

Pileated Woodpecker

Dryocopus pileatus

The largest New England woodpecker, the pileated is both strikingly colored—black, white, red—and loud; its jackhammer drumming and maniacal cries ring through the woods. Even where the Pileated Woodpecker is common, the sight of such a large, gorgeous bird hammering wood chips from a tree trunk remains exciting. The species breeds across the forests of southern Canada, throughout much of the eastern United States from New England southward to the Gulf Coast, west into the belts of woodlands that trace the rivers of the Great Plains, and in the Pacific Northwest to central California (AOU 1998). Thompson (1853) reported this species in an appendix to his list of bird species in Vermont, and Cutting (1884) referred to the Pileated Woodpecker as wild and solitary, implying that it was not common during the era when much of the state's forests had been cleared. Forbush (1927) stated that in Vermont the Pileated Woodpecker was a "rather rare resident, found mostly in forested hills." As forests replaced the extensive agricultural landscape of nineteenth-century Vermont, this year-round woodpecker has become more common, but is still not encountered by most Vermont residents on a daily basis. The oblong, rectangular holes left in tree trunks by foraging birds are more often seen than the birds themselves. Feeding excavations remain visible for years and serve as a reminder of this woodpecker's widespread presence. Old nesting and brooding cavities, distinguished by their more rounded entrances, are utilized as refuges by a variety of wildlife (Bull and Jackson 1995).

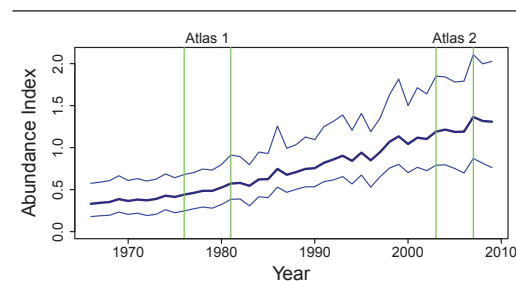
Pileated Woodpeckers are found in both coniferous and deciduous forests, and use landscapes ranging from large, undisturbed forest tracts to small woodlots near suburban developments. In New Hampshire these birds are ordinarily found below 610 meters (2000 feet) in elevation (Kilham and Foss 1994); a similar limit applies in Vermont. At least some large trees or snags are required for the Pileated Woodpecker's nest and roost cavities. Nests are found primarily in dead trees but sometimes in living ones (Bull and Jackson 1995); such trees may be along the forest edge or in the forest interior. Trees that

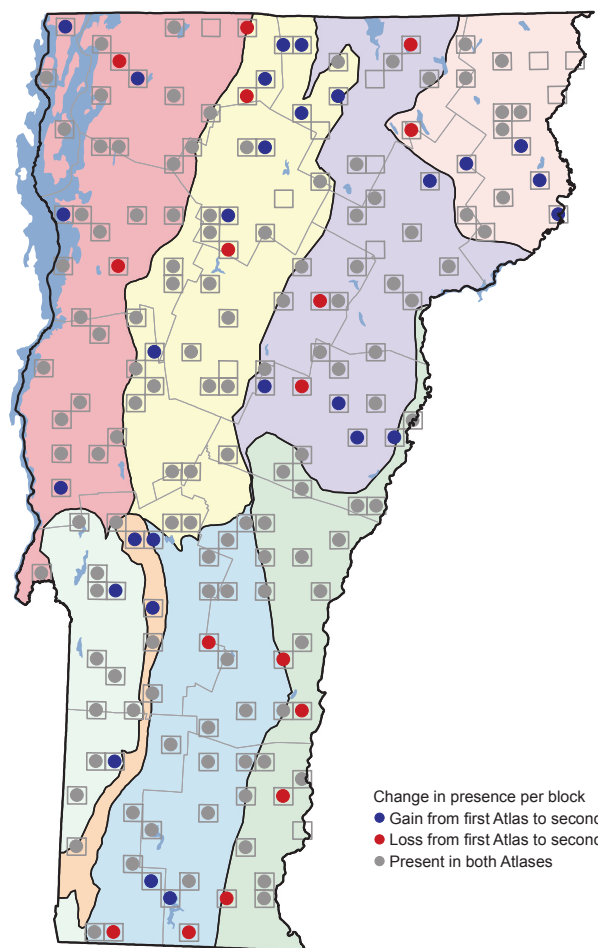


were victim to Dutch elm disease have been frequently used for nesting and foraging (e.g., Nicholls 1994). During the second atlas, nestlings were found from 12 June to 1 August ($N = 7$) and fledglings from 20 May to 9 August ($N = 24$). Although the Pileated Woodpecker is less tolerant of people than other woodpecker species in Vermont, it is conspicuous in flight and at times very vocal. Although the species becomes quiet during nesting, it seems likely that the Pileated Woodpecker, if present, would be detected during the time required to complete coverage of an atlas block.

