

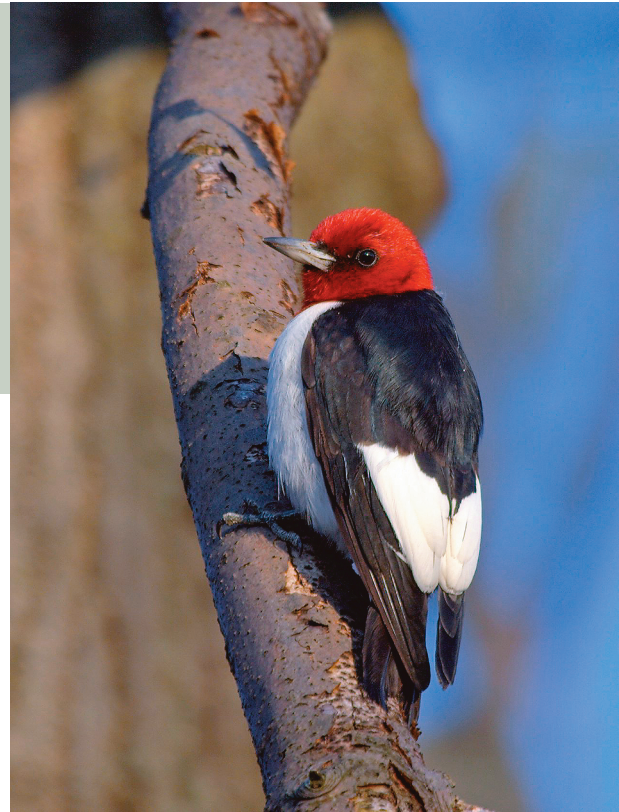
Red-headed Woodpecker

Melanerpes erythrocephalus

The Red-headed Woodpecker was once common enough in the Northeast to be considered a crop pest (Bent 1939). Although found across the United States from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic, the bird has become increasingly rare in the Northeast. Vermont is at the northeastern edge of the species' range with only a small population extending northward into Quebec along the St. Lawrence River. In the late 1800s and mid-1900s, die-offs of American chestnut and elm, respectively, created the dead standing snags used by the Red-headed Woodpecker for nesting and roosting, and population increases ensued (Kendeigh 1982, Hall 1983). Early settlers frequently shot Red-headed Woodpeckers that were caught foraging on fruit, berries, and corn; 100 were reportedly shot from a single cherry tree (Bent 1939). The carcasses were not of use, however; John James Audubon described them as "tough" and "scarcely eatable" (Smith et al. 2000).

The Red-headed Woodpecker is found in open deciduous forests with mast-producing beech and oak. Snags are often used as perches from which the woodpeckers make aerial sorties on passing insects. In addition to flycatching, the species feeds on beechnuts and acorns, which are often stored for later use. Northern populations are migratory, depending upon acorn and beechnut availability, and return in March or April to nesting sites. Red-headed Woodpeckers nest in harder trees (or utility poles) than other woodpeckers (Conner et al. 1994) and often reuse the nest cavity for several years (Smith et al. 2000).

In the early 1900s, the Red-headed Woodpecker was considered common in western Vermont but uncommon to rare in the remainder of the state (Forbush 1925). During the first atlas, the Red-headed Woodpecker was found in 9 Priority 1 blocks (17 total), primarily in the western half of the state. Only a single record—of an individual in unsuitable habitat late in the season—was submitted during the second atlas. Breeding records since the first atlas included Addison in 1985 and 1986, Ferrisburg, West Arlington, and Bridport in 1990, West Arlington in 1992 and Bridport in 1993 (Vermont Bird Records Committee). The species is most frequently encountered in the west-

