

Cedar Waxwing

Bombycilla cedrorum

The Cedar Waxwing derives the second part of its name from the wax-like red structures on the tips of the secondary feathers of the wing and sometimes on the tips of the tail feathers (Witmer et al. 1997). The presence and number of these colorful tips in both sexes increases as birds become older and appears to influence mate selection (Witmer et al. 1997). The characteristic bright yellow tips of the waxwing's tail are orange in many individuals in the Northeast—the result of feeding on an introduced honeysuckle (Witmer 1996). The Cedar Waxwing breeds commonly across southern Canada and the northern United States, reaching its highest abundance in the Northeast (Price et al. 1995). In Vermont, it was historically a common summer resident (Thompson 1842); in winter, its abundance can be highly variable from year to year (see Christmas Bird Count data from 1982 to 2007) and even within a single winter, depending on the availability of fruit crops (Witmer et al. 1997).

Sugary fruits are the primary food of the Cedar Waxwing, and the species will nest in a wide variety of habitats where this resource is available. Because fruit trees require a good deal of sunlight, these areas are usually in edge situations. Cedar Waxwings are late breeders. During the second Vermont atlas, nest building was observed ($N = 159$) from 23 May to 15 August. Nineteen nests with eggs were found from 12 June to 29 July, and nests with young ($N = 21$) were located from 20 June to 15 August. Fledglings from 88 nests were found from 5 June to 30 August. Commonly found in groups, the Cedar Waxwing is generally quite conspicuous, with a distinctive, high-pitched call. It is unlikely that this lovely and active bird was overlooked during atlas surveys.

Both the first and second Vermont atlases showed the Cedar Waxwing breeding in 100 percent of priority blocks with a more than 70 percent confirmation rate statewide, a testament to the species' abundance and visibility. Even blocks within extensive mature woodlands ordinarily include a stream, pond, marsh, or other forest opening that provides its desired edge habitat.

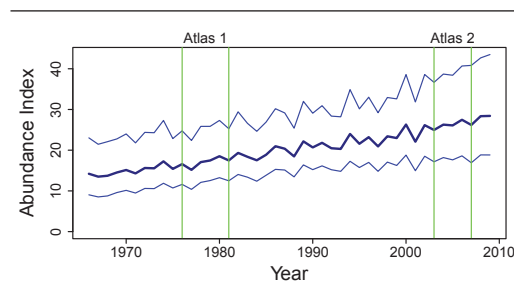
Breeding Bird Survey data show no significant trends