During the second atlas, the Pileated Woodpecker was distributed throughout most of the state and was found in 9 percent more blocks than during the first atlas. Although the number of birds per route is low, Breeding Bird Survey data for the Pileated Woodpecker show a sig-

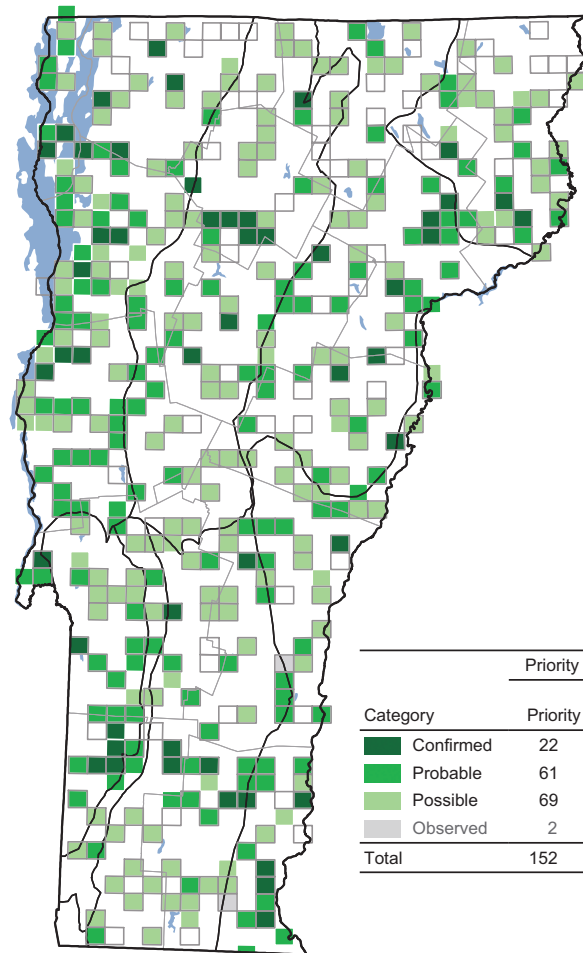
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	28	29	+ 1	+ 4
Northeastern Highlands	10	13	+ 3	+ 30
Northern Green Mountains	24	30	+ 6	+ 25
Northern Vermont Piedmont	22	24	+ 2	+ 9
Southern Green Mountains	24	24	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	16	- 4	- 20
Taconic Mountains	9	11	+ 2	+ 22
Vermont Valley	3	5	+ 2	+ 67
Totals	140	152	+ 12	+ 9



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	22	46
Probable	61	120
Possible	69	142
Observed	2	2
Total	152	308

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	89	21
Northeastern Highlands	70	8
Northern Green Mountains	86	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	78	17
Southern Green Mountains	87	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	82	11
Taconic Mountains	95	6
Vermont Valley	100	3

nificant 2.0 percent annual increase from 1982 to 2007 in eastern North America; for Vermont the increase was a significant 3.1 percent per year. Significant increases in BBS data were found during the same period for New Hampshire and New York. Second atlases in Maryland (Ellison 2010), Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012), and New York (McGowan and Corwin 2008) showed large increases of similar magnitude (34, 38, and 29 percent, respectively) in Pileated Woodpecker presence. In Ontario the second atlas also showed an increase (Naylor 2007).

After losing much of its forested habitat with the

spread of agriculture in New England, the Pileated Woodpecker has in recent decades reclaimed former breeding areas as forests regrew and again provided mature trees of sufficient size (DeGraaf et al. 2006). As long as forests retain sufficient large trees for nesting, roosting, and foraging, we can expect to enjoy the presence of this impressive bird for years to come.

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