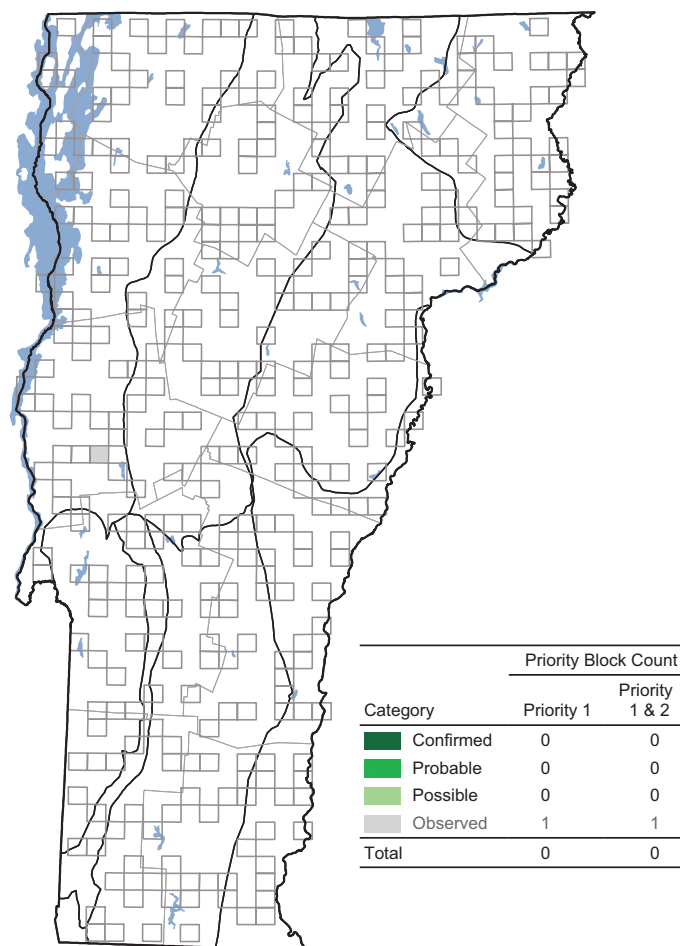
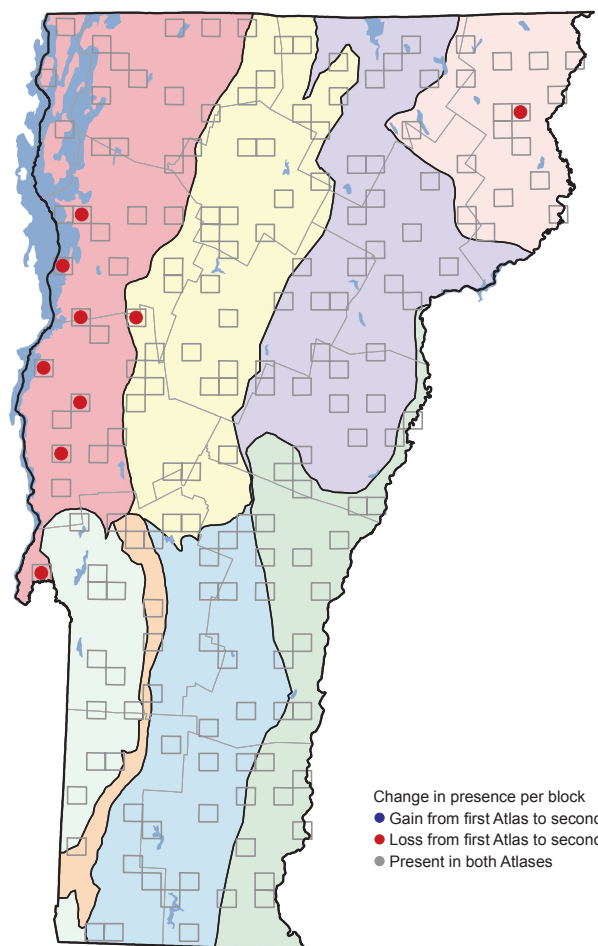


ern half of the state where hedgerows, pastures, and agricultural land provide a mosaic of open forest and snags. They are rarely reported from higher elevations and are not known to breed in the Green Mountains (Fichtel 1985).

New York's second atlas found a drop of more than 75 percent in occurrence (McGowan and Corwin 2008) and Pennsylvania recorded a 46 percent decrease in occupied blocks (Wilson et al. 2012). Ontario estimates that their population has decreased by two-thirds since the first atlas (Woodliffe 2007).

Competition with European Starling for nest sites was once considered a potential threat to the species, but they have demonstrated the ability to successfully compete with starlings and most other potential competitors for cavities (Ingold 1989). Fichtel (1985) predicted a decline in the Champlain lowlands due to snag removal and encroachment of forest into open areas. While these are possible contributors to the decline observed in Vermont, a more dramatic region-wide decrease appears to be occurring. The species is rare enough in Vermont to earn it Species of Special Concern status.

Despite its near disappearance from Vermont, the Red-headed Woodpecker may be one of the "winners" under climate change; models predict increases in the species' habitat throughout the northeastern United States (Matthews et al. 2007). Other population expansions have been tied to forest tree die-offs, and the advance of the emerald ash borer across the range of the American ash



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	7	0	-7	-100
Northeastern Highlands	1	0	-1	-100
Northern Green Mountains	1	0	-1	-100
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+0	+0
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	9	0	-9	-100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	0	0
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

may provide the Red-headed Woodpecker with new nesting opportunities. At present, however, Vermont's Red-headed Woodpeckers appear to have declined to the point where only an expansion of the mid-continental population will provide the colonizers needed to rebuild the state's depleted population. This may not occur any-time soon, as the Midwest population has been experiencing a significant decline of 3.2 percent per year (1982 to 2007; Sauer et al. 2011), and the species is rapidly vanishing from the Northeast's avifauna.

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