

Spotted Sandpiper

Actitis macularius



The Spotted Sandpiper is widely distributed in North America, breeding from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts and from the tree line in northern Canada and Alaska to the southern United States. In Vermont the species is widely distributed and one of the state's most frequently encountered shorebirds.

Spotted Sandpipers return from wintering grounds in the southern United States, Central America, and the Caribbean in late April and early May (Oring et al. 1997, Murin and Pfeiffer 2002). Their breeding habitat comprises vegetated or partly vegetated riverine gravel and shingle bars, the banks of rivers and lakes, and farm ponds. They nest on the ground, usually within a few meters of the waterline, but occasionally up to 20 meters (60 feet) or more away from shore. They lay clutches of 4 well-camouflaged eggs, and incubation takes about 21 days. Most of the incubation of the clutch and tending of the young is carried out by the males. The precocial young feed themselves soon after hatching and are capable of flight 18 days later (Oring et al. 1997). This species is polyandrous, and females may mate with 2 to 4 males. Polyandry is an unusual mating system among birds but occurs most commonly in shorebirds. Its evolutionary origins are debatable but may have evolved out of the independence of the young, which frees one of the parents from rearing responsibilities (Van de Kam et al. 2004).

During the first atlas the Spotted Sandpiper was distributed fairly evenly throughout Vermont. The Champlain Valley hosted the greatest proportion (25 percent) of occupied blocks in the state. It was found in 29 percent fewer blocks in the second atlas. Losses occurred across Vermont but were most pronounced in the Northern Vermont Piedmont and Northeastern Highlands.

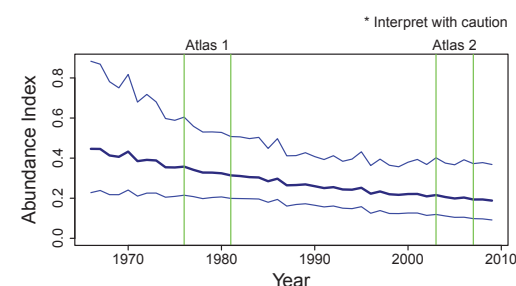
Declining trends for Spotted Sandpiper populations are not unique to Vermont. In Massachusetts, Veit and Peterson (1993) reported that the Spotted Sandpiper has declined during the last century. During the second Ontario atlas, Spotted Sandpipers went undetected in 17 to 30 percent of blocks where they had previously been found in the southern portion of the province, but there were only

