

EVALUATING FEEDBACK

The Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) is a citizen science project in which dedicated birders voluntarily collect data for bird lists. As the project has been running since 2007, understanding birders' motivation is key to maintaining contributions over such a long time. The last participant survey was conducted in 2015 by Dale Wright and his co-authors, so it was high time for another one.

In July 2022 we conducted an online survey to assess contributor experience and to identify barriers to participation. We wanted to measure how participants view the feedback they receive, determine where SABAP2 can improve and to better understand what motivates participants. We had two online surveys aimed at different audiences: one for existing participants and one for people who are not yet contributing data to SABAP2. Over a period of six weeks, 350 existing participants completed the survey, while 172 who had not contributed to SABAP2 responded.

By far the most common reason listed for atlasing was that people believe it lends purpose to their birding and they feel they are contributing to science and conservation. Interestingly, there was an even split among people who responded 'no', 'yes' and 'maybe' to a question about whether they would be motivated by features such as leader boards. Further enquiries revealed that this ambivalence towards public gamification appears to stem from a concern about atlasing turning into a competition, leading to dubious records.

SABAP2 participants showed a consistently high satisfaction level for the feedback they receive on both their personal atlasing contributions and on a project level. The most cited reasons hindering the amount of atlasing participants do is the price of fuel and an increasingly limited time for hobbies.

There were several useful suggestions regarding website improvement, several



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of which were implemented after the survey. The Out-of-Range forms have been simplified and additional features have been added to individual user profiles and species coverage maps.

We were particularly interested to hear from people who do not contribute to the atlas projects. We distributed the survey widely, posting on 10 different Facebook groups and pages, including BirdLasser. About 40 per cent of respondents indicated that although they use BirdLasser, they do not atlas. The most common reasons given for not atlasing were that the atlas protocol is too difficult or time consuming. Many people indicated that they feel their data are not good enough because they are new to birdwatching and therefore cannot correctly identify all species encountered in a pentad. Interestingly, 35 per cent of respondents said that they use the SABAP2 website, particularly species data and coverage maps, even though they themselves do not contribute data.

For us as project managers of SABAP, there were key take-home messages from both surveys. We need to maintain the feedback to participants, especially with how atlas data are used in scientific research and conservation planning. We need to better communicate how the

Participate in SABAP2 and help us conserve Africa's birdlife.

atlas protocol works and that every record is very important, especially in areas with poor coverage. These data are used for a wide variety of reasons, from holiday planning to environmental impact assessments and conservation planning.

Atlasing is not difficult, but we realise that the numerous terms such as 'pentad', 'protocol' and 'BirdMap' can be very confusing initially. If you are new to birdwatching, we would encourage you to submit ad hoc lists. If you are a seasoned atlaser but constrained by fuel costs or time, then why not go 'deep' on your home patch of pentads? We also want to urge seasoned atlasers to motivate the next generation of SABAP2 participants. New birders are critical for achieving the long-term monitoring goals of the atlas project. For more information, visit sabap2.birdmap.africa or e-mail sabap2@birdlife.org.za
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