Upland Sandpiper

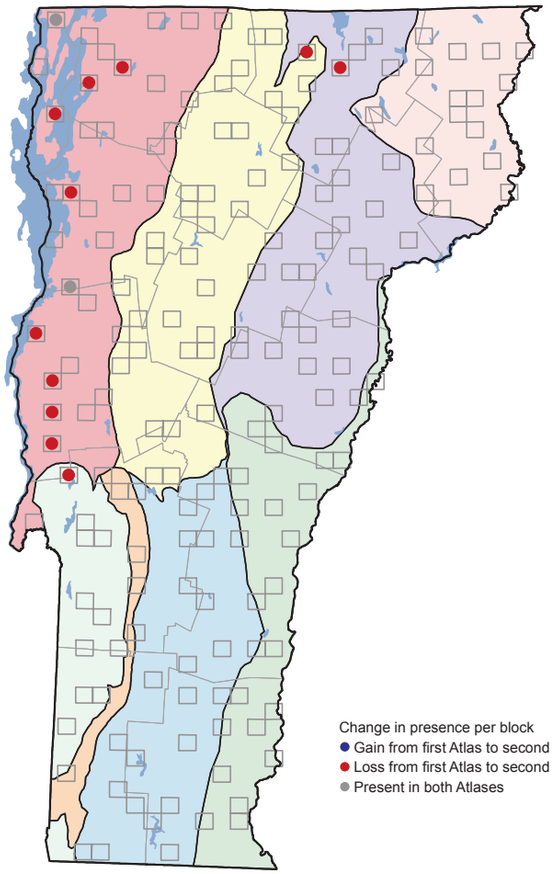
Bartramia longicauda

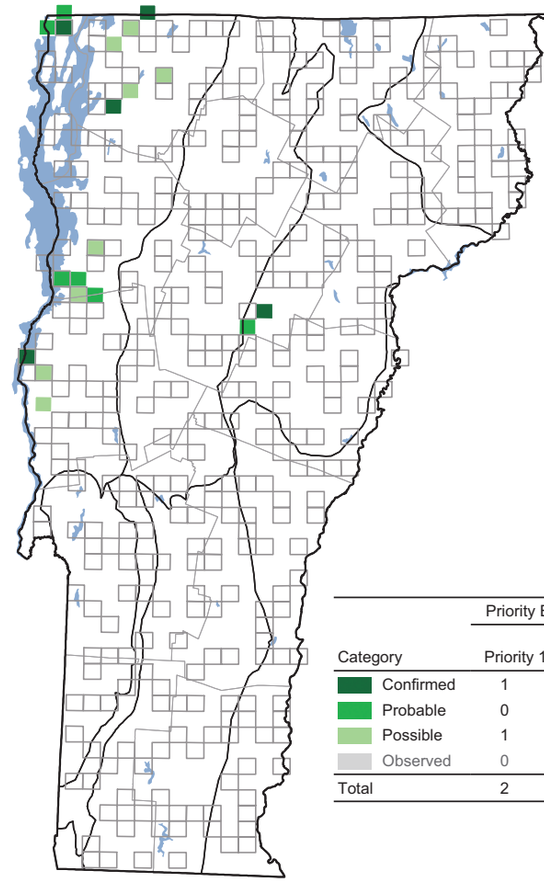
The Upland Sandpiper long ago forsook the ocean shore for the rich prairies of interior North America. This medium-sized sandpiper has a round head and large, dark eyes and issues an unmistakable, long and mellow "wolf whistle" in flight. No other bird is quite like it on its limited Vermont nesting grounds. Vermont has always been on the fringe of the Upland Sandpiper's breeding range. Populations in the Northeast increased in the early and mid-1900s, when midwestern prairies and hayfields were replaced by row crops and development. More recently, grassland habitat in Vermont has become increasingly inhospitable for the Upland Sandpiper. Three factors contribute to their declines: first, grasslands have reforested or have been developed; second, grasslands have become increasingly fragmented; and third, the timing and frequency of haying and grazing have increased in intensity.

The Upland Sandpiper nests on the ground in a scrape lined by both the male and female, selecting dry sites within hayfields or pastures of intermediate height. This single-brooded species produces clutches of 4 eggs and rarely renests after nest failure. Incubation lasts from 23 to 24 days and hatching occurs between 28 May and 1 July. Shortly after hatching, chicks quickly move to more open areas within the grassland complex (Houston and Bowen 2001).

Upland Sandpipers underwent a significant population decline between atlas surveys, appearing in 85 percent fewer blocks. During the first atlas, Vermont's small population was concentrated in the Champlain Valley. The sandpiper was also recorded in 1 block in the Northern Vermont Piedmont during the first atlas; that region produced no records during the second atlas. Confirmed on only 2 Champlain Valley blocks during the second atlas, the majority of documented breeding occurred in Franklin and Grand Isle counties. Although not within atlas blocks, breeding was also reported at two locations in Washington County, including the Knapp Airport in Berlin. Further evidence of the scarcity of this species was collected in 2004–5: in 774 point counts in 199 hayfields and 18 pastures encompassing 1325 hectares (3273 acres) throughout Chittenden, Franklin, and Addison counties (Perlut et al. 2008b), only two Upland Sandpipers were found (A. Strong unpubl. data). Breeding Bird Survey data from 1982 to 2007 showed that populations were too sparse to estimate in Vermont, Massachusetts, or New Hampshire, although the New York population showed marked declines (4.9 percent annually) and Maine was stable (Sauer et al. 2011). In Pennsylvania the Upland Sandpiper was found in 56 percent fewer blocks during the second atlas (Wilson et al. 2012). This species is listed as endangered in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, and as threatened in Maine.

Although the Upland Sandpiper shows strong area sensitivity, almost nothing is known about its specific habitat requirements in Vermont. Research by Vickery et al. (1994) in Maine and Bollinger (1995) in central New York have provided insights regarding the grassland landscapes that are most suitable for this species. In Maine, the Upland Sandpiper was found infrequently in areas with less than 50 hectares (124 acres) of contiguous grassland but occurred more commonly in landscapes with 200 hectares (494 acres) of contiguous grassland. In New York, this species was most abundant in older hayfields dominated by short and sparse grasses (Bollinger 1995). These data strongly suggest that the Champlain Valley will continue to be the only region in Vermont that offers the potential of large areas of unbroken habitat. Because of





Category	Priority Block Count: Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	1	2
Probable	0	1
Possible	1	5
Observed	0	0
Total	2	8

CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	10	2	- 8	- 80
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	1	0	- 1	- 100
Northern Vermont Piedmont	1	0	- 1	- 100
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	1	0	- 1	- 100
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	13	2	- 11	- 85

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	10	100
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

this sandpiper's reluctance to renest, conservation measures should focus in two directions. First, delay mowing until at least 15 July to avoid disturbing nesting birds. Although young may leave the nest in mid-June, their flight skills develop over time and chicks require a substantial undisturbed post-fledging period. Second, maintain or increase the extent of large, contiguous grassland areas. Opportunities are available on farms that maintain a mix of corn and grass, where corn can be phased out of rotation and replaced by permanent grass.

NOAH PERLUT