

Chipping Sparrow

Spizella passerina



The Chipping Sparrow is one of a handful of native bird species that regularly forage in gardens and on lawns. The association of this sparrow with habitats modified by human activity dates to at least the first half of the nineteenth century, when Thompson (1842) considered it to be the most familiar and common sparrow statewide. The breeding range of the Chipping Sparrow extends in a wide swath across North America from eastern Alaska eastward across the wooded parts of Canada, with the exclusion of Newfoundland, and southward through much of the northern half of the United States (Middleton 1998). In both Vermont and New Hampshire, its regular range is below 610 meters (2000 feet), but in New Hampshire it has been encountered at elevations up to 792 meters (2600 feet; Ellison 1985, McDermott 1994). In winter, the Chipping Sparrow occupies the southeastern United States south into Mexico, and is rare anywhere in New England (Middleton 1998).

This species frequents edges with open ground for foraging, in proximity to trees or shrubs for nest placement. Nests are frequently situated in conifers located in clearings, such as lawns, or in open wooded sites. Hughes and Hudson (1997) reported the advantages of overhead concealment provided by Vermont's Christmas tree plantations to both the Chipping Sparrow and the House Finch. In the current atlas, nest building was observed from 8 May to 14 July ($N = 36$). Nests with eggs were found from 29 May to 15 August ($N = 11$), and nests with nestlings were recorded from 1 June to 26 July ($N = 15$). Fledglings were found from 3 June to 14 August ($N = 177$).

A potential problem for field observers is the similarity of the Chipping Sparrow's trilling song with those of the Dark-eyed Junco and the Pine Warbler. The Chipping Sparrow is generally conspicuous both in activity and song, however, and is thus unlikely to be misidentified or overlooked.

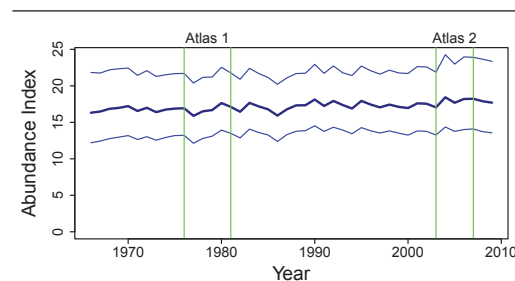
The Chipping Sparrow is uniformly distributed in suitable habitat across the state. Priority block occupancy was at least 96 percent in all biophysical regions except the Northeastern Highlands, where occupancy

