

American Robin

Turdus migratorius



The American Robin has established a successful ecological relationship with habitats created by humans. Never a deep forest dweller, the robin has thrived in the fragmented landscape created when early settlers cleared extensive forests. A person can walk for miles in unbroken forestland without seeing a robin, but come upon a clearing or road cut and you will be almost certain to find a pair. This thrush is well known to even the most casual nature observer and is generally regarded as the first sign of spring. The American Robin breeds in a broad band across North America from Alaska to Newfoundland southward to the mountains of Mexico (Sallabanks and James 1999). Birds move south in autumn in large flocks and form winter roosts sometimes numbering in the hundreds of thousands. These flocks subsist on berries to a large degree. American Robins overwinter at Vermont latitudes with some frequency, depending upon the weather and the availability of juniper berries, crab apples, hawthorn fruit, and apples in a given year (D. Kibbe pers. obs.).

Though the American Robin avoids interior forestland, it is quick to occupy the edge of clearings created naturally (by windfalls and burns, for example) or by human activities (such as clear-cuts and rights-of-way). Hedgerows, riparian corridors, and suburban areas are all used. By late April robins are busy constructing a nest and starting the first of two or three clutches of eggs they will rear that year. Nest building (N = 49) was noted 21 April to 14 July. Nests with eggs (N = 70) were found 20 April to 15 August. Nests with young (N = 74) were located 10 May to 5 September. Juveniles, readily recognized by their spotted breasts, were seen 31 May to 28 August (N = 119). Robins breed close to humans, forage in the open, carry large, obvious food items, build persistent and easily recognized nests, are fierce defenders of their young, and have a juvenile plumage identifiable at a distance (Kibbe 1985).

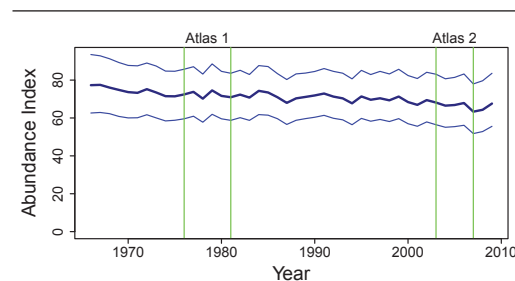
The American Robin occurs throughout Vermont, although its abundance in extensively forested areas is lower than in more fragmented landscapes. Robins even nest in spruce-fir habitat at high elevations in Ver-

