A Glimpse into an Oldtime Fiddler's Repertoire

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1 Introduction

Oldtime music is rooted in the interaction of diverse communities which continually formed US culture. Oldtime music is commonly associated with the Southeastern Appalachian fiddle and banjo dance-traditions. Fiddlers typically act as the community event facilitators providing music for dances. Hence the naming of a subset of oldtime music as fiddle tunes or fiddle music. Solo pieces and songs are common in oldtime for various instruments. Oldtime music varies by time, and place and is largely informed on a community level, even if an individual performs alone. The popularity of the term stems from the urban, folk-revivalist Mike Seeger, who was influenced by the 1920s commercial recording industry's re-branding of the term [1]. In the global information age, I think a broader scope of the term is best to encourage open engagement.

I am an oldtime fiddler, who specializes in Virginia tunes based on my repertoire in Figures 6. I starting learning oldtime fiddle from Mark Campbell at age 16 or 17 around 2011-2012. Mark learned how to fiddle from Armin Barnett when they met in college at the University of Virginia during the 1970s. Armin Barnett learned to fiddle from Franklin George who learned from his oldtimer neighbors in West Virginia. Like Mark Campbell, I collect and listen to source recordings of oldtimers to learn their repertoire and style. Many of these oldtimers were born before and around the turn of the 20^{th} century. I like the way these oldtimers sound so I try to play their repertoire, and musical styles. I do not attempt to imitate the source recordings exactly, but I attempt to meticulously optimize the highest level of musicality constrained by their style. For

some artists with high musicianship, minimal interpolation is performed, but for others with lower musicianship, more interpolation is performed. I accept my own contributions and experiences in this learning process while I'm interact with these old art forms to produce my own sonic output.

Most of the information in this inquiry comes from my identity as an oldtime fiddler in the Mid-Atlantic states. Consequently, many of my claims reflect this identity, and my academic background of studying ethnomusicology. This dual etic and emic approach has bias from self-reporting data and also identifying as a Virginia fiddler. This study is an exploratory data analysis of my repertoire of oldtime fiddle tunes and the practices of this art form. Analysis of my repertoire data comes from an active spreadsheet of fiddle tunes which include tunings, sources, and other attributes that I maintained since around 2017.

2 Methods

Since 2017, I compiled a spreadsheet of active fiddle tunes in my repertoire. It includes columns such as 'Tune Title', 'Source of Tune', 'Key', 'Tuning Notes', 'Crooked [-/+]' status, and 'Irish' status for individual tunes. As of the publication of this inquiry, there are 465 tunes in my repertoire included in this spreadsheet.

I attempt to play tunes daily, which has become a meditative ritual for me especially after returning from work. Often, I consult the tune spreadsheet and sort the tunes by key or tuning for sequential practice in that particular key or tuning. In this process, my memory, retention, and musicality are exercised for each piece. A portion, or an entire tune are often forgotten if they were in-frequently practiced. Sometimes listening to the source recording helps recall a tune. A tune will be dropped from the spreadsheet and repertoire if it is not memorable enough and I don't want to re-learn it. Repertoire expansion and contraction processes often involves a trade-off between learning new tunes, and retaining frequent and infrequently played tunes.

Positive feedback loops occur for the tunes I practice more frequently, and conversely the tunes

that are practiced infrequently. Tunes that are infrequently played are often the main driving influence if they are removed from the spreadsheet. For new tunes, there is a period of time before they become part of repertoire and added (or conversely not removed) from the spreadsheet. Time is also spent listening to source recordings when I learn new tunes, and to refresh memory and musicality of prior tunes. Multiple sources for tunes are ordered by 'Source of Tune' with the first listed source assuming more guiding influence on the overall version of a tune.

The following tables, and figures were created using my repertoire spreadsheet. R-studio scripts were created to automate data interpretation. Fiddlers are geographically distributed at the county level, for their state and binned into the count of tunes my repertoire attributes to them. The bins of tune counts are as follows: 1, 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, and 16+. These bins were selected based on the total tune count distribution.

Geographic spread of the tunes were assigned based on the primary source listed in the 'Source of Tune' variable at the county of residence during the creation of the source recording. For many oldtime fiddlers this is the county where they lived for most of their life, and for other fiddlers this is the community where they happened to reside when they were recorded.

One example of this assumption is with Armin Barnett. Armin now resides in Washington state, but at the time of recording (in 1973) he had lived at least three years of residence in Albemarle County, Virginia during graduate school. Armin met and taught my fiddling mentor Mark Campbell while they were students at the University of Virginia. He was influential on Mark and imparted many of Mark's fiddling sensibilities. Another example is John Johnson who was recorded in his home county in Braxton County, West Virginia by Louis Watson Chappell in 1947. However, John Johnson traveled and spent many years in Texas, which influenced his bowing, repertoire, and style. While John Johnson returned to his home county to record, he is reflective of the time, place, experience, and community from his musical consumption.

Geographic county-level data does not entirely represent the interwoven interactions of people. Nor does not encapsulate the internet, radio, or commercial recording, influences which now offer

a more interconnected, global reach. To account for these larger, global influences, county level assignment ingrain (to whatever degree) the artist living in their community (at the county-level) at that point in time of the source recordings.

3 Results

A Chi-Squared Independence test was conducted for the total tune counts per state. The assumption of independence was met by assuming distinct observations and versions of a tune to that particular state's tune count. This means that there could be numerous versions across state boundaries without affecting one state's count of the tune. The matrix size assumption was met by removing states with less than 5 counts. This left only Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama as states with large enough tune counts for this test.

Test	Chi-Squared	df	p-value
χ^2	268.55	6	$2.2e^{-16}$

Table 1: The Chi-squared independence test results of the top six states (VA, NC, WV, KY, TN, GA).

The p-value from the chi-squared test in Table 1 is statistically significant at the 5% level, which suggests that each state's fiddle tune counts are on independent Chi-Squared distributions. Given these results, and the large amounts of Virginia tunes as in Figure 1 I can assert that I am a Virginia fiddler at least based on repertoire.

