

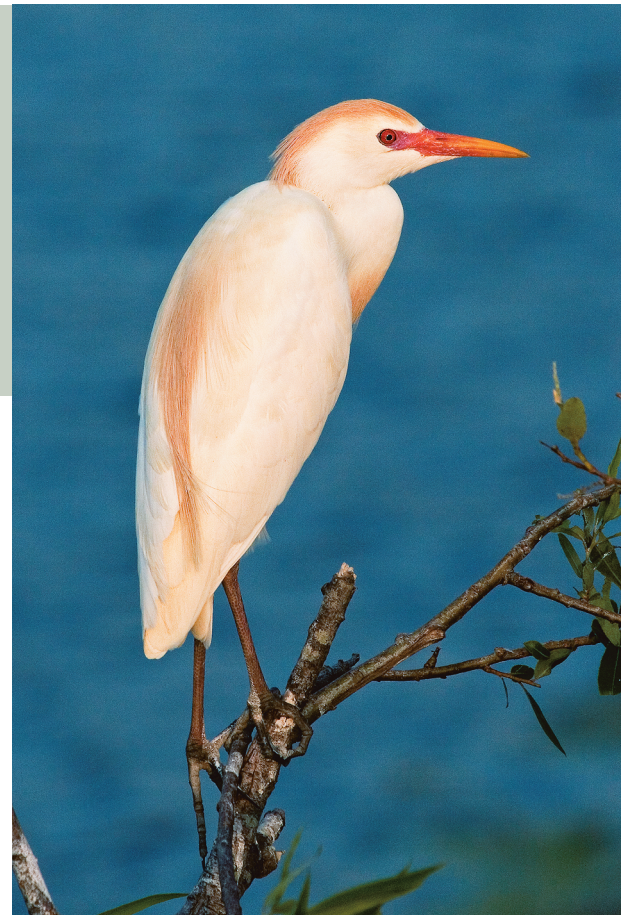
Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

A bird with unusual dispersal capabilities and adaptable feeding habits, the Cattle Egret may be observed in tropical and temporal climates throughout the world. Native to Africa, this species began its range expansion in the late 1800s and arrived in North America in the early 1950s. Cattle egrets are now widespread throughout Central America and much of North America, where they breed in all but four contiguous states and five Canadian provinces (Telfair 2006). In Vermont, the first recorded sighting was in 1961 (Carleton 1961); the first nesting record came from Young Island, Grand Isle County, in 1975 (Ellison 1985). The first nesting record for Lake Champlain, however, came two years earlier, on Four Brothers Islands in Westport, New York (Carleton 1980).

