

Hairy Woodpecker

Picoides villosus

This middle-sized woodpecker resembles the smaller Downy Woodpecker in plumage, but the Hairy Woodpecker differs in having a longer, sturdier bill and a more emphatic call. The pounding force of the Hairy Woodpecker's bill is well appreciated by bird-banders—who must handle this powerful species with great caution or risk losing blood. The Hairy Woodpecker is widespread through the forested parts of Canada and the United States. In the Northeast this species occurs in all types of woodlands and at any elevation below timberline (Beehler 1978, Hall 1983). In Vermont this year-round resident has been reported since the earliest ornithological records from the first half of the nineteenth century (Thompson 1842), although populations probably declined as forests were cleared for agriculture.

The Hairy Woodpecker nests in edge situations, like those found in many suburbs, as well as in forests, including extensive tracts of mature forest where the Downy Woodpecker is generally absent. During the second Vermont atlas, the sole egg date for Hairy Woodpecker was 6 June. Dates for 74 nests with young ranged from 10 May to 20 July. Fledglings from 139 nests were found from 18 May to 4 August. Although the Hairy Woodpecker is relatively quiet during incubation, the species is usually quite conspicuous because of its calls and flights when feeding young, whether the juveniles are in the nest or have recently fledged. This species is thus likely to be detected by atlas surveys, and is easy to confirm as well; 65 percent of all priority block records were confirmations.

The Hairy Woodpecker was widespread throughout all biophysical regions of Vermont in both atlases. There was a 5 percent increase in the number of blocks with Hairy Woodpecker records during the second atlas, and the proportions of occupied blocks in regions were between 87 and 100 percent. The continued maturation of Vermont woodlands in recent decades is likely a contributing factor in explaining this increase.

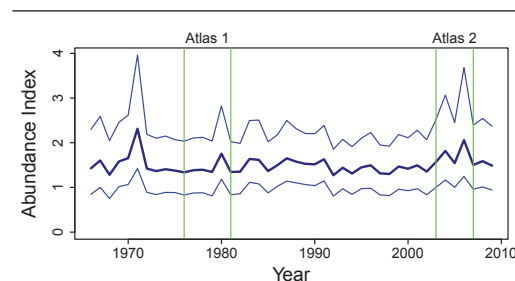
Breeding Bird Survey data showed a significant increase in the Hairy Woodpecker population from 1982 to 2007 in New York and Maine, but there was no significant

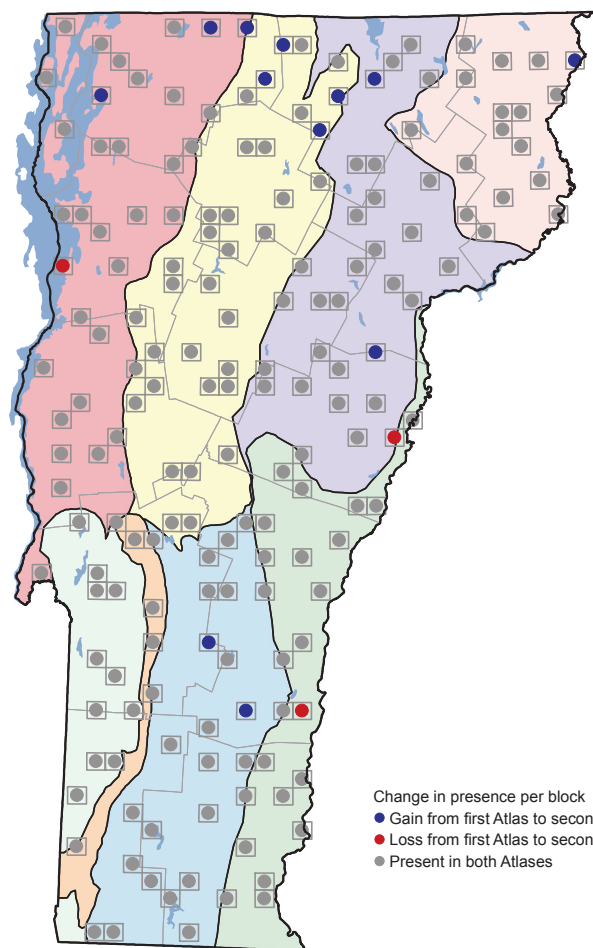


trend in Vermont, New Hampshire, or Massachusetts. Range-wide the BBS shows a significant increase during the same period (Sauer et al. 2011). In a thirty-year study (from 1969 to 1998) at Hubbard Brook in New Hampshire, the number of Hairy Woodpeckers remained stable (Holmes and Sherry 2001). Hairy Woodpecker showed about a 10 percent increase in the second atlas of Maryland and 16 percent in that of Pennsylvania (Ellison 2010, R. Mulvihill pers. comm.). The second atlas in New York showed no change (McGowan and Corwin 2008). In Ontario there was little change between the first and second atlases (Bavrlie 2007).

