Northern Pintail

Anas acuta

"Northward, ever northward, clearly indicated on the distant sky, points the long slim figure of the pintail, in the vanguard of the spring migration, wending its way toward the remote and still frozen shores" (Bent 1923). Within its circumpolar distribution, the Northern Pintail's center of abundance in North America is in Alaska and the Prairie Pothole Region on the northern plains with a smaller portion of the population (approximately 10 percent) nesting in the boreal forests and aspen parklands of western Canada (USFWS 2008). In the East, the species' range primarily hugs the Hudson Bay and the St. Lawrence River drainage, with a sparse breeding distribution in the northeastern United States (Austin and Miller 1995).

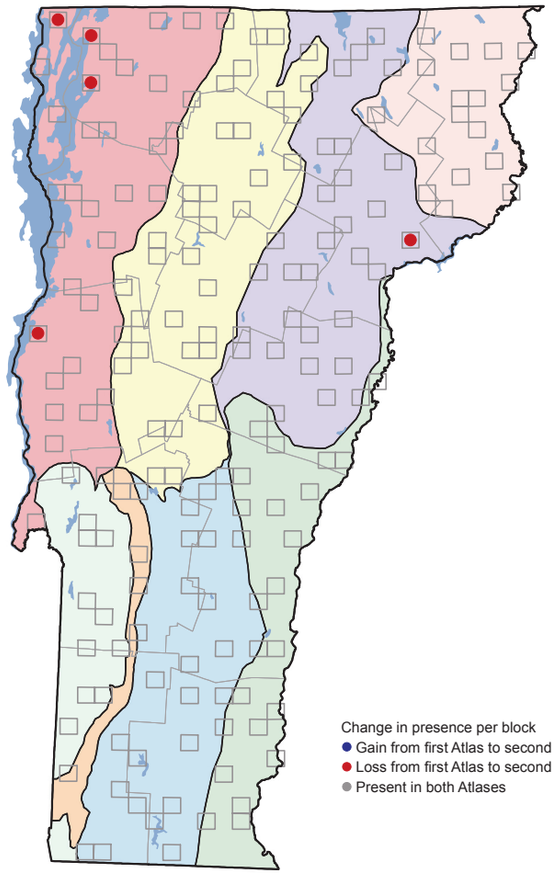
In Vermont, Northern Pintail are most common during spring and fall migration; summer records are relatively scarce. Pintails nest on the ground, in open habitats, often in relatively sparse vegetation. In the pothole region of North America, they may nest 1 to 2 kilometers (0.6 to 1.2 miles) from water (Duncan 1987). Studies in the Prairie Pothole Region suggest that pintails prefer tilled land where their nests are frequently destroyed by agricultural activity (Klett et al. 1988).

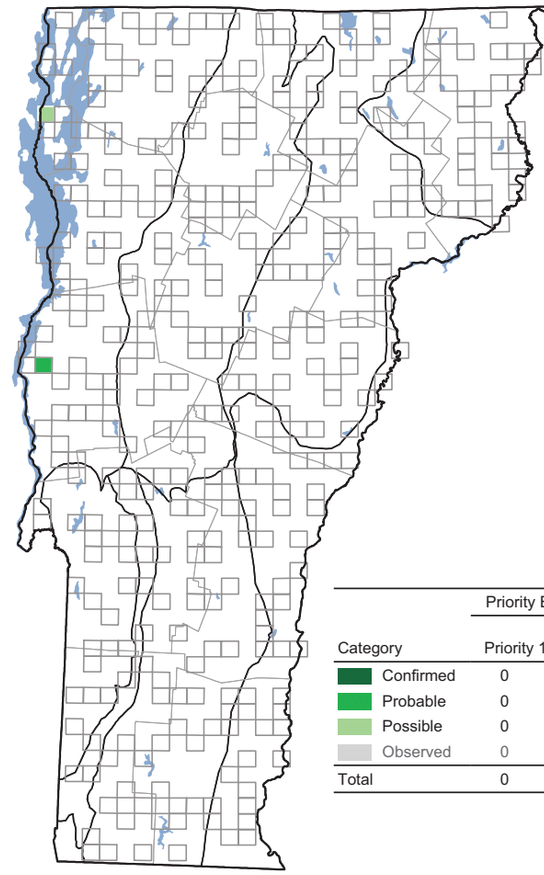
During the first atlas, pintails were confirmed almost exclusively in the Champlain Valley in five priority blocks and six additional blocks. As a breeding bird, the Northern Pintail virtually disappeared from Vermont between the first and second atlases. In 1959, Northern Pintails were released in New York by the Department of Environmental Conservation in an effort to establish a breeding population (Bull 1974). Ellis and Ellison (1985) noted that this effort may have contributed to the establishment of the breeding population in Vermont documented during the first atlas. However, the long-term effects of these releases appear to have been negligible. During the second atlas, there were no confirmations. In the Champlain Valley, atlasers noted a single PR record in a Priority 2 block and a single PO record in a non-priority block. In New York, the distribution of pintails decreased by 71 percent between the first and second atlases. Although relatively rare in Ontario, the probability of observation of the species decreased 23 percent between their first and second atlases.

Northern Pintail are rare enough in the USFWS eastern survey region that no population estimates are provided. As with most prairie-nesting ducks, the Northern Pintail population fluctuates with mid-continental water conditions; it is, however one of the few species whose populations have not recovered from severe drought conditions in the 1980s. The current continental population estimate is 2.6 million birds (USFWS 2008), less than half of the population goal in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (USFWS and Canadian Wildlife Service 1986).

New York's second atlas documented one CO and one PR record on northern Lake Champlain (McGowan and Corwin 2008), suggesting that a small breeding population still exists on the lake. The retreating eastern edge of the species' range could be a result of population declines at the core of the pintail's range, or perhaps the decline of the introduced New York population. Additionally, increased management intensity on agricultural lands (Troy et al. 2005) could also be driving population changes in Vermont. Given that the western portion of the continent holds the core of the pintail's breeding population, Vermont is unlikely to contribute substantially to it.

ALLAN STRONG





Category	Priority Block Count Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	0	0
Probable	0	1
Possible	0	0
Observed	0	0
Total	0	1

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	4	0	- 4	- 100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	1	0	- 1	- 100
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	5	0	- 5	- 100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	1	100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Southern Green Mountains	0	0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Taconic Mountains	0	0
Vermont Valley	0	0