

Chestnut-sided Warbler

Dendroica pensylvanica

Once considered one of the rarest warblers in America, the Chestnut-sided Warbler is now one of the most common within its breeding range (Bent 1953). In Canada it occurs from the Maritime Provinces west to Saskatchewan. The distribution in the United States is more restricted, encompassing New England, New York, and the Great Lakes states, southward to northern Pennsylvania, and extending along the Appalachians southwest to North Carolina (Richardson and Brauning 1995). Continental populations are estimated at 9.6 million birds (RMBO 2007) with the greatest density in prime habitat west and north of the Great Lakes (Price et al. 1995).

The Chestnut-sided Warbler winters in Central America and returns to Vermont in mid-May to breed in brushy fields, alder swamps, and early seral stage forests. During the atlas, nest building was observed 20 May to 6 July (N = 20). Nests with eggs were recorded 4 June to 1 July (N = 8). Nestlings were found from 14 June through the end of July (N = 11). As in the first atlas, fledglings accounted for most of the confirmations reported, with records from 13 June until 17 August (N = 79). Since the parents continue caring for the young as long as four weeks post fledging, the two-month fledgling observation period is not surprising. By mid-August migration has begun and most birds have left Vermont by late September.

The Chestnut-sided Warbler occurs throughout Vermont and may be especially abundant in the early seral stage community that springs up in clear-cuts. This warbler avoids large expanses of unbroken forest, but will quickly colonize forest gaps and edges created by lumbering, roads, rights-of-way, or other activities of man. The clearing of forests in the Northeast is considered a major contributor to the growth of the Chestnut-sided Warbler population (Bent 1953). Abandonment of these farmlands after the collapse of the sheep industry in the latter half of the 1800s (Spear 1893) set the stage for regrowth of pastures that provided the abundant habitat that led to the species' success.

The Chestnut-sided Warbler was found in nearly every standardized block surveyed (356 out of 366); the only

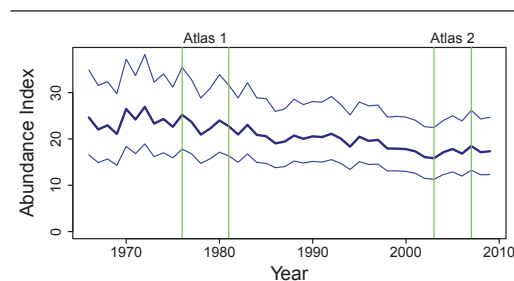


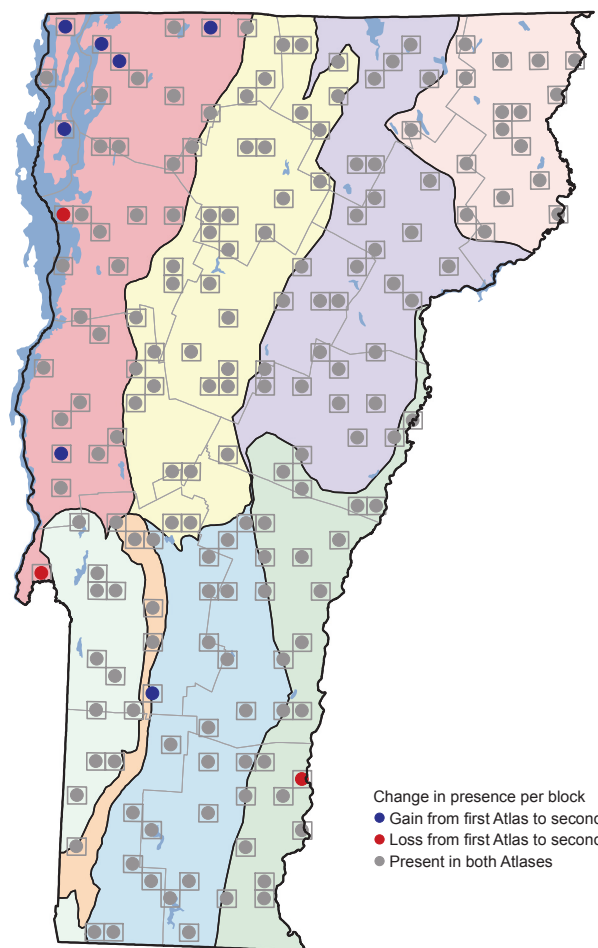
unoccupied blocks occurred in the Champlain Valley and the Southern Vermont Piedmont. The Champlain Valley saw the largest increase in block occupancy among the regions, likely due to the abandonment of farmland since the first atlas. Vermont Breeding Bird Survey data for the period from 1982 to 2007 indicate that the Chestnut-sided Warbler population has been stable (Sauer et al. 2011).