Tuning or scordatura, is an important aspect to mid-Atlantic oldtime traditions. I engage in the practice of re-tuning depending on individual tune. Most of my repertoire is in standard tuning (GDAE), high-bass (ADAE), or high-bass and counter (aka cross) (AEAE) tuning as observed in Figure 3. The latter two tunings are almost exclusive diatonic. Other tunings besides these main three have lower amounts of tunes attributed to them, and often include solo pieces. Besides tuning and key categorization, tunes are categorized by tonality in oldtime music. Cotillion form involves a key change among the tune structure, which usually change key to the fifth or less commonly

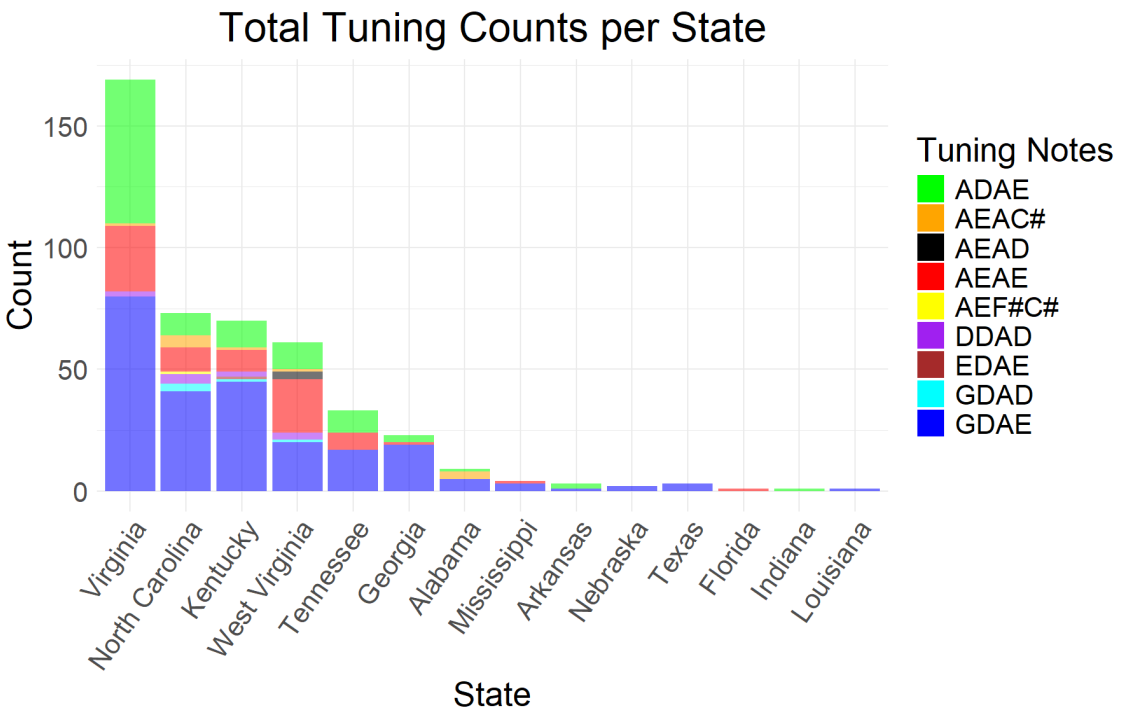

Figure 1: Total counts of fiddle tunes attributed to each state and the frequency of each tuning.

to the fourth. This study notes cotillion tunes by their starting key even if they do not follow the other characteristics of cotillion tunes. Modal tunes suggests ambiguous tonality, which is often defined with backup instrumentation choices. Figure 3 showcases the amount of Cotillion, modal, and minor tunes associated for each tuning. Standard tuning (GDAE) contains the highest counts of cotillion, modal, and minor tunes, which makes sense given its versatility.

Crooked tunes are another category in oldtime repertoire where certain tune parts are in different time signatures. In oldtime music, crooked tunes are distinguished by "adding" a beat, "subtracting" a beat, or more rarely a combination of both. In either scenario, crooked tunes could be defined by the sum of beats through one iteration of the piece. Modulo operations of this sum by an even integer divisor less than nine but greater than zero represents the division of beats in a measure. The divisor represents the total expected amount of beats (for any whole number count of beats) in a measure. With this division as outlined in Equation 1 this formula elicits remainders which showcase the crooked beat based on the expected amount of beats per measure. This is a mathematical expression of what is internalized by most oldtime musicians where they

count beats in a measure to determine irregularities, and crooked tunes.

$$\sum_{i=0}^{1} (Beats_i) \,\%\, 2n \quad \text{for } n \in \mathbb{Z}, \text{in } (1 \leq n \leq 4) \tag{1}$$

The bottom plot of Figure 3 showcases tuning and occurrence of crooked tunes with the most varied counts occurring in standard (GDAE) tuning, followed by high-bass and counter (AEAE) tuning.

The top five artists in Table 2 are Ed Haley, Marcus Martin, Emmett Lundy, Norman Edmonds, and Mark Campbell. This is not entirely surprising since I play a lot of tunes from my mentor, Mark Campbell, and that he also attributes many tunes to these same artists in his repertoire. Artists 6-10 are solely attributed to either Virginia or West Virginia. Below are maps of individual states with binned dots for each artist. Most of the counts occur in the Appalachian region as shown in Figure 4.

