

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Known for high-speed aerial pursuits, the once regionally extirpated Peregrine Falcon has made a remarkable comeback in the Northeast. In the past twenty years, the falcon's distinctive silhouette—long, pointed wings and streamlined body—has become a more common sight in Vermont. This raptor is distributed nearly worldwide, and is absent only from Antarctica (White et al. 2002). The Peregrine Falcon breeds on remote mountain cliffs and on city bridges and skyscrapers.

Peregrine Falcons nest on horizontal ledges that offer protection from predators, weather, and human disturbance. In Vermont they nest primarily on steep natural cliffs, including both acidic and calcareous ledges in boreal and temperate forests. The breeding population has been monitored closely since reintroduction efforts began in 1977. Twenty-nine pairs bred in Vermont in 2003, 34 in 2007. In 2008 the population reached a post-recovery record of 38 pairs, which fledged at least 59 young. The average number of young per territorial pair from 1984 to 2008 was 1.56; the average number during the atlas years was 1.25 (Fowle et al. 2008). Vermont's productivity falls well within the range of 1 or 2 fledglings per nest that Hickey and Anderson (1969) and Wootton and Bell (1992) established as indicative of a healthy population. Breeding usually begins in late winter; the earliest egg date recorded during the atlas was 10 April. The incubation and nestling stages average 3 months. The latest fledging date recorded was 2 August. Eyries were either former Common Raven nests or depressions on rock ledges.

The Peregrine Falcon's distribution has expanded dramatically in Vermont in the past fifteen years and includes breeding pairs in all biophysical regions except the Vermont Valley. An apparent lack of suitable nesting sites in the southern portion of the state may be limiting expansion to that region. The first atlas recorded a single falcon that was not in a priority block, but did not confirm breeding. Nearly 100 young Peregrine Falcons were released from three Vermont hack sites from 1977 to 1987, launching the species' recovery in the state. A pair first re-

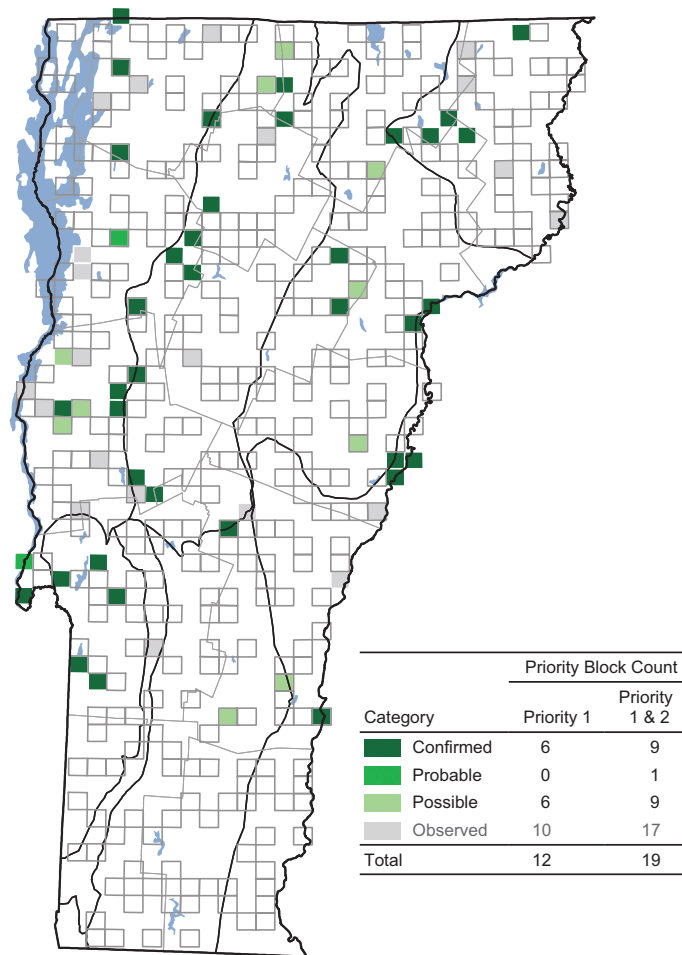
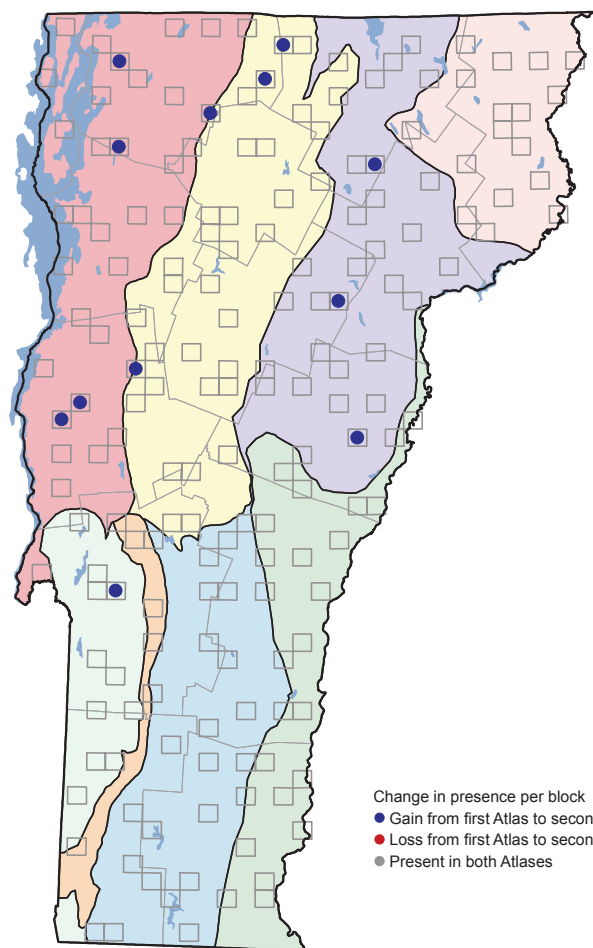