The increase in Chestnut-sided Warbler occurrence in New York was 10 percent between the first and second atlases (McGowan and Corwin 2008) and, in Pennsylvania, 36 percent (Wilson et al. 2012). Ontario also found increases in Chestnut-sided Warbler occurrence in all of their physiographic regions (Cadman et al. 2007) and significantly more migrants have been seen at Long Point Bird Observatory since 1961 (Crewe 2006). Despite these apparent positive trends, Breeding Bird Survey data for the Atlantic Northern Forest showed steady declines (1.3 percent annually) in Chestnut-sided Warbler abundance from 1966 to 2007, and this trend was similar for the more recent period from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011).

The Chestnut-sided Warbler is on Vermont's medium-

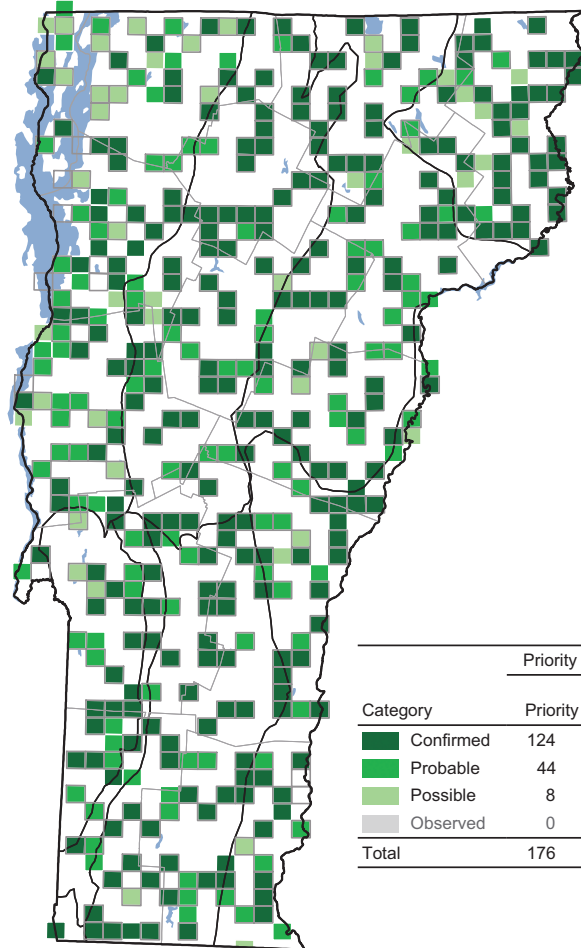
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	27	31	+ 4	+ 15
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	26	27	+ 1	+ 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	20	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	172	176	+ 4	+ 2



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	124	246
Probable	44	84
Possible	8	26
Observed	0	0
Total	176	356

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	90	19
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	100	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	95	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

priority list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, although it is recorded in greater numbers (an average of 19.4 birds per route in 2009) on Vermont BBS routes than in any other Northeastern state. Principal reasons for concern identified in Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan are "loss of successional habitats due to conversion to non-forested uses, suppression of natural disturbance (flood, fire), and reductions in active forest management." The plan recommends even-aged forestry practices (such as clear-cutting) to maintain seedling/sapling forest habitat. Forest edges, rights-of-way, and timber harvesting are

likely to provide sufficient habitat for the Chestnut-sided Warbler to continue to thrive in Vermont.

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