

Northern Waterthrush

Parkesia noveboracensis



True to its name, the Northern Waterthrush is a bird of boreal wetlands, where it bobs its body and wags its tail along the periphery of bogs, swamps, and streams near the protection of dense shrubs and trees. The Northern Waterthrush breeds from northwestern Alaska to Newfoundland, crossing the Canadian border into the northern United States. It ranges into New England, New York, and southward through the Appalachian Mountains to eastern West Virginia. It also breeds in the western Great Lake states and in the Rocky Mountains southward into Idaho and Montana. An isolated population occurs in southwestern Oregon. The Northern Waterthrush is most abundant at opposite ends of its breeding range, in Newfoundland and British Columbia, with the continental population estimated at 13 million (RMBO 2007). The Northern Waterthrush has been historically considered a “common migrant” but a “less common local summer resident” in Vermont (Forbush 1929). The first atlas documented them in 54 percent of the surveyed blocks (Kibbe 1985). Northern Waterthrushes winter in the mangrove jungles and second-growth forests of the Western Hemisphere, from south Florida and the Caribbean to northern South America, and return to Vermont in early May.

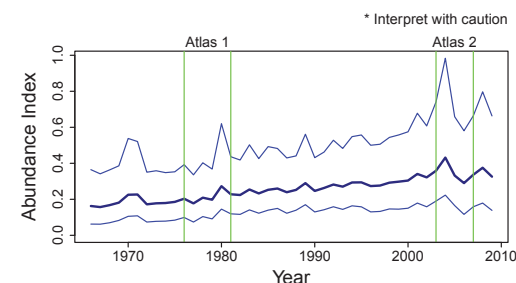
In Vermont this warbler prefers alder thickets, boreal bogs, and the edges of beaver ponds, lakes, and streams, provided shrub and fern cover is dense. The female selects a nest site, on the ground close to water, often in overturned roots or depressions in a bank (Eaton 1995). Nests are difficult to find. One pair was observed nest building on 7 June and a nest with eggs was reported 11 June. The male sings less frequently as the breeding season progresses, which makes the species difficult to find in mid-summer without some extra effort. Young leave the nest before they can fly and are cared for by both parents for 4 to 5 weeks. Most confirmed sightings were of fledglings (N = 11), documented between 13 June and 26 July. An early migrant, most Northern Waterthrushes leave Vermont by mid-August.

