

Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura



The Mourning Dove is considered a songbird in Vermont, but in much of the remainder of the country it is a game bird. The estimated annual harvest is at least 16.5 million birds, with almost 1 million dove hunters spending about 3 million days afield (Sanders and Parker 2010). Found throughout the contiguous forty-eight states, from southern Canada to Central America, the Mourning Dove is the most widespread member of the dove family in North America. It uses almost all habitat types except boreal forests and wetlands (Aldrich and Duvall 1958) and consistently ranks as one of the most abundant species in the country (Sauer et al. 2008).

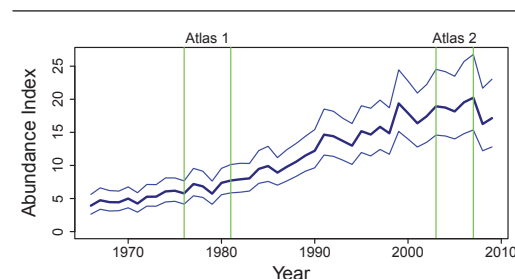
Mourning Doves exploit a variety of nesting habitats and substrates. Nests are haphazard structures placed in a vast array of deciduous and coniferous tree species or on almost any surface, including building ledges, crop fields, even parked automobiles. Doves begin nesting early—nests with eggs have been noted as early as 2 April—and rear their two young on “pigeon’s milk,” the sloughed-off lining of the adult’s crop (Mirarchi 1993). Mourning Doves may raise three or more broods in one season, depending upon weather and available food (Sayre and Silvy 1993). In Vermont, nest building was observed as late as 3 August, and fledglings were reported as late as 21 September. Mourning Doves are relatively easy to find and recognize; they commonly nest near human habitation, vocalize throughout the breeding season, and forage in open areas.

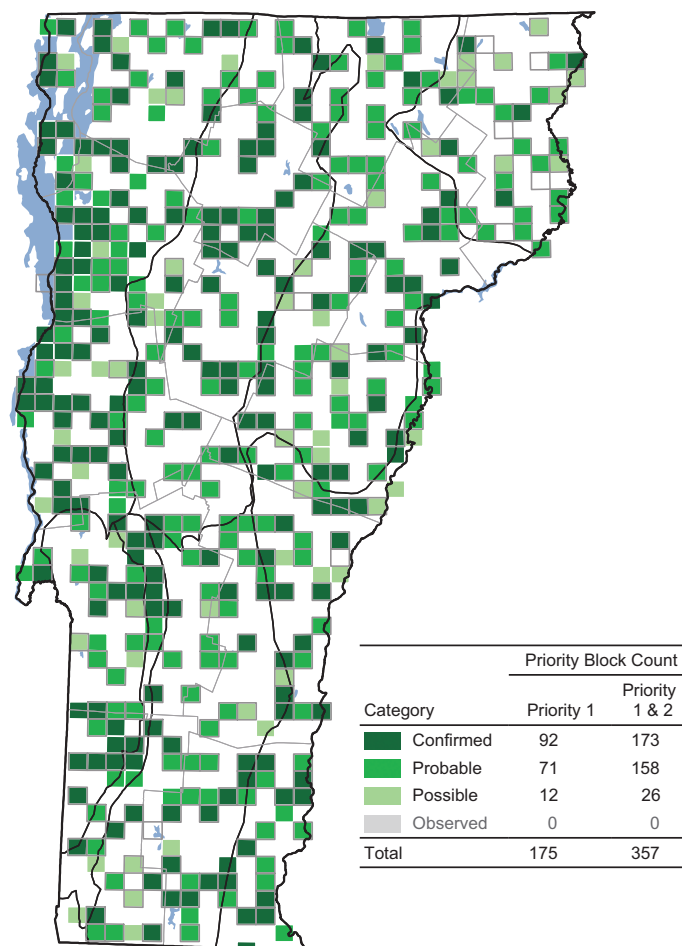
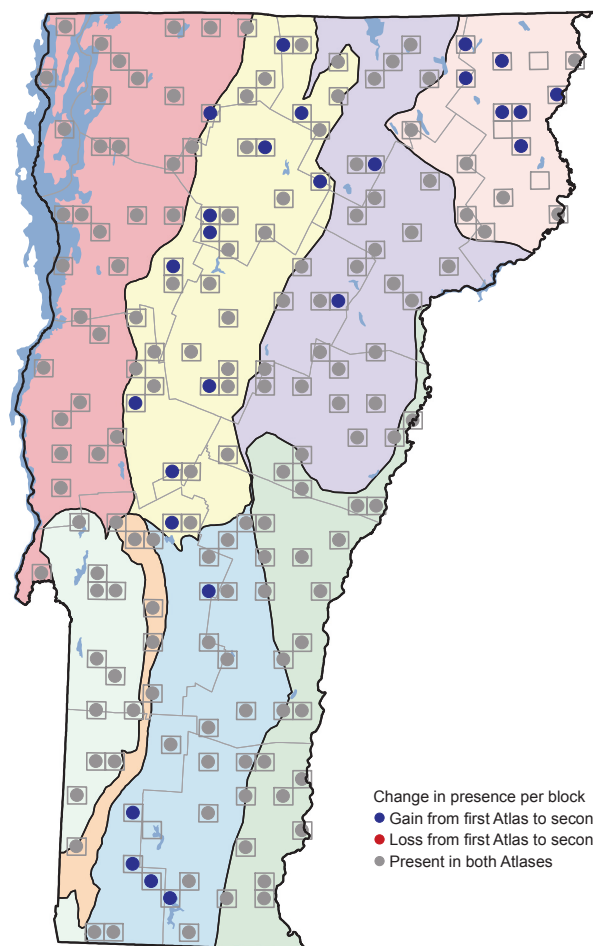
Mourning Doves are distributed throughout the state, proving difficult to find only in a few mountainous, densely forested atlas blocks. Even a single meadow in an otherwise forested block might host a nesting pair. Once an uncommon species in the state in winter, numbers have increased steadily on Christmas Bird Count routes since the mid-twentieth century (Kelling 2006). The number of blocks occupied by Mourning Doves increased by 17 percent in the second atlas, even though Vermont’s forests have both matured and increased slightly in acreage since the first atlas. Most of the increase occurred in the Green Mountains and Northeastern Highlands.