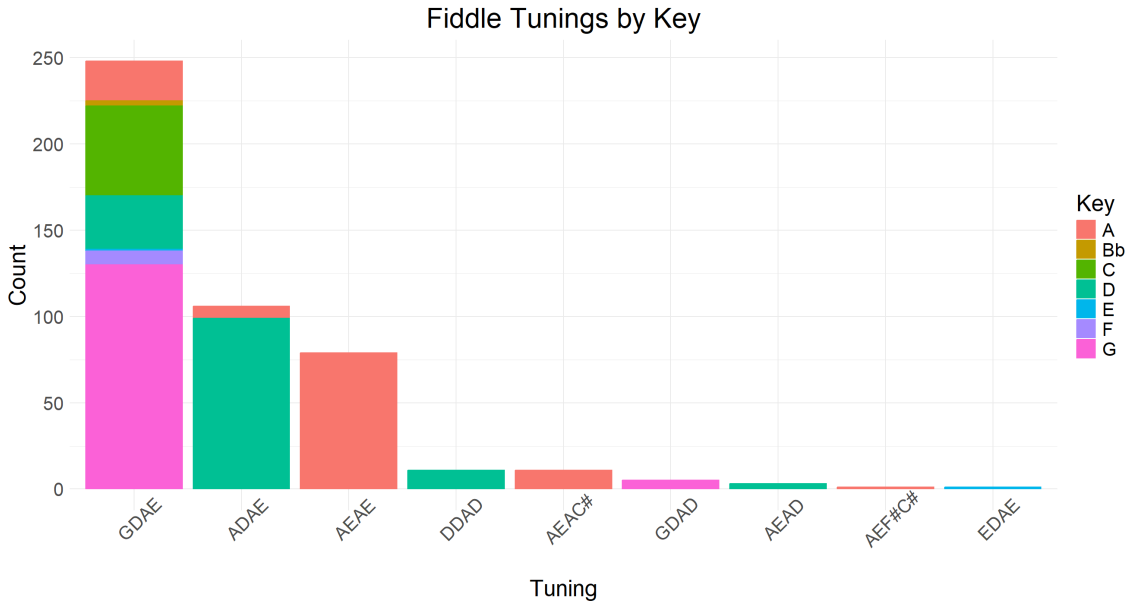

Figure 2: The distribution of tune key by fiddle tuning with key changes included as the initial key.

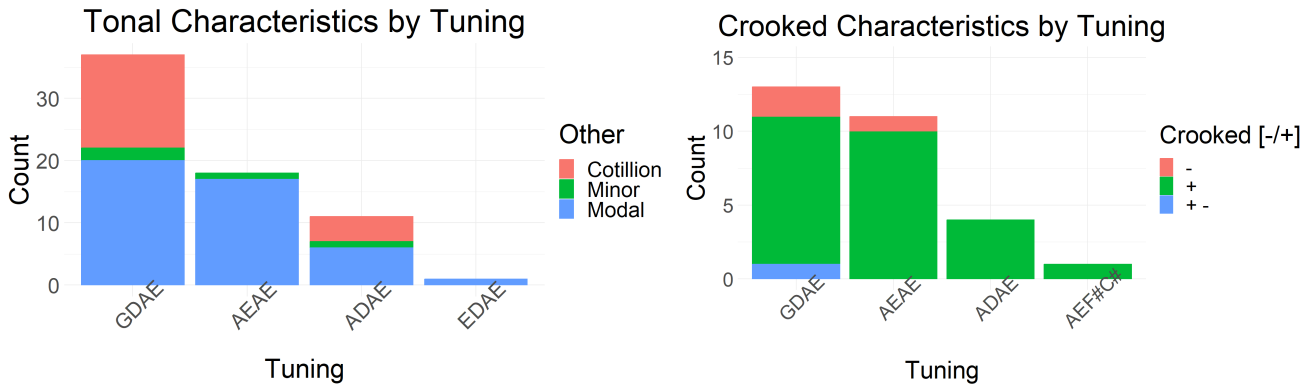

Figure 3: The left plot shows the distribution of cotillion, modal, and minor tunes by tuning. The right plot shows the distribution of crooked tunes by tuning. The minus sign (-) signifies subtracting a beat, and the plus sign (+) signifies adding a beat. Both signs (+-) indicate both subtraction and addition.