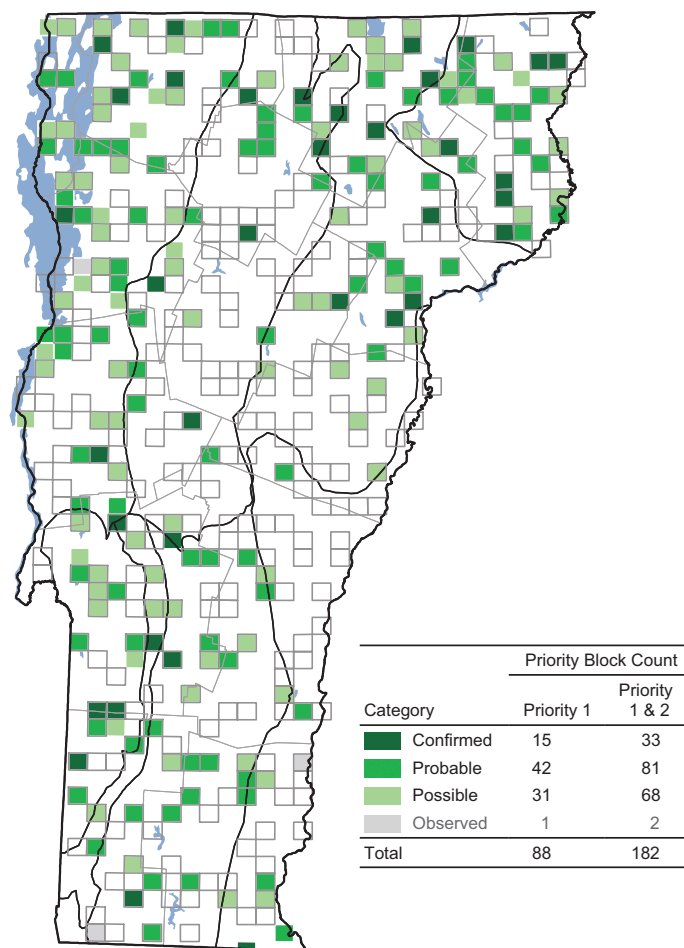
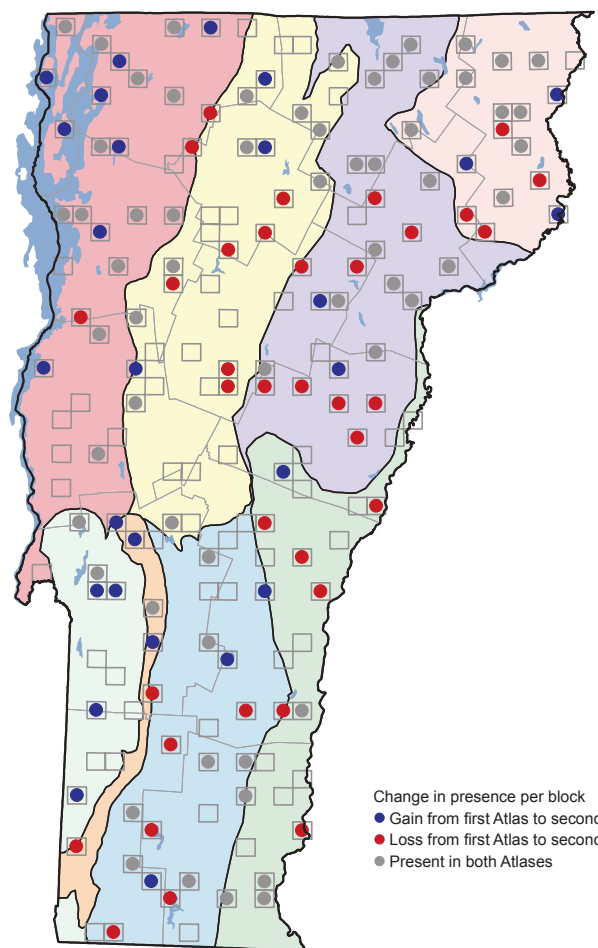
During the second atlas the Northern Waterthrush occurred throughout Vermont, wherever suitable hab-

itat was available. A slight decline in occurrence was noted, with the decrease most evident in the eastern two-thirds of the state, particularly in the Green Mountains and Southern Vermont Piedmont. These losses were partially offset by increases in the western third of the state. Northern Waterthrush was most frequently encountered in the Champlain Valley and in the Northeastern Highlands; the latter area has been a traditional stronghold. Increasing forestation along the low-gradient streams of the Champlain Valley may have led to the increase in that region.

The Breeding Bird Survey data for Vermont indicate a non-significant, positive trend in abundance from 1982 to 2007. Populations have been stable range-wide and in eastern North America (Sauer et al. 2011). The New York atlas data showed a 4 percent increase in the percentage of blocks hosting Northern Waterthrush, with no changes in distribution (McGowan 2008). In Ontario, a 12 percent increase occurred between the first and second atlases (Cadman et al. 2007). In Pennsylvania, at the southern edge of the breeding range, block occupancy decreased by 29 percent (Wilson et al. 2012). This parallels the range contraction predicted for Northern Waterthrush in the face of increasing temperatures (Matthews et al. 2007).

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	16	21	+ 5	+ 31
Northeastern Highlands	13	12	- 1	- 8
Northern Green Mountains	16	13	- 3	- 19
Northern Vermont Piedmont	23	16	- 7	- 30
Southern Green Mountains	15	11	- 4	- 27
Southern Vermont Piedmont	9	5	- 4	- 44
Taconic Mountains	2	6	+ 4	+ 200
Vermont Valley	2	4	+ 2	+ 100
Totals	96	88	- 8	- 8

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	60	24
Northeastern Highlands	70	14
Northern Green Mountains	35	13
Northern Vermont Piedmont	52	19
Southern Green Mountains	50	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	15	3
Taconic Mountains	66	8
Vermont Valley	87	4

No apparent threats to the Northern Waterthrush's habitat within Vermont are evident and the bird's continued existence in the state appears secure. Critical wintering habitat, however, has been in broad decline along the Central and South American coasts and throughout the Caribbean (Eaton 1995).

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