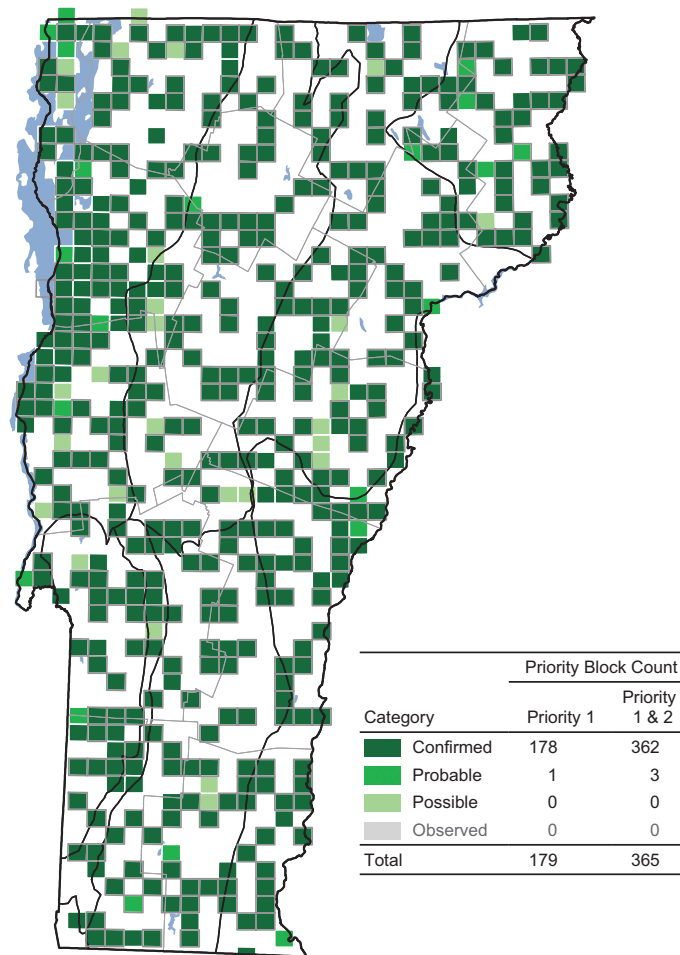
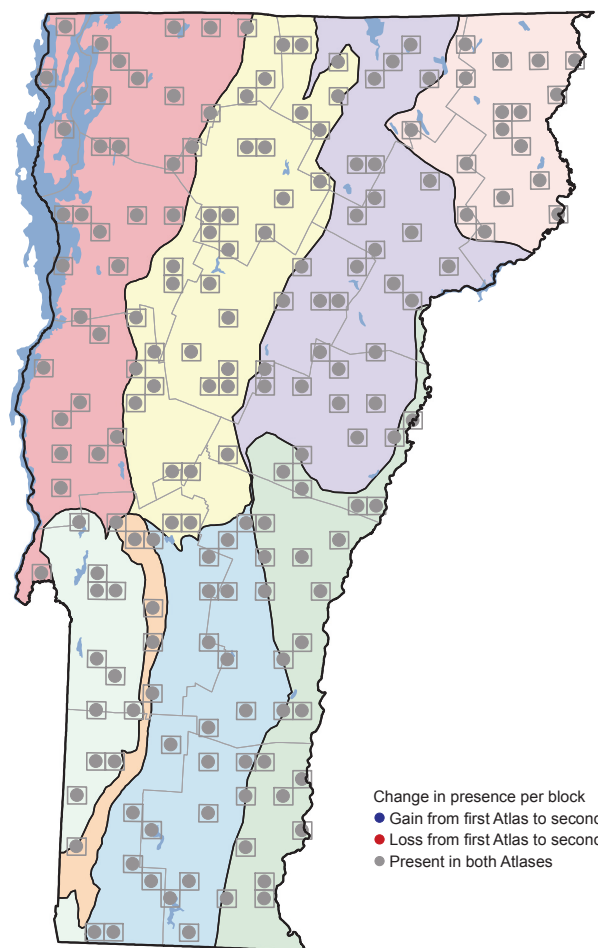
mont, mostly but not exclusively where there has been human disturbance (such as ski areas). The Northeast has the highest robin abundance of any region in the United States (Sauer et al. 2011).

Robins were found in every priority block during both Vermont atlases and are ubiquitous in adjacent states as well. No significant change in block occupancy was noted in the second atlases in New York, Pennsylvania, or Maryland, where each state noted a 1 percent increase (McGowan and Corwin 2008, Ellison 2010, R. Mulvihill pers. comm.). In Ontario, the American Robin appears to be expanding its range northward (Burke 2007). Whether this is a consequence of global warming, or the result of the lumbering of previously unbroken boreal forest, is uncertain. Though climate-change models predict decreases in abundance, especially in the southern portion of the range, the distribution of the American Robin in the Northeast is not expected to change (Matthews et al. 2007).

The Northeast is one of the American Robin's many strongholds, and there appear to be no threatening conservation issues currently facing the species within the region. The robin has been deemed a "super-spreader" of West Nile virus, however, and it has been suggested that its once-increasing populations leveled off due to the disease (Kilpatrick 2011). Robins are susceptible to some

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	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	179	179	+ 0	+ 0

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	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	100	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

pesticides that they are exposed to through their diet of earthworms, but major mortality incidents from poisoning have not occurred in several decades (Sallabanks and James 1999). The species is considered a potential pest to fruit and berry growers in the fall, when migrants band into marauding hordes; surprisingly, fruits high in sucrose (greater than 15 percent) are avoided (Sallabanks and James 1999). The American Robin has a strong likelihood of continuing as one of Vermont's most abundant avian species through several more breeding bird atlases.

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