Rank	Name	Count	County	State
1	Ed Haley	26	Rowan	Kentucky
2	Marcus Martin	26	Buncombe	North Carolina
3	Emmett Lundy	24	Grayson	Virginia
4	Norman Edmonds	20	Carroll	Virginia
5	Mark Campbell	17	Chesterfield	Virginia
6	Clayton McMichen	14	Fulton	Georgia
7	Cowan Powers	13	Scott	Virginia
8	Edden Hammons	13	Pocahontas	West Virginia
9	Melvin Wine	13	Braxton	West Virginia
10	French Carpenter	12	Clay	West Virginia
11	Manco Sneed	12	Cherokee	North Carolina
12	Burl Hammons	11	Pocahontas	West Virginia
13	J.W. Day	11	Rowan	Kentucky
14	Henry Reed	10	Giles	Virginia
15	Tommy Jarrell	10	Surry	North Carolina
16	John Ashby	9	Fauquier	Virginia
17	Eck Dunford	8	Carroll	Virginia
18	N.H. Mills	8	Franklin	Virginia
19	Taylor Kimble	8	Carroll	Virginia
20	W.H. Stepp	6	Magoffin	Kentucky
21	Charlie Higgins	5	Grayson	Virginia
22	Charlie Melvin Stripling	5	Lamar	Alabama
23	Fulton Myers	5	Carroll	Virginia
24	G.B. Grayson	5	Johnson	Tennessee
25	Ben Jarrell	4	Surry	North Carolina
26	Bill Shelor	4	Patrick	Virginia
27	Charlie Bowman	4	Washington	Tennessee
28	J.D. Harris	4	Buncombe	North Carolina
29	J.W. "Babe" Spangler	4	Patrick	Virginia
30	John Dykes	4	Scott	Virginia
31	John Salyer	4	Magoffin	Kentucky
32	Leonard Rutherford	4	Wayne	Kentucky
33	Luther Strong	4	Perry	Kentucky
34	Posey Rorer	4	Rockingham	North Carolina
35	Allen Sisson	3	Fannin	Georgia
36	Armin Barnett	3	Albemarle	Virginia
37	Bunt Stephens	3	Moore	Tennessee
38	Clyde Davenport	3	Wayne	Kentucky
39	Dr. D.D. Hollis	3	Lamar	Alabama
40	Emory Bailey	3	Calhoun	West Virginia
41	Ernest Stanley	3	Carroll	Virginia
42	Floyd Ethridge	3	Rutherford	Tennessee
43	Frank Weems	3	Perry	Tennessee
44	James Chisholm	3	Albemarle	Virginia
45	Oscar Stone	3	Sumner	Tennessee
46	Sid Harkreader	3	Wilson	Tennessee
47	Stuart Lundy	3	Grayson	Virginia
48	Ambrose Stuart	2	Hamblen	Tennessee
49	Bob Walters	2	Burt	Nebraska
50	Estill Bingham	2	Bell	Kentucky
51	Frank "Dad" Williams	2	Avery	North Carolina
52	Franklin George	2	Mercer	West Virginia
53	Fred Cockerham	2	Surry	North Carolina
54	Howard Wyatt	2	Washington	Virginia
55	Jesse Shelor	2	Patrick	Virginia
56	Joe Birchfield	2	Carter	Tennessee
57	John Carson	2	Fulton	Georgia
58	John W. "Peg" Hatcher	2	Tishomingo	Mississippi
59	Osey Helton	2	Buncombe	North Carolina
60	Owen "Snake" Chapman	2	Pike	Kentucky
61	Pug Allen	2	Augusta	Virginia
62	Sam Conner	2	Floyd	Virginia
63	Theron Hale	2	Davidson	Tennessee
64	Alva Green	1	Elliott	Kentucky
65	Andrew Baxter	1	Gordon	Georgia
66	Bill Helms	1	Upson	Georgia
67	Bill Hensley	1	Madison	North Carolina
68	Billy Altizer	1	Roanoke	Virginia
69	Blaine Smith	1	Hamilton	Tennessee
70	Bruce Greene	1	Yancey	North Carolina
71	Charlie Osborne	1	Russell	Virginia
72	Clarence Cobb	1	Hopkins	Kentucky
73	Coley Jones	1	Dallas	Texas
74	Cush Holden	1	Levy	Florida
75	Cyrus Futrell	1	Cross	Arkansas
76	Dewey Hamrick	1	Clay	West Virginia
77	Dudley Vance	1	Washington	Tennessee
78	Earl Johnson	1	Gwinnett	Georgia
79	Ed Morrison	1	Boyd	Kentucky
80	Ed Taylor	1	Dickenson	Virginia
81	Emory Mills	1	Whitley	Kentucky
82	Ernie Carpenter	1	Braxton	West Virginia
83	Esker Hutchins	1	Surry	North Carolina
84	Grey Craig	1	Henry	Virginia
85	Guy Brooks	1	Alleghany	North Carolina
86	Harold Hausenfluck	1	Chesterfield	Virginia
87	Hick Edmonds	1	Smyth	Virginia
88	Hiter Colvin	1	Lincoln	Louisiana
89	Issac "Ike" Reaves	1	White	Arkansas
90	Ivan Weddle	1	Floyd	Virginia
91	J.E. Mainer	1	Cabarrus	North Carolina
92	Jack Pierce	1	Smyth	Virginia
93	James Brown	1	Muhlenberg	Kentucky
94	James Hammons	1	Pocahontas	West Virginia
95	James McCarroll	1	Roane	Tennessee
96	Jim Booker	1	Jessamine	Kentucky
97	Jimmy Driftwood	1	Washington	Arkansas
98	John Johnson	1	Braxton	West Virginia
99	John Lewis	1	Stokes	North Carolina
100	John Summers	1	Howard	Indiana
101	Lonnie Corsbie	1	Guilford	North Carolina
102	Lowe Stokes	1	Fulton	Georgia
103	Mose Coffman	1	Greenbrier	West Virginia
104	Oscar Harper	1	Terrell	Texas
105	Oscar Wright	1	Mercer	West Virginia
106	Roy "Speedy" Tolliver	1	Arlington	Virginia
107	Sam McNeils	1	Floyd	Virginia
108	Samuel Peacock	1	Navarro	Texas
109	Samuel Warren Caplinger	1	Wood	West Virginia
110	Ted Gossett	1	Muhlenberg	Kentucky
111	Warner Carver	1	Barren	Kentucky
112	William Thomas Narmour	1	Carroll	Mississippi
113	William Gilmer	1	Leake	Mississippi
114	Y.Z. "Wyzee" Hamilton	1	Clay	Alabama
NA	Various	12	Various	Ireland

Table 2: Artists, tune count, county and state information. Irish tunes, are listed as NA and Various.

4 Conclusion

Repertoire could be analyzed by tuning, key, artist, and county-level geographic information. Most artists are clustered in the Appalachian region often with multiple tune attribution counts. A data-driven approach of tunes indicate that I am mainly an oldtime Virginia fiddler by tune repertoire and style. There is bias in self-reporting data, and there is bias in my future repertoire selections. Despite this bias, time series analysis might elicit interesting results on how repertoire changes as one ages. Other research in key and tuning geographic distributions is discouraged since many oldtime fiddlers in this time and place are more similar than different compared to other fiddling traditions. In short, I hope this brief is a start to greater examination of data, and mapping music cultures. Thanks for reading.

References

[1] Seeger, M. (1997). "what is old-time music?" mike seeger, what is old-time music? In *Bluegrass Unlimited*.

