

Winter Wren

Troglodytes hiemalis

The effervescent, boisterous song of the tiny Winter Wren is unrivaled in a bird of any size. Mouse-like in its movements, the Winter Wren frequents mature evergreen forests. Once divided into more than thirty subspecies over three continents, its taxonomy was recently consolidated into three species: our Winter Wren, the Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*), and the Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*). In North America, Winter Wrens range from Newfoundland to northern Georgia and across North America nearly to the Pacific, where it is replaced by the Pacific Wren. The North American population is estimated at 18 million birds with some 50,000 in Vermont (RMBO 2007). Greatest densities are found in northern Maine and eastern Canada (Sauer et al. 2011). Vermont sits in the middle of the Winter Wren's range in eastern North America.

As might be expected of a species with such a broad geographic range, Winter Wrens breed in a myriad of habitats from conifer bogs to the margins of clear-cuts to mountaintop spruce forests. There are common features, however, to its nest sites, which are well hidden, often near water, and usually tucked into a cavity in a tangle of windfall, upturned roots, or logging residue. The Winter Wren is quite hardy and occasionally overwinters in Vermont, but most individuals return in April from wintering grounds in the southeastern United States. Vermont's three recorded nest-building dates fall between 21 and 24 May. Only two nests with eggs were located during the atlas: 30 June and 10 July. Five nests with young were found between 24 June and 22 July. Fledglings, far easier to locate than nests, were seen between 6 June and 29 August (N = 84).

Results of the second atlas demonstrate that Winter Wren is widely distributed in all biophysical regions of the state. Statewide, the species increased by 23 percent, with the majority of new blocks being added in the Champlain Valley and southern Vermont, in areas where the species previously was uncommon. Despite increases in the Champlain Valley since the first atlas, Winter Wrens were still least common in this biophysi-

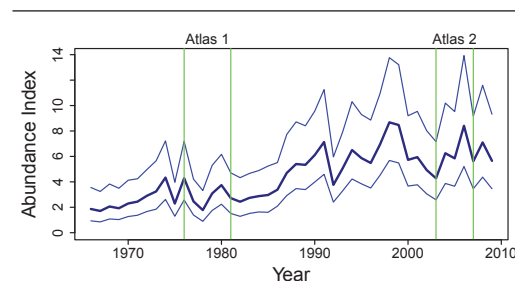


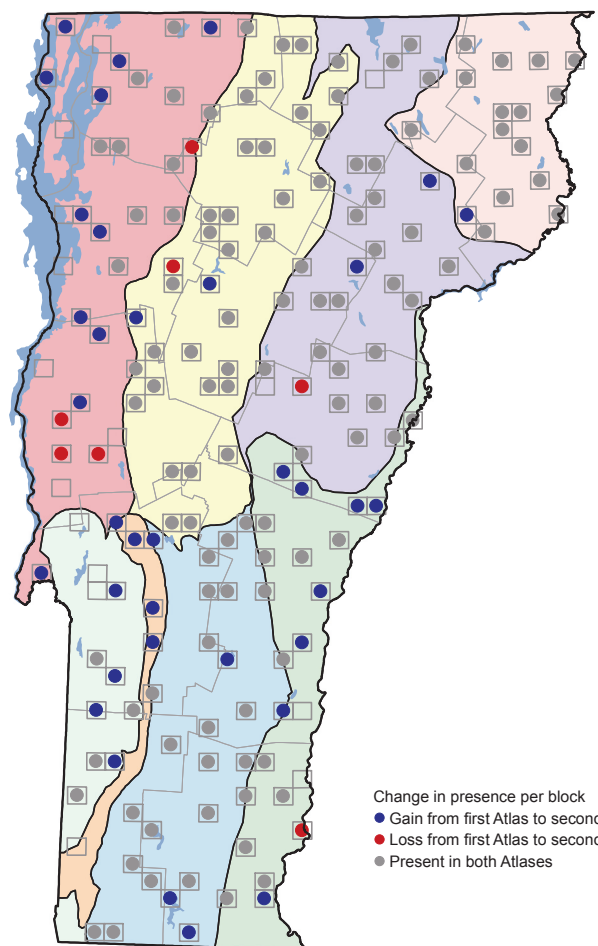
cal region, where grasslands and agricultural fields dominate the landscape.

