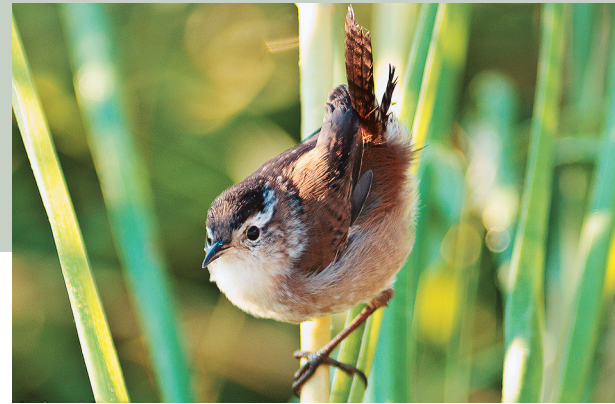


Marsh Wren

Cistothorus palustris



The Marsh Wren, aptly named for its habitat, has a complex breeding system. Male Marsh Wrens are polygynous and build several “dummy” nests for each mate; these extra nests are never used for nesting but may demonstrate the male’s fitness to prospective females. Furthermore, both males and females regularly destroy eggs in surrounding nests, including those of other species. Marsh Wrens breed across the northern United States, north to northern British Columbia, and south to Baja California. In winter they retreat to the marshes of the Gulf Coast, the Southwest, and Mexico. They return to Vermont in late April and early May.

In Vermont, Marsh Wrens are found in cattail and sedge marshes larger than 0.8 hectares (2 acres; D. Kibbe pers. obs.). Nesting success is higher in wet cattail stands compared to drier cattail marshes or sedge marshes (Kroodsma and Verner 1997). The only record of nest building (considered probable breeding in this species) was recorded on 9 June. Nests with eggs were found on 21 June and 6 July. Nestlings were found on 2 July and 12 July (N = 3), and fledglings were found on 25 and 31 July. Although multiple broods may be raised in areas where Marsh Wrens are permanent residents, it is likely that only a single brood is attempted at our latitude.

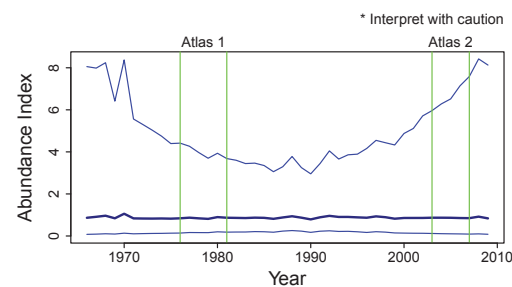
The Marsh Wren’s distribution did not change substantially since the first atlas and is still restricted to major marsh systems along Lake Champlain, the Connecticut River, and Lake Memphremagog. Although missed in 12 blocks where they were previously recorded, Marsh Wrens were found in 14 new blocks. Most of these were in the Champlain Valley and Northern Vermont Piedmont. There is an apparent reduction in use of smaller marsh systems, which may account for the shift in block occupancy between the two atlases. Smaller marshes are probably only occupied when populations are high. Overall the state’s population appears to be stable but small and locally distributed, as would be expected for a specialist whose available habitat is limited. The Marsh Wren’s distribution closely matches that of the Virginia

