

Hermit Thrush

Catharus guttatus

Often a quiet and unobtrusive bird, the Hermit Thrush abandons its namesake reputation at dawn and dusk, when its ethereal, flute-like song dominates much of the chorus across Vermont's forests. The Hermit Thrush is one of North America's most widespread forest songbirds; an estimated 60 million breed from southern Alaska to Newfoundland, and southward in the west to Arizona and New Mexico (RMBO 2007). In the East, it is found along the Appalachian Mountains to Virginia (Jones and Donovan 1996). In the late 1800s, the heyday of farming in Vermont was detrimental for the species. Reforestation of Vermont's pasturelands since then has undoubtedly greatly benefited the Hermit Thrush, which was proclaimed Vermont's state bird in 1927.

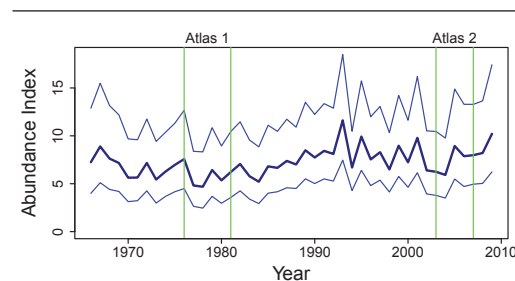
Given the broad range of ecological zones that the Hermit Thrush occupies across the continent, it is not surprising that it makes itself at home in a wide variety of forest habitats. In the Northeast, it may be found in deciduous hardwoods, mixed conifers, and northern boreal forest up to mountaintop krummholz. The Hermit Thrush usually prefers habitats drier than those occupied by Veery and Swainson's and Wood thrushes, and often establishes its territory near small forest gaps within larger contiguous forests (Jones and Donovan 1996). The earliest breeders of Vermont's woodland thrushes, Hermit Thrushes appear in early April. Nest building was noted ($N = 10$) as early as 8 May and as late as 19 July. Nests are generally placed on the ground. Atlas workers found 27 nests with eggs, the earliest 14 May and the last 1 August. Nests with young ($N = 10$) were found from 2 June through 15 August. It is suspected that they raise second broods, but there is no documentation of that in Vermont (Kibbe 1985). Late nesting may represent a second attempt after loss of the first nest. Fledglings leave the nest 12 days after hatching and remain dependent upon the parents for some time thereafter. Dependent fledglings, which accounted for 60 percent of the confirmations, were seen from 6 June until 22 August ($N = 71$). The Hermit Thrush's abundance and prolonged fledgling care counterbalance its retiring nature for atlasers who are seeking to confirm nesting.

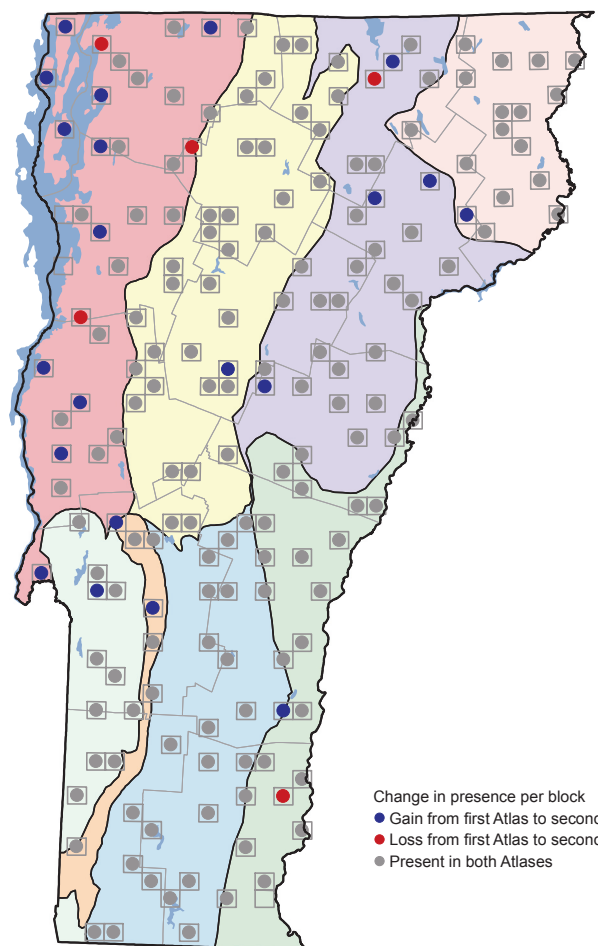


Hermit Thrush is found in virtually every atlas block in Vermont's seven biophysical regions, with the exception of the Champlain Valley. Increases in block occupancy by Hermit Thrush were seen in almost every region, but the most dramatic changes were in the agricultural areas of the Vermont Valley and especially in the Champlain Valley, where occurrence was lowest during the first atlas.