The increase in Vermont mirrored regional increases. The Breeding Bird Survey trend for Vermont since the first atlas has been positive (2.9 percent), as has the national trend (1.6 percent; Sauer et al. 2011). In New York, the second atlas showed an increase of 49 percent (McGowan and Corwin 2008), while Pennsylvania recorded a 112 percent increase (Wilson et al. 2012), and Maryland, with limited boreal habitat, reported an increase of 47 percent (Ellison 2010). In Ontario, where the Winter Wren has always been well distributed except in the southernmost section along Lake Erie, an increase of 27 percent was noted (Brewer 2007).

Statewide and regional population increases were perhaps a reflection of the continued maturation of northeastern forests. Although severe winter weather in southeastern wintering areas is known to occasionally

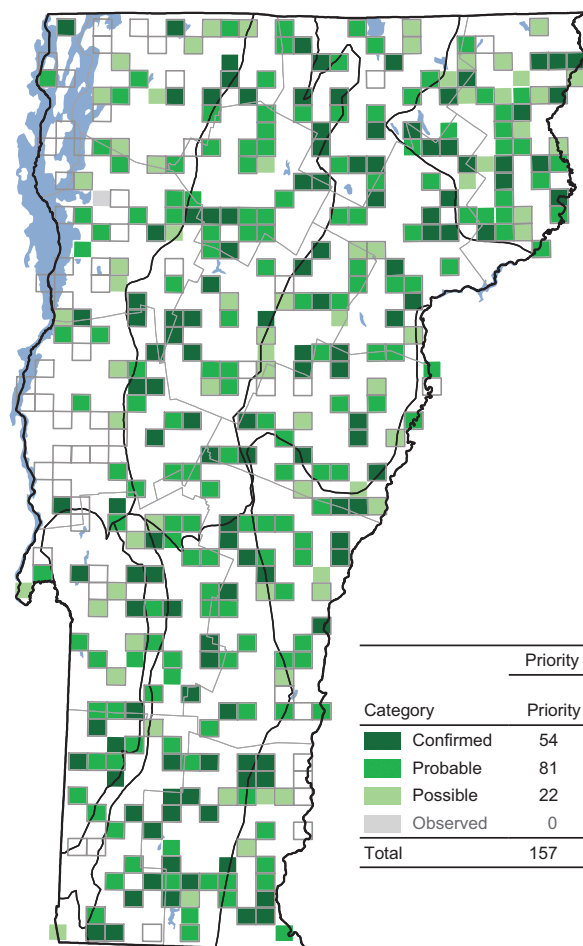
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	15	22	+ 7	+ 47
Northeastern Highlands	16	17	+ 1	+ 6
Northern Green Mountains	33	34	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	26	27	+ 1	+ 4
Southern Green Mountains	22	27	+ 5	+ 23
Southern Vermont Piedmont	12	18	+ 6	+ 50
Taconic Mountains	4	8	+ 4	+ 100
Vermont Valley	0	4	+ 4	+ 400
Totals	128	157	+ 29	+ 23



DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	52	12
Northeastern Highlands	97	12
Northern Green Mountains	95	20
Northern Vermont Piedmont	95	20
Southern Green Mountains	96	17
Southern Vermont Piedmont	85	11
Taconic Mountains	85	6
Vermont Valley	75	2

inflict heavy mortality (Hejl et al. 2002), the species has a high reproductive rate (clutches average 5 or 6 eggs) and the population rebounds quickly. A decrease in Winter Wren habitat in Vermont has been forecast under climatic warming scenarios (Matthews et al. 2007), although warming trends could benefit the wren's winter survival. Generally found in the interior of forest tracts, the Winter Wren may be area sensitive, preferring woodlands of at least 30 hectares (74 acres; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources 2000). In view of its apparent increase in abundance and distribution, however, Vermonters should be

more likely to hear the Winter Wren's song, termed the "pinnacle of song complexity" (Kroodsmas 1980).

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