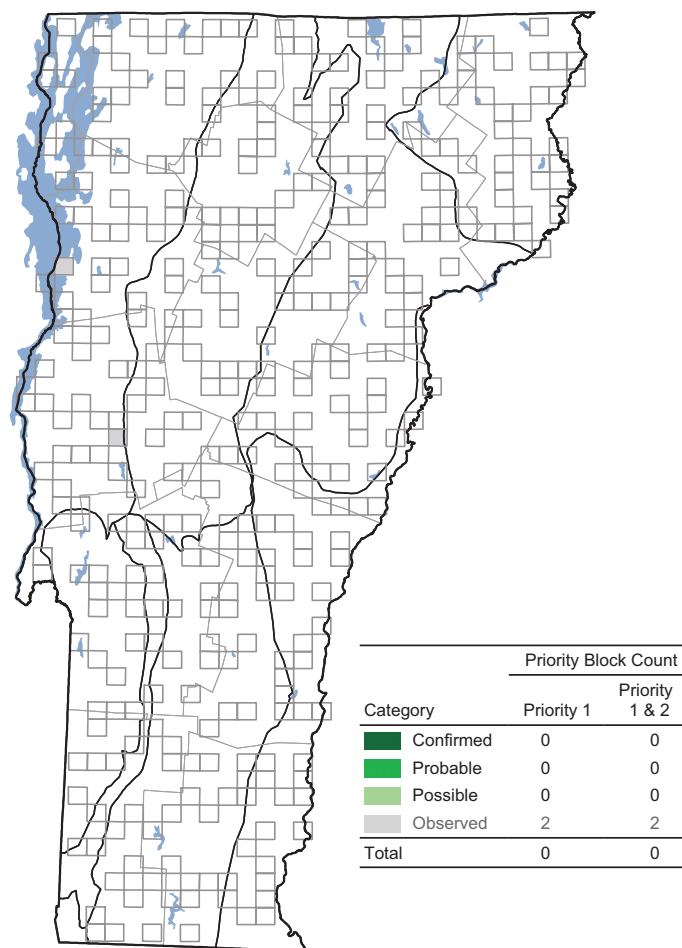
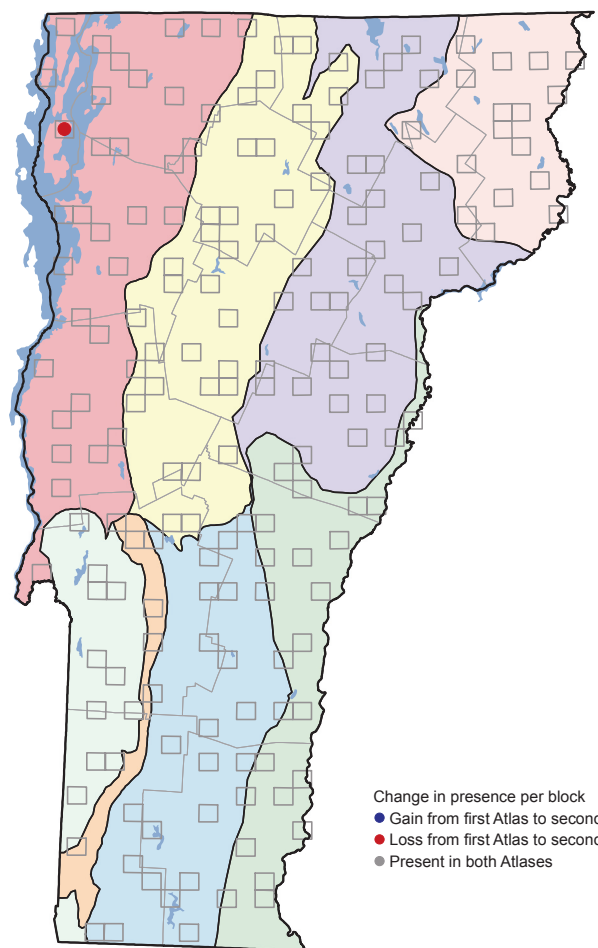
The Cattle Egret is a species that nests in colonies, usually with other herons and ibises. It feeds in pastured fields, often associated with cattle. Islands in Lake Champlain provide suitable nesting sites in close proximity to pastureland. The species has nested consistently with Black-crowned Night Herons, initially on both Four Brothers Islands and Young Island, then only on Young Island for many years, and most recently back on Four Brothers Islands as well. The shift back to Four Brothers, by both Cattle Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons, took place in the early 1990s, a result of trees dying on Young Island because of dense nesting by Double-crested Cormorants. Cattle Egrets build stick nests in trees, often only 3 to 4 meters (9 to 12 feet) above ground, lay a typical clutch of 3 to 4 eggs, and raise a single brood each year; like other herons they usually acquire their buff-colored breeding plumage and breed for the first time when three years of age (Telfair 2006). Although this species is often sighted in Vermont in late April, nesting usually does not begin until mid or late May (Ellison 1985, D. E. Capen unpubl. data).

In recent years, numbers of Cattle Egrets on Lake Champlain have declined gradually. The highest recorded count of nests was 22, on Young Island in 1979 (Ellison 1985); counts since 1990 have not exceeded 6 nesting pairs, dropping to 2 pairs on Four Brothers Is-



lands in 2009 (D. E. Capen unpubl. data). Atlas projects in New York and Ontario have documented similar declines in numbers of blocks where Cattle Egrets have been confirmed nesting. In New York, this species was found breeding in 8 blocks during the first atlas, but only 5 during the second atlas; in upstate New York, the decline was from 2 blocks to 1, and they occurred only on Four Brothers Islands (McCrimmon 2008). In Ontario, the Cattle Egret was found in only a single block during the first atlas, and not at all during the second atlas (Cadman et al. 2007).

The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (Kushlan et al. 2002) classified the Cattle Egret as a breeding species in 24 Bird Conservation Regions in North America, and concluded the species was not at risk, noting that more than 160,000 pairs breed in Texas alone. An analysis of Breeding Bird Survey data shows a peak in numbers for the entire United States during the mid-1980s. For the Northeast, BBS data reveal a population increase in Cattle Egrets from 1966 through mid-1970s, then a slow downward trend through 2007 (Sauer et al. 2008). Breeding records for this species in the Champlain Valley of Vermont and New York correspond with the regional and national trend of a declining population. Such a population trend is to be expected for a species that pioneers a new environment—indeed a new continent—



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	1	0	- 1	- 100
Northeastern Highlands	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	0	0	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	1	0	- 1	- 100

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	0	0
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

and finds suitable habitat (McCrimmon et al. 1997). The apparent restriction in numbers and distribution of Cattle Egrets after the species' initial expansion into North American may mean that this species will not be recorded as a breeding bird in the third Vermont atlas.

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