

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Melanerpes carolinus

Most field guides show Vermont outside the Red-bellied Woodpecker's regular breeding range. The species is depicted as breeding in the eastern United States, barely reaching north to southern Ontario. Shackelford et al. (2000) described its entire range as expanding northward, but they failed to list any records for Vermont. There is no evidence that the Red-bellied Woodpecker occurred historically in northern New England or northern New York (Bent 1939). Although not mentioned in the first Vermont atlas, single Red-bellied Woodpeckers were recorded in at least five locations in the Champlain Valley from 1978 until 1982; it was not until May 1989 that two birds were reported from a single location, in Poultney.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are found in a variety of habitats including deciduous woodlands, pine forests and plantations, hedgerows, and riparian corridors. Although they are less likely to be found in areas dominated by spruce-fir forest, Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been reported from Victory Basin Wildlife Management Area in Essex County and Mount Hor, which straddles Caledonia and Orleans counties. The Red-bellied Woodpecker is a year-round resident throughout its range, although some spring and fall movements have been noted (Shackelford et al. 2000). The only Vermont nest (with young) found to date was on 5 July 2008. The usual clutch is 4 eggs; incubation takes about 12 days. The young remain in the nest for nearly a month and may be dependent on the adults for up to 10 weeks post-fledging (Kilham 1961). Locating fledglings proved to be the most common method of confirmation, with 6 records from late June through early July.

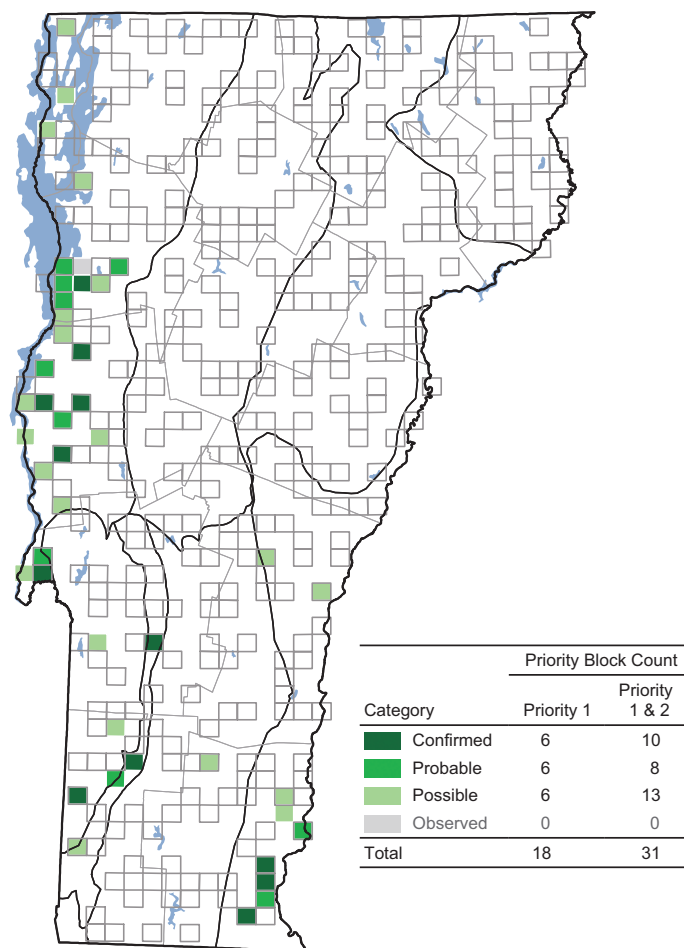
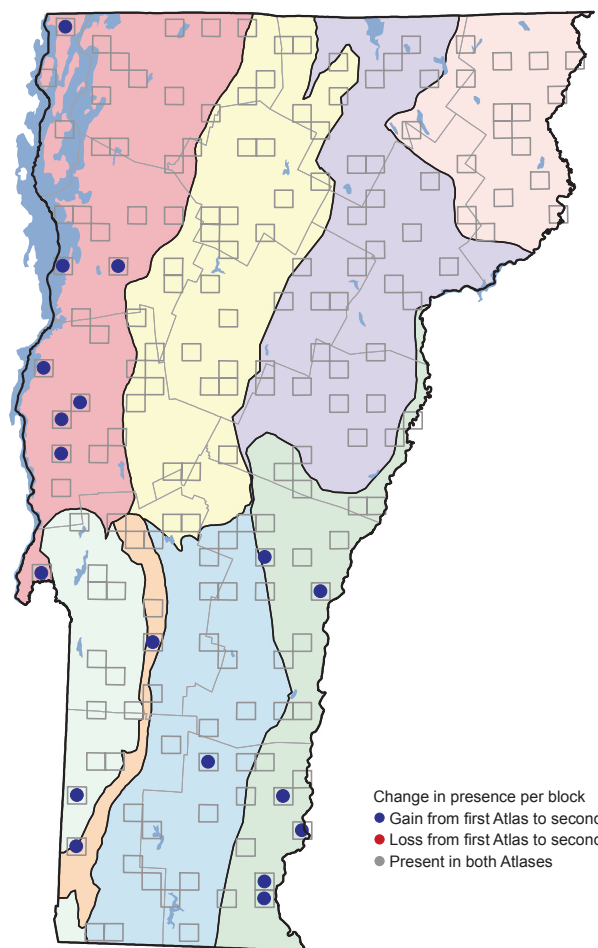
The appearance of the Red-bellied Woodpecker in the second atlas was not a surprise. Populations have been spreading north from the southern Hudson River and Connecticut River for several decades, and there have been numerous records from Vermont since the late 1970s. The western portion of the state was one of the first areas to be colonized, although early records from New Hampshire indicate the southern Connecticut River val-



ley was an alternative avenue into the state. The current distribution map shows concentrations of Red-bellied Woodpeckers in the southern portion of the Champlain Valley and in the Southern Vermont Piedmont. Although the atlas records are generally from open farmland areas at lower elevations, breeding season reports to the Vermont Bird Records Committee since completion of the second atlas suggest that more mountainous regions in the central and northeastern parts of the state are now being colonized (VCE unpubl. data).

Meade (1988) recognized an ongoing expansion of Red-bellied Woodpeckers in New York's first atlas, and the second atlas found that the number of occupied blocks had more than doubled (McGowan and Corwin 2008). Breeding Bird Survey data have also shown a significant increase (8.6 percent per year) in the Red-bellied Woodpecker in New York from 1982 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011). The second Ontario atlas documented a northward expansion and population increases of 250 percent (Bavrlie 2007). While most of the increase and the greatest population density were north of Lake Erie, the bird's range also expanded northeast along the north side of the St. Lawrence River. In New Hampshire and Maine, there have been more than 100 sightings in June and July since 1982, concentrated mainly in the southern halves of the two states (eBird 2011).

The Red-bellied Woodpecker appears to be well on its way to becoming a common and widespread addition to Vermont's avifauna, at least at lower elevations. The species is often first noted at feeders, ingesting sunflower



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	8	+ 8	+ 800
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	6	+ 6	+ 600
Taconic Mountains	0	1	+ 1	+ 100
Vermont Valley	0	2	+ 2	+ 200
Totals	0	18	+ 18	+1800

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	26	61
Northeastern Highlands	0	0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0
Southern Green Mountains	1	3
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	26
Taconic Mountains	4	3
Vermont Valley	25	6

seeds and suet. Feeders can benefit a variety of species by improving survival rates and reproductive success (Robb et al. 2008). Observers in Vermont should be on the lookout for this colorful and vociferous addition to our state.

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