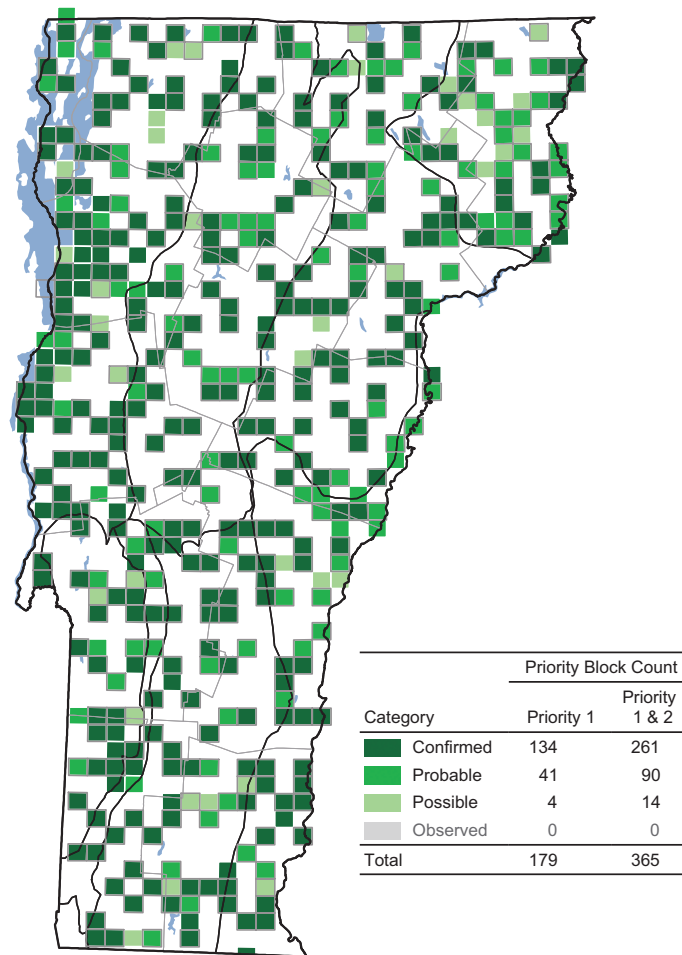
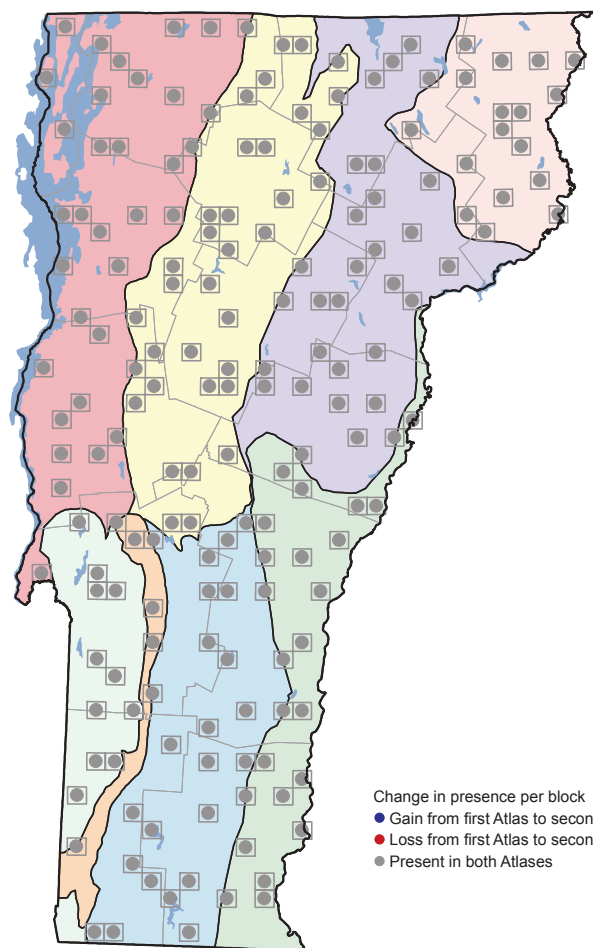


from 1982 to 2007 for Cedar Waxwing range-wide, regionally, or in Vermont. During more recent years (2000 to 2007), however, populations declined significantly range-wide and in the Atlantic Northern Forest (Sauer et al. 2011). Second atlases in Maryland (Ellison 2010), Pennsylvania (Wilson et al. 2012), and New York (McGowan and Corwin 2008) showed increases. In New York, dramatic increases were seen in New York City and western Long Island (Witmer 2008), two of the state's most heavily populated areas. Cedar Waxwing distribution remained similar between the first and second Ontario atlases (Kits 2007).

The planting of ornamental fruit trees over the past sixty years has undoubtedly benefited the Cedar Waxwing, and conceivably could have facilitated a southward expansion of the eastern breeding range in recent decades (Witmer et al. 1997). The cause of relatively recent pop-

RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	33	33	+ 0	+ 0
Northeastern Highlands	17	17	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Green Mountains	35	35	+ 0	+ 0
Northern Vermont Piedmont	30	30	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Green Mountains	27	27	+ 0	+ 0
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	21	+ 0	+ 0
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	179	179	+ 0	+ 0

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	100	20
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	100	18
Southern Green Mountains	100	15
Southern Vermont Piedmont	100	11
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	100	2

ulation declines indicated by Breeding Bird Survey data is uncertain. West Nile virus was concurrently spreading in North America, but the Cedar Waxwing does not appear to be especially vulnerable (LaDeau et al. 2008, Wheeler et al. 2009). Maturation of second-growth forest could account, in part, for the sharp declines within the past decade, but there are no data to support or refute this conjecture. Despite recent decreases in abundance in some parts of its range, the Cedar Waxwing has remained a common breeding species in Vermont.

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