

Barn Owl

Tyto alba



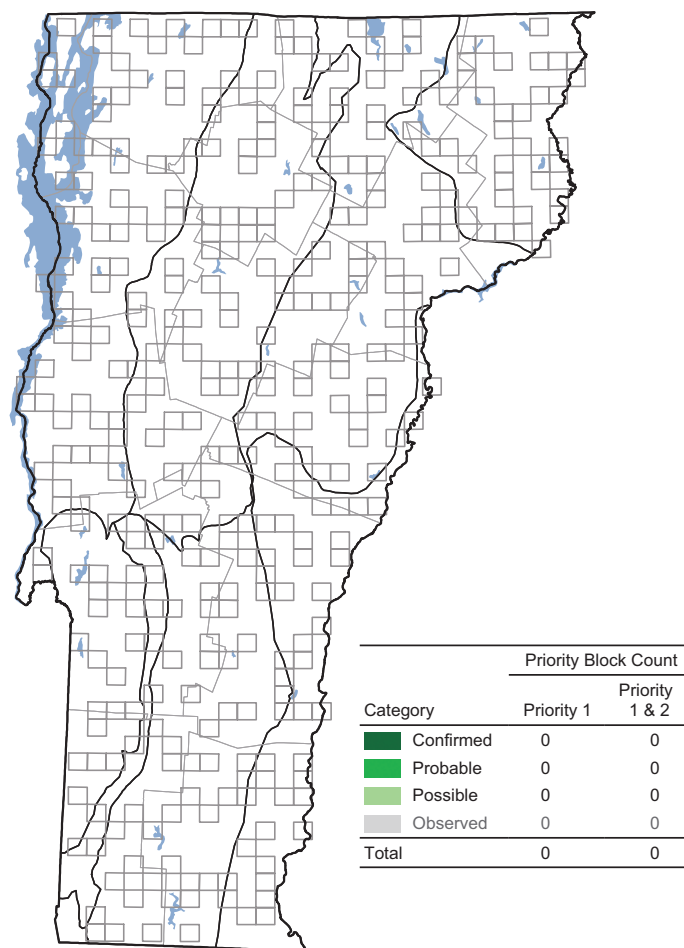
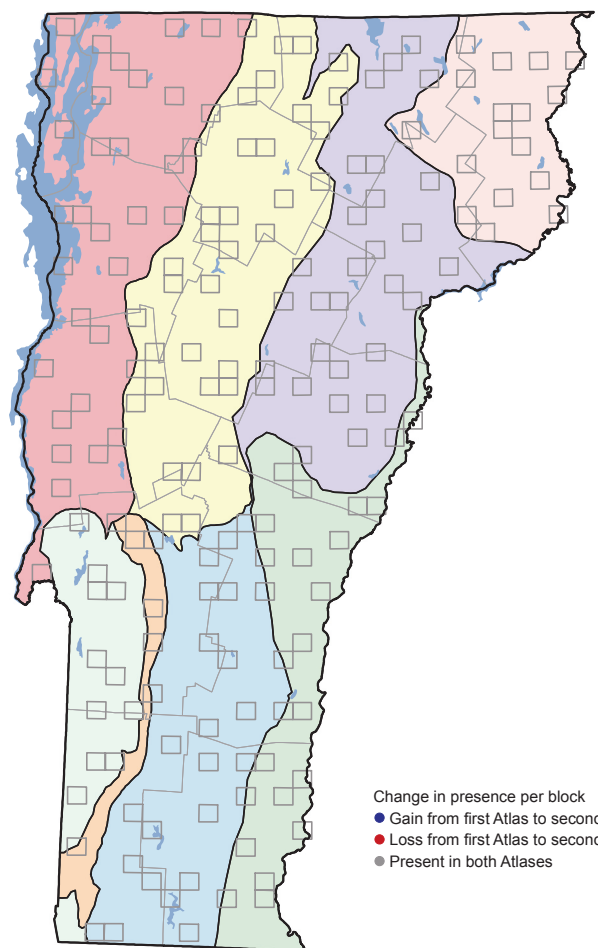
Although one of the most widely distributed birds of prey in the world, the Barn Owl can barely claim Vermont as part of its range. Range maps of the species' North American distribution show it occurring across the United States north to the Great Lakes with a finger extending up the Champlain Valley. In 1976, Barn Owls were found breeding in an abandoned chimney in Addison (Laughlin 1985). Fairly regular reports of Barn Owls continued through the early 1980s within the Champlain Valley. However, there have been only four reports in the past twenty-five years: in Barre in 1992, Landsgrove in 1997, Ferrisburg in 1999, and Addison in 2008 and 2009.