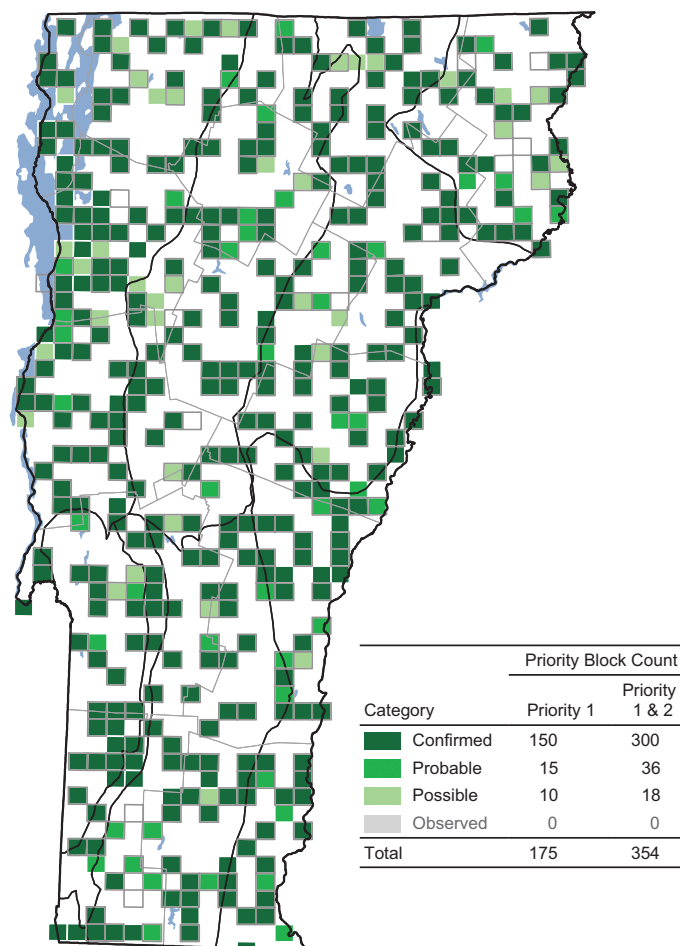
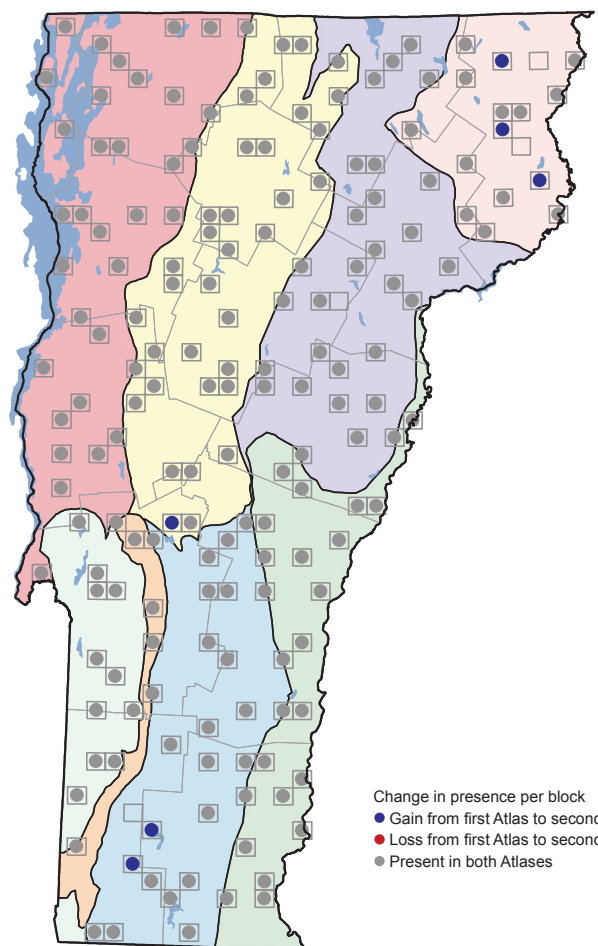
was 89 percent. These results are similar to those of the first atlas, where the Northeastern Highlands had a 69 percent occupancy in Priority 1 blocks and all the other regions reached at least 93 percent occupancy. Modest increases in the Northeastern Highlands (3 blocks), the Northern Green Mountains (1 block), and the Southern Green Mountains (2 blocks) were the most notable changes in the current atlas. These relatively slight changes, in predominantly forested areas, presumably reflect an increase in new openings produced either by timber removal or development.

Breeding Bird Survey data showed stable Chipping Sparrow populations in eastern North America, the Atlantic Northern Forest (Bird Conservation Region 14), and in Vermont alone (Sauer et al. 2011). The western region recorded a significant 1.1 percent decline per year over the same period. Second atlas data for Maryland (Ellison 2010) and Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012) show increases of 3 percent or less; in New York and Ontario, there were no changes (Cadman et al. 2007, McGowan and Corwin 2008).

Any increases in Chipping Sparrow populations in the Northeast might be related to gradual changes in land use associated with human activity. Declines in western North America may be attributable to intense brood par-

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	33	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	12	15	+ 3	+ 25
Northern Green Mountains	34	35	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	29	29	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	24	26	+ 2	+ 8
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	169	175	+ 6	+ 4

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	98	20
Northeastern Highlands	89	9
Northern Green Mountains	96	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	96	18
Southern Green Mountains	96	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

asitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds (Middleton 1998), to fire suppression, and to natural forest regeneration (Saab and Powell 2005). Although parasitism is not an important factor for the Chipping Sparrow in Vermont, forest regeneration could reduce populations. The species thrives in suburban environments, however, and may be expected to remain plentiful and perhaps even to expand its range if habitat modification continues in more remote, forested areas.

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