turned to Mount Pisgah in 1984 and bred successfully in 1985. Due to the banning of DDT, reintroduction efforts, endangered species status and associated nest site protection, the population has since increased steadily (USFWS 1998, Fowle et al. 2000).

Similar recovery trends have been documented range-wide. The population in Vermont's designated federal recovery region, which includes New Hampshire, Maine, and northern New York, increased from 80 to 97 territorial pairs from 2003 to 2007, and 103 pairs fledged 151 young in 2008 (USFWS unpubl. data, B. Loucks pers. comm.). Atlases in nearby states have shown similar expansions. New York confirmed 2 breeding pairs during its first atlas and had a total population of 62 territorial pairs in the final season of its second atlas (Loucks pers. comm.). Pennsylvania confirmed 3 pairs in its first atlas and 22 in its second (Wilson et al. 2012), and Maryland saw a 157 percent increase in distribution from its first atlas (Ellison 2010).

The Peregrine Falcon was removed from the federal endangered species list in 1999 and from Vermont's endangered species list in 2005. Although Vermont was the first state in the region to de-list the Peregrine Falcon, it remains a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

Although recovery of the Peregrine Falcon population has been successful, human disturbance at nesting sites (Fowle et al. 2000) and adverse weather could still compromise its future (Newton and Mearns 1988, Ratcliffe 1993). Contaminants, including fire-retardant chemicals, have been found at elevated levels in several Peregrine Falcon populations, including those in Vermont and the northeastern region (Eriksson et al. 2001, Lindburg et al. 2004, Da Chen et al. 2008). Continued monitoring of occupancy and productivity, and periodic collection of un-



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	5	+ 5	+ 500
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	3	+ 3	+ 300
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	3	+ 3	+ 300
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	0	12	+ 12	+1200

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	8	32
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
Northern Green Mountains	6	21
Northern Vermont Piedmont	6	21
Southern Green Mountains	5	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	2	5
Taconic Mountains	4	5
Vermont Valley	0	0

hatched eggs for contaminant testing will determine the impact and extent of these threats. Managing the threat of human disturbance through seasonal cliff closures and long-term breeding site protection will ensure the species' continued success in Vermont.

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