Although occurrence of Hermit Thrush in Vermont increased, abundance decreased by 5.5 percent from 1989 to 2010 ($p = 0.10$), based on Vermont's Forest Bird Monitoring Program (S. Faccio unpubl. data). That program surveys unmanaged forests, where maturation could underlie declines in abundance for a species that prefers mid-successional stands (Noon 1981). New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York all show annual increases in Hermit Thrush abundance from 1982 to 2007, although only New York's trend is significant (Sauer et al. 2011). New York's second atlas found that occurrence had increased by 31 percent (McGowan and Corwin 2008). Similar or greater increases were found during second atlases

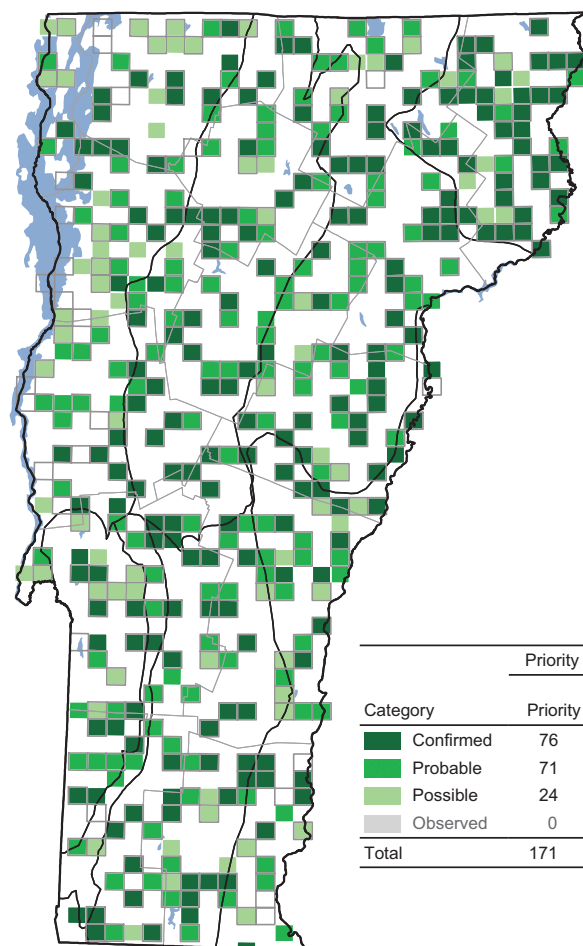
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	20	28	+ 8	+ 40
Northeastern Highlands	16	17	+ 1	+ 6
Northern Green Mountains	34	35	+ 1	+ 3
Northern Vermont Piedmont	26	29	+ 3	+ 12
Southern Green Mountains	26	27	+ 1	+ 4
Southern Vermont Piedmont	20	19	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	10	11	+ 1	+ 10
Vermont Valley	3	5	+ 2	+ 67
Totals	155	171	+ 16	+ 10



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	76	173
Probable	71	126
Possible	24	43
Observed	0	0
Total	171	342

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	79	17
Northeastern Highlands	100	11
Northern Green Mountains	100	19
Northern Vermont Piedmont	98	19
Southern Green Mountains	100	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	87	10
Taconic Mountains	95	6
Vermont Valley	87	2

in Pennsylvania (37 percent; Wilson et al. 2012), Maryland (60 percent; Ellison 2010), and Ontario (Cadman et al. 2007).

Forest fragmentation remains an important conservation issue for many species of wildlife, including the Hermit Thrush, which prefers large tracts of forests. Another threat to the species is climate change; decreases in Hermit Thrush are forecasted (Matthews et al. 2007). Despite these threats, Vermont's state bird is likely to remain a stalwart in Vermont's forest-dominated landscapes. It uses a wide range of forested habitats and tolerates forest

openings, and climate-warming analysis does not project the species to disappear from the state. The Hermit Thrush winters in the United States to some degree, and consequently is not subject to the tropical deforestation issues that most thrushes face.

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