Barn Owls nest in a wide variety of man-made structures, including barns and silos, as well as in hollow trees and crevices in cliffs (Laughlin 1985, Marti et al. 2005). The adults forage in open habitats including agricultural fields, pastures, hayfields, and marshland. Because the Barn Owl is strictly nocturnal and probably does not issue territorial vocalizations (Marti et al. 2005), documenting the presence of individuals, even if they are living in close proximity to humans, can be difficult. Canvassing Vermont farmers via a mailing during the first atlas did not result in additional nest records, and no comparable effort was made during the second atlas.

Laughlin (1985) details each of the few existing Barn Owl records in Vermont. All four observations reported during the first atlas were in non-priority blocks; their losses do not appear on the map that accompanies this account. All of these records were confirmations in the Champlain Valley (in the towns of Charlotte, Addison, Ferrisburgh, and Burlington). As the current distribution map shows, there were no reports during Vermont's second atlas. In Addison County, however, feathers were found in a barn (outside of a nest box) on 18 September 2008, and a bird from a different barn was photographed on 26 May 2009. In 2011 four nest boxes were occupied: one box contained a nest with two unhatched eggs (at least one chick may have hatched); another box contained three chicks (R. Olsen pers. comm.).

New Hampshire's last nesting pair was reported in 1972 near Franconia (K. M. Goldthwait pers. comm.). New York's Barn Owl population has nearly vanished, dropping by 78 percent, although there was a Champlain Valley report from Clinton County and two CO records in Ulster County in the southern part of the state during the second atlas (McGowan 2008). Pennsylvania hosts a much larger population, but the 112 blocks reporting Barn Owl in the second atlas represent a 54 percent decrease from the first atlas (Wilson et al. 2012). There is still a very small population (5 to 10 pairs) in southern Ontario, but a majority of the "breeding" records in some areas were young Barn Owls found dead along roads (Badzinski 2007). The Barn Owl is listed as endangered in Ontario, where a campaign to erect nest boxes was implemented in 1997 (Bird Studies Canada [no date]).

The Barn Owl is declining regionally and is a Species of Conservation Concern in Vermont, even though young Barn Owls can disperse hundreds of miles from their nest site (Marti et al. 2005) and habitat in the state, while limited, is apparently suitable. Since the early 1900s, Vermont's forests have been reclaiming the sheep meadow and dairy pastures that had covered nearly 80 percent of the state. The forested area is now close to 80 percent, and barns and silos have been disappearing (Visser 1997). Because Vermont's forests are maturing and provide potential nest sites that could replace lost barns, the Barn Owl decline in the Northeast may have resulted from the loss of open grasslands and agricultural lands needed for foraging. Another factor in the regional decline may have been mortality of birds due to collisions with vehicles (Badzinski 2007). Nest boxes are recommended by more than twenty-five state agencies, and are clearly beneficial in the Champlain Valley, where continued, more inten-



CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	0	0	+0	+0
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	0	0	+0	+0

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

sive monitoring is strongly recommended. Boxes may be of questionable utility in other regions in the state, where foraging habitat appears to be the primary limiting factor.

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