

## Wilson's Warbler

*Wilsonia pusilla*

Wilson's Warblers have a fondness for wet, mosquito-infested thickets; this may be one reason why they seem so active. The species breeds across North America from Alaska to Newfoundland. In the contiguous United States, its distribution is much more limited. In the East, breeding is restricted to extreme northern portions of New England with a tiny isolated population in New York's Adirondack Mountains. In the West, breeding occurs along the higher mountain ranges south to New Mexico and in the humid Pacific coastal forest from Washington to southern California, where very dense populations can occur (Ammon and Gilbert 1999). Wilson's Warblers winter along the Gulf Coast southward into Mexico. One of our smallest warblers, the species is an uncommon migrant in Vermont from mid to late May, but may be fairly common in the fall (Oatman 1985).

The Wilson's Warbler prefers to nest in moist shrub thickets along streams, beaver ponds, and bogs. In the West, they breed at high elevations in willow thickets; eastern populations are not found in alpine locations. Females return after males, and may visit the territories of several males before selecting one. Polygyny has been observed but appears to be rare (Ammon and Gilbert 1999). The nest is generally placed on or near the ground in dense herbaceous cover in late May or early June. The female takes on the 11-day incubation and 10-day brooding responsibilities. She may occasionally be fed by the male, who also assists with the feeding of the nestlings. The Wilson's Warbler engages in broken-wing displays when a predator approaches its nest (Ammon and Gilbert 1999); given the low number of Vermont sightings during the breeding season, however, chances of witnessing such a display are slim.

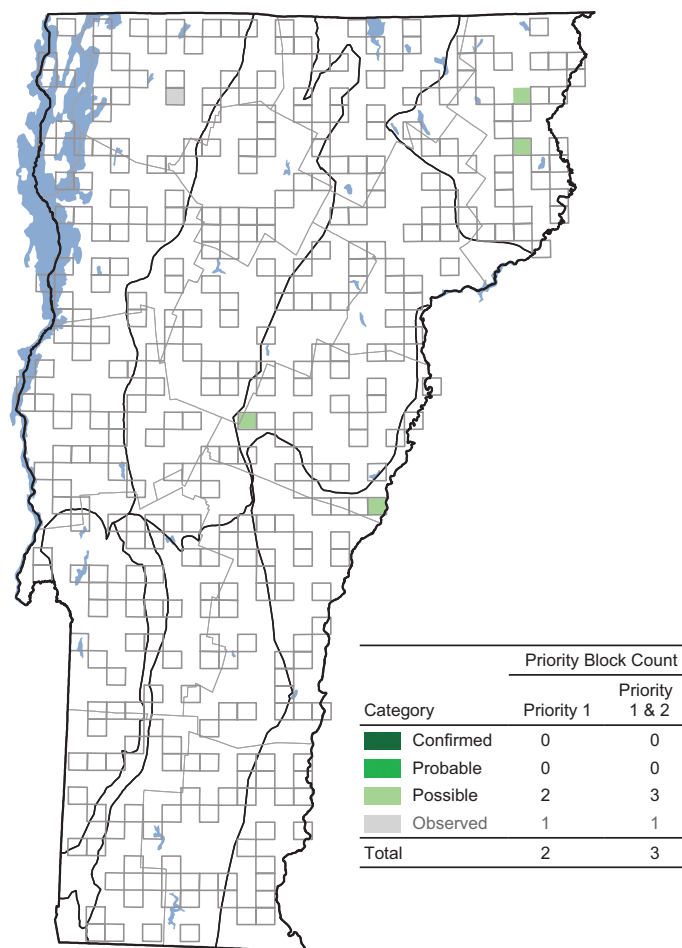
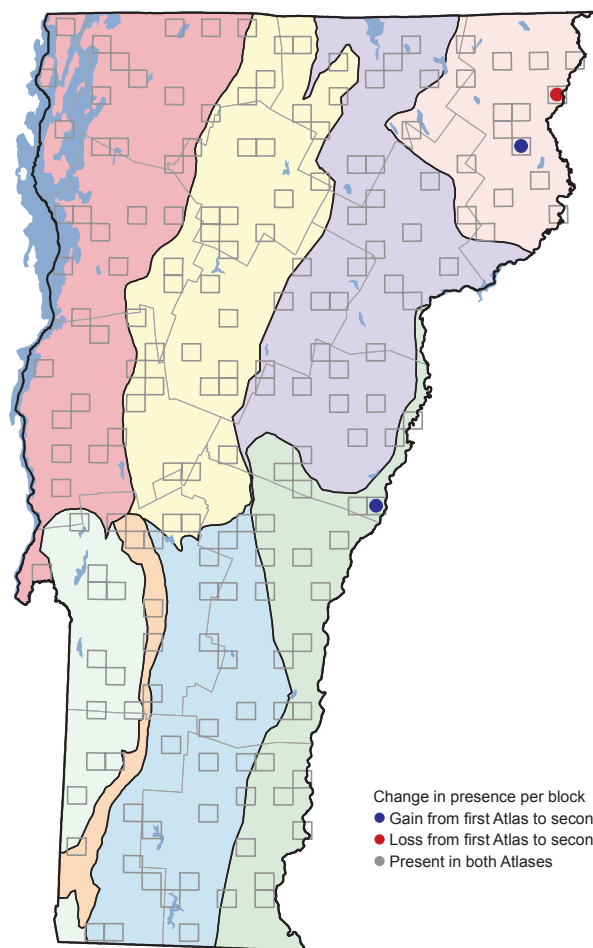
Although the Wilson's Warbler is a regular migrant through Vermont, there is no indication that it has a breeding population of consequence in the state. Although it had been mentioned in the 1950s as a regular breeder, in small numbers, in Morgan township (Orleans