5 Appendix

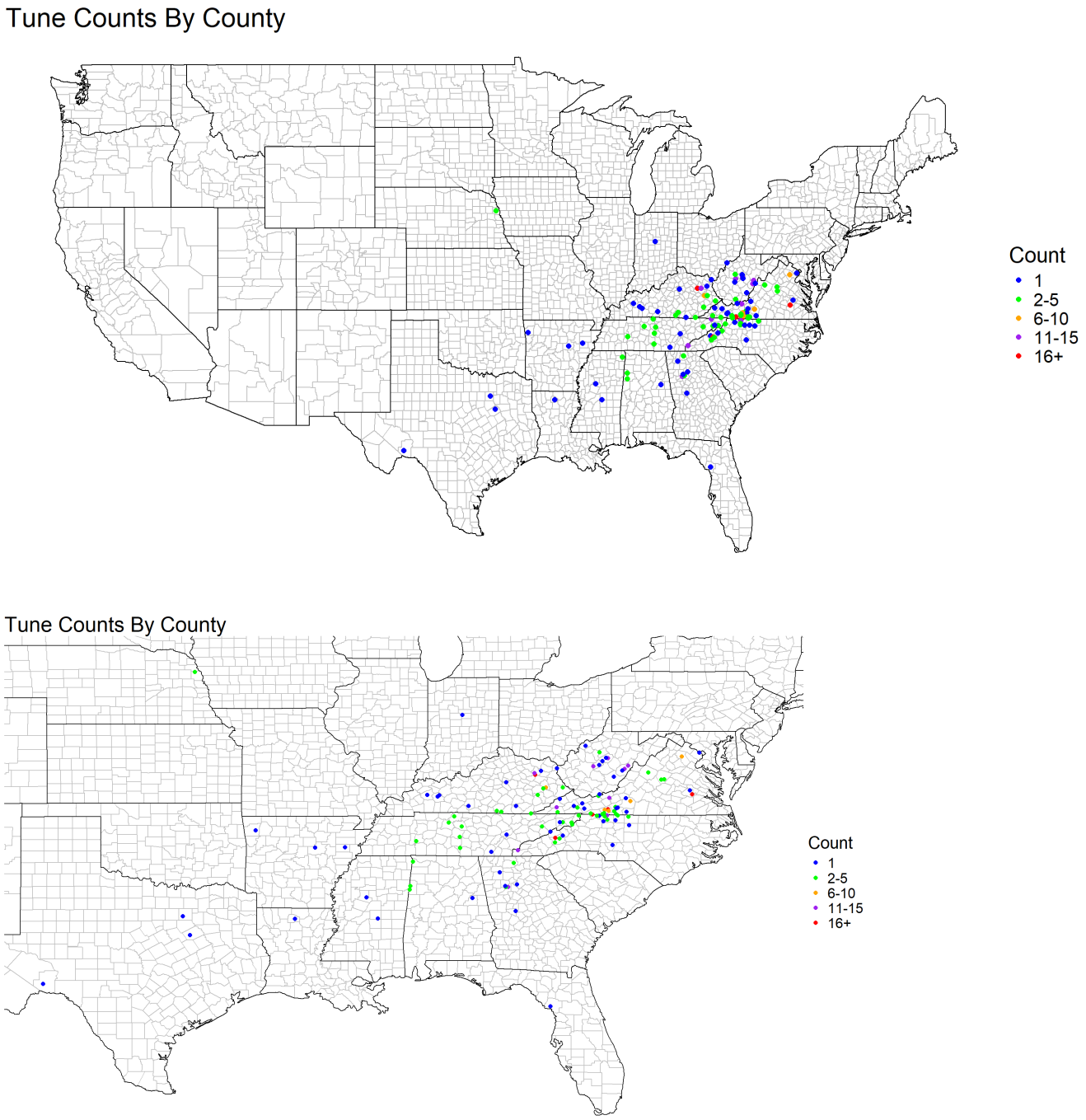

Figure 4: Contiguous United States map (top) and regional map (below) of the tune frequency per artist.

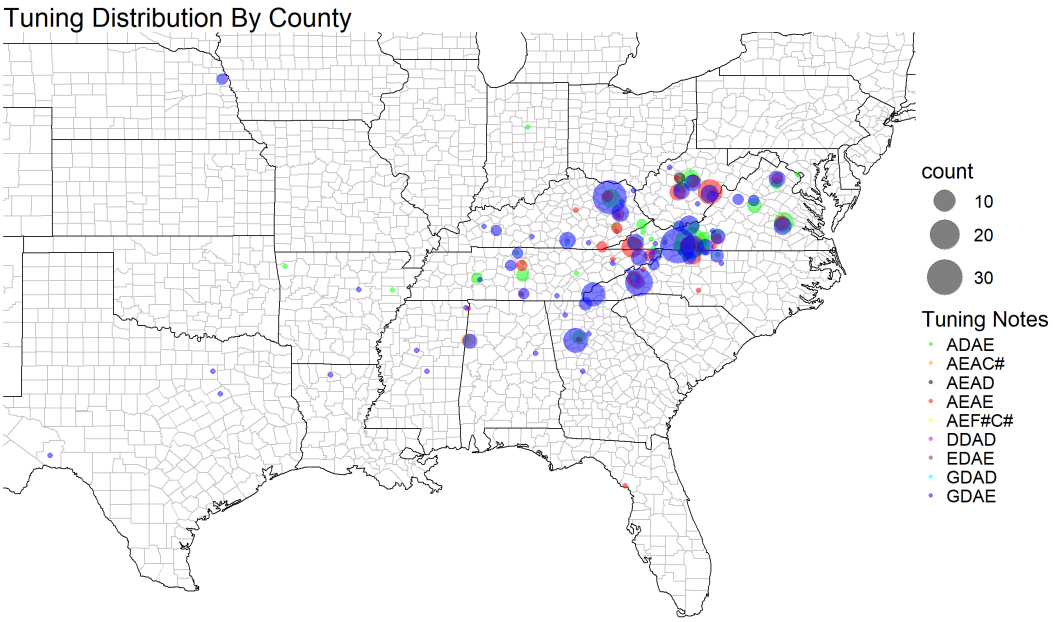

Figure 5: The distribution of tunings by county and frequency.