Breeding Bird Survey data concur with atlas results, indicating a significant annual increase of 3.6 percent from 1982 to 2007 in Vermont (Sauer et al. 2011). However, call count data collected from 1997 to 2007 suggest that Mourning Dove abundance may have decreased significantly in New England (Dolton et al. 2008). In New York, a 9 percent increase in block occupancy was found statewide during the second atlas; although the species is still absent from much of the Adirondack Mountains, this area saw a 52 percent increase (McGowan 2008). In Pennsylvania and Maryland, where Mourning Doves are hunted, atlasers found 7 and 2 percent increases in the number of blocks occupied, respectively (Ellison 2010, Wilson et al. 2012). In southern Canada, the Mourning Dove spread north in Quebec in the latter half of the twentieth century (Otis et al. 2008); the bird also expanded its range northward in Ontario and has become more abundant (Kelling 2006). The second Ontario atlas found an increase of more than 70 percent in the southern portion of the province, attributed in part to milder winters and more bird feeders (Armstrong 2007).

The threefold increase in the Ontario dove population (13 percent per year since 1977) has been used as justification for establishing a hunting season in the province (Lebanc et al. 2007). Rhode Island is the only New En-

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	32	33	+ 1	+ 3
Northeastern Highlands	7	14	+ 7	+ 100
Northern Green Mountains	24	35	+ 11	+ 46
Northern Vermont Piedmont	28	30	+ 2	+ 7
Southern Green Mountains	21	26	+ 5	+ 24
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	149	175	+ 26	+ 17

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	20
Northeastern Highlands	86	9
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	98	18
Southern Green Mountains	98	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	97	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

gland state to allow hunting, and New York recently rejected suggestions that a season be established. The Eurasian Collared Dove, a species not yet breeding in Vermont but likely to spread to the state before the next atlas is conducted, is similar to the Mourning Dove in size and habits. Competition between the two species appears to be minimal but is subject to ongoing studies (Poling and Hayslette 2006).

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