

An introduction to Atlassing

Wits Bird Club Outing – 10 September – Feedback on Pentads and Atlassing Technique for 5x5 minute grid squares.

Positives

- Pentad is a nice size to bird for several hours. Participants think about 3 hours would normally be sufficient to cover reasonably.
- Navigation easier than with triads because 3 times table not involved and Surveyer-General map sheets show the 5 degree marks.
- Because there are only 9 blocks in a QDS, this seems more manageable in terms of getting coverage in a few outings as opposed to triads (25)
- People enjoyed the outing, and felt that a pentad provided plenty of good birding. 2 hours is clearly too little for most pentads.

Negatives

- Name – seems to confuse people (don't get "Penta")
- It is often much more difficult to access all habitat types (However compared with QDS) because roads do not pass through as many areas as with QDS.
- Nomenclature potentially very confusing and prone to errors, particularly since the numbers are not the same as those appearing on the standard map sheets (1:50 000 sheets). The 1- 9 naming is much simpler, but this assumes reliance on 1:50 000 map sheets, which not everyone will have.
- Errors in naming pentads may be significant, and it may be advisable to require two different names **2528DB(1)** and **25302845** (for those using maps) and an actual GPS reading as well as the grid name for those using GPS.
- Typical grid-bashing days should aim to cover several pentads, but the second and third pentads are reached when many species are not calling, this skewing the data towards the more conspicuous birds.
- Most of the group were quite happy to pentad in an organized group, but only a few felt confident to go and do this on their own.

Initial Recommendations and Impressions regarding “fine-scale” atlasing:

- With smaller grids, maps are going to be essential for planned and thus systematic coverage.
- Training and an intensive and well-planned campaign of public education will be essential to get significant buy-in.
- Role for bird clubs in organizing “grid-bashing” days is going to be essential.
- Some sort of accreditation of “atlasers” in terms of map reading training, understanding of the rules and hazards would be a great help.
- Because of the massive challenge for getting big coverage, It is essential that BEST PRACTISE guidelines are compiled in such a way as to encourage and incentivise participants to cover several grids a day as thoroughly as possible.
- There is an implication for Temporal Resolution, in that the coarser the temporal resolution required as “best practice” for atlasing, the fewer grids will be covered- and hence the poorer the coverage. Conversely a finer scale temporal resolution will encourage more grids to be covered in the same time and also provide better data for bird movements.

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