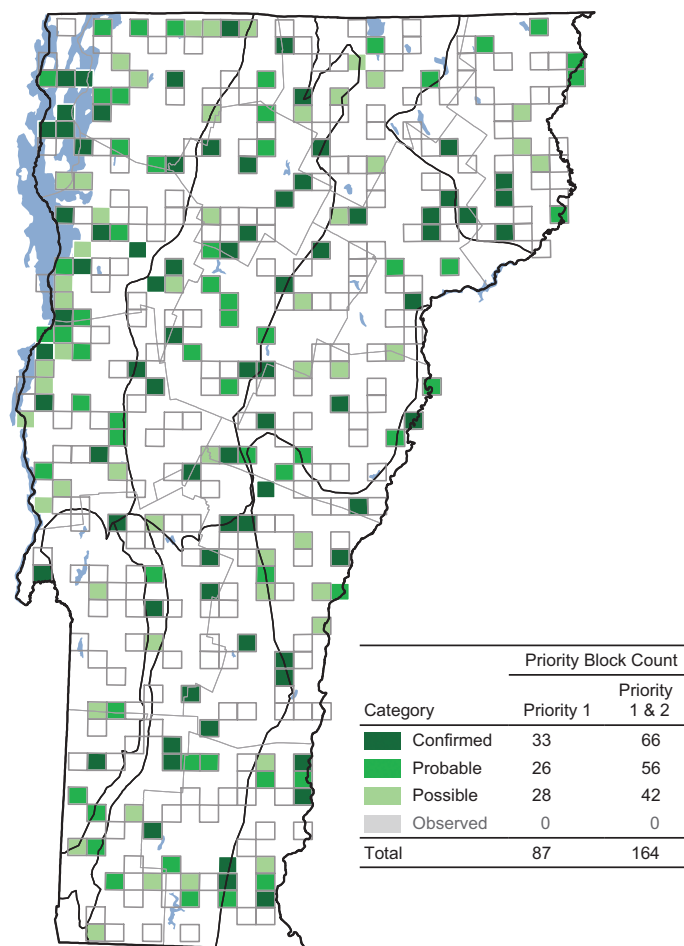
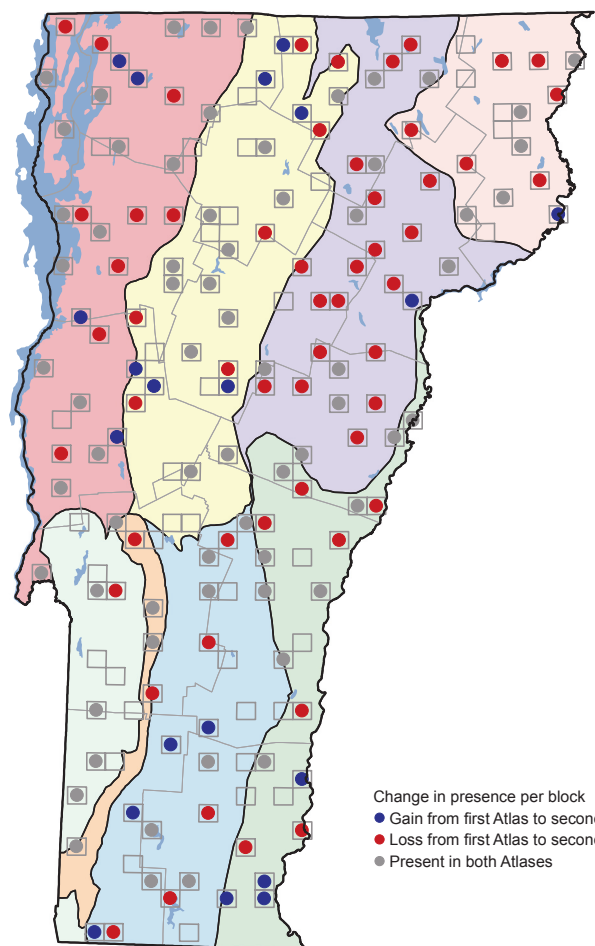
minor changes in northern regions (Cadman et al. 2007). The New York atlas documented a 12 percent decline in occupied blocks (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The reasons why this species is apparently decreasing as a breeding bird in Vermont and elsewhere in the Northeast are not clear, and other recently completed atlases have been unable to explain the losses. It seems unlikely that the Spotted Sandpiper's preferred breeding habitats have been lost to any great extent. However, many other migratory shorebirds with widely different breeding habitats and ranges are currently experiencing population declines in North America (Bart et al. 2007), though the reasons for these trends across such a wide range of species are obscure. Changes in migration or wintering habitats could be responsible for decreases in the populations of many of these species. Although Spotted Sandpiper populations remain widespread enough in Vermont to keep serious conservation concerns at bay, the observed declines warrant more focused and intensive monitoring in the future.

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RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	26	21	- 5	- 19
Northeastern Highlands	11	6	- 5	- 45
Northern Green Mountains	19	18	- 1	- 5
Northern Vermont Piedmont	28	11	- 17	- 61
Southern Green Mountains	14	12	- 2	- 14
Southern Vermont Piedmont	14	11	- 3	- 21
Taconic Mountains	5	4	- 1	- 20
Vermont Valley	5	4	- 1	- 20
Totals	122	87	- 35	- 29

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	56	25
Northeastern Highlands	35	8
Northern Green Mountains	49	20
Northern Vermont Piedmont	35	14
Southern Green Mountains	39	13
Southern Vermont Piedmont	52	13
Taconic Mountains	23	3
Vermont Valley	87	4