

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos



The American Crow was presumably much less numerous in Vermont in the extensive forests that existed prior to the colonial expansion of lumbering and agriculture. Despite bounties for its control as an agricultural pest (Thompson 1842), however, the crow was considered to be “a very common resident” in Vermont by the end of the nineteenth century (Perkins and Howe 1901). The species occurs throughout North America, with the exception of the far Northwest, including Alaska, and the far Southwest (Verbeek and Caffrey 2002).

A species generally of open areas, the American Crow commonly nests near farms, suburban, or urban areas in small patches of woodlands or along woodland edges, often favoring a tall white pine for its nest. In the second Vermont atlas, 35 observations of nest building ranged from 21 March to 24 July. In Vermont observations of nests with eggs and nestlings are too few to provide an adequate sample, but in New York eggs have been found from 30 March to 14 June, and nestlings from 1 May to 28 July (Bull 1974). During the second Vermont atlas, fledglings ($N = 112$) were observed from 4 May to 15 August. This species is generally conspicuous in its vocalizations, appearance, and behavior and is unlikely to be missed when present in an atlas block.

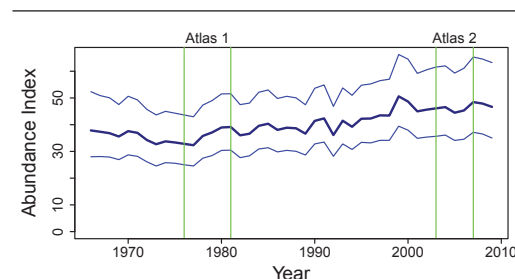
The American Crow is widely distributed statewide. It was found during the second atlas in at least 94 percent of priority blocks in all regions except the Northeastern Highlands, where it occurred in 83 percent of priority blocks. The second atlas revealed 4 more Priority 1 blocks with crows than in the first atlas; 3 of these were in the Green Mountains. This small overall increase suggests that the statewide distribution of crows changed little over twenty-five years. In the Northeastern Highlands, where crows are more sparsely distributed, there was no change since the first atlas. The relatively lower number of occupied blocks in this region is presumably attributable to a greater extent of forested land without suitable openings.

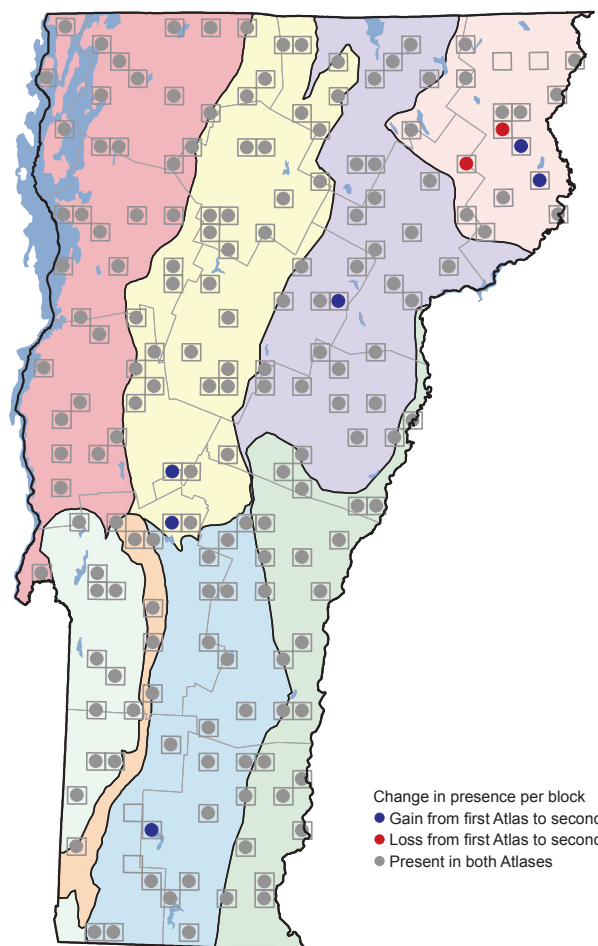
Results from the second breeding bird atlases in Maryland (Ellison 2010), Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012), and

