White-breasted Nuthatch

Sitta carolinensis

The White-breasted Nuthatch is one of Vermont's most familiar birds, known for strolling headfirst down tree trunks with uncanny ease. The nasal call of this nuthatch fills the dooryard, as this species frequents well-stocked bird feeders. Food is generally cached throughout its territory for future use. White-breasted Nuthatches live as paired, permanent residents throughout their wide range, which extends from the Canadian Maritime Provinces across southern Canada to British Columbia and southward into northern Florida and Mexico (Grubb and Pravosudov 2008). Irruptive movements occasionally occur in the northern portion of its range, including Vermont, but there is no consensus as to what triggers them or whether both adults and juveniles participate (Grubb and Pravosudov 2008).

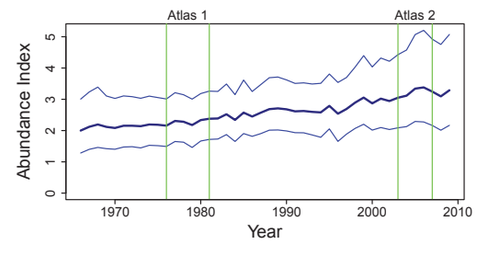
White-breasted Nuthatches prefer relatively open, mature, deciduous and mixed coniferous that offer abundant tree cavities for roosting and nesting. They are apparently less abundant in regions dominated by coniferous forest (Sauer et al. 2011). This bird is so widespread and familiar that Vermont fieldworkers generally had little trouble documenting its presence. Nest building (N = 12) was noted between 14 April and 8 July. Because singing ceases during nesting (Kilham 1972), and nests are difficult to access (Grubb and Pravosudov 2008), it is not surprising that no nests with eggs were reported during the second atlas. Nestlings (N = 13) were found from 26 May through 13 July. Fledglings (N = 141) were noted 16 May through 10 August and were the principal source of confirmation. More than 57 percent of the blocks where White-breasted Nuthatches were found contained CO records.

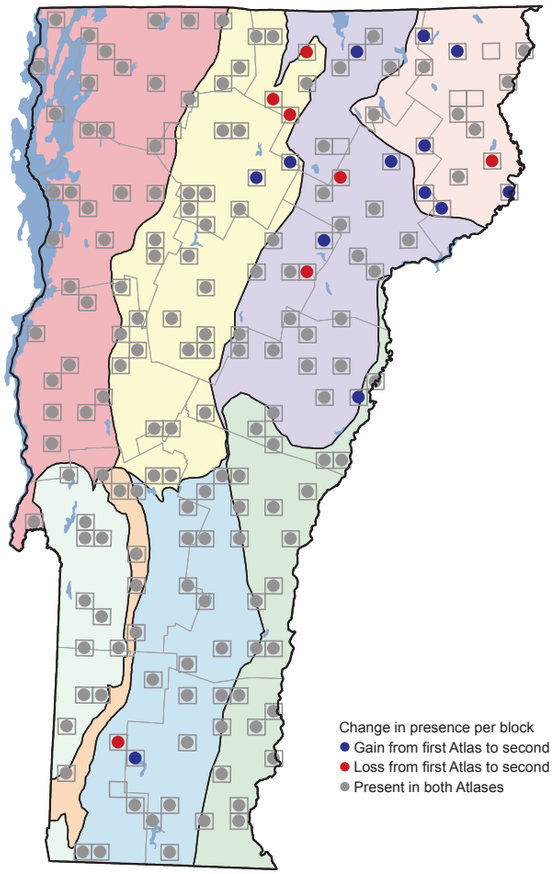
Ubiquitous in Vermont, the White-breasted Nuthatch was not found in 7 blocks it had previously occupied, but this was offset by new detections in the northeastern section of the state. During the second atlas, they were found in 13 Priority 1 blocks in the Northeastern Highlands, a substantial increase from 8 blocks during the first atlas. In all other biophysical regions, the species occupied at least 72 percent of priority blocks. The species probably occurs in every block in Vermont but, once nesting has begun, may be difficult to locate in heavily forested areas—especially in the northeast, where coniferous forest predominates.

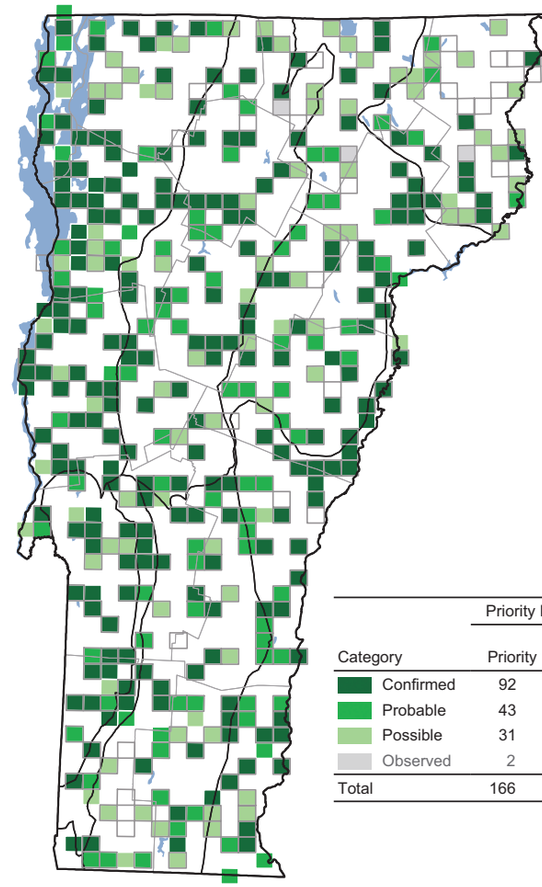
New York's second atlas found a slight (3 percent) increase in the number of occupied blocks; most of the unoccupied blocks were located in the Adirondacks, where spruce and fir predominate. Pennsylvania's second atlas indicated a 13 percent increase (Wilson et al. 2012), and Maryland recorded a major increase of 44 percent (Ellison 2010). In Ontario, atlas work indicated a 20 percent increase in the probability of observing White-breasted Nuthatch (Bavrlic 2007). Breeding Bird Survey data from eastern North America showed a significant 2.6 percent increase from 1982 to 2007; the Lower Great Lakes / St. Lawrence Plain (Bird Conservation Region 13) and the New England / Mid-Atlantic Coast (Bird Conservation Region 30) are among the regions that showed significant increases (Sauer et al. 2011).

The White-breasted Nuthatch appears to have adjusted well to human presence and its population is sta-

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME







Category	Priority Block Count: Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	92	193
Probable	43	81
Possible	31	64
Observed	2	3
Total	166	338

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	32	32	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	8	13	+ 5	+ 63
Northern Green Mountains	33	32	- 1	- 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	25	27	+ 2	+ 8
Southern Green Mountains	25	25	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	160	166	+ 6	+ 4

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	97	21
Northeastern Highlands	72	8
Northern Green Mountains	93	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	93	18
Southern Green Mountains	92	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	92	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

ble. Neither West Nile virus nor climate change appear to be affecting this species (LaDeau et al. 2008). Because natural cavities in snags and old woodpecker holes are key components of the White-breasted Nuthatch's breeding requirements, the continued maturation of Vermont's forests should benefit the species.

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