Ohio since the 19th century (Wheaton 1882). Hicks (1935) recorded them from every county, and considered them to be common to abundant residents. Their statewide numbers have remained fairly stable during subsequent decades. While temporary declines have been noted following severe winters, their populations have strongly increased throughout eastern and central North America between 1965 and 1979 (Robbins, C. S., et al. 1986), a trend that has probably continued into the 1980s.

Killdeer normally nest on the ground in open situations, although a few pairs have utilized roof tops. Some nests are partially concealed by vegetation, but most are placed on sand, gravel, or exposed soil. The cryptically-colored eggs can be difficult to locate, especially against a gravel background, while the attentive adults are masters of leading intruders away from the nest sites with their familiar broken wing distraction display. Most nests contain four eggs, although there is a report of seven eggs in a clutch (Peck and James 1983). Late nesting attempts frequently produce clutches of three or fewer eggs.



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Nesting activities begin shortly after Killdeer establish their territories and pair bonds. During warm seasons, the first clutches are laid in late March; nests with eggs have been reported as early as March 24 at Cincinnati and March 31 at Cleveland (Kemsies and Randle 1953, Williams 1950). Most first clutches are laid during April. Renesting attempts are frequent and some pairs may raise two broods, resulting in numerous reports of nests with eggs through the first week of July. Some late clutches may not hatch until the second half of the month. Recently hatched young may appear as early as the last week of April, and these early young may fledge by mid-June. However, most young are noted between mid-May and mid-July. Late nesting attempts have produced adults accompanied by partially grown young through August 19 (Peterjohn 1989a).



Analysis of Block Data by Physiographic Region

Physiographic Region	Total Blocks Surveyed	Blocks with Data	% with Data	Regional % for Ohio	Ave. # Individ per BBS Route (1982–1987)
Lake Plain	95	95	100.0	12.5	19.0
Till Plain	271	271	100.0	35.8	14.2
Ill. Till Plain	46	46	100.0	6.1	13.6
Glaciated Plateau	140	140	100.0	18.5	12.2
Unglaciated Plateau	212	206	97.2	27.2	3.2

Summary of Breeding Status

No. of Blocks in Which Species Recorded		
Total	758	99.2%
Confirmed	491	64.8%
Probable	175	23.1%
Possible	92	12.1%