New York (McGowan and Corwin 2008) showed slight, but not significant, increases for the American Crow. In Ontario the second atlas showed an expansion in the northern part of the range (Sandilands 2007). Breeding Bird Survey data show significant population increases of crows in Maine, New York, and New Hampshire (1.5, 1.3, and 2.1 percent per year, respectively) from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011). In Vermont, the species increased significantly by 1.2 percent per year during this period (Sauer et al. 2011). A more comprehensive examination of BBS data shows, however, that population trends have changed recently: over North America as a whole, crow populations had been increasing from the late 1960s until the early 2000s, when they suddenly dropped, resulting in a significant negative population trend (0.5 percent annually) from 1999 to 2009 (Sauer et al. 2011).

From detailed studies of crows in New York, McGowan (2001) proposed that the general increase in crow numbers in the latter half of the twentieth century might be explained by their spread into centers of human population. In Vermont and elsewhere in New England, crows have become commonplace in urban centers and suburbs, where they exercise their curious and opportunistic nature by investigating and consuming many edible items that people discard. Since 1999, however, West Nile

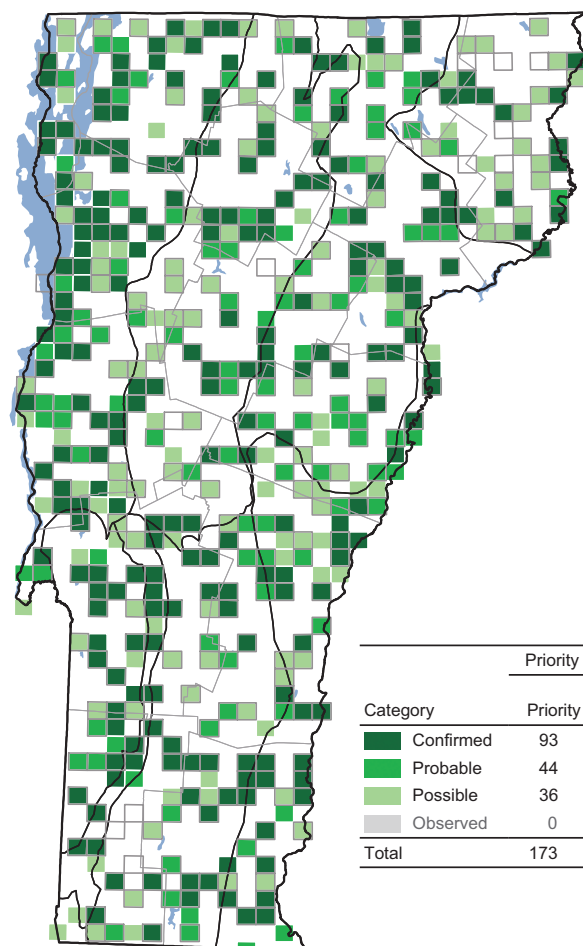
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	33	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	13	13	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	33	35	+ 2	+ 6
Northern Vermont Piedmont	29	30	+ 1	+ 3
Southern Green Mountains	24	25	+ 1	+ 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	169	173	+ 4	+ 2



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	93	193
Probable	44	79
Possible	36	81
Observed	0	0
Total	173	353

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	21
Northeastern Highlands	83	9
Northern Green Mountains	96	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	98	18
Southern Green Mountains	94	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

virus produced drastic decreases in American Crow populations in many states (Kilpatrick et al. 2007, LaDeau et al. 2011). Breeding Bird Survey data from 2000 to 2007 show significant, precipitous population declines in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. Crow populations in northern New England were less affected, possibly due to regional differences in climate and land use that may affect the replication of viruses in mosquitoes (Molaei et al. 2006, LaDeau et al. 2011). In contrast to states farther south, crow populations in Vermont appear to have remained stable; the state's low densities of crows and its

rural environment make the species less susceptible to West Nile virus (Koenig et al. 2010). Unless the impacts of West Nile virus substantially increase, the crow seems likely to remain a familiar species in the state.

GEORGE A. CLARK, JR.