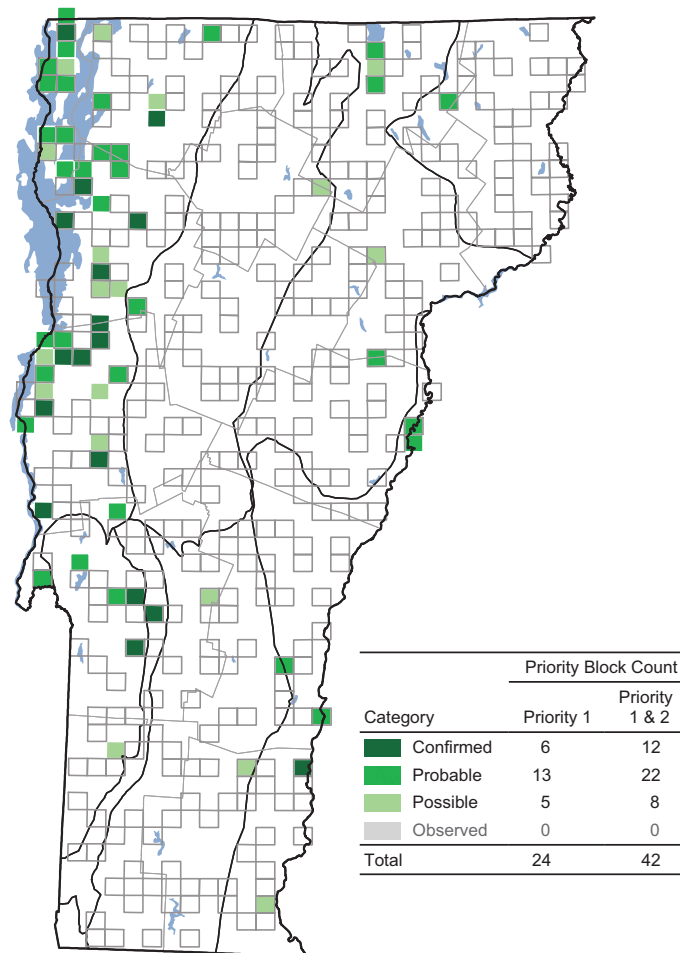
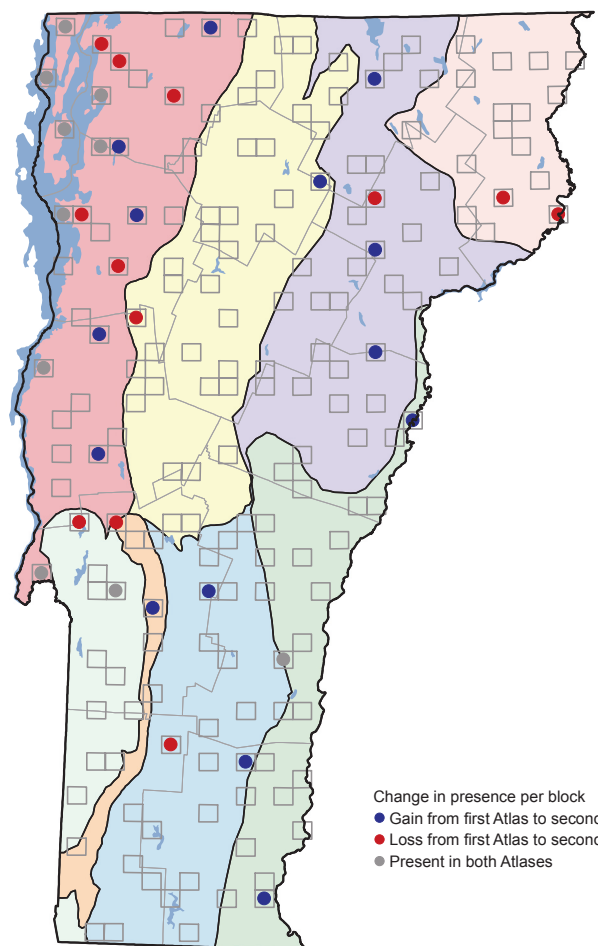
Rail, although the wrens are more closely tied to monocultures of cattails than are the rails.

As in Vermont, the New York atlas found only a slight increase in the proportion of blocks occupied by Marsh Wren, but a shift in distribution: more than 25 percent of the blocks occupied during the first atlas were not occupied during the second atlas. These blocks were replaced by more than 100 previously unoccupied blocks (McGowan 2008). Pennsylvania, on the other hand, found a 31 percent decrease in blocks where Marsh Wren was detected (Wilson et al. 2012). In Ontario there was little change in block occupancy but a shift northward was noted (Tozer 2007). The Marsh Wren is most abundant in the Prairie Pothole Region and Breeding Bird Survey data for this and other marshbird species in New England may be too sparse to be highly reliable. Populations have been stable in the eastern Breeding Bird Survey region and increased significantly (2.8 percent per year) range-wide from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011).

Since the first atlas, wetlands inhabited by Marsh Wrens have been subjected to regulatory protection; when destroyed, such areas are usually required to be reconstructed as mitigation. Even in the absence of regulatory protection, Vermont marshes are relatively stable habitats that are only slowly replaced by shrubs and

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	13	13	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	2	0	- 2	- 100
Northern Green Mountains	1	1	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	1	3	+ 2	+ 200
Southern Green Mountains	1	2	+ 1	+ 100
Southern Vermont Piedmont	1	3	+ 2	+ 200
Taconic Mountains	2	1	- 1	- 50
Vermont Valley	1	1	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	22	24	+ 2	+ 9

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	34	60
Northeastern Highlands	2	2
Northern Green Mountains	3	5
Northern Vermont Piedmont	6	10
Southern Green Mountains	3	5
Southern Vermont Piedmont	12	12
Taconic Mountains	9	5
Vermont Valley	12	2

trees. Some wetlands may be impacted negatively by cattle grazing or altered by the invasion of purple loosestrife or *Phragmites* (Peck and James 1987). Conversion of cattails to other types of emergent vegetation may have a significant impact on the avifauna using the marsh, but Marsh Wrens are quick to reoccupy restored wetlands (Zimmerman et al. 2002), suggesting that they constantly reevaluate habitat condition prior to selecting a breeding site.

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