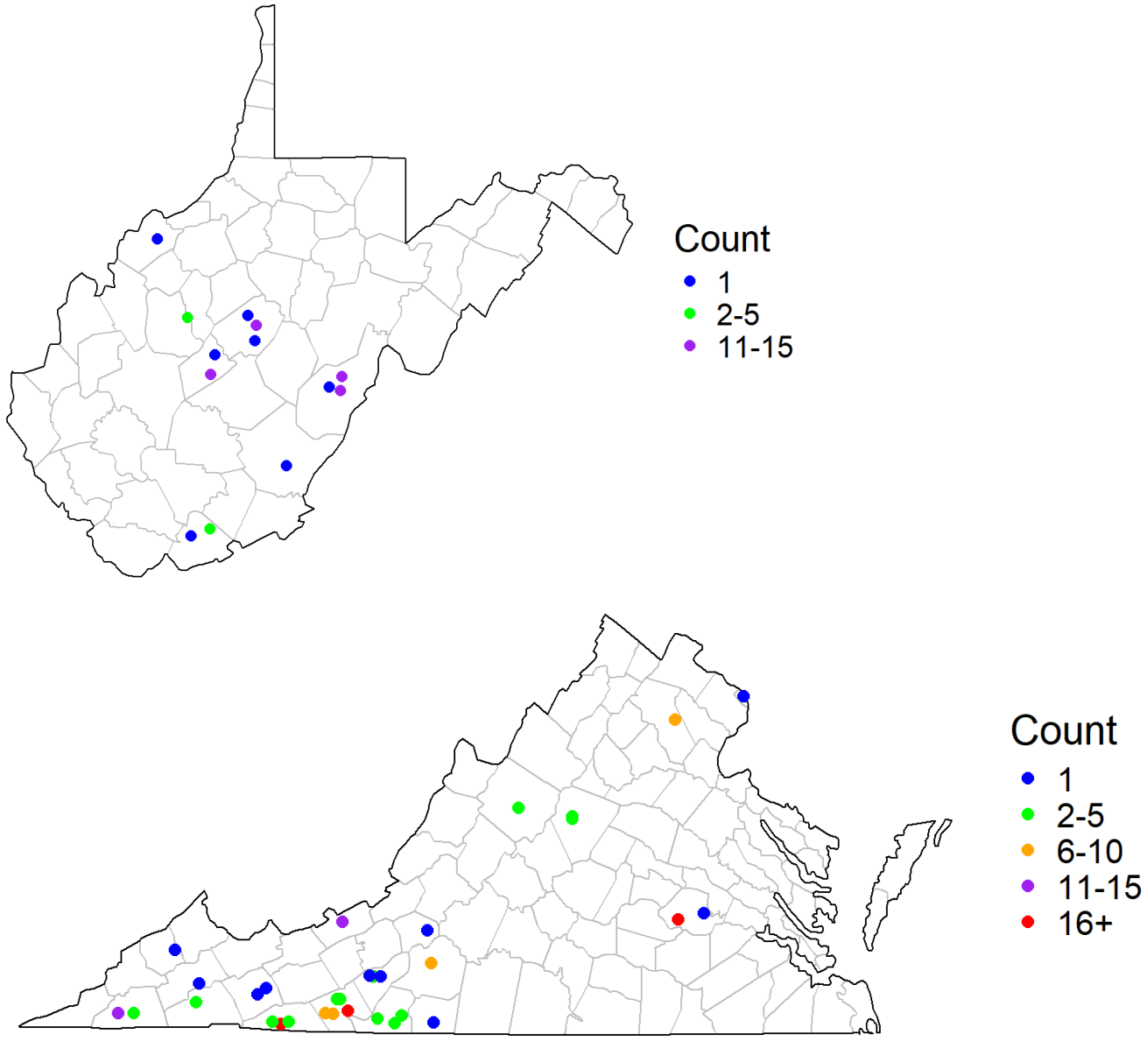

Figure 6: West Virginia, and Virginia artist counts. The red dots corresponding to Emmett Lundy in Grayson county and Norman Edmonds in Carroll county Virginia. The two artists in the city of Richmond, are attributed to Chesterfield county since cities are not included in this study.

