

Common Raven

Corvus corax



The Common Raven has an extensive breeding distribution, from the Pacific coast of Siberia west to Europe, and across North America from the Arctic Circle south to Mexico. In the United States it is absent only from the Great Plains and some of the southeastern states. In eastern North America it breeds from Greenland south through Labrador and Quebec to New England, then south along the Appalachians to South Carolina (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). The fortunes of the Common Raven in New England have fluctuated markedly since European colonization. Prior to that, it occupied most of New England and was relatively common (Laughlin and Kibbe 1985). However, this changed as farming, particularly sheep husbandry, spread across the landscape. Accused of killing lambs and sickly sheep, ravens were extirpated from Vermont and other northeastern states; by the mid-1800s, they were regarded as rare and confined to a few coastal areas in Maine and the Adirondacks. Persecution by humans also resulted in population reductions in many other parts of the species' U.S. range (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

Beginning in the twentieth century, conditions began to improve for Common Ravens in New England, as agriculture diminished, forests regrew, and the growing deer herd provided ample food. Recolonization began in the mid-1960s. Ravens were breeding again in New Hampshire by 1976 and in western Massachusetts by 1982, followed by a range expansion into the rest of New England (Kilham and Foss 1994, Petersen and Meservey 2003a). In Vermont, where they had been breeding since the mid-1960s, the first atlas recorded Common Ravens in 85 survey blocks—a remarkable recovery over less than twenty years.

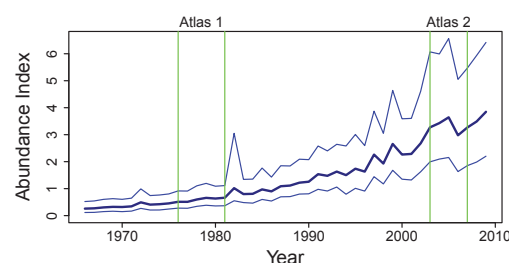
Year-round residents in Vermont, Common Raven generally breed in mid- to high-elevation conifer and deciduous forests. They typically build their stick nests in trees or cliffs, but also breed in less “natural” habitats, such as abandoned quarries. They are early breeders; during the second atlas, the earliest records of nest building and nests with young were 6 March and 22 April, re-

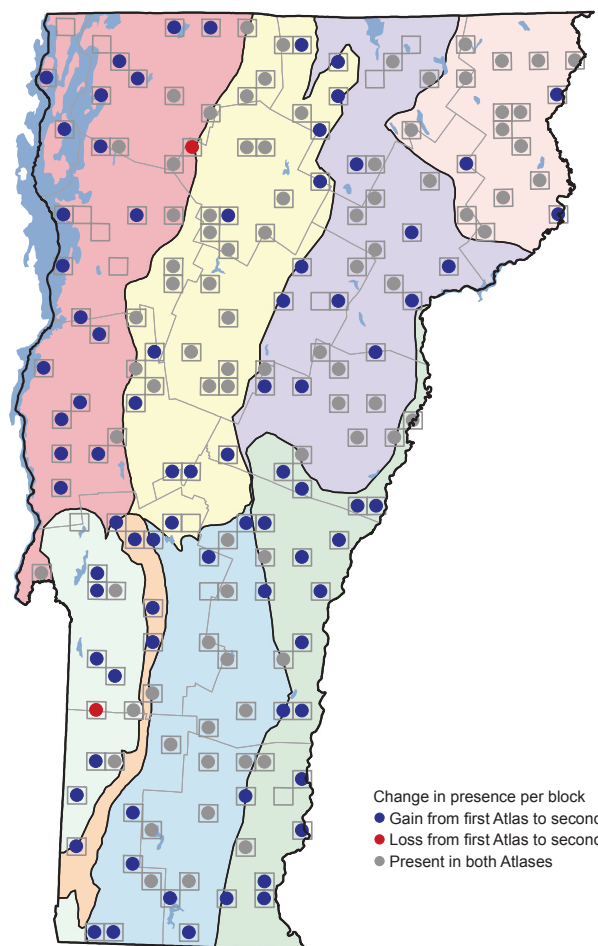
spectively. Clutches vary from 3 to 7 eggs, and the young hatch after about 20 to 25 days (Boarman and Heinrich 1999). The young are in the nest for about 5 to 6 weeks and remain with their parents after leaving the nest. Family parties can be seen well into the fall (Boarman and Heinrich 1999).