Hairy Woodpeckers can become nuisances to humans when they attempt to excavate cavities in wooden buildings and homes. Although methods are available for discouraging such damage, such as blocking the bird's access to a particular site, persistent woodpeckers will often move to another spot on the building (Jackson et al. 2002).

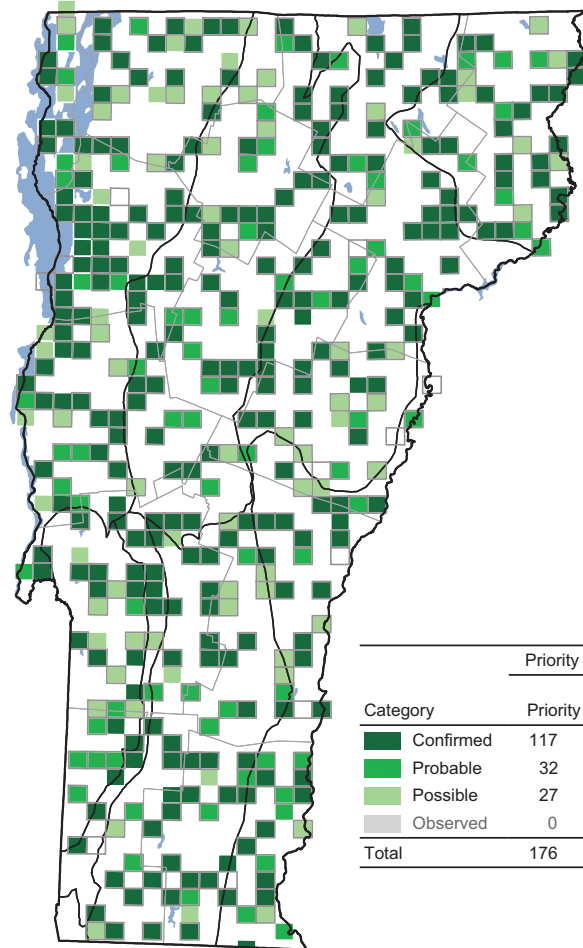
RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OVER TIME





CHANGE IN DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN ATLASES

Biophysical Region	First Atlas	Second Atlas	Change	% Change
Champlain Valley	30	32	+ 2	+ 7
Northeastern Highlands	16	17	+ 1	+ 6
Northern Green Mountains	31	35	+ 4	+ 13
Northern Vermont Piedmont	28	29	+ 1	+ 4
Southern Green Mountains	25	27	+ 2	+ 8
Southern Vermont Piedmont	21	20	- 1	- 5
Taconic Mountains	11	11	+ 0	+ 0
Vermont Valley	5	5	+ 0	+ 0
Totals	167	176	+ 9	+ 5



Category	Priority Block Count	
	Priority 1	Priority 1 & 2
Confirmed	117	232
Probable	32	69
Possible	27	54
Observed	0	0
Total	176	355

DISTRIBUTION IN CURRENT ATLAS

Biophysical Region	% of region species occupies	% of all records for this species found in region
Champlain Valley	97	20
Northeastern Highlands	100	10
Northern Green Mountains	100	18
Northern Vermont Piedmont	95	17
Southern Green Mountains	100	16
Southern Vermont Piedmont	90	10
Taconic Mountains	100	6
Vermont Valley	87	2

Hall (1983), writing specifically about declines in West Virginia during the 1950s and 1970s, suggested that the Hairy Woodpecker population shows long-term fluctuations for reasons that are not apparent. Christmas Bird Count data for Vermont show a brief upward spike in numbers in the early 1950s; thereafter the population was relatively stable up to 2008–9. Long-term fluctuations in the Vermont population are also not apparent in Breeding Bird Survey data from 1966 to 2007 (Sauer et al. 2011). Hairy Woodpeckers have generally been maintaining their numbers or slightly increasing in the northeast-

ern states. Regrowth and maturation of forests appear to account for their success. Forest fragmentation has been suggested as a factor in the decline of Hairy Woodpecker populations (Jackson et al. 2002), but in the extensive forests of northern New England, a permanent loss of forest by development is a more serious threat than temporary fragmentation due to forest management (DeGraaf et al. 2006). There are no known imminent threats to the continued widespread presence of Hairy Woodpeckers in the state.

GEORGE A. CLARK, JR.