County), this could not be substantiated during the first atlas, when breeding was confirmed only once. That record was in Bloomfield (Essex County), at the extreme northeastern edge of the state (Oatman 1985). Most suspected breeding records have come from the northeastern portions of the state, the area closest to the Canadian breeding population. Since the first atlas, there have been two approved records: a male and female seen on 6 June 1993, and singing males plus a female on 8 and 26 June 1988. Both occurred in Yellow Bogs in Essex County (R. Fretwell pers. comm.).

As was the case in the first Vermont atlas, Wilson's Warblers were recorded only a handful of times during the second atlas. Although the species was confirmed breeding in 1 block during the first atlas, there were no records of even probable breeding in the second atlas. Focused efforts to find and confirm breeding for the species in areas of former sightings and potential habitat were unsuccessful (T. Murin pers. comm.).

The second atlas in New York provided little evidence that Wilson's Warbler was a regular breeder in the Adirondacks. There were two PO records, neither of which was in any of the three blocks where the species had occurred during the first atlas (McGowan 2008). The second atlas in Ontario found no discernible change in the distribution of the Wilson's Warbler, which was quite common in the northern portion of the province, but absent in the southern region. McLaren (2007) suggested that singing males south of the species' main breeding areas were likely to be non-breeding individuals. This may also apply to many of Vermont's sporadic sightings, which are south of the core range in the East. The spe-



#### CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

| Biophysical Region        | First Atlas | Second Atlas | Change     | % Change     |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Champlain Valley          | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Northeastern Highlands    | 1           | 1            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Northern Green Mountains  | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Northern Vermont Piedmont | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Southern Green Mountains  | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Southern Vermont Piedmont | 0           | 1            | + 1        | + 100        |
| Taconic Mountains         | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| Vermont Valley            | 0           | 0            | + 0        | + 0          |
| <b>Totals</b>             | <b>1</b>    | <b>2</b>     | <b>+ 1</b> | <b>+ 100</b> |

#### DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

| Biophysical Region        | % of region species occupies | % of all records for this species found in region |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Champlain Valley          | 0                            | 0                                                 |
| Northeastern Highlands    | 2                            | 33                                                |
| Northern Green Mountains  | 0                            | 0                                                 |
| Northern Vermont Piedmont | 1                            | 33                                                |
| Southern Green Mountains  | 0                            | 0                                                 |
| Southern Vermont Piedmont | 2                            | 33                                                |
| Taconic Mountains         | 0                            | 0                                                 |
| Vermont Valley            | 0                            | 0                                                 |

cies breeds at latitudes well south of Vermont in the West, however, and it seems possible that it could extend its eastern range southward into parts of the state that offer suitable habitat.

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