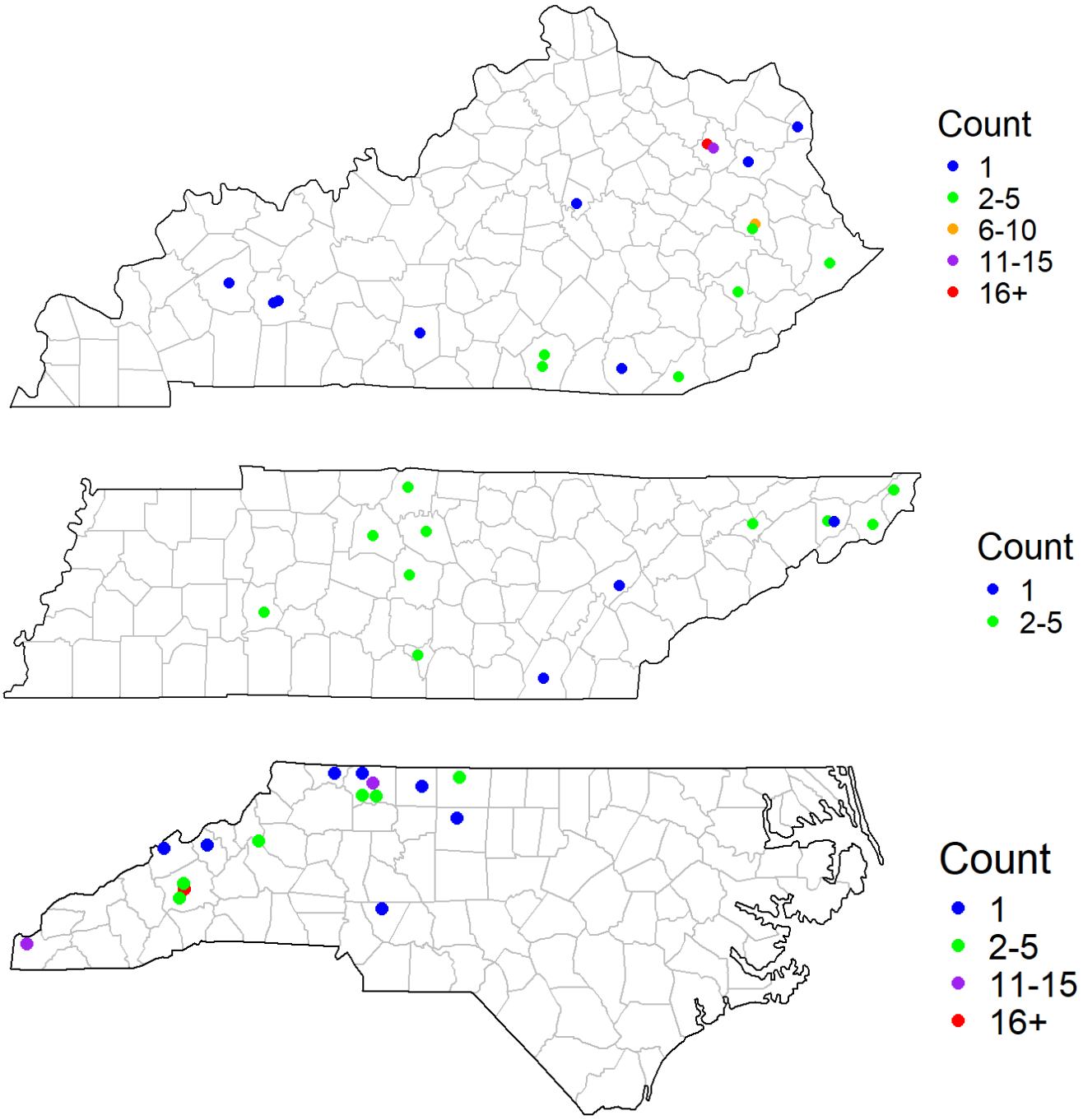

Figure 7: Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina artist counts. The red dot in Kentucky corresponds to Ed Haley, and the red dot in North Carolina corresponds to Marcus Martin.

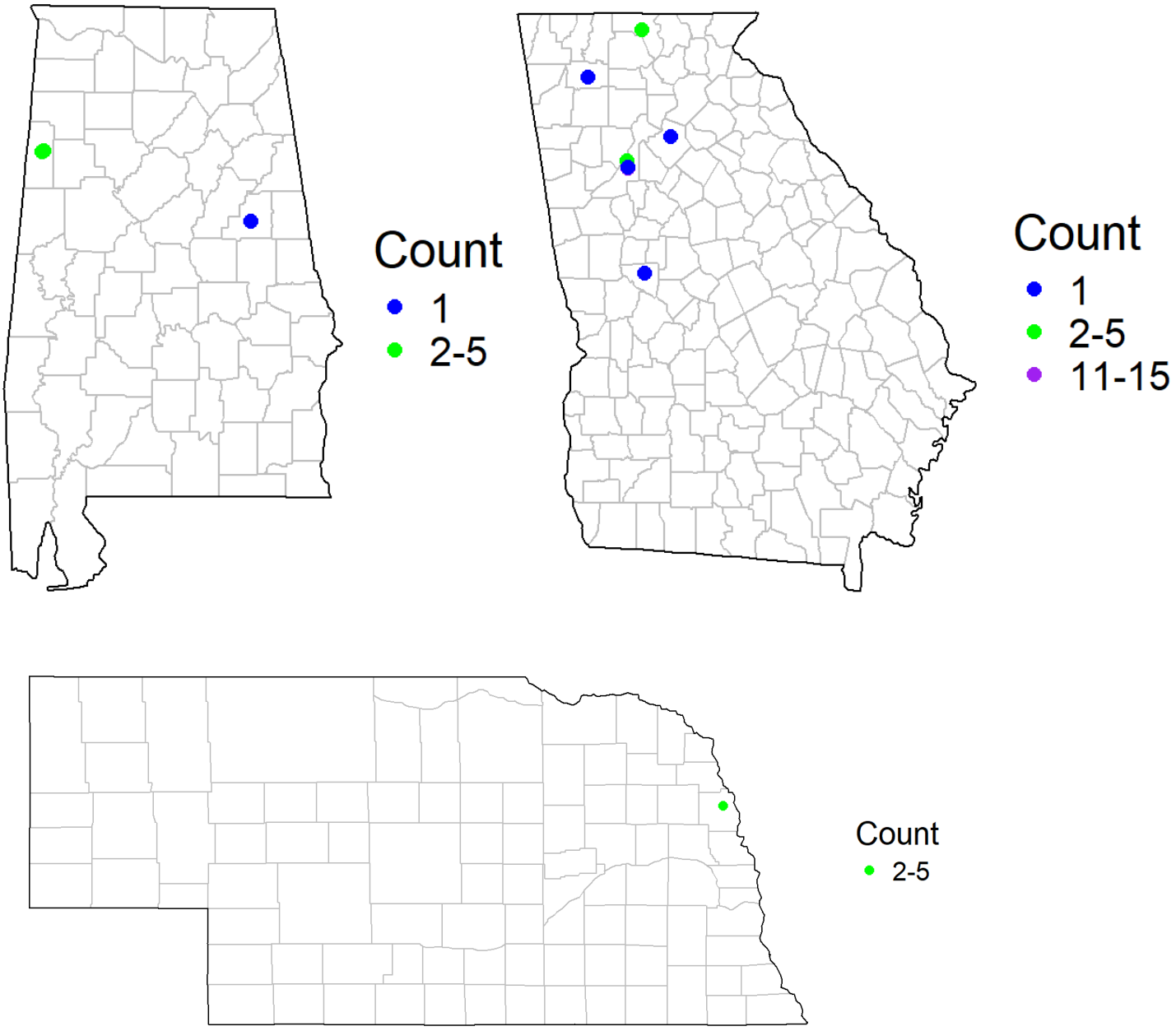

Figure 8: Alabama, Georgia, and Nebraska artist counts. The three artists in the city of Atlanta, are attributed to Fulton County since cities are not included in this study.