The distribution of Common Raven during the first Vermont atlas reflected its initial recolonization of the state. Most of the occupied blocks were in remote upland areas: the Northern and Southern Green Mountains, the Northern Vermont Piedmont, and the Northeastern Highlands. The second atlas depicts a continued range extension, with a doubling of occupied blocks since the first atlas. Although this increase was seen in all of the state's regions, it was most marked at lower elevations (Vermont Valley, Southern Vermont Piedmont, and Champlain Valley), suggesting a colonization of lower-lying land and an extension of the range southward. The smallest gains were in regions originally recolonized in the twentieth century, perhaps indicating that these areas are closer to saturation.

Similar patterns of colonization have been recorded

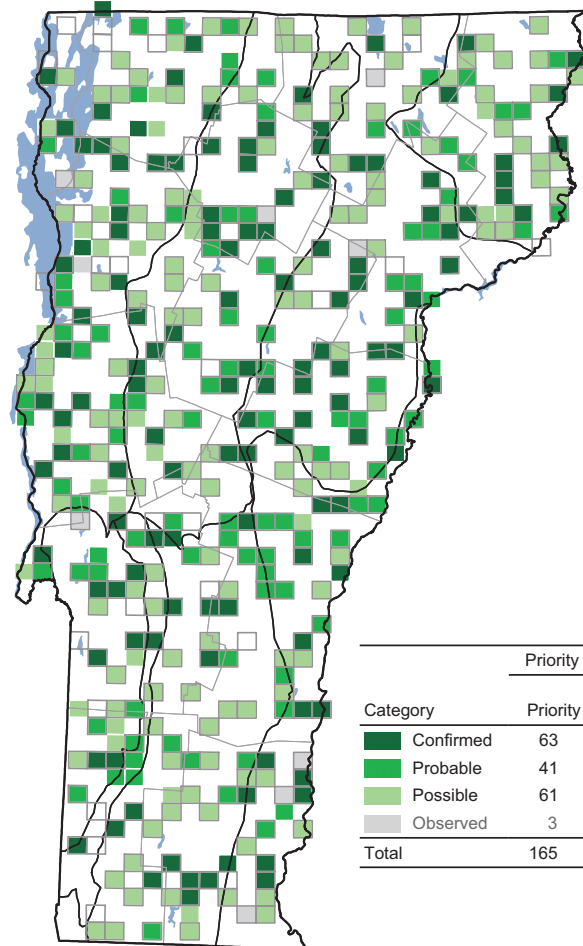
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	9	27	+ 18	+ 200
Northeastern Highlands	14	17	+ 3	+ 21
Northern Green Mountains	22	34	+ 12	+ 55
Northern Vermont Piedmont	17	27	+ 10	+ 59
Southern Green Mountains	14	26	+ 12	+ 86
Southern Vermont Piedmont	5	20	+ 15	+ 300
Taconic Mountains	4	9	+ 5	+ 125
Vermont Valley	0	5	+ 5	+ 500
Totals	85	165	+ 80	+ 94



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	63	117
Probable	41	86
Possible	61	127
Observed	3	8
Total	165	330

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	83	18
Northeastern Highlands	97	11
Northern Green Mountains	93	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	92	18
Southern Green Mountains	94	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	90	11
Taconic Mountains	80	5
Vermont Valley	75	2

elsewhere in the region. During the first New York atlas, ravens were largely confined to the Adirondack Mountains. By the second atlas, they had colonized most of the state as far south as the outskirts of New York City (McGowan 2008). In Ontario, observations in the first atlas were confined to the Canadian Shield, but by the second atlas ravens had spread southward to colonize the lower-lying habitats bordering Lake Ontario (Cadman et al. 2007).

The Common Raven has a proven capacity to adapt and survive. Its rapid population rebound after years of

persecution, its tolerance of harsh weather conditions, and its ability to occupy habitats ranging from tundra to forests to farmland all serve as testimony. These characteristics, combined with its famed intelligence, may also enable the raven to successfully cope with future environmental change.

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