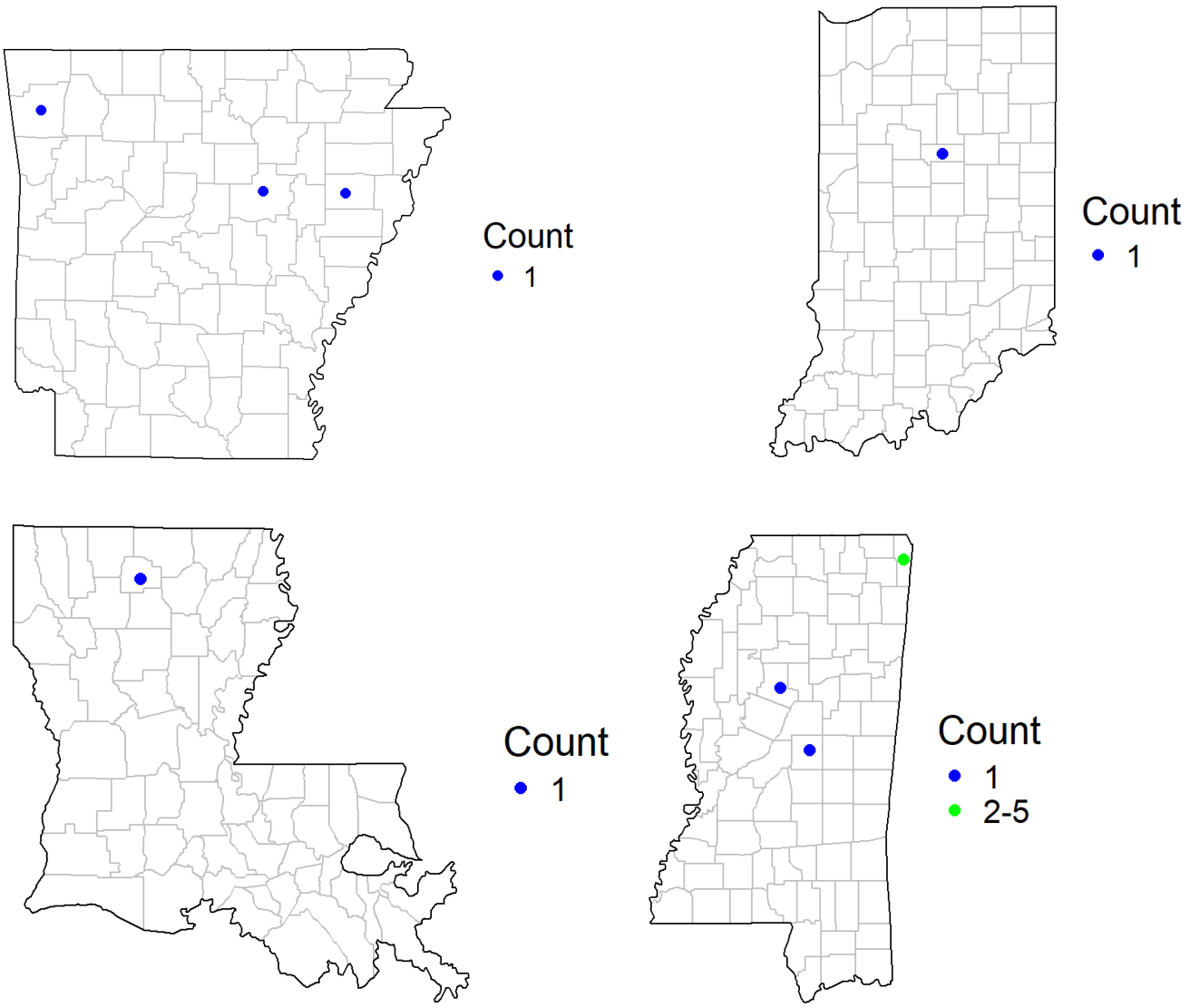

Figure 9: Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, and Mississippi artist counts.

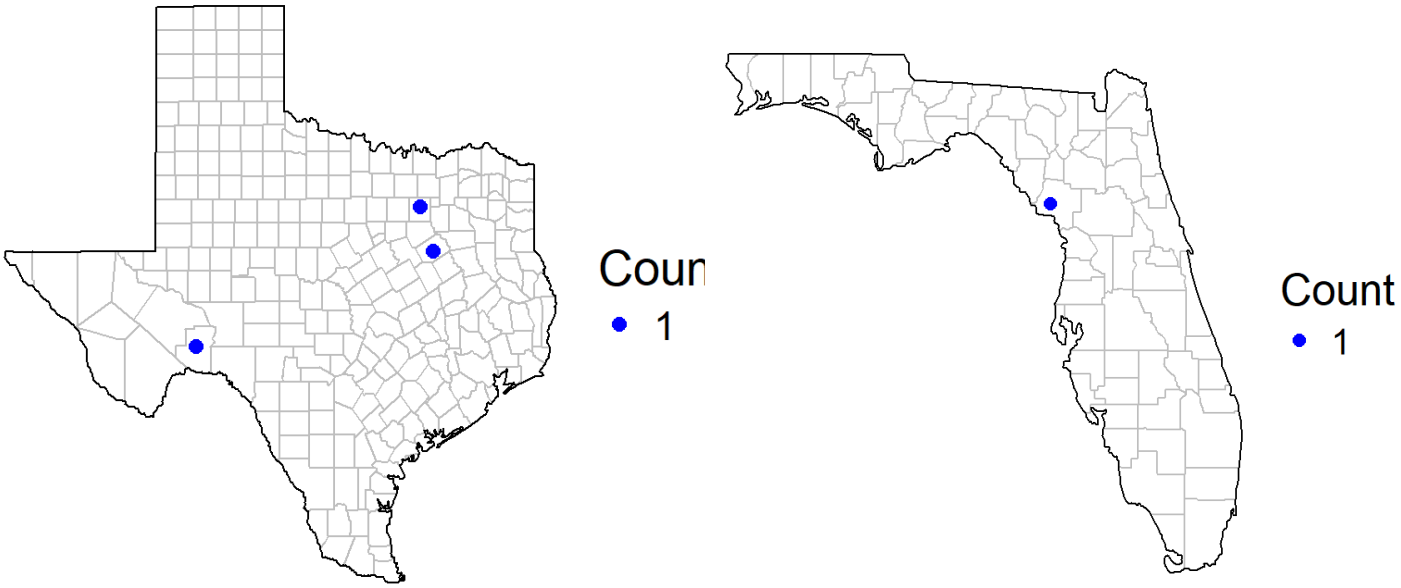

Figure 10: Texas and Florida artist counts.